

**REGIME CHANGES, PUBLIC MEMORY AND THE  
PURSUIT OF JUSTICE:  
THE CASE OF GERMAN-SPEAKING JEWS IN  
BUKOVINA  
( 1920-1960)**

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## **Introduction**

The fall of communism in Romania in December 1989 inaugurated a new period in the country's history that would impact on public memory as well as on historiography. Romania's history had to be rewritten or reinterpreted unveiling the abuses, the persecution and the crimes of the communist regime during the last 45 years. Several publications and mass media products took over the task to re-establish for the Romanian people the historical truth. However, little was done to come to terms with the period that preceded the Communist domination marked by the pro-fascist dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu, a period during which the country's leadership was responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands Romanian and Ukrainian Jews. Since Communism in Romania had a pronounced national character based on the mythologisation and the glorification of national history, such atrocities that occurred on Romanian territory and in the occupied south-western Ukraine called by that time Transnistria could not fit into the pattern of the "innocent" Romanian people fighting always for its own rights and freedom. Refusing to make a distinction between individuals and the nation as a whole, the ideologists of the Romanian national-communism preferred to keep the silence over the "forgotten Holocaust" as if had never happened.

The establishment of the democratic political system after 1990 offered new opportunities for coming to terms with the suppressed past. However, this process turned out to be a very difficult and a highly disputed one. Many post-communist societies in Eastern Europe had to re-define their national identity by searching for historical figures in order to replace the "false heroes" created by the communist regimes during the last fifty years. The favourite "new heroes" became those former statesmen who were known for their anti-communist but also nationalist attitude, regardless of the political and moral values they promoted. As in the early 1990s Jozef Tiso became a national hero for many Slovaks,

so in to the same way did Miklós Horthy for Hungarians, Ante Pavelić for Croatians and Ion Antonescu for Romanians. Even if one ought to distinguish between the different roles they played during the Second World War, they most certainly share one common feature between all of them: they represented autocratic regimes and were involved in the physical destruction of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. After the Communist regime had been overthrown in 1989, not only nationalist, but also moderate politicians and even historians began to emphasise the ‘patriotic’ and ‘anti-Communist’ character of the Romanian military dictator during the Second World War. Paradoxically, the construction of a democratic society based on tolerance and respect for human rights started by regarding an oppressive military dictator as an acceptable model for the function of head of state. However, the voices of those who experienced the ordeal of Transnistria and other atrocities during the domestic Holocaust could not be silenced any longer. The commemorations organised by the local Jewish community opened the process of coming to terms with the domestic Holocaust in Romania. The international press reported how “Romanians are told of their nation’s role in mass killing of Jews”.<sup>1</sup> Even if the new post-communist Romanian officials attended the commemoration in order to gain international support for Romania, their attitude was very controversial fitting into the patterns of the reflective denial of the Holocaust i.e. they recognised the Holocaust as a general phenomenon but they refused to accept that Romania had also its part of responsibility in it.<sup>2</sup> This process of coming to terms, similar to the entire democratisation process in

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<sup>1</sup> In an article by Henry Kahn the *New York Times* underlined: “The facts widely known elsewhere, were never acknowledged here: that a great number of Jewish men, women and children were killed in pogroms of a brutality that sometimes shocked even the Germans, pogroms carried out by the Romanian military and the police. The Jews worked, starved or froze to death in concentration camps established and ran by Romanians... As a result, many Romanians have professed unawareness that the killing of the Jews was also a Romanian matter. *New York Times*, Tuesday, 2 July 1991. A photocopy of the article is available in the Centre for the Research of the History of the Romanian Jews located in Bucharest (CSIER), fileVII/125.

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle* from London reported in an article “Romanians lied for fifty years about Holocaust” by Joseph Finkelstone that the democratically elected new president of Romania condemned those who denied the Holocaust and spread anti-Semitism. However, in a message to the participants to the commemoration in the memory of the victims of the Holocaust in Romania, Iliescu himself denied the existence of a domestic Holocaust, stating that “the Final Solution could not be carried out in Romania because its citizens opposed to it”. *Jewish Chronicle*, No.6376, July 5, London, 1991

Romania, is an irreversible one. Owing to international pressure but also due to the increasing willingness of the Romanian political class, intellectuals including also some historians, the issue of the domestic Holocaust has ceased to be a taboo any longer during the last decade <sup>3</sup>, even if extreme right-wing voices are still trying to mitigate its impact on the Jewish population of Romania. My doctoral thesis was conceived as a contribution to this process, using the framework of the project related to the life and artistic creation of Arnold Daghani by reflecting on the interconnection between politics and private life.

The influence exerted by political and historical events contributed in many instances to the shaping of the creative personality of artists who consequently have transmitted through their works their own life experience as they have lived through different political regimes in these turbulent years. Such a case is the life and work of Arnold Daghani. Born as a German-speaking Jew in Austrian Bukovina, a province later to become Romanian and subject to the horrible upheaval of the Second World War, Daghani spent the formative years of his artistic life in the political, historical and cultural context of the interwar period. This research focused on the period starting with Daghani reaching adulthood and ending with his final departure from communist Romania. This is the period that coincides with the emergence of the extreme right towards the end of the 1920s and the end of the period of de-Stalinisation in the late 1950s. This was a period of spectacular upheavals in the political life of the country, which dramatically affected above all the Jewish population of Bukovina and Moldavia. The life story of Arnold Daghani served as reference for the interconnection between individual destiny and politics, making a comparison with other individual destinies of German-speaking Jewish intellectuals from Bukovina, such as Paul Celan, Rose Ausländer, Immanuel Weißglass and others.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2005 the Romanian Television broadcasted for the first time a documentary based on interviews with Romanian and Ukrainian Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Transnistria. The documentary of Cristian Hadji-Culea, "Minorități sub trei dictaturi. Evreii 1940-1944" was also available on the internet homepage of the Romanian Public Television.

I approached the subject using English, German and Romanian specialised literature relating to national, religious and regional identity, nationalism, ethnicity and public memory as well as bibliography regarding the socio-political realities in Romania in the period 1930-1960. To prepare this main part of the theoretical approach of my thesis, I used mainly the book collections of the following institutions: *Library of the University of Sussex*, *The British Library* in London, *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară* in Cluj (Romania), *Biblioteca Academiei Române* in Bucharest, as well as the libraries of the *Freie Universität* in Berlin.

During my research, I processed private and official primary sources, like letters, memoirs, diaries of contemporary victims or simple observers of the political changes during the period under discussion, but also reports, internal confidential files of legislative and executive authorities (minutes' papers, interrogations, declarations, etc). An essential aim of my investigation was to find survivors who knew Daghani during the years of persecution in Transnistria and beyond the river Bug for interviews including oral history into my historical research. Using the methods of the oral history in my investigation I increased also the specificity of my research. An considerable part of the research has been carried out at the University of Sussex processing the impressive narrative as well as pictorial archive material of the Arnold Daghani Collection. A significant research work was done also in the Archive of the Centre for Holocaust Advanced Studies in Washington, at the Centre for the Research of the History of the Romanian Jews (CSIER) in Bucharest, as well as at the branch of the Romanian National Archive in the city of Suceava and in the Federal Archive of the German Foreign Office (Bundesarchiv des Auswärtigen Amtes) in Berlin. I paid special attention to the secondary sources i.e. the analysis of contemporary press and other mass media publications found in the above-mentioned archives and libraries.

Little is known about public memory of the Holocaust in Romania. The most important historical work on the perception of the Holocaust in Romania is *Cartea neagră: Suferințele evreilor din România în timpul dictaturii fasciste 1940-1944* (The black book: The suffering of the Romanian Jewry during the fascist dictatorship) written by Matatias Carp and published in 1946 and republished in 1996. But this book offers only a collateral approach of the questions relating to public memory in the after-war Romania. There are two recent volumes, one in English *The tragedy of the Romanian Jewry* edited by Randolph L. Braham and one in German *Rumänien und der Holocaust* edited by Mariana Hausleitner, Brigitte Mihok and Juliane Wetzel which contains the most relevant studies (some of them also in English) related to the perception of the Holocaust in the after-war and post-communist Romania. A significant contribution to the post-war history of the Jews in Romania was made by Hiltrun Glass with her book *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen: Zur Geschichte der Juden in Rumänien 1944-1949* published in 2002.

Nevertheless, these studies do not refer to public memory in terms of an all-inclusive investigation regarding the whole Romanian society or mentioning the issue of the judicial investigation against war criminals and their executioners. A subject that in Romania was totally neglected being, a white spot in the contemporary historiography is the issue of calling to account those responsible for the crimes committed during the Holocaust in Romania and Transnistria. My thesis made therefore a first step in order to clarify the main aspects of this ignored subject opening the prospect of further investigations in this field.

The substantial originality of my thesis consists, on one hand in using private primary sources as “documents of life” in order to analyse identity changes caused by the intrusion of the politics in the private sphere and on the other hand being the first approach of the question related to the judicial prosecution of those who were responsible for the crimes of the domestic Holocaust in Romania during the right-wing dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu. Bringing into discussion the role of the Romanian political class and the

attitude of the Romanian society during the most inhuman atrocities in the Romanian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, my thesis aims to be also a contribution to the process of renewal of the Romanian historiography, offering a historical view free of all kind of ideological and demagogical influences.

## **Chapter I: Bukovina, “lieu de memoire” for the Romanian German-speaking Jewry**

### **1. Ethnic and religious co-habitation in Bukovina under Romanian rule**

The province of Bukovina was a creation of the Austrian Empire in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the acquisition of the former northern Moldavian territory in 1775.<sup>4</sup> After the First World War, it became part of the Romanian Kingdom, and a new chapter was opened in its cultural and political transformation. For a better understanding of the cultural and political aspects that characterised the inter-ethnic relations under Romanian rule it is necessary to consider the development of these relations before 1919.

As the language of the Austrian Empire, the German gained an outstanding role in the cultural and administrative fields, spoken mostly by the predominantly urban Jewish population, which, according to the census of 1910, represented almost 13% of the population. The major ethnic group was represented by the Ukrainians, concentrated in the northern part, representing 40%, followed by the Romanians with 34% and 8% ethnic Germans. There were many other smaller ethnic groups, like the Poles representing 5.35% of the population, living mainly in smaller market towns. In Czernowitz the capital of Bukovina the population elected several times a Polish mayor before the First World War. Some of them were landowners in the countryside or merchants. Hungarians represented 1.3% and were living in some villages concentrated in the south-western part of the province. About 3000 Russians lived there, spread throughout the countryside. Also, about 6000 Roma people enriched the ethnic diversity of the Bukovina at the beginning of the

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<sup>4</sup> When the Austrians annexed this northern part of Moldavia, there were about 206 Jewish families, meaning less than 1000 individuals. A decade later, the Jewish population doubled to 2131. Since Bukovina became after 1848 an autonomous duchy separated from Galitia, the Jewish population rose steeply: in 1857 they represented 6.5% of the population, in 1869, 9.3%, in 1899, 12.8% and in 1910, 12.9%. William O. McCagg Jr., *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, p.173.

20<sup>th</sup> century, even if the Austrian census from 1910 did not consider them as a distinct ethnic group.<sup>5</sup> In terms of religious aspects as well, Bukovina was a province based on diversity: Romanians and Ukrainians belonged to the Christian Orthodox denomination, whereas German speakers were predominantly Protestants or Jews, whose non-Christian faith accentuated the religious diversity. This diversity was the result of several waves of immigration of different ethnic groups from within the Austrian Empire, especially from Galicia, Transylvania, Banat and Bohemia, but in some cases people came also from Moldavia, south-western Germany or Russia. Economic advantages and greater freedom lured the immigrants to the young province, where they could also enjoy a range of facilities. The new settlers and their economic activities contributed to the modernisation of Bukovina.

One can establish that peasants and shepherds traditionally formed the mass of the Romanian and Ukrainian population. There were some Romanian landowners, who benefited from a privileged status in comparison with the Ukrainians, but many of them lost a part of their property due to the land reform of 1921. The Germans were predominantly craftsmen, who from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had to face competition from the Jewish immigrants, who joined the same professions. Therefore, until 1910 the proportion of the Jewish craftsmen had grown to 50%. At the time of the incorporation of Bukovina into Romania, the majority of the industrial enterprises belonged to Jewish owners. In commerce, the Jewish proportion represented 83% of the entire trade, even higher than in industry. In the countryside, many Jews became tenant farmers, leasing the land from the big landowners, who owned almost 70% of the arable land, subletting it to Romanian and Ukrainian peasants, who lived in poverty. Already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian and Ukrainian intelligentsia, made up of priests, teachers and civil servants, developed an increasingly aggressive discourse against the

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<sup>5</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukovina. Die Durchsetzung des nationalstaatlichen Anspruchs Großrumäniens 1918-1944*, München: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2001, p.79

Jews, who were accused of being responsible through their “greedy Jewish capitalism” for the poverty of the peasantry. The latter also considered that the Jewish immigrants were ousting the Romanian middle-class from its positions. Nationalist and therefore anti-Semitic intellectuals tried to prove their assertions. However, it was impossible to prove this statistically, since the Romanian middle-class developed after Jewish immigrants gained their economic positions. Therefore, they emphasized the disproportions between the representation of the Jews and Romanians in commerce, trade or liberal professions, as registered by the census from 1910. But only 15% of the Romanians lived in urban environment where they could practice these professions, whereas Jews lived mainly in cities and shtetls. Local nationalists started to create agitation among the rural craftsmen and peasants, trying to inculcate the belief that “the aliens” i.e. the Jews were plotting against Romanians in order to make them emigrate from Bukovina.<sup>6</sup> Gradually, the competition for jobs, social and professional positions became a tool in the hands of nationalists, who through their anti-Semitic demagoguery, created the conditions for a more radical anti-Semitic discourse propagated by the extreme right wing movement after Bukovina became part of Greater Romania in 1919.

In spite of the ethnic and religious diversity and the demagogic agitations of anti-Semitic Romanian and Ukrainian nationalists, there was a relatively peaceful co-habitation in Bukovina until the First World War. There were no pogroms or physical attacks against Jewish people, such as those in the neighbouring province of Galicia or in Russia. Some Romanian newspapers, such as *Gazeta Bucovinei* could disseminate anti-Semitic ideas against the effort of the Austrian authorities to combat anti-Semitic agitation in order to keep the social peace.<sup>7</sup> After each ethnic group had set up its own cultural and political organisations, their collaboration decreased due to the latent antagonism which developed

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<sup>6</sup> In the fact, those who emigrated overseas from Bukovina were mainly Jewish craftsmen and Ukrainian peasants and not Romanians. Ibid, p.51.

<sup>7</sup> In 1878, a prosecutor forbids the distribution of an anti-Semitic paper called *Epidemia Jidovească* (The Jewish Epidemic). Ibid, p.56.

between them. Despite the common Orthodox religious background of Romanians and Ukrainians, there was an intense political struggle between them for the supremacy in administrative and cultural fields. Romanians claimed exclusively for themselves the “historical right” to control Bukovina and regarded all other ethnic groups as “alien”. Although Germans and many Jews had the same mother tongue, there was little interest in political collaboration between them, even after 1919 when they would have had good reason for that, in order to protect their language against the Romanisation tendencies of the Romanian authorities. Especially after the German University was founded in Czernowitz in 1875, professors who came from the western part of the Empire to teach at this University tried to separate the ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) from the German-speaking Jews (*Sprachdeutsche*). The gulf between a liberal and a national (*deutschnational*) wing of the German-speaking population became deeper and deeper. In 1897, a “Union of the Christian Germans” was set up. The increasing economic role of Jews was prejudicing the trade of the German craftsmen and clerks, so it enforced suspicion and prejudice amongst Germans towards the Jews with whom they shared the same language. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all the Jews involved in the political life of Bukovina, who were mainly highly assimilated intellectuals who gained access in the local Parliament (*Landtag*), supported the German Liberal Party. Nevertheless, later, after the antagonism between Germans and Jews became evident, even liberal Jews decided to create their own separate organisation. Not only the Romanians and Ukrainians, but also the ethnic Germans developed in a short time an anti-Semitic ideology. Because Jews monopolized some very important economic activities<sup>8</sup>, the image of the Jew became one

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<sup>8</sup> The immigration of the Jews to Bukovina stimulated the economy, which the local administration welcomed. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 98% of the public bars were Jewish owned. By 1910, Jews ran about 85% of the arable land as tenants or even as owners. In the cities, Jewish entrepreneurs and craftsmen pushed ethnic Germans out of competition, whereas all the bigger branches of the *Wiener Bank* had almost exclusively Jewish directors. The presidency of the trade and industry association was in the hand of some influential Jewish families and Jews gained access also in the *Landtag*, the provincial parliament. Ibid, p.73.

of an exploiting capitalist. The rapid social rise of the Jews, especially in Czernowitz<sup>9</sup>, created a hard competition with the other ethnic groups, above all with the Germans, for preferential jobs in administration and justice. After there were no more vacancies for these jobs, Jewish high school-leavers and academics had to join the liberal professions and soon, Jews came to dominate these jobs as well: in 1889 from 59 lawyers in Bukovina, 45 were Jewish. More than half of the medical doctors were also Jewish. Their success aroused the envy of the other ethnic groups. Envy soon associated with conspiracy theories, so stereotyping and prejudices stood at the base of the image of the Jew among the Christian ethnic groups in Bukovina, an image that was successfully propagated later by the extreme right-wing movements. However, social and political differences within the Jewish community were even greater than between other ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> Many Jews had modest living conditions. Jewish orthodox communities were especially poor and for many of them the emigration to the United States of America or to Palestine seemed to be the only solution for a decent life. However, only a few hundred of them managed to emigrate. On the eve of the First World War three main political trends characterised the Jewish communities in the Bukovina: acculturation, Zionism and the movement for the recognition of the Yiddish identity as distinct from German. These features were also to define the character of the Jewish identity in Bukovina also under Romanian rule.

After the First World War Romania's territorial claims to Bukovina were satisfied and the peace treaty from 1919 confirmed Romania's new acquisition.<sup>11</sup> However, at the same time Romania, which doubled its territory and population, becoming a multi-ethnic state, had to accept also the Treaty on the Protection of National Minorities. As it contained quite general and vague terms, it could be interpreted in various ways and its original

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<sup>9</sup>After some grammar schools were set up in Czernowitz at the end of the 19th century, the percentage of Jews in these schools increased considerably every year. In 1895 Jewish students represented 42% in the High Grammar School (Obergymnasium) of the city and 90% in the High School for Commerce. Ibid, p.74.

<sup>10</sup> Raphael Vago, Romanian Jewry During the Interwar Period, in: Randolph L. Brahm, *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.39.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers. The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*, London: John Murray, 2002, p.137.

purpose, i.e. to avoid a forced assimilation policy by the Romanian governments, lost its power. The new authorities imposed in all provinces they acquired a rigid centralising policy, accompanied by measures that were to create favourable conditions for the emergence of a strong Romanian middle-class. In Bukovina, these measures seriously affected the local cultural and political organisations of the Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians. The German *Schiller-Theater* in Czernowitz was forced to close and a Romanian one was opened. In addition, the University was transformed into a Romanian institution. Many anti-Semitic Romanian intellectuals gained leading positions, whereas Jewish professors were banned from their chairs. In 1921, Jewish students protested against these practices, but with no result. Right-wing Romanians, supported by the state authorities, became increasingly aggressive in their attempts to eliminate the Jewish competition in the academic and economic fields. Ukrainian students refused to join them, but some ethnic Germans gave their support.<sup>12</sup> However, the majority of the non-Romanian population in Czernowitz rediscovered under Romanian rule the glamour of the Austrian times and started to cultivate it during the 1920s. The German House in Czernowitz was still so tolerant that a Jewish theatre team was invited to play on its stage, after the *Schiller-Theater* had to close. Nevertheless, in spite of the state politics, which disadvantaged all non-Romanian ethnic groups, there was no further political collaboration between them. Especially the relations between Romanians and Jews deteriorated considerably after 1923, when the League of National-Christian Defence (*Liga Apărării Național-Creștine*, further LANC) was founded.<sup>13</sup> Its anti-Semitic propaganda gained supporters even among Ukrainians and ethnic Germans, although after 1933 the government in Bucharest used the pressure made by the League in order to adopt the “Romanisation” laws, which affected also Ukrainians and ethnic Germans. Due to the

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<sup>12</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.170.

<sup>13</sup> Its leader A.C. Cuza who was at that time 70, can be regarded as a central figure and founder of the Romanian anti-Semitic movement. His name became a term (“Cuzism” – “Cuzist”) defining an ideology and the supporters of a virulent and aggressive anti-Semitism during the inter-war period. The openly fascist “Iron Guard” was a splinter group of LANC.

political propaganda of some “respectable” elderly LANC members from Câmpulung, Rădăuți and Suceava among the peasants, the simple stereotypes and prejudice the peasants had towards Jews were in some cases successfully converted into hatred. However, ordinary people still preferred to stay away from the political struggles. More active were the student organisations, which had a pronounced anti-Semitic and conservative character. The first attacks against Jews and left wing supporters took place during the early 1930s in Czernowitz, and the radicalisation of these kinds of actions led the authorities to place them under surveillance.<sup>14</sup> The interest of the central government in Bucharest was to keep the social and political order and to carry on at the same time with its “Romanisation” policy. One of the measures in this direction was the reform of the educational system.

In the Bukovina, and especially in Czernowitz, Jews and Germans dominated the secondary schools, being represented in a higher proportion than other nationalities. The new Romanian legislation relating to the education of national minorities<sup>15</sup> stipulated that every nationality might attend only schools designated for it or Romanian schools. Since Jews were considered a separate nationality, they lost the possibility to attend German schools, as they had done during the Austrian rule. This led to a further segregation of the Jews from the Germans. The Romanian authorities hoped to cut off the Jews from their German cultural identity and to give them a Romanian orientation. The Ministry for National Education planned a transition period of ten years after which the language of education in Jewish schools should become Romanian and Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> According to these plans, from 1919 on, the number of Jewish classes in schools would decrease year by year and after six years, only half of the initial number would still be available for Jewish

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<sup>14</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.251.

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘national minorities’ defines in this case the ethnic and linguistic groups living in Romania as Romanian citizens. ‘National’ does not relate to citizenship but to ethnicity.

<sup>16</sup> Irina Livezianu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare 1918-1930*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998, p.91. There is also an English edition of the same book: *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle (1918-1930)*, Cornell University Press, 1995

students. The protests of the parents and community leaders did not bring any change to this policy. Jewish students increasingly had to attend private secondary schools, where they could better cultivate their cultural, linguistic and religious identity, although their parents paid the highest taxes to the state. Even attending schools in the distant Vienna was more attractive for many of them than to be subject to the Romanisation policy in Bukovina. But the majority who could not afford such a financial effort, and stayed in Bukovina, had to face serious difficulties because of the new official language rules. Examination commissions sent from Bucharest were in charge of testing the knowledge of Romanian language of Jewish students during the baccalaureate examination. Many students belonging to a national minority simply could not pass the exam, because on one hand, there were nationalist and anti-Semitic professors among the examiners, and on the other hand, it was a kind of “raison d’état” to disadvantage Jews, Hungarians and Germans and to promote Romanians. Surprisingly, the most likely to assimilate were not the Jews, but the Ukrainians. Belonging to the same Orthodox Church and having names which often sounded very similar, many of Ukrainians considered that assimilation could provide their children a better chance, since most of them gave up believing in an independent Ukrainian state after in 1922, when the largest part of Ukraine fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, they sent their children to schools with pronounced Romanian character and Jews took their place in the former Ukrainian schools which after a few years became Romanian as well.<sup>17</sup>

In Bukovina Romanians considered themselves the only “indigenous” nation. Many of them, influenced by nationalist and xenophobic discourses, considered it unfair that economic power was still in “Jewish hands”, even after Bukovina became part of Romania. Political parties and the ruling regime tried to draw political capital of these resentments. Such an attitude went so far that even the murderer of a Jewish student was

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<sup>17</sup> Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979, p.57.

acquitted and celebrated as a national hero.<sup>18</sup> However, despite the Romanisation policy, Bukovina during the inter-war period could still keep its multi-cultural character.

Although the census carried out by the Romanian authorities in 1930 reflected a decrease in the Jewish population throughout the country and to 10.9% in Bukovina, Jews still formed 73.9% of the urban population in Bukovina. Some of them were not born in the Bukovina and in spite of the stipulations of the Treaty for the Protection of the National Minorities, which obliged the Romanian State to naturalise them all, many could not become Romanian citizens. This discrimination affected mainly the Jews and Ukrainians born outside the territories which became part of Greater Romania after 1919, even if they lived for decades in Bukovina. In Romania, there was a general rejection of the idea of naturalisation of Jews and despite the 1923 Constitution, which guaranteed equal treatment to all citizens, the naturalisation procedure was extremely difficult. Without possessing Romanian citizenship, they were at any time liable to be deported, and were seriously disadvantaged in their professional life.<sup>19</sup>

One can conclude that the incorporation of Bukovina in the Romanian state changed the *status quo* upon which the co-habitation of the different ethnic and religious groups had been established by the Austrian authorities. Although theoretically all could have benefited equally from the liberalism offered by the Austrian rule, the main winners of those times were the Jews and the Germans. Their skills and education permitted them to get higher social positions. But Romanian landowners as well, who were educated in the

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<sup>18</sup> It was the case of the Jewish student from Czernowitz, David Fallik. It happened in 1926 after he and his colleagues were failed at the baccalaureate exam by a commission sent from Bucharest. A group of students led by David Fallik allegedly insulted on the street the commission members or at least, the history professor of this commissions, shouting slogans like “Down with the Romanians”, “Down with the bribery”, etc. The police arrested some of the students, who were put on trial because of insult and offence to the Romanian state. While the trial was transferred from Czernowitz to Câmpulung (considered to be the centre of anti-Semitism in Bukovina), a Romanian law student (!), Nicolai Totu shot David Fallik in public. Totu was put on trial for murder but the Romanian public opinion and many politicians made such a pressure on the court that he was acquitted and celebrated as a “good Romanian”. Irina Livezianu, pp.106-109.

<sup>19</sup> Those Jews from Bukovina who intended to apply for Romanian citizenship and were not able to prove with ‘Heimatschein’ (certificates confirming the place of birth emitted by the former Austrian authorities) that they were born in Bukovina, had to start legal proceedings in order to have a chance to get it. Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.149.

spirit of loyalty towards the Habsburgs enjoyed leading positions in the provincial institutions. Romanians had even the highest representation in the Landtag, fighting the attempts of Ukrainians to emancipate themselves from Romanian clerical subordination. Once the Romanian rule was introduced, local nationalist Romanians, supported by the central authorities, strived to oust the “old” intellectual and social elites from their positions, implementing the “Romanisation” policy from the centre. Their main adversaries were the Jews, especially those who still possessed a considerable economic power, but the anti-Semitic propaganda made no difference between the social levels of the Jewish population. This propaganda, the old prejudices towards Jews and the eagerness to eliminate competition created a hostile attitude towards Jews, which, starting with the early 1930s, was shared by ethnic Germans and a part of the Ukrainians. The co-habitation was increasingly burdened by antagonistic tendencies, making it possible for Christian fellow-citizens to rejoice and rob their Jewish neighbours when they were deported during the Second World War. However, the evolution of the relations between the different ethnic groups was determined from the top down, i.e. by politicians and intellectuals who strived to convince their own politically more or less indifferent ethnic-fellows of the rightness of the cause they represented. But, as many memoirs prove it, these political messages, especially in the case of the German-Jewish relations in Bukovina, did not “contaminate” with immediate effect all the common people as politicians expected. For this reason, one must distinguish between the relations on political level and the character of co-habitation that existed between common people of different ethnic origins.<sup>20</sup> The destruction of the multi-cultural Bukovina would be speeded up after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from 23 August 1939 that allowed the

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<sup>20</sup> This kind of relations between common people of different ethnic and religious background is reflected by many memoirs of contemporaries, attesting a more tolerant co-habitation than the press organs or documents of political organisations reflect. See Gerhard Schreiber: *A Tale of Survival (Or if Stalin Could have Swallowed Hitler And Choked On It)* unpublished manuscript, Centre for German-Jewish Studies Archive, University of Sussex.

Soviets to occupy northern Bukovina. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, an organisation in Nazi Germany, charged with the resettlement of ethnic Germans from all over the Eastern Europe into the Reich, decided to “bring home” the Bukowinian Germans. People could theoretically decide if they were willing to move to Germany (actually into the occupied western Polish territories) or to stay under Soviet regime. Being misled through unrealistic promises of how they would be able to start a new life in Germany and because of the fear of the Soviets, between 27 September and 17 November 1940 all the ethnic Germans from northern Bukovina, about 44,650 people, emigrated to Germany. Shortly after the Germans from northern i.e. Soviet Bukovina started to emigrate, those from the Romanian Bukovina, many having relatives among those from northern Bukovina, also applied for emigration. By autumn 1941 all Germans from northern Bukovina had left for Germany whereas in the southern part there remained only 3446<sup>21</sup>. This was just the beginning of the destruction of the multi-ethnic Bukovina. Frightened of the Soviet occupation, which occurred in northern Bukovina on 28 June 1940, this time it was the Romanians who had to leave. One year later, when Romanian and German troops took Bukovina under their control, Ukrainians and Jews had to flee. Last, but not least, came the Transnistrian ordeal that definitively put an end to multi-cultural society in Bukovina created under Austrian rule and still maintained during the interwar period. Under the circumstances of the Second World War, in only five years, Bukovina completely changed its ethnic and religious composition, ceasing to represent anymore an East-European Switzerland.

## **2. German-Jewish identities in Bukovina before the Second World War**

Jews lived in the Bukovina even before it has existed as a separate province. Already in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, some Jewish families chose to move from the German lands to that part of northern Moldavia, which later became Bukovina. They found under Moldavian

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<sup>21</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.371.

voivodes, who were vassals of the Ottomans, more protection and a better chance for survival. Since they came from German-speaking territory, they were speaking a Germanic language, the archaic Yiddish. In spite of the fact that some later Austrian authorities considered Yiddish only as a dialect of the German and not a distinct language, the crystallisation of a separate German and Yiddish cultural identity among the Bukovinian Jews makes it justified to regard German and Yiddish as two distinct languages. Therefore, German-Jewish identity refers only to those Bukovinian Jews whose native language was the literary German, a kind of “Hochdeutsch” with a local accent, and who cultivated, according to their “Bildungsideal” what they saw as German culture.

After the Turks lost the war against the Austrian Empire, these territories became Austrian in 1775. More waves of Jewish immigration during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enriched Bukovina’s multi-cultural character. Those who first came into the new Austrian acquisition were Yiddish-speaking Jews from the neighbouring Galicia and Podolia. Migration within the extended imperial borders was easier, and a series of economical advantages granted by the Austrian authorities lured people to Bukovina. In exchange for the chance to have a better life, the authorities expected them to become loyal subjects, and after 1867, loyal citizens of the Habsburg Empire. The assimilation or respectively the acculturation of the Jews<sup>22</sup> in Central Europe was a general phenomenon. Through education and a relative prosperity, many Jews managed to elevate themselves to the level of the local national elites. A good example of this is Hungary, where by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the Jews were Hungarian-speaking.<sup>23</sup> In Bukovina, even at

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<sup>22</sup> The term “acculturation” seems to be more suitable than “assimilation” to define the process the Central European Jewry went through. It means that they assimilated the cultural values of their German or Hungarian environment but they were not assimilated in the German, respectively Hungarian society. Their “acculturation” was a highly differentiated process in which Jewish identity, knowledge, and commitment were maintained in varying degrees. Thus, “acculturation” cannot be equated with an abandonment of Judaism. Paul Mendes-Flohr: *German Jews. A Dual Identity*, Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1999, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> William O. McCagg Jr., *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, p.139.

such distance from the nucleus of the German language and culture, a considerable part of the Jewish immigrants became German-speaking, cultivating the German culture as their own. However, they were not the majority among the Bukovinian Jews, since new waves of Jewish immigrants continued to enter the province until the First World War and shortly afterwards<sup>24</sup>, but they represented the majority in the urban areas, and above all in the capital of Bukovina, Czernowitz. In addition, many German-speaking Jews lived in some other smaller towns such as Suceava (34.2%) and Rădăuți (33.6%)<sup>25</sup>. Their identification with German language and culture was an expression of their loyalty towards the Austrian State. Having an important social-economic role in Bukovina, they developed a special local identity as part of their Austrian past. It was only the religion and their traditions that made them different from the Christian Germans. But the collapse of the Austrian Empire, the “Romanisation” policy in Greater Romania, their degradation to second class-citizens and not least, the spreading of Nazism among Germans, made their attachment to the German culture questionable. In the new state of the Greater Romania one can barely speak of “Romanian Jewry” since the majority of the Jews living from 1919 on in Romanian territory had little in common with the Romanian language, history, culture and mentality, regarding Romania rather as a “host state”<sup>26</sup>. Transylvanian Jews assimilated culturally and linguistically to Hungarian and those from urban areas even regarded themselves as Hungarians of Jewish faith. In Bessarabia, the majority of the Jews were Yiddish-speaking, with a few Russian-speaking Jewish intellectuals. In the rest of the country, Jews used to speak Romanian, Yiddish, and German as well. Hebrew was still rather a language of worship and by no means all the Jews were ready to accept the Zionist vision of its revival and daily use.

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<sup>24</sup> According to the census from 1930, 79.8% of the Bukovinian Jews specified Yiddish as their mother tongue and only the rest, about 20% German. Sabin Manuila, Wilhelm Filderman, *Regional Development of the Jewish Population in Romania*, Hallandale, 1996, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.292.

<sup>26</sup> About 70% of the Jews in Greater Romania became Romanian subjects through territorial acquisitions Romanian made after the First World War. Only less than 30% used Romanian as colloquial language or had affiliations to the Romanian culture. Raphael Vago, *Romanian Jewry During the Interwar Period*, in: Randolph L. Braham, *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.29.

Under such a linguistic diversity, it became soon evident that language could not be regarded any longer as a bonding agent of the Jews living in Romania, but it would have been preferable to find a common language and that could have been Romanian. Why were the German-speaking Jews, after they no longer belonged to Austria not more willing to exchange their German identity for a Romanian one? During historical times, Jews adjusted themselves linguistically with ease, as their interests required it. Even Yiddish was the result of such a linguistic adjustment made centuries ago.

There was a significant difference between the Jews who lived in Romania (the Old Kingdom) before the First World War and their co-religionists from Bukovina. The latter group had long been emancipated under Austrian rule and enjoyed full equality, whereas in the Old Kingdom of Romania, Jews emancipated slowly and Romanians were quite reluctant to give them political rights.

The German-Jewish culture in Bukovina developed under Austrian rule during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in literature, through its representatives such as Karl Emil Franzos, Emil Singer and Kamillo Lauer. After a relative ‘calm’ in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bukovinian German-Jewish cultural activity experienced a spectacular upswing, precisely during the 1930s, under Romania rule. It was again literature, represented this time by Alfred Margul-Sperber, Alfred Kittner and Rose Ausländer that expressed their affiliation to the German language and culture. However, even if Bukovina’s borders changed, all those who were educated in German before the First World War remained marked by a strong German-Jewish identity with nostalgic feelings towards Vienna. Especially intellectuals identified themselves through the German language and tried to integrate their literary creation in the general German culture<sup>27</sup>. The above-mentioned writers belonged to this category.

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<sup>27</sup> Alfred Kittner, a German-speaking Jewish poet from Czernowitz considered himself “ein Deutschrumäne, im alten Österreich geboren” (1906) in a letter addressed to Hermann Hesse, a well-known German writer and

Under Romanian rule, Jews could attend only primary school in German and afterwards had to learn in Romanian secondary schools. These changes introduced a process that began, in different ways and with variable intensity, to affect the identity of the younger generation. One must recognize that assimilation to the Romanian national culture would not have offered a more comfortable life, since Romanian nationalism had an exclusive character based on ethnic origin. In spite of that, in little towns, especially from southern Bukovina, with a more predominant Romanian environment such as Câmpulung, Gura Humorului, Suceava, the preference for Romanian among the young became evident by the late 1930s<sup>28</sup>. Some of them adopted deliberately a “patriotic” attitude, as a reaction to the new socio-political realities, hoping that Romania would treat them like Romanians and not like undesirable aliens<sup>29</sup>.

In northern Bukovina and especially in Czernowitz, the German cultural heritage was still strong enough to hinder or at least to delay a new acculturation. An appropriate example in this sense is the poet Paul Celan, the last remarkable representative of the German-Jewish literature from Bukovina. To his generation belonged also Immanuel Weißglas and Alfred Gong.

Paul Celan’s education and identity are illustrative of the young German-speaking middle-class Jews of Czernowitz. Celan first went to a German kindergarten where one would

editor, asking help in order to publish some of his poems. Erst Wichner; Herbert Wiesner (editors), *In der Sprache der Mörder. Eine Literatur aus Czernowitz, Bukowina*, Literaturhaus Berlin, 1993, p.107.

<sup>28</sup> Mirjam Korber, a Transnistria survivor from Câmpulung, preferred to keep her diary during her deportation in Djurin (1941-1944) in Romanian, although she grew up in a German-speaking Jewish family. As a child during the 1920s, she attended Romanian and German-Jewish kindergarten at the same time, learning also Hebrew. Other friends of similar age and cultural background used at the same time German and Romanian when they wrote recollections in her diary. See Miriam Bercovici-Korber, *Jurnal de ghetou: Djurin*. Translated in German; see also Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert. Jüdische Überlebensschicksale aus Rumänien 1941-1944. Ein Tagebuch*, Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1993, p.109.

<sup>29</sup> Illustrative in this sense is Gerhard Schreiber’s story described in his memoirs. He was a German-speaking Jewish teenage boy during the mid 1930s, attending in Czernowitz, as the majority of the Jews had to do, a Romanian high school. “Once, while we were all standing at attention in the school yard for some flag raising ceremony, during the singing of the national anthem, with our right hands raised in a Roman salute (almost like the Nazi variety), I normally sang along with much gusto. A Romanian classmate told me not to exert myself too much since it wasn’t my anthem, - you are Jewish. I very much wanted to be Romanian, and here I got a cold shower that dampened my patriotic zeal.” Gerhard Schreiber: *A Tale of Survival*, p.5. Ruth Glasberg Gold asserts in her memoir that she felt patriotism for Romania and love for the Romanian crown prince Mihai. Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth’s Journey. A Survivor’s Memoir*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.

seldom speak Romanian. In the 1920s, parents still considered it necessary to provide for their children an environment where they would cultivate the German mother tongue. Religion had a subordinated, secondary role, since the forefathers of these emancipated families from Czernowitz already abandoned the orthodox Jewish traditions by adhering to Hasidism.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, religious education was provided only after the age when the child went to school.

There was a Hebrew elementary school in Czernowitz that Paul Celan attended and where he learnt Hebrew. As language of worship, Hebrew represented, at that time, one of the most significant elements of the Jewish identity. Its revival and the attempts to elevate it to the rank of a colloquial language under the influence of Zionism, solidified the Jewish consciousness, even if German continued to dominate the everyday life of the German-Jewish families in Czernowitz<sup>31</sup>. It is hardly possible to speak of bilingualism in this case, since Hebrew was not regularly used and the knowledge of this language was different from one person to another.<sup>32</sup> Although bilingualism or even multilingualism was specific not only for Jewish families, but also for Romanians or Ukrainians, Jews were very flexible in assimilating the language of the dominant nation, and during the interwar period, that was to be Romanian.

High school education in Greater Romania was possible only in Romanian. Thus, Jewish children, too, had to learn Romanian. There had been established schools for Romanians, but because of their small number, mainly Jews and Ukrainians were attending them. That

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<sup>30</sup> "Hasidism was a religious movement which arose among the Polish Jews in the eighteenth century and which won over nearly half of the Jewish masses. In its literal meaning, the word "Hasidism" is identical with "pietism" and the Hasidic teachings resemble the synonymous Protestant teachings in so far as they both assign the first place in religion not to religious dogma and ritual but to the sentiment and the emotion of faith. Presenting in its inner motives one of the most peculiar phenomena of religious psychology in general, Hasidism should in Jewish history be classed among the most momentous spiritual revolutions that have influenced the social life of the Jews, particularly those of Eastern Europe." *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. VI, New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1904, p.251

<sup>31</sup>The rise of Nazism in Germany led to a certain weakness of the identification with the German culture mainly among Jews, who sympathised with Zionist ideas or were left-wing oriented. In addition, due to the deterioration of the economic situation, which made the perspective of emigration to Palestine more attractive, the influence of Zionists considerably increased by the 1930s. Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.297.

<sup>32</sup> It is unknown how many Jews knew Hebrew since they did not declare it as mother tongue during the census from 1930. Raphael Vago, *Romanian Jewry...*, p.35.

was the case with the high school where Paul Celan studied for his Baccalaureate or Matura, as during the Austrian time<sup>33</sup>. But, as many other German-speaking Jews from Czernowitz, Paul Celan remained true to the German language, even after the horrifying experience of the war. Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, a young poet from Czernowitz started to write poems in German at age of 15. She continued to write poems in German in spite of the cruel conditions of the slave labour camp in Mikhailovka, administrated by the Germans.<sup>34</sup> These people continued to speak among each other their mother tongue. Even now, some Czernowitzers raised in German-speaking Jewish families spread all over the world prefer, after so many years in totally different linguistic environments, to use German as an everyday language.

The time spent in Romanian educational institutions influenced in a different way the linguistic preferences of young German-speaking Jews. As shown above, Czernowitzers kept almost entirely their German mother tongue, whereas in smaller cities and villages from southern Bukovina, German-speaking Jews were more likely to assimilate into Romanian. Therefore, one can distinguish two main directions in which the linguistic and cultural identity of German-speaking Jews from the Bukovina developed in the interwar period: keeping the German cultural heritage in the North and a gradual assimilation into the Romanian language in the South.

The question of whether there was a “third way” of constructing a linguistic and cultural identity might arise. Arnold Daghani, the “forgotten” painter from Bukovina who immortalised in one of his paintings the tragic demise of Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, developed an individual way to express his own identity. Although it contained elements

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<sup>33</sup> Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend*, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979, p.43.

<sup>34</sup> She died of typhoid fever on 16 December 1942 at age of 17. In the labour camp of Mikhailovka she wrote poems such as the *Wiegenlied*, dated January 1941 on the struggle of Jewish settlers in Palestine, and *Poem* expressing her desire and struggle to survive. Erst Wichner, Herbert Wiesner (editors), *In der Sprache der Mörder*, p.160. See also Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan*, p.42. For more poems of her, see in: Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt. Gedichte eines jüdischen Mädchens an seinen Freund*. (Herausgeber Jürgen Serke), Hamburg/Frankfurt am Main, 1980.

of Judaism, German, and Romanian culture, it was something what we would call today “European identity”. He was born in 1909 in a German-speaking Jewish family in Suceava (Suceava). His family name was Korn meaning “corn” in English. Although he abandoned the religious strictness of his father, he changed his name by translating the German Korn into Hebrew. Monica Bohm Duchem, who wrote a biographical introduction to her book on Daghani’s artistic creation alleged that this change must have happened probably in the 1930s after he moved to Bucharest but new evidence prove that Daghani was known during his deportation between 1942-1944 as Arnold Korn and this was also his official name used in the documents at that time.<sup>35</sup> Even more, he was ready to change his religion, converting to Calvinism on the eve of the Second World War<sup>36</sup>. Was it pure opportunism, was it part of his endeavour to become more West European or was it his honest religious conviction to do so? Nevertheless, it was not German but English and French culture he wanted to cultivate. Apparently, it could seem like a rejection of the German cultural heritage of the family. Was there any connexion between these changes in his identity and the rise of Nazism in Germany? However, many German-speaking Jews, such as Paul Celan, retained their German identity refusing to link German culture with Nazism. Taking into consideration Arnold Daghani’s whole personality reflected in his artistic heritage, it is hard to believe that he renounced his German cultural identity because of a possible connection between Germans and Nazism<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> One of the survivors of the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka, Philipp Kellmer remembered him as Arnold Korn, finding out only in 1960 that he changed his name.

<sup>36</sup> It is still unclear when exactly he converted or even if he converted at all. In his eyewitness interrogation report presented to the Court of Lübeck during some investigations against German war criminals, Daghani asserted that he was already “a Protestant Jew” when he left Bucharest for Czernowitz. It is still unclear if he left Bucharest in June 1940 or after the earthquake from 8 November 1940. Zeugenhaftliche Vernehmung, Staatsanwaltschaft Lübeck bei dem Landesgericht, 2 P Js 1629/64, 9 June 1965: vorgeladen Arnold Daghani, p.2. A copy of this document is in the Daghani Archive at the University of Sussex (DAUS).

<sup>37</sup> Monica Bohm Duchem asserted that “only with the accession of Hitler to power in 1933 did Daghani come to hate and to renounce the language of his childhood”. She also considered that Daghani should have changed his family name “to avoid an identification with a Jew of Germanic origin.” Monica Bohm Duchem, *Arnold Daghani*, London: Diptych, 1987, pp. 11-12.

Even if we would merge all German-speakers into one cultural group, Christian and Jewish alike, was not possible any more because of the gradual segregation between the two communities, the evolution of the relations between ethnic Germans and German-speaking Jews had an essential role in the diversification of the German-Jewish identity. However, until the First World War and even during the 1920s, anti-Semitism was not perceived as a German phenomenon<sup>38</sup>. One could find among Romanians or Ukrainians as well anti-Semitic agitators. Anti-Semitism still did not have the violence that would be known during the 1930s and all the propaganda and political agitation still did not poison ordinary people<sup>39</sup>. During that time, it was still possible for a Jewish boy to have a German governess and Germans to have Jews as their best friends<sup>40</sup>. Germans and Jews in Czernowitz read the same newspapers until 1925, since there was no separate German-Christian and German-Jewish daily press. This German-speaking press belonged to Jewish owners who pleaded for a better understanding between Germans and Jews.

In 1927 Mayer Ebner, one of the leaders of the Zionists in the Bukovina, characterised the relations between Germans and Jews, asserting: "There are few regions populated by Germans and Jews, where they were and still are on such peaceful, friendly and warm terms, like in the Bukovina."<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, once major changes occurred in political life, they began to affect also the relations at a lower level. It began with intensive and virulent disputes between intellectuals and gradually, hostility penetrated the consciousness of the masses. Even if there were some exceptions, the gap between Bukovinian Germans and

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<sup>38</sup> A turning point for the Bukovinian Jews about the political realities in Germany must have been the 9 November 1938 (Reichskristallnacht). As the news about these atrocities reached Bukovina, German-speaking Jews could not believe that a "civilized and disciplined nation" could support such brutalities. Leiza Hoffer: Ordinary people in extraordinary times, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered! 50 Years of Silence. History and Voices of the Tragedy in Romania and Transnistria*, Toronto: Abbyfield Publisher, 1997, p.270.

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Korber-Hoisie, the sister of Mirjam, remembered about the 1920s in Câmpulung where the family lived: „During my childhood there was no difference between Romanian, German and Jewish children. We all played together, I have never felt any difference. It was the same regarding our Romanian and German neighbours. They invited us to celebrate Christmas and we invited them to celebrate Purim. There were many Germans and we understood each other well. I have to emphasize: we were good neighbours; we had a nice time together. We lived with Romanians and with Germans too in peace until 1940. But soon after the first attacks on Jews started.” (Translated from German), Mirjam Korber: *Deportiert*, p.39.

<sup>40</sup> Gerhard Schreiber: *A Tale of Survival*, p.1; Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey*, p.55.

<sup>41</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*, p.186.

Jews became, after 1933<sup>42</sup> and especially after 9 November 1938, unbridgeable. In one of his attempts to fill this gap, the well-known German-speaking Jewish journalist and literary man, Alfred Margul-Sperber, analysed in an article from 1937 the changes which had occurred in the relations between ethnic Germans and Jews since the beginning of the First World War. This was obviously a reaction to the increasing anti-Jewish attitude of the Czernovitzian German newspapers (called by Margul-Sperber “Neanderthalian journalism”), which instigated a pogrom and boycott of Jewish shops. He admitted that the Jews of Bukovina achieved their higher cultural level through the German professors and intellectuals who taught them about western civilisation. The ethnic Germans were aware that the German-speaking Jewry was the most reliable and energetic partner (“Bundesgenossen”) for their cultural mission in that corner of the world, arousing the anger of the dominant (Romanian) nation.

After the First World War, when the ethnic Germans became themselves a minority in Greater Romania, they regarded the Jews rather as their fellows (“Schicksalgenossen”), but not their adversaries. However, after the big political changes in the German Reich, a similarly great change occurred also in the relations between Germans and Jews in Bukovina. After the Nazis came to power and introduced anti-Semitic laws discrediting and libelling Jews, Jewish people from all over the world, including those from Bukovina, felt it was their duty to take a protective position on behalf of their fellow Jews in Germany, against all the defamation and accusation launched by Nazis and condemning their inhuman policy. Although these positions of the Jewish newspapers from Bukovina never targeted the German people, ethnic Germans from Bukovina regarded the anti-Nazi position of their Jewish co-inhabitants as an anti-German attitude. The local press had an important role in the degradation and poisoning of the German-Jewish relations, since

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<sup>42</sup> After one of the Jewish parties (Partidul Evreesc din România) declared in the Romanian parliament in 1933 a general boycott of products from Germany, the representatives of the German minority suspended any contact with Jewish political organisations. *Ibid.*, p.298.

German newspapers (and above all the most widely read *Tageblatt*) intensified their increasingly aggressive propaganda.

Alfred Margul-Sperber was also wondering about the causes that poisoned the German-Jewish relations in the Bukovina since Bukovinian Jews, numerical superior to ethnic Germans, were never hostile or rivals. There had never been serious frictions or conflicts between the two German-speaking “nations”, opined Margul-Sperber. It seemed that both ethnic Germans and Jews, after losing their political power (in the Austrian Empire), were threatened by the Romanisation policy of the new authorities, whose aim was undermine their socio-economic position. Instead of collaborating against the common enemy, Romanian chauvinism, Germans and Jews in Bukovina had to witness at their own spiritual annihilation. The two “nations”, Germans and Jews who would have had all the reasons to fight together for their national survival, supporting each other in their attempts to keep their German-speaking character, had been alienated from each other through an “irresponsible” instigation.

Alfred Margul-Sperber considered that it was still not too late to put an end to this abnormality, as long as the verbal confrontation did not develop into hatred between the two “nations”, that the unbearable tension between both would be eliminated in order to rescue them out the present situation of ruin.<sup>43</sup> However, Margul-Sperber’s appeal could not convince the representatives of the German minority from Bukovina to collaborate between ethnic Germans and German-speaking Jews and not to pursue a rapprochement with Nazi-Germany.

The organisations of the German minority in Romania could hardly finance themselves after the economic crisis of the early 1930s. The old elites had no new ideas how to stop the impoverishment of large social categories of the German minority. Due to the decrease in the financial contribution by its members, German organisations depended on

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<sup>43</sup>Ernest Wichner, Herbert Wiesener, *In der Sprache der Mörder*, p.110.

subventions from Germany. They were in a serious competition with each other for the support of the German government in order to receive grants. After the Nazis came to power, these organisations did not hesitate to adopt a “völkisch” ideology, hoping to gain the sympathy of the new rulers in Berlin, for the same purpose: subventions.<sup>44</sup> The politicising of everyday life forced people to be confronted by the question of their own identity and in a short time, identity became a crucial factor on which destinies and even lives depended.

During the interwar period and especially during the Second World War, Jewish identity exposed people to the worst consequences. However, each ethnic group living in the Bukovina was affected in different ways by the political events, because of their identity. In fact, the first who had to leave Bukovina en masse were the ethnic Germans. It is true that they were not deported, but the whole action of “repatriating” ethnic Germans from Northern, and few months later from Southern Bukovina, seemed more like a “self-deportation” than emigration<sup>45</sup>. They were simple chess pawns in the plans regarding the German “Neue Ordnung” in Eastern Europe. After all, it was a voluntary decision of each person who felt being a German and hoped for a better future in Germany. Statistics of this “repatriation” show that many of those who applied for emigration to Germany were refused or were classed in the category of those whose right to be nationalised by the Germans authorities was denied. A significant part of them were baptised German-speaking Jews. Paradoxically, they were Jews who must have had such a dominant German identity that they decided to “deny” their Jewish origin in order to “flee” from the Soviets to Nazi-Germany.

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<sup>44</sup> Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*p.275.

<sup>45</sup> An „Umsiedlungskommando“ led by an SS officer carried out the entire procedure of emigration. Because people were transported on railway, they were not allowed to take with them more than 35 kg handbag and 50 kg freight transport per family. Once in the Reich, many of them had to live in camps and to accept jobs, which were inferior to their professional skills. Although they were promised that communities would be settled together, families were spread all over the country as the “Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle” considered necessary for its purpose. Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung...*p.373.

The identity issue of the Bukovina Jewry is a very complex one. Besides the two main categories of Jewish identities represented by the German-speaking and the Yiddish-speaking Jews, new identity trends developed inside of the German-speaking Jewish community itself. There were changes occurring in the political evolution in Europe, and these affected Bukovina as well. However, the process of political transformation from the second half of the 1930s developed so quickly that these identity trends were not able anymore to merge into a larger, new Bukovinian Jewish identity. The deportations to Transnistria, the flight from the German and Romanian fascists, and the general tendency of the survivors after the war to start a new life far away from their '*lieu de mémoire*', dispersed the Bukovinian German-speaking Jews all over the world. Retaining elements of their pre-war identity, the intrusion of the political upheavals in their life left behind evident traces in their souls. Nevertheless, this issue relating to the transformation through which their Bukovinian German-Jewish identity underwent after the experience of the terrible years 1940-1944, is of such a complexity that it requires separate research.

## **Chapter II: Human destinies in the shadow of the racial and xenophobic ideology**

### **1. Particular aspects of anti-Semitism in Romania (1920-1944)**

The interwar period was in many countries of Europe a time in which the fascist, anti-Semitic extremist right wing ideology was elevated to the rank of state policy enabling the establishment of regimes based on anti-Semitic, xenophobic legislation and racial persecution. The path from ideological confrontation to the physical harm and extermination of the imagined enemies identified with the Jewish population had its own particularity in each of these countries. Greater Romania having already a pronounced anti-Semitic tradition inherited to the previous decades and amplified during the whole interwar period was no exception from the political development ending in an anti-Semitic totalitarian regime under the circumstances of a gradual rapprochement towards Nazi-Germany and a political and military alliance with it. Unlike in Germany, the intrusion of the politics in the every day life of the Romanian Jews as result of the anti-Semitic ideology occurred gradually since Romania could remain in spite of the anti-Semitic atmosphere and riots until the end of 1930s a constitutional democracy. Therefore at least until the first openly anti-Semitic law decreed in January 1938 the Romanian Jewry hoped to benefit of the protection of the state authorities against the violence of the supporters of the racial and xenophobic ideology.

This ideology varied from a “soft” discourse against alleged Jewish economic dominance until the expulsion and even extermination of the Jews. On the one hand there were the theoreticians of the racial and xenophobic ideology represented by well-known intellectuals who spread their extremist right wing philosophy among the younger generation ready to carry out an imagined “spiritual revolution”. On the other hand there

were supporters of this ideology grouped in political organisations who fanatically believed in the creation of a new Romania without Jews. Their main organisation was the Legion of the Archangel Mihail, later called Iron Guard, which spread fear and terror among the Jews. Its beginning goes back to the year 1922 when on 10 December a youth union of the nationalist anti-Semitic forces was created known as the “Generation of ‘22”. These young men and university students were first the supporters of the “father of the Romanian anti-Semitism”, Professor A. C. Cuza but later they developed their own ideology based on a mixture of Orthodox religious mysticism and nationalist xenophobia targeting the Jews as the main obstacle in the fulfilment of their “mission”.<sup>46</sup>

One can distinguish three main forms of anti-Semitism in Romania, which could be also found in other countries in different historical periods. Besides the social anti-Semitism that was the dominating form, there existed also the religious anti-Semitism gradually replaced by the different nuances of the racial anti-Semitism as known in Germany. However the religious anti-Semitism alone was less exclusive since according to its principles Jews were just wrong to refuse to accept the fulfilment of the prophecies of the New Testament. Their conversion to Christianity would have been a benevolent sign of reconciliation between Jews and Christians honestly appreciated by the later and therefore would have had spared the Jews so many inconveniences.<sup>47</sup> However the legionary ideology contained all the three forms of anti-Semitism excluding any concession for those considered Jews to become Romanians.

Anti-Semitism in the interwar Romania had a wide scale of representation. Being anti-Semitic did not mean automatically being also the supporter of the pro-fascist movement. The so-called moderate anti-Semitism with tradition in the pre-war Romania was widely represented in the Romanian cultural and political life. To these moderate anti-Semites

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<sup>46</sup> Codreanu, *Eiserne Garde*, Berlin: Brunnen-Verlag. The book was probably published during the war after the death of the leader of the Iron Guard Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and contains his political testimony.

<sup>47</sup> The anti-Semitic newspaper *Sfarmă Piatră* published in December 1936 an article on this issue. See the article *Naționalismul sub aspectul creștin*, in: *Sfarmă Piatră*, no.56, 20 December 1936, p.8.

belonged also the renowned historian and politician Nicolae Iorga.<sup>48</sup> He approached the “Jewish question” from a nationalist ideology inspired by the traditional values of Romanian rural life in opposition to the modernisation and the heterogeneous character of the urban environment. Iorga’s favourite political subject was the economic domination of the Jews and its negative effects on the peasantry. However the intensity of his anti-Semitism varied also in time from a strong xenophobic discourse published in inflammatory pamphlets before the First World War suggesting that the struggle against the Jewish dominance had almost been lost and the Romanians had become serfs of the Jews, to a conciliatory attitude rejecting violence and extreme measures in the last period of his life. Nevertheless he continued to believe that even if some outstanding Jewish personalities had contributed to the Romanian culture, on the whole Jews remained aliens and a real threat to the Romanian nation because of their number and socio-economic influence.<sup>49</sup>

Whereas Iorga blamed the Jews from his position of a conservative nationalist, the social democrat Constantin Stere considered them an “impediment” to Romania’s normal development emphasising the social character of the “Jewish question”. However he was the one who inaugurated a new form of anti-Semitism rejecting “vocal” anti-Semitism, excesses, violence and demagogy. Like Iorga, he softened his anti-Semitic rhetoric when the anti-Semitic tensions grew due to the enforcement of the pro-fascist movement after 1927. Already in 1927 Stere wrote about the importance of the Jews in the history of mankind expressing his belief that they would continue to occupy a place of honour in the

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<sup>48</sup> Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) is considered the greatest Romanian historian. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until his assassination in 1940, he dominated the cultural and academic life in Romania. Iorga received his doctorate at Leipzig University in 1893 and began lecturing in world history at the Bucharest University one year later for forty-six years. He founded important Romanian cultural and scientific institutions, being elected as a honorary member of the most prestigious European academies. As a politician he founded in 1910 together with the fervent anti-Semitic A.C. Cuza the Democratic Nationalist Party but he broke with him after 1922. In the interwar period Iorga was an MP, minister and even prime minister for a short time. The members of the fascist Iron Guard assassinated him in November 1940. See Petre Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga în viața politică a României*, Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1991, p.372.

<sup>49</sup> Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism, The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930's*, Oxford, New York, Seoul, Tokyo: Pergamon Press, 1991, p.32.

community and society.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately not all the influential politicians and theoreticians of the interwar period reacted in that way to the increasing anti-democratic, anti-Jewish and pro-fascist violence. On the contrary, certain politicians were captivated by the nationalist ardour of the “generation of ‘22”. So was the Transylvanian poet and politician Octavian Goga, the prospective chief of the Goga-Cuza cabinet, which introduced in February 1938 the first openly anti-Semitic law depriving thousands of Jews of their Romanian citizenship. In comparison with the supporters and members of the fascist Iron Guard, Goga was still a moderate anti-Semitic politician even if his political creed contained elements of the Nazi-friendly Iron Guard ideology about “racial purity”, “prerogatives of the blood” and the “organic truths of the race”. He saw the revival of anti-Semitism during the 1930s as proof of the outbreak of a war against ‘foreigners’, by regarding Jews as aggressors, then he could justify the violence of the ‘Romanians’ i.e. of the pro-fascists against the Jews.<sup>51</sup>

Moderate anti-Semitism meant the lesser evil for the Jewish population since this form of indirect attack against Jews was mainly limited to press articles, pamphlets, and political discourses. The factual threat came from the radical youth of the “generation of ‘22” and its political leaders, who not only spoke against the Jews but also were ready to physically harm them. This extreme form of anti-Semitism had its origin in the political thoughts of A.C. Cuza,<sup>52</sup> the founder of the Guard of National Awareness in 1919, of the Christian National Defence League in 1923 and of the National Christian Party in 1935. His main ideas were reflected in the programme of the League of Christian National Defence advocating the immediate abrogation of the political rights of the Jews, the expulsion of all those who had entered the country after 1914 and the dismissal of Jews from the army

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.39

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.43

<sup>52</sup> In the 1920's A.C. Cuza was highly respected in Romania. Due to his seniority Cuza occupied the position of the president of the Chamber of Deputies since 1922.

and public offices.<sup>53</sup> Almost simultaneously with the beginning of the use of the swastika in Germany by the National Socialist Workers Party, this symbol was adopted also by A.C. Cuza, for his party considered an Aryan symbol the most suitable for the Romanians because of their “Thracian Aryan origin”. The members and supporters of Cuza’s League often called ‘Cuzists’ wore a blue uniform frightening the Jewish population during their manifestations. Thus the Cuzists dominated with their violent behaviour the anti-Semitic scene of the 1920s. During the following decade a new anti-Semitic, more radical and aggressive political organisation conquered the extremist political scene in Romania: the Legionary Movement.<sup>54</sup>

The cradle of this movement was actually the already existing radical anti-Semitic party of A.C. Cuza. However, the recently founded more radical anti-Semitic groups within the League tended to escape Cuza’s tutelage by the late 1920s. An ambitious, young, apparently charismatic and mystic but also fanatic figure stood out from the members of the League gaining an increasing number of supporters. His name was Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. His family was originally from Bukovina. His father Johann Zelinsky was of German-Polish origin. His mother Eliza Brauner was the granddaughter of an immigrant from Bavaria. J. Zelinsky left Bukovina in 1901 and moved to Iași, then to Vaslui. Zelinsky changed his name into Zelea sounding more Romanian. His son, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu added the Romanian word “codrean” (person living in the forest) to his name. One could allege that his extremist nationalism and xenophobia was also a result of his “identity uncertainty”.<sup>55</sup> Called the “Capitan” of the Legionary Movement, he founded in 1927 his own party under the name The Legion of the Archangel Mihail. Cuza’s party

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<sup>53</sup> Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism*, p.27

<sup>54</sup> At the election of 1932 the League of National Christian Defence still could obtain more votes than the young legionary movement. However at the elections of 1937 the Legionnaires obtained further more votes (15.5%) than Cuza’s party (9.15%). Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail. Mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, p. 180. The original edition in German: *Die Legion “Erzengel Mihail” in Rumänien: Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, München: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1986.

<sup>55</sup> Mihai Vișan, *Antonescu și legiunea*, Ed. Timpul: Reșița, 2002, pp.9-10.

failed to be elected in the Parliament in 1929 whereas the radical new party became increasingly popular among university students, young intellectuals, factory workers and peasants. The Legion's ideology was consequently reflected in its semi-official newspaper *Pământ Strămoșesc* (Our Forefathers' Land). Already the design of the newspaper's front page suggested the xenophobic character of its content. The swastika appeared combined with the figure of the archangel Michael with a map representing Greater Romania containing black circles. Subsequent issues explained that these circles represent the "icon of the Romanian towns overwhelmed by the Jews". The articles published in *Pământ Strămoșesc* often gave the impression that the Legionnaires were actually defending themselves as innocent victims of Jewish aggression.<sup>56</sup> Two years after the official foundation of the Legion its members launched a violent press campaign in order to "awake the Christians" agitating against the peaceful co-habitation between Christians and Jews.<sup>57</sup> The Legionnaires regarded the rural areas as a place still free of Jews but threatened to be "conquered" by them. With simplistic slogans they enforced their agitation presenting the attacks against Jews as self-defence in order to rescue the Romanian village.<sup>58</sup> The religious component of their anti-Semitism was high and always associated with the racial and social anti-Semitism. They often published appeals for "fighting the Judah" and the descendants of the killers of Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup> This kind of religious anti-Semitism went so far that even the Jewish origin of Jesus was denied. An article written by the university professor Ion Găvănescu "demonstrated" that Jesus of

<sup>56</sup> Defining its role in the Romanian society, the newspaper assumed the task "of making an anti-Semitic atmosphere" by presenting in its columns "cases" in which Romanians (peasants, university students, members and supporters of the Legion) were attacked and maltreated by Jews being afterwards "unjustly" punished by the authorities. See the "case" of Vatra Dornei in the Bukovina in: *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.6, 15.10.1927, p.13.

<sup>57</sup> *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 15.06.1929, p.5. In an article dedicated to Romania's national holiday on 10 May the author was indignant because the Jewish "Maccabi" sport team was also allowed to participate at the parade in Iași. He ended his article with a clear appeal to violence: "...We have to clean a whole country of the Yiddish guests and we don't think a moment that this goal can be achieved only by words". *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 15.06.1929, p.7.

<sup>58</sup> „Look at this now how also our villages are invaded by the scoundrel and whereas some time ago the peasant was despoiled of his goods by the Jews living in towns who swarmed around the countryside markets and along the edge of the towns, so the enemy was only in the yard, now the Romanian peasant has the enemy in his own house.... Should we wait until the knife will cut our bones, being crushed by them (by the Jews) or should we take the knife from our enemy's hand as long as we still can do it turning it against him?" *Ibid.*, p.7

<sup>59</sup> *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.4, 15.09.1927, p12.

Nazareth did not belong to David's people, therefore he could not be Jewish and even born by Mary, he was a "pure product" of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> This movement had many features common with other European fascist movements but was also distinguishable from other fascist organisations. The Legion of the Archangel Mihail renamed in 1933 Iron Guard<sup>61</sup> was in fact a populist organisation with strong mystical characteristics practicing rituals taken from medieval Orthodox Christianity dedicated to the cult of the dead and later to the "martyrs" of the movement.<sup>62</sup> The sacrifice became the supreme fulfilment. Dying in the actions of the Iron Guard meant in their view sacrificing the life as a martyr for nation and Christianity.<sup>63</sup> The Legionnaires introduced for the first time in Romania murder as a method of combating adversaries.<sup>64</sup> Their aim was to create the "Legionary-Christian state" as a new political form that would achieve a perfect accord between the supreme leader and the will of the people undermining the political system of the constitutional democracy that existed in Romania until 1938.<sup>65</sup> Before Hitler came to power in Germany the model of the legionary movement was Italian fascism, Zelea Codreanu being often compared with Mussolini. But the most relevant aspect that differed from the Italian fascists was the exacerbated anti-Semitism typical of Nazism.<sup>66</sup> They anticipated the Nazis' actions by organising boycotts against Jewish shops like in December-January 1932-1933 in memory of the day of 10 December 1922, "the day of the awaking to

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<sup>60</sup> *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 01.01.1933, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> The change of name reflects a kind of military conversion of the xenophobic orthodox-fundamentalist movement. Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*, p.186.

<sup>62</sup> Before Ion I. Moța, one of the leaders of the legionnaires, died on 20 January 1937 during his voluntary participation in the Spanish civil war on Franco's side, he allegedly declared: "That was the duty of my life! I loved the Christ and I went happy to die for Him." *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 08.11.1940, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> In the "order of battle" issued by C. Zelea Codreanu the Legion had to set up a formation composed of three battle pick-up trucks destined for three regions that should have been "conquered" by the Legionnaires: Oltenia, the entire South-Eastern Romania and Bukovina. *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 01.01.1933, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> Their victims were not only Jews but also Romanian Christians: lawyers, politicians, even the prime minister I.G. Duca assassinated for the measures he took in order to limit the violence of the Iron Guard. After he became Prime Minister Duca outlawed the Iron Guard on 9 December 1933 considering that this organisation jeopardised the independency and the sovereignty of Romania. As response to his policy two members of the Iron Guard shot him death on 29 December 1933 in the railway station of Sinaia. Ioan Scurtu, *Viața politică a României (1926-1947)*, Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, pp.273-275.

<sup>65</sup> Leon Volovici, *National Ideology and Anti-Semitism*, p.62.

<sup>66</sup> The pro-fascist newspaper *Straja Neamului* of 15 December 1930 compared Zelea Codreanu with Mussolini: "Among us came a man who makes justice and whom we trustfully must follow with all love of our souls. He is Romania's Mussolini, he is Corneliu Zelea Codreanu." Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*, p.176.

struggle of the nation's students".<sup>67</sup> Beside the fundamental stereotypes sustaining the idea of a Jewish threat exposed by many representatives of the Romanian cultural life decades ago, the legionary movement developed in addition the image of the Jew as an exponent of the Communist threat. The so-called 'legionary oath' the Legionnaires were sworn in contained a sentence expressing the hatred against the Jews.<sup>68</sup> The complete identification of the Jews regardless of social origin or profession with the Communism became one of the fundamental slogans of the movement.<sup>69</sup> This interpretation was gradually taken over by Romanian anti-Semitic propaganda generally, reaching epidemic proportions during the Second World War. In 1933 during a trial against students of a Jewish school in Czernowitz accused of Communist propaganda, Dr. Mayer Ebner, one of the representatives of the Bukovinian Jews in the Romanian Parliament, admitted that a part of Jewish youth was tempted to a belief in Communism because of their desperation and hopelessness and thinking that the Communism could solve all their problems. However he insisted that this idealistic imagination of the youth had nothing to do with a subversive attitude or treason.<sup>70</sup>

Also the Jews living in Romania and especially the German-speaking Jewry of Bukovina received with concern the rise to power of the Nazi party in Germany. By the end of March 1933 first Jewish refugees and deportees from Germany entered Czernowitz.<sup>71</sup>

Starting with March 1933 the local Jewish press daily informed the population of

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<sup>67</sup> The leadership of the Legion declared a one-month lasting boycott from 10 December 1932 to 10 January 1933 in the capital Bucharest as well as in other towns. The proclamation of the boycott stated that during that time "legionary units, men, women or children will carry out an intensive propaganda among Romanians in order to fulfil the accomplishments of the boycott.... The Legionnaires will go from home to home, from friend to friend explaining them the meaning of the boycott, asking our Christian-fellows to make this effort in order to encourage the Romanian merchants and craftsmen." *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.2, 01.12.1932, p.8.

<sup>68</sup> The sentence is formulated as a question on which the new members of the movement had to answer "Yes": "Admitting that domination of the Yids in our country is causing our spiritual and national annihilation are you ready to become our brother for the defence, the cleansing and the liberation of our forefathers' land?" *Pământ Strămoșesc*, no.1, 08.11.1940, p.6.

<sup>69</sup> In his book *Pentru legionari* (For Legionnaires), a kind of Romanian *Mein Kampf* published in 1936, C. Zelea Codreanu described the Jew in following terms: "In his radius of action, each and every Yid, trader, intellectual or capitalist banker, was agent of these anti-Romanian revolutionary ideas.... When I say Communist I mean Yid." Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism*, p.64.

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Meyer Ebner, *Gegen Pauschalverdächtigung*, in: *Ostjüdische Zeitung*, no.1676, 01.02.1933, p.1.

<sup>71</sup> *Brutaler Vernichtungskampf gegen Juden*, in: *Ostjüdische Zeitung*, no.1688, 15.03.1933, p.1.

Czernowitz about the anti-Semitic persecution in Germany. Titles like “Judenverfolgung ohne Ende” (Endless persecution against Jews), “Vernichtungskampf gegen jüdische Intellektuelle in Deutschland” (Extermination struggle against Jewish intellectuals in Germany), “Der Nazi-Terror in Deutschland” (The Nazi-terror in Germany), etc occupied the front pages of the local Jewish dailies. The local German press reacted with a virulent anti-Jewish campaign defending Nazi-Germany’s policy. This created a huge gap on political level between two nationalities, which were both minorities in Greater Romania. But the Jewish politicians of Bukovina were determined to oppose the Nazi ideology.<sup>72</sup> Even a demonstration was intended in Czernowitz against the Nazi persecution in Germany but at the last moment the Romanian authorities forbade the demonstration invoking the impossibility of providing the security of the demonstrators.<sup>73</sup> From 1933 onwards the Jews living in Romania were helplessly bystanders to how their coreligionists were persecuted in Germany, while the anti-Semitic pressure in Romania itself increased day by day. However, they still could not realise the real dimension of the threat that struck them in the 1940s.

The main targets of the anti-Jewish attacks were the provinces with a larger concentration of Jewish population like Bukovina, Moldavia, Bessarabia and Maramureş. Therefore, the legionnaires concentrated their forces in order to intimidate the Jews of these regions, hoping to determine a greater number to emigrate. In one of the appeals of the “Capitan” to the Legionnaires, he calls for a fight for the “salvation” of the above-mentioned Romanian provinces, which “became Jewish colonies” encroaching upon the Constitution that stipulated “Romanian’s territory cannot be colonised by populations of foreign origin”.<sup>74</sup> As one of their methods of spreading fear, the groups of Legionnaires “visited” different places in the country where they organised “nest meetings” drawing up “black

<sup>72</sup> Die Bukoviner: Ableger des Hitlerismus, in: *Ostjüdische Zeitung*, no.1692, 29.03.1933, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Gegen Nazi-Barbarei, in: *Ostjüdische Zeitung*, no.1690, 29.03.1933, p.2.

<sup>74</sup> The appeal was first published on the front page of the newly issued legionary newspaper for Bukovina. See *Garda Bucovinei*, no.1, 13.01.1933, p.1.

lists” with the names of those who, in their views, had to be punished for their attitude to or alleged complicity with the Jews. The legionnaires often used university students and other young people to rouse the local population against local Jews. Marching in groups and singing legionary songs, they created an atmosphere of fear among the Jewish population. Most of such actions ended in scuffles and scandals.<sup>75</sup> In July 1930 the government withdrew the permission for a march planned by the Legionnaires in Bessarabia due to the consequences of a similar action held in Maramureş where the Legionnaires set fire to the Jewish district in the little town of Borşa.<sup>76</sup> The Iron Guard was obviously the most fanatic promoter of anti-Semitism in Romania, from its foundation until its demise. The fact that the first official anti-Semitic law was introduced by a rival anti-Semitic party and not by the Iron Guard itself has no relevance since the Iron Guard proved before as well as after it came to power in the “National Legionary” State its hard line anti-Semitic policy and practices.<sup>77</sup> Even if during the 1930s the government restricted more and more the Iron Guard’s activity, persecuting its members during the years of the authoritarian regime of King Carol II between 1938-1940, these measures could not stop or reduce the intensity of the anti-Semitic ideology widely spread among intellectuals (historians, philosophers, journalists, etc).

Well-known personalities of the Romanian thought like Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, Constantin Noica and others were debating in the press and in their publications in anti-Semitic terms about the “Jewish question”. Even if their points of

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<sup>75</sup> Such a case was the scandal at the National Theatre of Czernowitz in January 1933 when Legionnaires and their supporters invaded the house and violently stopped the play because one of the performing actresses, Annie Capustino-Fotino, was Jewish. They occupied the stage and held anti-Semitic speeches. Eventually the police intervened and arrested the ‘trouble makers’. However, this occurrence caused a series of violent confrontation in the city for a couple of days. See *Garda Bucovinei*, no.1, 13.01.1933, p.2.

<sup>76</sup> Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*, p.187.

<sup>77</sup> In 1996 a book on the Legionary Movement and the Jews was published in Romania trying to demonstrate the “goodwill” of the Iron Guard towards the Jewish population. Its author stated that in fact during the “national-legionary state” the legionnaires even rectified on behalf of the Jews the anti-Semitic legislation of the king Carol’s regime and those who might have harmed Jews did not represent the Iron Guard. These persons just wore the green shirts but had nothing in common with the movement and were trying to enrich themselves by robbing Jews. In the author’s view “the Romanian people” would be entitled to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace if it would be awarded to peoples because of its “goodwill” towards the Jews during the period of persecution. Flor Strejnicu, *Mișcarea legionară și evreii*, Ed. Imago: Sibiu, 1996, pp.112, 113, 13.

view differed about an aspect or another, as well as the passion of their anti-Semitism might have had varied, they all continued to propagate through these debates anti-Semitism in the public opinion. The idea of a “Judaic spirit” was a constant preoccupation of this new anti-Semitism, highlighting its incompatibility with the Christian and ethnic Romanian spirit. Some of these scholars could not get rid of the usual anti-Semitic stereotypes. Nichifor Crainic was convinced about the will of the Jewish organisations to dominate the world via freemasonry and banks. Mircea Eliade reproached the Jews a “Masonic mentality” characterized by defective thinking habits and the obsession they were a persecuted people. Emil Cioran breaking with the traditional “unmasking” of the destructive Jewish spirit, sought a ‘reasonable’ explanation of the Jewish character. Therefore he came to the conclusion that “the Jew is not our fellow being. However intimate we may become with him, a precipice divides us, whether we want it or not. It is as he were descendent from a different species of ape than we are and have been condemned from the beginning to a sterile tragedy, to an everlasting series of cheated hopes. We cannot approach him like a human because a Jew is first a Jew and than a man.”<sup>78</sup> However, Cioran realised that the fanatic anti-Semitism which made the Jews responsible for Romania’s backwardness could not be sustained. “If Romania had not had a single Jews, would its existence be less miserable? Would its historical level have been higher? There would have been less corruption, that is obvious, but from this to a glorious history is a long way. At most, the Jews have delayed the solemn hour of Romania; they are not by any means the cause of our misery, our age-old misery.”<sup>79</sup>

In spite of the dominating anti-Semitism in Romanian society, which had first a national and than a racial character, not all Romanian intellectuals were anti-Semites. Some of them were even adversaries of anti-Semitism, representing great values in Romanian culture and science. Theorising about a non-chauvinistic and non-anti-Semitic

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<sup>78</sup> Leon Volovici, *National Ideology and Anti-Semitism*, p.108.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

nationalism, there was no place in their thoughts for the “Jewish question”. Among these intellectuals were eminent cultural personalities like Lucian Blaga, Dimitrie Gusti, Mihail Sadoveanu, Tudor Arghezi, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Eugen Lovinescu, George Călinescu, and others. This category of non-anti-Semitic prominent intellectuals included also left-wing, antifascist and pro-Communist personalities like Geo Bogza, Tudor Teodorescu-Braniște, Iorgu Iordan, and others. Respected and influential during the 1920s and the early 1930s, they lost ground after 1935 being overwhelmed by the increasing right-wing support and the dictatorial measures taken after 1937 when the principal democratic dailies were banned. When the openly anti-Semitic Goga-Cuza cabinet enforced its anti-Semitic legislation and the Gigurtu government elevated anti-Semitism to state policy, these personalities were totally silenced. The territorial losses of the year 1940 and the hopes for the reestablishment of the borders by a ‘strong hand’ linked with the wish for the removal of the “Bolshevik threat” determined the adhesion of many democratic intellectuals to the new dictatorial regime of General Antonescu.

This anti-Semitic ideology, with its Romanian specificity based on a long tradition had a crucial role in the political development of the country during the second half of the 1930s and during the Second World War. It facilitated Romania’s approach towards Nazi-Germany and the collaboration between the two dictators, Hitler and Antonescu, up to a certain point. One could allege that without this anti-Semitic tradition elevated to the rank of a “national ideology” the outcome of the Second World War regarding the treatment of the Jews in Romania would have had a different development, with fewer victims and less injustice, even if under a right wing dictatorial regime. Italy under Mussolini or Bulgaria, which were Germany’s allies, too, provided an example in this sense.<sup>80</sup> The anti-Semitic ideology in Romania had nothing to do with a certain ‘Romanian soul’ or a ‘predisposition’ of the Romanians to be anti-Semites. As shown above, many of them

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<sup>80</sup> *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust: Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, Band II, München, Zürich: Pieper, 1998, pp.645-654 and 262-267.

rejected this destructive ideology. Even if during the interwar period not all Romanian intellectuals were such radical anti-Semites like the leaders of the Iron Guard, they were attached to an idealistic imaginary vision about national awareness and a perception of the Jew (as well as of others national minorities) as aliens. Under the circumstances of the Communist threat and the alliance with Hitler's Germany on the eve of the Second World War, they overestimated the 'dangerous characteristic' of the Jews and therefore failed to reject in the most critical days the deportation, pogroms, and massacres that followed in Bukovina and Bessarabia.

## **2. Second class citizens in the “national unitary” Romania: From the disguised discrimination to the institutionalised persecution**

The outcome of the First World War was for Romania and Romanians a very favourable one. The hopes and wishes to get rid of the “foreign domination” became true for hundred of thousands Romanians living under Austro-Hungarian and Russian rule outside the borders of the “Old Kingdom” of Romania in Transylvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia. The Romanians of the “Old Kingdom” could achieve under these circumstances their “national dream” of a great, unitary national state, which should have included within its borders all the Romanians living between the rivers Tisa and Dniestr. In 1920 Romania doubled its initial territory and population, becoming known as “Greater Romania”<sup>81</sup>. However, the downside of this “national dream” was that the incorporated territories were populated not only by Romanians but also by several ethnic and religious minorities: Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians and not least Jews. One of these new territories was Bukovina with 13% Jewish populations and of about 55% other non-Romanian ethnic groups.

<sup>81</sup> Before the First World War Romania had an area of 53,224 square miles and a population of 7,234,919 inhabitants. After 1920 its territory grew with more than 60,000 square miles in which lived almost 11,000,000 inhabitants. George Cipăianu, Gheorghe Iancu, Minderheiten in Rumänien der Zwischenkriegszeit und der Völkerbund, in: *Interethnische- und Zivilisationsbeziehungen im siebenbürgischen Raum*, Cluj/Klausenburg/Kolozsvár: Babeş-Bolyai Universität, 1996, p.275.

Modern anti-Semitism in 1920 in Romania had already a history of more than half a century. It was characterised by the reluctance of the Romanian political class to naturalise the Jews that lived in Romania, refusing to grant them civil rights and a secure social status. Only due to the external pressure of the Berlin Congress in 1878 and the Peace Treaty of 1920, Romania agreed to certain concessions, being thus forced to regulate the situation of the Jews. However, the lawmakers tried to delay the laws that could make it possible for Jews to become Romanian citizens.<sup>82</sup> Once the Peace Treaty and the additional Treaty for the Protection of the National Minorities were signed and ratified, the Romanian political class was obliged to implement their stipulations.<sup>83</sup> That provided an opportunity for a comprehensive naturalization of the Jews, including those leaving in Bukovina. The Constitution of March 1923 adopted the principle of the “willing naturalization” in contrast to the collective naturalization adopted decades or even a century ago in Austria or in France. This meant that every Jew born in the territories united with Romania after 1918 who desired to become Romanian citizen had to make a “statement of option” in which he or she requested the citizenship but did not become automatically Romanian citizen like the Christians (Germans, Hungarians, etc) living in the new Romanian territories. Those who failed to request within three months the Romanian citizenship lost the right to be naturalized. The new regulation was obviously in contradiction with articles 4, 7, and 8 of the Treaty for the Protection of the National Minorities.<sup>84</sup> In fact the first law, which regulated in real terms the naturalisation of the

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<sup>82</sup> The decree-laws issued until the endorsement of the Constitution of 1923 that confirmed the collective naturalization of the Jews living in Romania made possible naturalization only individually if somebody required it and was conditioned by certain criteria. Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România (1919-1938): de la emancipare la marginalizare*, Bucharest: Hasefer, 2000, p.17.

<sup>83</sup> The articles 7 and 8 of the Peace Treaty obliged Romania to fully recognise without any other formalities as Romanian citizens the Jews living in all the territories belonging to Romania who have no other citizenship. Gabriel Asandului, *Istoria evreilor din România (1866-1938)*, Bucharest: Institutul European, 2003, p.65.

<sup>84</sup> §4: « La Roumanie reconnaît comme ressortissants roumains, de plein droit et **sans aucune formalité** les personnes de nationalité autrichienne ou hongroise qui sont nées sur les territoire qui sont transférés à la Roumanie par la Traités de paix avec l' Autriche et la Hongrie.... ».

§7 : La Roumanie s'engage à reconnaître comme ressortissants roumains, de plein droit et sans aucune formalité, les juifs habitant **tout les territoires de la Roumanie** et ne pouvant se prévaloir d'aucune autre nationalité. »

§8 : « ...La différence de religion, de croyance ou de confession ne devra nuire à aucun ressortissant roumain en ce qui concerne la jouissance des droits civils et politique, notamment pour l'admission aux emplois publics,

Jews created a new categories of Jews living in Greater Romania deprived of the right to become Romanian citizens. The so-called Mârzescu-Law of 24 February 1924 stipulated a series of bureaucratic requirements for the applicants in order to discourage their aim to obtain the Romanian citizenship. Therefore, those who could not prove with documents their ancestry in the territories united with Romania were liable to become stateless (*Heimatlos*). The law was intended to avoid a naturalization of the Jewish refugees that left Russia because of the civil war but it affected also thousands of Jews who would have been entitled to become Romanian citizens but failed to request it in due time or were not able to prove their ancestry in the new Romanian territories because during the war registers and documents were destroyed. Due to bureaucracy as well as to the hostile attitude of the officials in the naturalization commissions that processed the applications for naturalization, about 100,000 people who renounced their former Austrian, Hungarian or Russian citizenship before 1920 hoping to become Romanian citizens were simply excluded from any entitlement to obtain it and became stateless. This situation affected 20 000 Jews living in Bukovina. These new non-citizens were relegated to the edge of society, being at the discretion of the police and civil authorities. They could not be employed any longer in the public sector. Their children were not allowed to attend public schools and were automatically discriminated. As non-citizens they had neither the right to have a permanent residency nor to own agricultural properties. The legal status of these Jews was that of “foreigners”. In this situation were also many ethnic Hungarians but they had the choice to emigrate to Hungary, whereas the stateless Jews did not have any other citizenship, respectively an affiliation to another state that could have protected them. Being at the mercy of the Romanian authorities, they could have been deported after one year of living in Romania, having no possibility to obtain a passport.<sup>85</sup> The gradual

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fonctions et honneurs ou l'exercice des différentes professions et industries. » Nagy Lajos, *A kisebbségek alkotmányjogi helyzete Nagyromániában*, Kolozsvár : Minerva Irodalmi és Nyomdai Műintézet RT, 1944, pp.215-216.

<sup>85</sup> Carol Iancu, *Evreii din Romania*, p.102.

intrusion of the state into the private life of the people living on its territory began already through this kind of discrimination, having a major influence on the evolution of the life of those affected. Even if the majority of the Jews succeeded in being naturalised and became Romanian citizens, the political forces representing them assumed the task of fighting for the abolition of the Mârzescu-law from 1924. But the anti-Semitic trend of the time hindered the effort of the Jewish organisations in this regard. Apart from some concessions made to the Jewish politicians, the Mârzescu-law continued to be valid during the interwar period, maintaining about 100,000 Jews in the inferior status of inhabitants without civil rights. A further question arose regarding those Jews that obtained Romanian citizenship and according to the Constitution of 1923 should have benefited of the same rights and treatment like the ethnic Romanians.

#### **A Jewish Invasion?**

After the First World War two main emancipations were carried out in the Romanian society: the emancipation of the peasantry and of the Jews. Due to the agrarian reform of 1921 and the introduction of the general vote for men, the pauper peasantry was given a real chance to ascend on the social scale by having more opportunities in order to attend schools. At the same time, as a result of the naturalisation of the majority of the Jews, more and more Jewish families could send their children to public schools. Both peasants and Jews who were Romanian citizens benefited of the same right to public education. Therefore many of them used the opportunities offered by their new civil status and a better economic situation to educate their children in the best schools of Romania's towns. The phenomenon of the numerical increase of Jewish children in the schools lasted until the middle class and the bourgeoisie aroused contrary reactions in the Romanian society, generating a latent discrimination. Many considered the presence of the Jews in Romanian schools as illegitimate and in discrepancy with the aims of the Romanian state, which regarded peasantry like a 'national reservoir' for the future Romanian elites and also

capable to resist Jewish influence. Even if after the First World War the Romanian political class unwillingly removed the wall built against the “foreigners”, the old customs were still deep in the mentality of the society and the discrimination against Jews did not stop either after they officially became Romanian citizens.<sup>86</sup> Already in the 1920s several abuses occurred proving that the authorities often ignored the provisions of the constitution that proclaimed the equal treatment of all Romanian citizens regardless of their religious belief or ethnic origin. In fact, the naturalization did not eliminate discrimination. It was not only the vast majority of the ethnic Romanian population that considered ‘foreigners’ those Romanian citizens whose ethnic origin was not Romanian, but also the authorities themselves. From Buenos Aires to Athens many Jewish organisation and societies from abroad asked the League of Nations to intervene with the Romanian government in order to stop the discrimination of the Jews in Romania. However, the Romanian government replied asserting that the complaints of these organisations were too general and they cannot be subject to a diplomatic reaction. Only during the mandate of Nicolae Titulescu as Romania’s minister for Foreign Affairs between 1927-1928 and 1932-1936 were serious measures taken against officials who were involved in anti-Jewish agitation.<sup>87</sup> Titulescu was known as a democrat and represented Romania also at the League of Nations, but few officials in leading positions possessed similar moral and political values during the time under discussion.

The Romanian authorities showed often rather an ambivalent attitude regarding anti-Jewish riots and failed to address the problem at its source. In spite of the ostensible readiness of the governments in Bucharest during the 1920s to limit as much as possible the violent actions against Jews carried out by nationalist, pro-fascist elements, the Jewish population continued to feel insecure in its own country. There were cases when the Jews,

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<sup>86</sup> Irina Livezianu, *Cultură și naționalism...*, p.241.

<sup>87</sup> Due to the measures taken by Titulescu three prefects and police commanders were removed from their positions, several investigations took place, resulting in sentences from fifteen days to some months of prison for the attacks carried out especially by university students against Jewish shops and synagogues. Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România...*, p.197

taxpayers in Greater Romania like any Romanian citizen, had to pay additionally for their protection.<sup>88</sup> Anti-Jewish attitude in the Romanian society of the 1920s and 1930s was also often amplified by opinions expressed by moderate personalities of the Romanian cultural and scientific life. In a study published in 1923, the eminent Romanian geographer and ex-minister of education Simion Mehedinți made public a map representing in black points the “invasion” of the Jewish element in Romania after the Bolshevik revolutions in Russia and Hungary. He compelled the attention asserting, “This Jewish invasion is the biggest event of any times, that has occurred on Romanian soil”.<sup>89</sup> The education law from 1925, in spite of several modifications due to the parliamentary interventions of the political representatives of the Jewish communities, maintained discriminative stipulations regarding the use of the mother tongue and the financial support of Jewish schools.<sup>90</sup>

### **The Discriminatory Legislation of the 1930s**

During the mandate of the national-liberal Tătăărăscu government appointed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1934, new laws were adopted that indirectly reflected once again the status of second-class citizens of the Jews living in Romania. Even if the national-liberal cabinet took measures in order to hinder violent attacks of the Legionnaires against their political adversaries and thus also against Jews, by introducing the state of emergency, the cabinet’s policy was characterised by a disguised anti-Semitism. Under the circumstances of an increasing support of the Romanian public opinion for the anti-Semitic propaganda of the extreme right wing forces, the government was willing to accept some of the anti-Semitic theories of A. C. Cuza and C. Zelea Codreanu. New economic laws, like the Law regarding the

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<sup>88</sup> When the fascist, anti-Semitic movement The Legion of Archangel Mihail held a meeting in the northern Romanian town of Sighet where many Jews lived, the authorities sent gendarmerie troops to Sighet in order to prevent an assault on the Jewish district but obliging the Jews to pay for the accommodation and the subsistence of the troops. Nicolas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*, Iași: Centre for Romanian Studies, 2000, p.190

<sup>89</sup> Irina Livezianu, *Cultură și naționalism...*, p.231.

<sup>90</sup> Carol Iancu, *Evreii din Romania*, pp.130-140.

conversion of the debts in agriculture and the Law regarding the employment of Romanian personnel in industrial units, stood in contradiction with the country's Constitution and Civil Code, disadvantaging Jews as well as other national minorities. Moreover, those Jews who due to the Mârzescu-law were refused the naturalisation, being treated as "foreigners", had been fired and had little chance to be employed in the industry.<sup>91</sup> All political interventions of the Jewish representatives abroad, especially in France and Great Britain, in order to obtain the abolition of the incriminated laws were in vain. These laws that continued to be operative gave new impulses to further anti-Jewish projects. Many of them initiated by the extremist right-wing parties were intensively debated in the Parliament. The national-liberal majority in Parliament did not support them because of the negative reaction aboard in France and Great Britain, but also because these initiatives went too far with their anti-democratic character. The law project about the revision of the Romanian citizenship adopted in 1938 by the right-wing Goga-Cuza cabinet was debated in the Parliament beginning with 1 December 1936, being first rejected by the majority of the MPs in 1936. Disputes on the so-called *numerus clausus* or even *numerus nullus* was increasingly on the agenda of the extremist, nationalist right-wing politicians during the entire period of the 1930s, and they repeatedly tried to impose a discriminatory law. The scope of such a law would have been to limit to a certain percentage or to completely eliminate the Jews from universities, Courts of Justice and several economic branches. However, such a law failed to be adopted since moderate anti-Semitic MPs or MPs with stronger democratic views, like those belonging to the National Peasant Party, refused to give their support for such initiatives. Anyway, since after the creation of Greater Romania the number of the Jewish students at Romanian universities continually decreased due to an unofficial but the more effective selection procedure regarding the

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<sup>91</sup> An additional nominative table to the Law about the Romanian personnel established three categories of personnel: a) ethnical Romanian citizens; b) Romanian citizens of other ethnic origin; and c) foreigners. The law stipulated that in all kind of economic units, industry, trade, and services the percentage of Romanians must represent 80% of the employees. Ibid, pp.138-139.

acceptance of Jewish university candidates, the goals propagated by the initiators of the *numerus clausus* were already achieved.<sup>92</sup> In fact the practice of unofficial, disguised discrimination worked very effectively also in several other fields. Many laws and regulations issued by the national-liberal government during 1937 had an ambiguous meaning making possible discrimination against non-Romanians. For instance the Regulation of the law regarding the employment of war invalids, orphans and widows from 2 April 1937 stated that there would be no distinction made relating to the ethnic or religious affiliation of the claimant, but in spite of this, the claimant had to show a certificate specifying the claimant's ethnic origin.<sup>93</sup>

The outcome of the elections of December 1937 paved the way for a political development characterised by an increasing openly anti-Semitic legislation reaching its climax during the years of the "national-legionary" state and lasting until the end of the Antonescu regime. Although such a political development towards a right wing, openly anti-Semitic policy after the elections of December 1937 could have been avoided since the openly anti-Semitic National Christian Party led by Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza collected only 9.15% of the votes<sup>94</sup>, King Carol II decided to appoint a right wing, anti-Semitic government for three main reasons. On one hand, he wanted to fight the Iron Guard since an acute enmity existed for years between the King and the Iron Guard. By appointing an anti-Semitic government, actually the rival party of the Iron Guard, he gave some satisfaction to the anti-Semites who would have given him free hand for fighting the Iron Guard. On the other hand, Romania realised the increasing role Germany played in Central Europe after 1933 and the king wanted to make a gesture of good will towards Germany by appointing an anti-Semitic government. However, in this political

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-248.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.252.

<sup>94</sup> In fact the main democratic parties (the National Liberal Party 35.9% and the National Peasant Party with 20.4%) obtained more votes than the extremist right wing anti-Semitic parties (the Iron Guard only 15.5% and the National Christian Party 9.15%). Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier (1919-1941): Mistica ultranaționalismului*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993, p.294.

arrangement the king's ambition to become an authoritarian ruler played also an important role. He managed to impose a new constitution, which took effect from 27 February 1938 and in fact put an end to the democratic political system by enforcing a corporatist regime based on the authority of the king. The Goga-Cuza cabinet functioned only one month, but during this time they managed to introduce a law that unleashed a new wave of discrimination due to the Citizenship Revision Law affecting the life of 225,222 Romanian citizens of Jewish origin, whose Romanian citizenship was withdrawn. That meant 36.30% of Romania's entire Jews population.<sup>95</sup> Those who due to the revision of their citizenship lost the status of Romanian citizen became "stateless", being treated as foreigners. The law regarding the revision of Romanian citizenship, even if it had a general character without an express reference to the Jews, was intended to weaken the Jewish communities in Romania. The main argument of the politicians who imposed the law was that after the First World War thousands of Jewish immigrants mainly from the Ukraine, fraudulently bribing the local authorities, managed to obtain Romanian citizenship. However, even if such cases might have existed, their proportion did not reach the figures of those deprived of their Romanian citizenship as a consequence of this law. According to this law, all Jews had to prove with certificates within 20 days that they have been naturalised at their own demand in 1919 and that they or their parents were living from 1913 onwards in the territories which after 1920 became Romanian. A Jew was defined as a person who on 1 December 1918 belonged to the Jewish religion, even if he or she converted later. The word "Jew" had by that time a political but yet not a racial definition.

King Carol II himself, in spite of having a mistress of Jewish origin<sup>96</sup>, gave his support for further anti-Jewish legislative measures and approved the first openly anti-Semitic, racial

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<sup>95</sup> Zagu Ornea, *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească*, Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Română, 1996, p.389

<sup>96</sup> Elena (Magda) Lupescu, for many years mistress of King Carol II had a Jewish father (Wolff) originally from Iași. Her mother is unknown. However, she had a strict Roman-Catholic education without any contact with the

decree-law brought in by the Gigurtu cabinet on 8 August 1940. The successful attack of Germany against France, Romania's main guarantor and supporter, ending with the occupation of Paris, determined the King to adopt a German-friendly policy, hoping for German protection in the case of a possible Romanian-Hungarian or Romanian-Soviet conflict. Therefore, he was willing to enforce an anti-Semitic home policy in order to generate more satisfaction in Berlin. He even had to give up his fight against the Iron Guard, freeing its members who were still imprisoned and co-opting some of them in the government.<sup>97</sup> The law of 8 August 1940 known as the Law regarding the juridical status of the Jews contained the first racial definition of a person considered a Jew: a person whose parents, or even only the father, belonged to the Jewish religion, even if he or she was baptised as a Christian. It was considered that new-borns "carry in their blood the destiny of a moral, spiritual and organic incompatibility with blood-Romanians." Therefore "baptism cannot change the destiny of the Jewish blood."<sup>98</sup> This law was in fact the Romanian version of the racial laws of Nuremberg from 1935.

In the exposé of the Minister of Justice of the Gigurtu cabinet about the necessity of the Law regarding the regulation of the juridical status of the Jews, the term "law of blood" appeared, which was intended to make a clear distinction between "Romanians of blood" and Romanian citizens that were not of "Romanian blood". The criteria that led to the definition of the Jews were not pure biological, but rather a combination between the religious affiliation and the 'blood' condition. However, in the view of the lawmaker, the blood condition did not have a biological but an ethical, moral meaning. Three main categories of Jews with different juridical statuses were established: The most discriminated were the Jews that settled in Romania after 30 December 1918. The second category was that of the Jews living before 1918 in Romania who "due to their length of

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Jewish community since she regarded herself as non-Jewish. A.L. Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu*, London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1942, pp.69-85.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid, p.209.

<sup>98</sup> Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1997, pp.26-29.

living on Romanian soil and an exemplary life can make use of the gift of the Romanian nation in terms of recognising them a limited complimentary status but only on a strict moral criteria.” The third and most ‘advantaged’ category was that of the Jews who were individually naturalised before 30 December 1918; those who were collectively naturalised in 1879 due to their participation in the War of Independence<sup>99</sup> according to the § 44 of the Berlin Treaty; the Jewish inhabitants of Dobrogea<sup>100</sup> who fought in the Romanian army and were naturalised according to the laws of 1909, 1910 and 1912. In this same category were included also the descendants of those who fell on battlefields in Romania’s wars as well as the descendants of those mentioned in the third category. The law of 8 August 1940 stipulated a series of interdictions in accordance with each category of the Jews mentioned above. For instance, even Jews belonging to the most ‘advantaged’ category were not permitted to get public positions, to own or to purchase rural properties, to be officers or to participate at the country’s political life. For the other two categories the interdictions had such a general character that the subsistence of those affected was seriously jeopardised. They were excluded from several professions like the bar, public notary or any profession that required direct contact with public authorities. They were not allowed to work as traders in the rural areas or to sell alcohol anywhere, to be soldiers, to own or to rent cinema houses, to own or to edit Romanian books, magazines or newspapers or to possess any means used by the Romanian national propaganda. Especially strict was the interdiction of purchasing any rural properties. The law entitled the state to carry out arbitrary expropriation in rural areas on the behalf of “blood Romanians”. Jews were also forbidden to adopt Romanian names. In the final text of the exposé the Minister of Justice justified the necessity of the law in following terms:

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<sup>99</sup> The Independency War meant actually Romania’s participation in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, when Romania proclaimed its independency of the Ottoman Empire. N. Adăniloie, *Independența națională a României*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1986.

<sup>100</sup> Dobrogea, the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea that for centuries belonged to the Ottoman Empire, was incorporated into Romania in 1879. Its territory expanded due to the Balkan Wars (1911-1912) to the prejudice of Bulgaria. Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, vol. I, Seattle&London: University of Washington Press, 1998, p.89.

“Romania is the country of Romanians only. The strength and structure of our Nation must prevail, the heroic virtues for which our land, economy and the political leadership in its hierarchical scale represents vital points of reference. Our Nation is a Nation of peasants; the peasantry is its single source, it is our nobleness of blood and land. Because of that it needs protection in its essential functions, it is the alarm signal of this law.”<sup>101</sup> In a short time new anti-Semitic laws followed. On 31 August was issued the decree regarding the “situation of the Jews” in the educational system that considerably limited the access of the Jews into the non-Jewish schools.

The territorial losses during the summer of 1940 when only in three months Romania had to cede more than one third of its territory to USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria, led to an increasing suspicion towards ethnic minorities. In addition to the already existing anti-Semitic policy, Jews had to bear also the stigma of a disloyal, ungrateful, Communist-friendly population. From July 1940 the anti-Semitic juridical persecution was accompanied also by physical persecution initiated by the series of pogroms in northern Moldavia, followed by the pogroms in Bucharest and Iași in January and June 1941, reaching its climax during the German-Romanian campaign against the Soviet Union.<sup>102</sup>

### **The Antonescu Era**

The major political change on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1940, when King Carol II was compelled to leave the country, investing the newly appointed Prime Minister General Ion Antonescu with dictatorial power, worsened the situation of the Jews, especially after Antonescu agreed to share the power in state with the fascist Iron Guard. On 14 September 1940 Romania was officially proclaimed a “national-legionary state” suggesting a

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<sup>101</sup> S. Stanciu (editor), *Martiriul evreilor din România 1940-1944: Documente și mărturii*, Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1991, p.21.

<sup>102</sup> In general terms even the Nazis disapproved the pogroms similar to what occurred in Iași on 29 June 1941. During a conversation between Hans Frank, the military governor of Warsaw, and Otto Wächter, the military governor of Krakow, they expressed their opinion saying: “Romanians are not a civilized people. We Germans are guided by reason, methods and organisation, not by bestial instincts.” Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts*, p.464.

‘revolutionary’ change in the country’s political development and the duality of the regime: Antonescu and the Iron Guard. In fact, this meant increased obedience towards Nazi Germany and the adjustment of the Romanian legislation regarding the “Jewish question” to the Nazi ideology.<sup>103</sup>

Between September and November 1940 Jews were excluded from the Guild of Romanian Journalists, of the Journalists Union, of the Romanian Writer’s Union, of the Romanian Architect’s Society, of the General Assembly of University Teachers, and even from the Association of Deaf-mutes.

On 4 October 1940 the decree-law issued by the deputy prime minister Mihai Antonescu stipulated the setting up of so-called Romanisation commissars whose task was to prepare and carry out the expropriation of all kind of Jewish property from factories to private homes, depending of the government’s needs. The Romanisation policy was not intended as it may sounds to ethnically assimilate the Jews, but to transfer Jewish properties to Romanians. Therefore, in all fields of the economic, cultural, and social life Romanians benefited from preferential treatment compared with persons belonging to other ethnic groups. However, these measures clearly targeted the Jews. The National Centre for Romanisation created in May 1941 coordinated the whole process of eliminating Jews from productive activities, even with the risk of serious disturbances in the country’s economic life. Especially from mid November 1940 onwards, after the so-called “Legionary Police” was set up as a paramilitary militia of the Iron Guard, the abuses and violence against Jews considerably increased. The “Legionary Police” arrested, tortured, evicted from their homes and killed Jews throughout the country, spreading insecurity and terror. Legionnaires holding important political positions issued at local level all kind of

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<sup>103</sup> In spite of the apparent similarities between Gen. Ion Antonescu’s political belief and the ideology propagated by the Iron Guard, there was a significant difference in matter of governing. The rather conservative, disciplined Antonescu thought ill of the Legionnaires who often acted in a chaotic manner, carrying out persecutions and political vendettas against the former representatives of King Carol’s regime and Jews that surpassed even the repressive practices of that time.

ordinances in order to intimidate and humiliate the Jewish population. One such ordinance was that regarding the Jewish cemeteries older than one hundred years. In Buzău, as well as in Vaslui, the Jewish communities were notified to remove the bones of those buried in cemeteries older than one hundred years because the authorities were planning to do away with these cemeteries. The legionnaires copied in many regards the practices of the Nazis in Germany. For instance, on 5 December 1940 they proclaimed a boycott of the Jewish shops in Piatra Neamț. The chief of the local legionary police patrolled with his men on the streets armed with guns and rifles, hanging on the doors and shop windows of Jewish shops huge posters with the text “Who buys from the Yids is a traitor and will be photographed and made public. It is forbidden to enter the shops of the Yids”. In Buzău all the Jewish shops had to hang an inscription “Jewish shop” whereas armed persons hindered the clients to enter the shops. Also synagogues were set on fire and destroyed, like in Focșani.<sup>104</sup> Following the Nazi examples, the fascist elements in the Ministry for Culture and Arts decided to separate the national i.e. Romanian culture from the Jews. Therefore, Jews were not permitted to play or to perform pieces written or composed by Romanian artists, whereas Romanian troupes were forbidden to perform pieces of Jewish authors. Even in the case that only one of the co-authors was Jewish, the play could not be performed any longer in Romanian theatres. Jewish bookshops and publishing named after Romanian cultural figures such as “Mihai Eminescu” or bearing the words National or Romanian like “The National Culture” or “The Romanian Culture”, had to change their names because “they could mislead the Romanian clients.”<sup>105</sup>

Antonescu disagreed with the chaotic actions carried out by the legionnaires not only against Jews, but also against the former representatives of King Carol’s regime and other political adversaries. By January 1941, the internal conflict between the Iron Guard and

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<sup>104</sup>S. Stanciu (Hg.), *Martiriul evreilor din România 1940-1944: Documente și mărturii*, pp.43-67.

<sup>105</sup> *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944. 1940-1942: Perioada unei mari restriți*, Part 1, vol. III, Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1997, p.114.

General Antonescu led to the so-called “legionary rebellion”, in fact an armed confrontation which ended with Antonescu’s victory and the elimination of the Iron Guard. In March 1941 Antonescu revoked the country’s official title of “national-legionary state”. However, the harsh anti-Semitic legislation was maintained during the entire period of the Antonescu regime, in spite of the elimination of the Iron Guard. This had little positive effect on the everyday life of the Jews. The disappearance of the legionnaires from the Romanian political scene brought some relief among Jews, since during their co-optation in the government the legionnaires kept the Jewish population under a permanent terror, climaxing in the massacre of Bucharest on 21-22 January 1941<sup>106</sup>.

The anti-Semitic state policy continued, however, also without the legionnaires. The main task of this legislation was the economic annihilation of the Jews, making it impossible to earn their own living, blocking them any access to a professional career. Comparing the discriminative measures adopted by the Gigurtu cabinet with those introduced by the Antonescu regime, one can observe a dramatic deterioration of their juridical status after 14 September 1940. Jewish children were relegated from non-fee-paying Romanian public schools, although their parents had to pay taxes to the state. The same happened also with Jewish teachers. Whereas the Judicial Status of August 1940 allowed Jews belonging to the second category to teach in public schools, the new regulation under Antonescu extended the prohibition to all Jewish teachers. In the same time private Jewish schools were forbidden to employ Christian teachers. The consequence was that for pupils who graduated six or seven classes in the secondary school it was impossible to continue the education and to obtain a baccalaureate degree, since in many places private Jewish schools could not run because of the small number of Jewish pupils. The universities did

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<sup>106</sup> During the armed confrontation between the paramilitary forces of the legionnaires and the army loyal to General Antonescu, bands of legionnaires attacked Jewish homes in Bucharest killing at least 118 Jews. Among the victims were also 118 non-Jewish civilians and 21 soldiers. Ibid, p.72.

not accept any Jewish applicants and those who were studying by September 1940, were allowed to end the current academic year but not to continue their study and to obtain a diploma. In order to increase the feeling of insecurity of those attending private Jewish schools, the Antonescu cabinet withdrew the right of the Jewish schools to issue diplomas recognised by the Ministry of Education. A series of other impediments created difficulties even for the education in private Jewish schools. Jews of all categories were forbidden to edit or to write school books or any other educational material, to sell school books and other school items. Regarding the status of the Jewish religion, the new regulation of the Antonescu regime excluded it from the constitutional protection that was guaranteed until then to all religions and denominations. Jewish shop owners were obliged by law to keep their shops open on Saturdays as well as on every Jewish holiday. The Ritual circumcision was also forbidden. Since the Jewish communities financed themselves collecting taxes for the ritual circumcision, this measure affected the budget provided for cultic establishments, cultural and social assistance institutions. The massive dismissals of Jewish civil servants, engineers, artists, teachers, merchants, etc created a huge mass of Jewish unemployed. Therefore, by the beginning of February 1941 about 100,000 Jews no longer had any income.<sup>107</sup>

The high rate of unemployment among Jews was probably also taken into consideration when on 5 December 1940 the Antonescu cabinet issued the decree-law regarding the obligation of the Jews to carry out “work on public behalf, on the behalf of the Ministry of National Defence or other public departments and institution”. In fact that meant forced labour. The forced labour affected all Jewish males between 18 and 50 years of age. Those between 18-21 and 41-50 had to carry out the forced labour in the places of their residency whereas those between 21 and 40 years of age were enrolled in the so-called “external

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp.117-126.

labour detachments” and were scattered throughout the country.<sup>108</sup> In a complementary instruction order regarding the forced labour of the Jews issued in July 1942, the age of those liable for this obligation was extended. The order stipulated that also teenagers between 14-17 years of age and elderly up to 69 years could ,“if necessary”, be obliged to undertake forced labour.<sup>109</sup> These labourers had to built roads, bridges, railways, etc being basically engaged in work related to the logistic infrastructure of the country. These people were often lodged in shabby places, unsuitable for living, like wagons, huts and stables guarded by gendarmes. In the general instructions regulating the labour carried out by Jews, as they appeared in the documents of the General Headquarter of the Romanian Army, various punishments were introduced from “corporal punishment” up to the deportation to Transnistria with the entire family. Even having intimate relationships with Romanian women could have had serious consequences for the forced labourers.

These conditions worsened after the Romanian-German attack on the Soviet Union and those who tried to escape the forced labour detachments were liable to be shot on the spot.<sup>110</sup> But the worst consequence of the anti-Semitic policy was the mass deportations of the Jews from Bukovina, Dorohoi region and Bessarabia to Transnistria. The first wave of deportations started in August 1941 lasting until November. In November 1941 about 57,000 Jews from Bukovina had already been deported. In Czernowitz many Jews could avoid to be deported, owing to the mayor of that time, Traian Popovici, who officially asked governor Calotescu permission to keep in town Jews needed for economic purpose. After the first wave of deportation in the ghetto of Czernowitz lived about 20,000 Jews.<sup>111</sup> In June 1942 followed a second wave of deportation from Czernowitz. This time the selection of the deportees was very chaotic. The deportation of 29 June was meant to

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<sup>108</sup> In such an external labour detachment was also enrolled Paul Celan, escaping in 1942 the deportation of his family to Transnistria and later beyond the Bug, where his parents died.

<sup>109</sup> *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944. 1940-1942: Perioada unei mari restriți*, Part II, p.329.

<sup>110</sup> Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, pp.36-37.

<sup>111</sup> *Encyclopedie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, vol.I, Piper: München, Zürich, p.261

deport 2000 Jews, but because many of them were hiding, the local authorities raised the figure to 3000 to ensure that at least 2000 will be caught and deported. Even Jews with “permit to remain” needed for the economic production were taken from their homes. The economy of Czernowitz was close to collapse due to these measures.<sup>112</sup> Many of the deportees died during the long transport in cattle trucks or during the exhausting marches. Most of them perished due to the unbearable living condition in Transnistria. From about 75,000 Jews from Bukovina only 9000 survived.<sup>113</sup>

From a historical perspective, these aspects referring to the discrimination and institutionalised persecution of the Jews living in Romania became part of the Romanian history itself. The history that we deal with today was in fact the everyday life of those who had to experience this treatment. In many cases their private and professional life took a negative turn. Their private life became dependent on the political decisions made by the country’s leadership in the name of the Romanian nation. There is always a certain link between private life and the political situation that dominates the society we are living in. Major political events like the change from a dictatorial political system to democracy in 1989 or from a democracy to dictatorship in 1938 and then 1940 in Romania often had a crucial role in how the individual life of contemporaries developed later on. That was the case of many people living during the upheavals of the political changes of the 1930s and 1940s. The declared or suggested status of second-class citizens of the country affecting above all the Jewish population had for many Jews the effect of becoming estranged from the Romanian state and majority population. This could have also contributed in a substantial way to the decision of the majority of them to leave the country after the fall of the pro-fascist regimes. Therefore, one can admit that the disguised discrimination of the 1930’s and the later persecution during the Second World War prepared the terrain for the

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<sup>112</sup>Report of the German consul in Czernowitz Fritz von Schellborg from 6 July 1942. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PAAAB), File „Czernowitz“ 6/4, Nr. 22/24

<sup>113</sup>Isabel Röskau-Rydel (editor), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Galizien, Bukovina, Moldau*, Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1999, p.327

massive emigration of the Jews from Romania after the war when the discriminative measures were officially abolished.

### **Chapter III: The days that changed their fate; narrative and artistic testimonies from beyond the barbed wire**

“When the survivors of the deportation will have disappeared, the archivists of the future may dispose of a few more documents, which still remain hidden today, but they will lack the principal source: the living memory of the witnesses.”

Michael de Bouard<sup>114</sup>

#### **1. Eyewitness testimonies as source of a historical analysis of the deportations to Transnistria (1941-1944)**

Although in the last decade the number of the historical publications concerning the fate of about 250,000 Romanian Jews during the Second World War increased considerably due to the remarkable work of researchers like Jean Ancel, Randolph L. Braham, I.C. Butnaru, Radu Ioanid a. o., the written and audio-recorded testimonies of eye-witnesses who had directly experienced the deportation and detention in Transnistria, were barely used as historical sources. Not because they seemed to be less reliable or conclusive, but because of the abundance of the official documents related to the deportations and treatment of the deportees in Transnistria. However, many of the eyewitness testimonies were published only in the last ten years, some of them are still manuscripts waiting to be published in the coming years, and the oral history, especially in Romania, is quite a new branch of historical research.

Besides official documents issued by the state authorities or by other organisations, in order to bring the historical facts closer to the reader, one needs to offer through the sum of personal experiences of ordinary people directly involved in those major political

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<sup>114</sup> Historian and former deportee.

events, those numerous additional details undetectable in the official files. Such an approach may also reveal the real dimension of the injustice and suffering which affected many tens of thousands of innocent civilians during those terrible years in order to discourage the attempt by some nationalists to deny, minimize or justify the ordeal. The public memory concerning the fate of deportees to Transnistria continues to ignore the historical facts because the Romanian society still did not come to terms with this episode in Romanian history. Those means which could have ‘touched’ the public opinion during all the years since the Second World War, were silent or were kept silent.

In the last ten years, an increasing number of former victims decide to break the silence making known their experiences of those terrible years. Historians have the duty to process these sources, giving them the scientific credibility in order to fill the vacuum left behind by the last fifty years. Corroborating in a well-balanced way the information extracted from the official files with those offered by the eyewitness testimonies one could provide a good premise for a thoroughgoing knowledge of the Romanian aspects of the Holocaust.

One can distinguish two main categories of testimonies suitable for the historical research:

1. Those which were the result of simultaneously writing down the experienced events and frame of mind in the same period during which they took place (cf. Arnold Daghani’s “Aufzeichnungen”)
2. Those which resulted from a process of remembrance several years after the experienced events (the memoirs)

Within the first category must be made also a difference between diaries kept up-to-date on the spot (cf. Miriam Bercovici-Korber, *Jurnal de ghetou: Djurin*) and diaries written months or a few years later after the personal experience, but based on notes taken while in the labour camp (cf. Arnold Daghani, *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*). Of the

second category, one could also make a distinction between two kinds of testimonies. On one hand, those which, in spite of being written from remembrance, contain exact names and data related to people, places and dates. These details are the result of writing them down by the deportee without any explanatory text, just to remember later or even with the intention of using them for her/his own memoirs at a later date (cf. Ruth Glasberg Gold, *A survivor's Memoir. Ruth's journey*). On the other hand there are testimonies based mainly on remembrance, written from memory. In both cases of this second category, the narration could have been influenced and completed by additional knowledge, gained by the author due to his/her own research regarding the historical upheavals of that period (cf. Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Childhood robbed* in the volume *Shattered. 50 Years of Silence. History and Voices of the Tragedy in Romania and Transnistria*). However, this classification of the testimonies does not mean that some of them could be more "truthful" and others less useful for the purposes of historical research. Regarding memoirs as primary source for historical research, one must presume to have a critical approach in order to avoid possible inaccuracies. Moreover, because remembrance is a subjective human capacity, a very careful analysis of the text will be necessary. Checking and comparing the information given by the author with those available in other similar sources, as well as in the specialised literature, the historian must synthesise the subjectivity of the memoirs into a scientific objectivity.

Personal testimonies, mostly included in memoirs, interviews as well as artefacts linked to a certain experience one had, are the tools of Life History. This quite new branch of the historical research focusing on biographical aspects, aims to present historical events or just the frame of mind or *Zeitgeist* of a certain epoch from the angle of the life experience accumulated during the years by ordinary people. For a social-political history of the period under discussion, Life History can often provide essential details about political and social aspects which official documents are unable to reproduce.

In our case, the testimonies recorded by the survivors of the Romanian Holocaust help us to understand the main feature of this tragedy: its contradiction. Similarities but also differences between the notorious Nazi extermination camps and the labour camps and ghettos under Romanian rule gave Transnistria its contradictory specificity. On the one hand, thousands of people died of starvation, cold, diseases and executions; on the other hand, people could much more easily survive here than in the Nazi camps. On which principles did such a system function that made possible this particularity of the Romanian “domestic” Holocaust? Was Transnistria the Romanian Madagascar? To find some absolute truth about these questions is difficult because of the diversity of the topic itself. What we can find are fragments of answers, which put together could reproduce a truthful image of what deportation and deportee’s life in Transnistria actually meant. And for such a purpose, we could not find better means than the eyewitness testimonies recorded in diaries, memoirs, reports and interviews.

Taking into consideration the first category of testimonies as described above, we realise that a new distinction must be made. First, it is the age and second it is the place of detention of the author of the eyewitness testimony. Two of them, namely the teenage girl Mirjam Korber and the artist Arnold Daghani in his thirties, are a very illustrative example for this differentiation. Whereas Mirjam Korber had to spend those critical years in the ghetto of Djurin where she made the entries in her diary, Arnold Daghani was detained in the labour camp from Mikhailovka, beyond the river Bug, under German administration.<sup>115</sup> Unlike Daghani, she started to keep a diary without thinking that her notes could ever be read by anybody else: “What I am writing here is in vain. Nobody will ever read it and if I get away from here I will burn all that is related to these cursed times in Djurin. But in spite of this I continue to write...” Even if in her vision, the events and

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<sup>115</sup> Since the labour camps beyond the river Bug were constantly supplied with detainees from the camps and ghettos of Transnistria “offered” by the Romanian authorities to the Germans, and because their presence in those labour camps was a result of their deportation from Romania, we must consider also their experiences beyond the Bug as a part of the Transnistria memorial.

stories she described seemed to be meaningless and monotonous, she carried on to record moments of the ghetto life for her own spiritual need.<sup>116</sup> The entries in the diary of Mirjam Korber are not daily. She inaugurated her diary shortly after the “evacuation” from the Bukovinian Kimpolong (Câmpulung) on 4 October 1941 and kept it until October 1943. Thus, during two years of her “exile”, she caught the main aspects of every day life of the deportees in the ghetto of Djurin. Sometimes the entries in the diary follow each other by a lapse of time of two, three days but at other times of entire weeks, depending on her mood that could have been influenced by the events and news in the ghetto.

Most of the entries date from the first year of her deportation<sup>117</sup>, while she had to adjust herself to conditions and situations she could never imagine before: “I start only today to describe, rather to sketch again the monstrosities we experienced, and who knows whether something more horrible isn’t in store for us.”<sup>118</sup> The alternation between hope and disappointment caused by the rumours about repatriation determined Mirjam to make more frequent entries in her diary<sup>119</sup> reflecting how deportees have had access to news and how they reacted to them<sup>120</sup>. One can say that rumours based on real facts (new laws or regulations regarding the deportees) often reached the ghettos and the labour camps quite

<sup>116</sup> „Wie ich dich brauche, liebes Tagebuch... Warum der Wunsch zu beichten und die Unfähigkeit Worte für die Beichten zu finden?“, Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert. Jüdische Überlebensschicksale aus Rumänien 1941-1944. Ein Tagebuch*, Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1993, p.109.

<sup>117</sup> Ten entries were made during only two months in comparison with thirty-three during twelve months in 1942 and only seven during 1943 (one in March, five in September and the last one on 10 October).

<sup>118</sup>Friday, 7 November 1941: „Erst heute beginne ich mit der Beschreibung, besser gesagt mit der Skizierung der Ungeheuerlichkeiten, die wir erlebt haben, und wer weiß, ob nicht andere noch schrecklichere auf uns warten. In der ersten Nacht in Ataki habe ich gesehen, was menschliche Misere bedeutet. Ich habe Menschen gesehen, die keinen menschlichen Antlitz mehr hatten. Ich habe Kinder mit geschwollenen Augen, mit erfrorenen Füßen, mit steifen Händchen gesehen. Mütter mit toten Kindern in den Armen, alte Leute, Jugendliche, die mit groben Decken zugedeckt waren.“ Ibid., p.55.

<sup>119</sup> Thursday, 2 September 1943: “Warum habe ich heute begonnen, wieder zu schreiben? Weil unsere Rückkehr nach Hause sehr aktuell geworden ist. Seit drei Wochen gibt es Gerüchte, dass wir nach Hause fahren. Da diese Gerüchte nichts Neues für uns sind, habe ich ihnen keine Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, und wie gewöhnlich glaubte ich, dass sie verstümmeln würden, wie sie gekommen sind. Aber jetzt scheint es doch etwas Wirkliches zu sein.“ (“Why did I start to write again? Because our return home has become very acute. There are for three weeks rumours that we will go home. Because these rumours are nothing new to us, I did not give any attention to them. But now it seems to be something real.”) Ibid, p.111; Friday, 3 September 1943: “Es gibt eine allgemeine Aufregung. Vom Morgen an reihen sich die Lügen: Wir fahren – wir fahren nicht, neuerdings Listen mit Namen. Niemand weißt Bescheid.“ Ibid, p.113; Saturday 11 September 1943: „Unser Traum ist zu Ende. Die Gerüchte haben sich beruhigt. Wir fahren nicht mehr nach Hause.“ Ibid., p.113

<sup>120</sup>The entire ghetto was in preparation fever to leave Djurin. People continued to spread all kind of hope giving rumours that in Lipnik they will be given carts and relieves for the journey, sent by the Jewish Central Office from Bucharest. Ibid.

distorted, thus causing confusion. The agitation aroused by the rumour during the first weeks of September 1943 that the “first deportees from Southern Bukovina” would be allowed to return to their homes can be explained through the readiness of the Romanian government to repatriate the Dorohoi Jews deported in 1941 “by mistake” and the orphans until the age of fifteen.<sup>121</sup> Mirjam mentioned in her diary that the reason of a possible permit to return home could be an amnesty decree issued on 6 September by Antonescu. But it is not known if any Jew were repatriated as a result of this decree. Many historical facts of the Second World War are also reflected in Mirjam Korber’s diary such as the participation of some Italian divisions on the eastern front line as allies in the German-Romanian coalition.<sup>122</sup> The Italian soldiers left a positive impression, as they showed compassion for the deportees. Similar appreciations about the Italian soldiers in Transnistria were recorded also by other deportee.<sup>123</sup>

Mirjam was only 18 years old when she started to keep her diary. Her vision of what was worth writing down was different from Arnold Daghani’s very deliberate intention to note aspects and details, including names and ranks of the camp guards and officers in order to publish them or even to use them for bearing testimony in a court of law. But the conditions themselves were different from one camp or ghetto to another. It is hard to imagine that Arnold Daghani could have been able to keep a diary like Mirjam Korber, since he had to hide his shorthanded notes.<sup>124</sup> Unlike A. Daghani, Mirjam Korber probably avoided, fearing repression, to register in her diary details about the Romanian soldiers,

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<sup>121</sup> Because of the sweeping advance of the Soviet troops in the fall of 1943, there was a shift in the Romanian Government’s attitude towards the deportees. Follow the negotiation with the representatives of the Jewish Community and the International Red Cross during 1943, in December 1943 the Dorohoi Jews could return to Romania and a few month later also about 5000 orphans left Transnistria for Romania. Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.123.

<sup>122</sup> Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert...*, p.94.

<sup>123</sup> „It was the first time that we saw soldiers, other than Romanians. They were Italians. Coincidentally, there was a medical doctor among us who graduated in Italy. He answered questions as to who we were and where we were headed. It became clear that the Italians were fully unaware of the persecutions and massacres of Jews perpetrated by their allies.... They (the Italians, P.W.) gave us a few loaves, and also some concentrated dry pills of alcohol which, when ignited, would suffice to boil a cup of water.” Jaime Prutschi, *Frozen Silence*, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*p.358.

<sup>124</sup> Edward Timms, *Memories of Mikhailowka. Labour camp testimonies in the Arnold Daghani Archive* in: Research Paper No.4 of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex, June 2000, p.10.

Ukrainian and Jewish militiamen as well as about the only one Romanian gendarme who guarded the ghetto.<sup>125</sup> But the fact that Mirjam Korber's notes could have been scarcely used as incriminating testimonies in a court of law does not disqualify her diary as a historical testimony, too. On the contrary, her diary contributes to the better understanding of the life of deportees in Transnistria, offering the particular point of view of an eighteen years old girl on how politics based on discrimination and hatred changed human destinies. Each of these testimonies, which obviously reflect a particular view, complete one by one the general frame of the Transnistria ordeal as it is known mainly from studies and articles written by historians and less by the eyewitnesses themselves.

As one of the few cases when the prosecution against war criminals was initiated based on a diary<sup>126</sup>, Arnold Daghani could see the fruits of his endeavour of recording by name the criminals and their deeds in the labour camp of Mikhailovka. He left behind a considerable quantity of narrative and pictorial works of high artistic quality related to his own and his wife's experience in Transnistria, especially in the labour camp of Mikhailovka, beyond the river Bug under German rule. Besides his famous diary, which had come to the attention of the German court of law from Lübeck in 1960, Arnold Daghani created in his lifetime many other commemorative works. This time we will refer only to his diary as a historical source. The artist Arnold Daghani and his wife Anișoara (or Nanino, néé Rabinovici) were deported from Czernowitz (Cernăuți) on 7 June 1942 to the eastern edge of Transnistria, near the river Bug to the place called Cariera de Piatră (the Quarry). The first record in his diary dates from 18 August 1942, two months and a week after his deportation. It was the day when German soldiers came to "recruit"

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<sup>125</sup> „Der größte Teil meines Tagebuches enthält Einzelheiten des täglichen Daseins in einem Ghetto, das außer der gelegentlich anwesenden Militär sowie ukrainischen und jüdischen Milizionäre von einem einzigen rumänischen Gendarmen ständig überwacht wurde. Jede Einzelheit vermeidend, die diese ‚Behörde‘ betreffen könnte, folgen im Text kleine Freuden, große Aufregungen, manchmal groteske Zufälle...“, Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert...*, p.10.

<sup>126</sup>Besides Arnold Daghani's diary, an eyewitness report written by Nathan Segall, the representative of the Romanian Jews in Mikhailovka and a letter of Heinz Rosengarten, a fellow inmate of Segall and Daghani, written on 14 September 1943, were also a starting-point for the prosecution against former criminal of war.

Transnistrian deportees, taking them over from the Romanian military authorities across the river Bug for slave labour in the territory under German rule.

It is unclear if Daghani recorded also the experience of those two months and a week spent at the Quarry, since his diary reproduces exclusively only the time endured in the labour camp from Mikhailovka and the time spent after his escape, in the ghetto from Bershad. There are only some references to his stay at the Quarry in a still unpublished pictorial-narrative album with the title “What a Nice World”. It seems rather that he only recalled the moments described in the album, but he started to record for his prospective diary once in Mikhailovka. But owing to the testimonies recorded by another Cernovitzian deportee at the Quarry, Isak Weißglas, the father of the poet Immanuel Weißglas, we can approximately reconstitute the detention conditions that Daghani could have experienced. About 12 Km from the Quarry, there was the village of Ladijin (Ladyžino) with a large Jewish ghetto. From time to time deportees from the Quarry have been sent to live in the ghetto from Ladijin. Daghani was also sent to Ladijin and from there together with others 480 deportees, they were taken by the Germans to Mikhailowka. But many other inhabitants of the ghetto were allowed to stay. We know from the first entry of Daghani’s diary that the Germans took them in the early morning of 18 August<sup>127</sup> 1942. A similar action took place the next day at the Quarry. I. Weißglas mentioned that not all the deportees from the Quarry have been taken by Germans. About other 450 deportees mainly from Czernowitz could stay or those more “lucky” have been sent sometime later to “better places” like the ghetto from Ladijin.<sup>128</sup> The fact that I. Weißglas was able to

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<sup>127</sup> Isak Weißglas gave in his 93 typed pages of the deportation report the date of 19 August 1942 for the day when the Germans took people (from the Quarry) for Mikhailowka. The historian Jean Ancel confirmed the date of 18 August as it is given in Daghani’s diary. It seems possible that the Germans took their slaves first from Ladijin, among them Daghani and Anișoara, and the very next day they took people from the Quarry, too. Daghani mentioned that the action in Ladijin took place very early in the morning whereas I. Weißglas asserts that the Germans came to the Quarry at 9 o’clock. Herbert Wiesner (editor), *In der Sprache der Mörder. Eine Literatur aus Czernowitz, Bukowina*, Literaturhaus Berlin, 1993. See there Isak Weißglas, Ghetto und Deportation, p.143.

<sup>128</sup> Isak Weißglas was one of them who had the lucky chance to be sent to Ladijin. He recalled in his deportation report: „Am Morgen hatten wir Gelegenheit, uns das berühmte Paradies näher anzuschauen. Die Juden wohnten im Orte, der sich weit übers Land ausbreitete, in einem Ghetto, mehrere größere und kleinere Häuser zusammen,

avoid to be included into transports for Mikhailowka, whereas A. Daghani had to leave Ladijin, was due only to fate in a contradictory historical time and place. I. Weißglas would never experience during his “exile” the same suffering which A. Daghani had to face in Mikhailowka.

During the period of 1942 to 1944, the Germans decided to build the *Durchgangstraße IV* (DG IV), a highway between the occupied Poland and the southern Ukraine. This territory did not belong to Transnistria, since it lay on the Eastern bank of the river Bug and was administered by the German military authorities. Labour camps of Ukrainian Jews surrounded by barbed wire were set up about ten to fifteen kilometres apart along the length of the highway. They were guarded by armed Ukrainian militiamen and regiments of Lithuanian volunteers.<sup>129</sup> Due to the extremely difficult conditions in these camps, a large number of the local Jewish detainees perished. In order to supply the lacking work force, SS detachments crossed the river Bug to Transnistria “recruiting” about 5000 Romanian Jews.

Because the slave labour camps were not in Transnistria, hence not under Romanian authority one could assert that all what detainees experienced there cannot be regarded as part of the Transnistria memorial. This theory could be valid only for the short period during which only local Ukrainian Jews were used for the slave labour at the *Duchgangstraße IV*. After the thousands of Romanian Jews were handed over to the Germans by the Romanian authorities with the assent of Marshal Antonescu, those over ten slave labour camps beyond the river Bug became certainly part of the ordeal endured by Transnistrian deportees and therefore part of the Romanian history, too.

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aber alle gut erhalten, zum Teil von Gärten umrahmt.... Die Juden fühlten sich gut in Ladijin, so erzählten uns unsere Wirte.“ Herbert Wiesner, *In der Sprache der Mörder...* p. 145; A. Daghani was less impressed by the ghetto from Ladijin: „Neither at the Quarry nor here, at Ladyshino (Ladijin), have the Rumanian authorities ever made available any other food except a bread-ration, nor have they given any means to the deportees to make a living. And yet ‘life’ is going on, but how long will it go on in this improvised Gypsy-like camp on the outskirts of the village.” Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, narrative-pictorial album, DAUS, p.64.

<sup>129</sup> Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.82.

Arnold Daghani strived to record the facts in the labour camp exactly as he experienced them, without exaggerating or fabricating them. Some of the events he mentioned were not witnessed by himself but by one or another of his inmates. However, there is no doubt that they really happened since during the trial in Lübeck they have been in many cases confirmed in the testimonies given not only by former inmates who escaped the final extermination, but also by German witnesses.<sup>130</sup> After the war, while he tried to find a publishing house for his diary, one of the editors of a publishing house in Bucharest who rejected the manuscript, reportedly observed that it contained “too few atrocities”<sup>131</sup> in comparison with what happened in Lublin. Finally, the diary has been published not only in Romanian (1947), but later also in English (1961) and in German (1960).<sup>132</sup>

Since all those twelve camps, including Mikhailovka, served as slave labour camps used by different German construction companies, it is possible that they had similar conditions in each of them. Arnold Daghani’s diary is one of the few proofs of the treatment endured by Jewish detainees beyond the Bug. The well-known slogan “Arbeit macht frei”<sup>133</sup> from the entrance of the former concentration camp in Auschwitz (Oświęcim) has been used also in Mikhailovka, as well as the final execution of the detainees, which in Mikhailovka has been carried out entirely. *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard* reflects also the collaboration of the Lithuanians with the Germans as well as the involvement of German construction companies in the forced labour projects exploiting the manpower of Jewish deportees. Daghani was astonished how German companies could accept to make profit of the labour of innocent people treated like slaves only because they were Jews. One of the

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<sup>130</sup> During the trial in Lübeck, the prosecutor Dieter Joachim declared to the president of the court: “Die Ereignisse an der DG IV, von denen Daghani in seinem Tagebuch berichtet, wurden alle von deutschen Zeugen bestätigt.” Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), „*Lasst mich Leben*“. *Stationen des Künstlers Arnold Daghani*, Lüneburg: zuKlampen Verlag, 2002, p.216.

<sup>131</sup> Edward Timms, *Memories of Mikhailovka*...p.11.

<sup>132</sup> A book edited by Mollie Brandl-Bowen and Felix Rieper containing Daghani’s diary and a wide documentation on his attempts to make justice for the memory of his labour camp fellow inmates killed by the SS has been also recently (2002) published in German by the publishing house “zuKlampen” from Lüneburg.

<sup>133</sup> The meaning of „Arbeit macht frei” resides in the most used method of extermination by the Nazis: killing by work. Daghani remarked about the labour camp in Mikhailovka: “Offensichtlich war hier ein System errichtet worden, um jenseits des Bugs aus jüdischen Zwangsarbeitern eine wirkungsvolle Arbeitsmaschinerie zu machen.“ Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen (editors), „*Lasst mich Leben*“..., p.36.

eight companies charged by the Todt Organisation (T.O.) with the construction of the Highway between Gaisin and Uman was owned by August Dohrmann from Remscheid in Rhenania, which provided also the daily “pay” for the detainees: “two and a half ounces of millet and three and a half ounces of pea per capita”.<sup>134</sup> To his company belonged also Daghani, as a slave. He remarked in his diary that the August Dohrmann’s company took more care of its horses than of the Jewish detainees who shared the stable with them.<sup>135</sup> The employees of the company working on the spot were aware of the method of extermination by forced labour of the detainees. They had to work often even if it was superfluous, under extreme weather conditions. When detainees were ordered to clean the bare field of snow because the road was already snow free, nobody from the Dohrmann Company attempted to stop the nonsensical activity. On the contrary, one of the T.O. men “could barely hold himself of laughing in his sleigh” making fun of how the Dohrmann Company was using the labour power of detainees.<sup>136</sup> Once in Mikhailowka, all the hopes of the people “recruited” in Ladijin that working for the German companies they could earn some more food and improve their living conditions were shattered very soon. During the time spent in the ghetto of Ladijin and at the Quarry, people could barely find work, being overcome by an atmosphere of lethargy due to doing nothing. When rumours were spread that the Germans “were recruiting” deportees from Transnistria for work on the highway, Daghani recalled how enthusiastic one of his fellow inmates, Heinz Rosengarten, was. He thought, being an engineer for roads and bridges, that the German company would provide him an appropriate position to his professional skills.<sup>137</sup> Only

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<sup>134</sup> Arnold Daghani, *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*, London: Adam International Review, Year XXIX, Nos.291-292-293, 1961, p.14.

<sup>135</sup> Some decades later, Josef Elsäßer, one of the engineers of the Dohrmann company who coordinated the work at the DS IV, declared in a letter addressed to A. Daghani that the company had no influence on the repartition of labour power and they were told the company will use the manpower of PO and that the horses did not belong to the Dohrmann company, Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), „*Lasst mich Leben*“..., p.251.

<sup>136</sup> A. Daghani remarked: „There would have been a world of difference had T.O.-man Willi Kustin ordered them to knock off work, as the *Strasse* was already cleared“. Manuscript revised and edited by Mollie Brandl Bowen. See also in: Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), „*Lasst mich Leben*“..., p.92.

<sup>137</sup> “So it could happen that on 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1942, Heinz Rosengarten, engineer for roads and bridges from Czernowitz, said to our tiny group within the 450 or so, as we were ordered to board the provided lorries, chalk-

after two months, the Romanian Jews in Mikhailowka would give all they still possessed just to be sent back to Transnistria.<sup>138</sup> It was even Heinz Rosengarten himself who launched the idea how they could achieve to be returned on the western side of the river Bug. However, it was not the German practice to send back to Transnistria deportees once “recruited”, since labour power became more valuable due to sporadic executions and “natural” death. They preferred to liquidate the camps when further works at the DG IV had to be given up.

Daghani’s diary has also a psychological dimension reflecting the habits and behaviour of the detainees under different circumstances. The most surprising aspect is that of the discrimination among the detainees themselves. Generally, Romanian Jews looked down on Ukrainian Jews because of their appearance and lack of education. Some of them even would have expected from the guards and camp commander to treat the Ukrainian Jews as “second class slaves”.<sup>139</sup> But even within the group of the Romanian Jews there were animosities. Sometimes the detainees themselves made living with each other even more difficult than it was, as the case of Dr. Gottlieb shows. He has been ostracized by his inmates who have alleged of him to be lousier than they were. Dr. Gottlieb had to move to the lodgings of the Ukrainian Jews.<sup>140</sup> Even an execution of a detainee should have taken place due to the complaints of his inmates at the T. O. men because of his “undignified behaviour”. It is not clear what this expression was meant to cover.

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marked T. O. (Todt Organisation): ‘I’m pretty sure we’ll be given work there. Much better there than have to stay here where one’s life is wasted’. Heinz Rosengarten saw himself ‘free’ and employed in his capacity as engineer for roads and bridges.” Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, p.82.

<sup>138</sup> Daghani noted the observation of an inmate that reflects the gravity of their situation: „What an extraordinary thing that we should pay for being sent back across the river. Here we die of a bullet we pay for, there of misery, likewise paid for.” Arnold Daghani, *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*, p.35.

<sup>139</sup> „Some amongst us seem to indulge in the illusion that they (the Ukrainian Jewish prisoners) must be treated as second-class slaves because they are more wretched than we seem to be. Only ask a passing T.O.-man to see if he can see any difference“. Manuscript revised and edited by Mollie Brandl Bowen, p.48. See also in: Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), *„Lasst mich Leben“*..., p.70.

<sup>140</sup> „Dr. Moses Gottlieb musste vom Raum jenseits des Flurs in ein gesondertes Wohnquartier umziehen, wo ungefähr 40 ukrainischen Juden lebten. Angeblich ist er stärker als die anderen von Läusen befallen.....Es ist sicherlich eine Angelegenheit zwischen den Häftlingen, das hat nichts mit dem Lagerkommandanten zu tun“. Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), *„Lasst mich Leben“*..., p.78.

Although all records about the aspects of life in the slave-labour camps are a useful historical source for a comparative study regarding the conditions in these camps under different authorities, diary notes related to the killing of people have an outstanding weight. Daghani's diary contains at least seventeen references related to executions, testifying of the violent death of hundreds of detainees, not to mention those who died due to the shabby living conditions. Therefore, a historical testimony becomes a judicial one, endowed to make justice after several years.

One of the written records, which are neither a diary nor a memoir, is the report conceived and composed as a statement. The author of such a deportation and detention report was Nathan Segall, the "self-styled spokesman" of the Romanian Jews in Mikhailovka. He dictated his report to a fellow detainee named Gerda Brüll on 21 October 1943. During the trial in Lübeck Segall's report was also taken under consideration as a testimony although Segall himself could not be present at the trial, being killed while the camp in Tarrasiwka has been "liquidated". Segall's report confirms the atrocities recorded by Daghani, offering also some supplementary information and an approach to the events from the point of view of the "spokesman". He mentioned things which cannot be found in Daghani's diary, like the collaboration of two Jewish boys who "worked as policemen for the Lithuanian guards", a collaboration which was the most painful experience of their gloomy life in the camp.<sup>141</sup> Although the report is quite a subjective one, in which Segall emphasized his own merits on organising the camp life and rescuing human lives, we have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of his assertions. They can be interpreted in different ways, as Daghani has also done after reading Segall's report some years later, without ignoring their factual importance.

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<sup>141</sup> „When I arrived there were no Jewish camp-leaders, just Jewish police composed of two people aged twenty-two and twenty-four respectively, who rendered the Lithuanians service as accomplices. These two Jews belong to the darkest chapter of our dark life there.“ Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl Bowen (editors), *„Lasst mich Leben“*..., p.182.

But many of the deportees were not in the position to keep a diary or were simply not aware during the detention of the importance of recording their experience simultaneously. Only after years, those who survived, encouraged and stimulated by relatives, friends and researchers, decided to share their experience with the world, regarding the effort to write a memoir as a “payment of a debt owed by a survivor to those who perished”. In the case of the Transnistria deportees, this “debt” became a necessity since that part of the Holocaust, eclipsed by notorious places like Auschwitz, Treblinka or Dachau, seemed to be forgotten. However, not all the memoirs have been published, many of them are still in manuscripts waiting for an opportunity to be taken under consideration for studies and articles related to Transnistria.

Because memoirs reflect the reproduction of the experience passed through a selective memory, one cannot exclude that some details or aspects of the narrative have lost their accuracy. Elements of life-experience accumulated between the frame of time reproduced and that of the writing down the memoir and these could influence the narration. However, this aspect is more relevant for interviews than for memoirs, since the authors’ memoirs possess more time for being able to submerge deeper in their own experiences again. For many of them, this process is not only painful, but also a very tiresome one. Writing a memoir means not just recalling but also researching, checking and reading in order to put the reproduced memories in the historical context of that time. Therefore, the interpretation of the political phenomenon by the author him/herself gives the narration a particular feature. One can divide the memoirs related to Transnistria into two categories: memoirs written shortly after the war (cf. E. Muniu in: *Pogromurile din Basarabia și alte câteva întâmplări* published in 1947) and memoirs written in the 1990s (the collection edited by Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly: *Shattered! 50 Years of Silence* published in 1997; Ruth Glasberg Gold: *A Survivor’s Memoir* published in 1993).

Owing to Felicia Carmelly's project destined to break the silence over the Transnistrian ordeal by publishing in the same volume besides her own memoir other thirteen eyewitness testimonies of Transnistria survivors, the research basis of this topic increased considerably.

These memoirs contribute to the understanding of those aspects of the Transnistria ordeal which would be difficult to trace only by processing official files in archives. How was it possible that so many people could be humiliated and dispossessed of their human dignity and how could they come to terms with their fate, so radically changed from one day to another? What was their reaction and attitude? There are so many questions that automatically flash to one's mind by taking notice of the tragedy beyond the Dniester. Due to the fact that the social background and educational level of the deportees was quite different, one can assume that also the psychological approach of this trauma varied. However, the majority of the deported Jews from Bukovina seem to have belonged to the middle class. Memoirs have been written generally by persons who belonged to this middle class, well educated, mannerly and more sensitive to the hardship they had endured. Even if an analysis of the memoirs cannot automatically reveal all the aspects regarding the experiences related to deportation, detention and liberation, it can offer at least access to an introspective view into this issue.

A first finding inferred from the reading of the memoirs is that Jewish families affected by deportation were not aware of the real danger. The lack of information and the belief that in modern time extreme right-wing ideology will not be capable to reawaken an "obsessive hatred and blood thirst toward innocent people" determined them to neglect the ominous threat.<sup>142</sup> Although anti-Semitism was an open state policy since 1938 and became more oppressive after 1940, people still believed that it could not threaten their

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<sup>142</sup> In a transport of deported Jewish people, some of them were discussing why Jews did not resist to all the measures taken against them. Rubin Udler, *The Cursed Years*, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.395.

life. Even after the pogroms in Dorohoi (1 July 1940) and Iași (29 June 1941), people kept their hope for better days.

Since September 1941, there were rumours about alleged deportations of Jews, but it was impossible to get more information since the plan to deport the Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia was kept secret. In some cases, Bessarabian Jews were driven away across the Dniester in the territory of the future Transnistria, which until the agreement of Tighina<sup>143</sup> was controlled by the German Army. Some news about this action could have reached Bukovina as rumours of possible deportations. The “organised” deportations commenced during the second half of September in Bessarabia and during the second week of October 1941 in Bukovina. Generally, deportation orders were made known in an interval from three days to just few hours before the deportation, so that people had often scarcely time to prepare themselves for the long journey. They were not informed for how long and under what conditions they would be deported. In Czernowitz, there were rumours during September about a future deportation. One rumour was that, once “relocated”, Jews would be given a piece of land to cultivate. During the same time, another rumour was that Jews would be deported to be killed. In the Czernowitz area, the ghettoisation of the Jews from the surroundings was a first sign for their early deportation.<sup>144</sup> Although people could scarcely believe that they would indeed be deported. Since bribery became a practice to escape deportation, Jews believed, the authorities “are playing tricks” in order to take their money but in the end they will not deport anybody.<sup>145</sup>

The official terms used for deportation were those of “evacuation” and “displacement”, giving them a harmless meaning that should have let the deportees be deceived at the start

<sup>143</sup> Due to the agreement of Tighina signed on 30.08.1941 between Germany and Romania, the latter was allowed to establish in the territory between the rivers Dniester and Bug named Transnistria, an administration in order to “exploit economically the region”. Andrej Angrick, *Rumänien, die SS und die Vernichtung der Juden* in: Mariana Hausleitner, Brigitte Mihok, Juliane Wetzel, *Rumänien und der Holocaust. Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien. 1941-1944*, Berlin: Metropol, 2001, p.130.

<sup>144</sup> The ghettoisation was part of the deportation plan issued by the Supreme Headquarters of the Romanian Army “in accordance with instructions by Marshal Antonescu”. Radu Ioanid, The deportation of the Jews to Transnistria, in: Mariana Hausleitner, Brigitte Mihok, Juliane Wetzel, *Rumänien und der Holocaust*, p.88.

<sup>145</sup> Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey. A Survivor's Memoir*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, p.44.

of their “journey”. People “evacuated” during the first wave of deportation did indeed believe that they would be back soon.<sup>146</sup> The deportees were also quite confused about the reason for their deportation. Since the anti-Semitic laws and the press campaigns got worse, they became aware that the authorities and a part of the population with extreme right-wing convictions would like to get rid of them. The accusation that Jews, especially those from Bukovina and Bessarabia were pro-Soviet was often repeated in the newspapers. But the deportees themselves became aware of their “guilt” for which they had to expiate the “condemnation” in Transnistria only after the war. For that reason the authors of memoirs would refer almost without exception to the attitude of the Bukovinian and Bessarabian Jews towards the Soviets. Their conclusion is that Jews hoped for a better future under Soviet regime after the experience they had under Romanian governments, but many of them were disappointed during the Soviet occupation. Romania, an ally of Nazi Germany seemed to them a more serious threat and some of the Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews preferred to flee with the Soviets when the Romanian and German armies launched the attack for the „liberation“ of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia.<sup>147</sup> Those who were unable to leave Romania before the attack on the Soviet Union, but submitted applications for that purpose at the Soviet consulate were also deported regardless of their place of residence<sup>148</sup>, after the applications fell into the hands of the Romanian Security Police (Siguranța).

There were cases when Romanians, who had better information channels and could learn more about the “displacement” of the Jewish population, warned the Jews. A gentile gesture came even from a servant of the regime, the prefect of Dorohoi, Barbu Stroici, who summoned the leaders of the Jewish community to inform them about the anti-Jewish

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<sup>146</sup> Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.223.

<sup>147</sup> Leiza Hoffer, Ordinary People in Extraordinary times, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, pp. 272, 350.

<sup>148</sup> See also the report of Magdalena Kuhn whose family was deported in September 1942 (!) from Timișoara “to the river Bug”, then handed over to the Germans who eventually shot them to death. Magdalema Kuhn, Timișoara, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.426.

measures planned by the Antonescu regime and to assure them that he would protect his Jews from hooliganism, vandalism, violence and other crimes.<sup>149</sup> In some special cases, non-Jewish neighbours were ready to help Jews, to hide them to escape murder and deportation.<sup>150</sup> However, most memoirs mention a rather hostile attitude of the non-Jewish population living in the same town or village, when the Jews were marched to the railway stations to be deported. Instead of compassion, some of Romanians and Ukrainians profited of their deportation. In short, while the first transport of Jews was on the way to Transnistria, many Romanians swarmed to Bukovina to enrich themselves by looting Jewish properties. They were the so-called “gold-rushers”.<sup>151</sup> Why did Jews not revolt against this obvious injustice? A possible answer could be that those who planned the deportations “took care” to deprive Jews of their local leaders who were killed before anybody could know anything for sure about the deportations. Without those who possessed the courage and the qualities to organise, guide and mobilize the people, resistance would have been meaningless. The losses they had encountered as well as the methodical use of brutality broke down any attempted resistance.<sup>152</sup>

During the deportation, people became day-by-day more aware of the cruelty that surrounded them. For many of them, crossing the Dniester was the first shock when they were deprived of their identity papers, thus of their human quality, exposed to the arbitrariness of gendarmes and local peasants. From the border of Transnistria on, it became clearer that they have been banished to Transnistria not to live but to die there. Deportees started to realize that without their identity papers they no longer had an identity and no one would be able to search for them if they disappeared or where they

<sup>149</sup> Miryam Leib, It began in Dorohoi, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p.288.

<sup>150</sup> Emma Lustig, a survivor member of the carnage in the village of Milie mentioned in her account how a non-Jewish peasant neighbour offered her family to hide them in his home for the night while other local peasants together with the “*Banderovtzes*” (pro-German Ukrainian paramilitary bandits called after their leader Bandera) slaughtered the entire Jewish population of Milie. Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey...*, p.39; see also p.280

<sup>151</sup> Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey...*, p.38.

<sup>152</sup> In the transit-camps from Transnistria gendarmes randomly picked up some of deportees and brutally beat them up for no apparent reason but those beatings were intended to intimidate and break the spirit the deportees in order to prevent any future attempt of resistance. Miryam Leib, It began in Dorohoi, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p. 296.

died.<sup>153</sup> Some more courageous people of the first groups of deportees who witnessed tragic scenes, attempted to escape during the deportation. Many of them were shot; others were caught and sent back with the next convoys. Consequently, during the march towards the river Dniester, among the next groups of deportees rumours were spread, that they will be shot near the Dniester or they would be thrown alive in the river. These rumours were the product of terror-stricken people, based on firsthand information by people who managed to escape previous deportations, but have been caught and deported again. In one case, a convoy of Bessarabian Jews was shot after they were ordered to cross the river Dniester, despite bribing the Romanian commanding officer who took the money from the Jews, promising them to let them live.<sup>154</sup> Once beyond the Dniester, the gendarmes who guarded the convoys did not find it in themselves to tell to deportees that they were sent to Transnistria “to die of cold and hunger”.<sup>155</sup>

The ways the authors describe the living conditions in the ghettos and labour camps of Transnistria are very similar. Words like typhoid fever, starvation, cold, dirt and death can be found in each narrative characterising the everyday life of the deportees. It seems like the Romanian authorities thought out a very sly method to annihilate Jewish deportees, creating “most propitious” conditions that inevitably led to the “natural” death of ten thousands of people.<sup>156</sup> During the marches to the places of their “exile”, some of local Ukrainians were looking at Jewish deportees disdainfully, grinning or even throwing stones at them as they walked by.<sup>157</sup> However, like in every society people are different, so among local Ukrainians there were people ready to help Jewish deportees, feeling a deep

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<sup>153</sup> Herman Rubinger, The bridge over troubled waters, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p.438

<sup>154</sup> Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey...*, p.55.

<sup>155</sup> Frada Rosenblatt, How I envied the dog, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p.370.

<sup>156</sup> In a report of the Gendarmerie Legion of Prahova about the circumstances in which 40 Jews died on one of the “death trains” from Iași, it was very important for the rapporteur to emphasize that they died because of “physical weakness” and “no violence has contributed to the death of the above-mentioned”. In fact, people were locked in overcrowded, stifling freight wagons driven in the torrid sunshine of July by temperature over 30°C. Comparisons with the circumstances of deportees in Transnistria reveal the underhand character of the Romanian way to exterminate the “undesirable” Jews. See the report of the Gendarmerie Legion Prahova in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...pp. 40; 41.

<sup>157</sup> Frada Rosenblatt, How I envied the dog, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p.368. See also Arnold Daghani, *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*, p.11.

compassion for their suffering.<sup>158</sup> Anti-German Ukrainian partisans acted beyond the Bug, attempting to liberate Jewish detainees.

The life conditions in the ghettos and concentration camps of Transnistria depicted in memoirs show a range of similar features (typhoid fever, cold, starvation, etc.), but also differences from case to case, since the conditions themselves varied from a ghetto to a concentration or labour camp. The most evident contrast could be drawn between the ghetto from Ladijin, described by Isak Weißglas as a “Jewish paradise” and the concentration camp in Vapniarca. The latter functioned as a typical concentration camp, surrounded by three barbed wire fences with watchtowers every fifty meters. Unlike other camps in Transnistria, people deported to Vapniarca were regarded as “political detainees” and not only Jewish but many Ukrainian and some Romanian “opponents” were detained there. The most numerous were the group of Ukrainian Jews deported from Odessa after the massacre from 23-25 October 1941. They were soon joined by several hundred Jewish deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina. In August and September 1942, a contingent of seven hundred and twenty-two Jewish deportees from different Romanian cities, arrested for various alleged offences, was also brought to Vapniarca.<sup>159</sup> Besides harsher detention conditions, Vapniarca can be compared with German extermination camps but here instead of using the more expensive Zyklone B gas, pea cattle fodder was introduced as meal for humans. It was a slow but efficient extermination of the deportees, of whom many died after becoming sick of Lathyrism.<sup>160</sup> Only after three month, the “action” was

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<sup>158</sup> Isak Weißglas described how a local peasant couple felt a deep compassion for him and his family while he was attempting to change their place of residence from a ghetto to another. The crying woman told them that in December 1941 more than 10,000 Jewish deportees were lodged in a huge overcrowded empty building nearby, from whom many thousand were left to die of starvation, diseases and cold, being maltreated and also shot by Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian militia men. Herbert Wiesner, *In der Sprache der Mörder...* p.151 .Arnold Daghani and his wife could escape from the labour camps of Mikhailowka with the help of a local Ukrainian from Gaisin, a shoemaker. Arnold Daghani, *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*, pp. 87, 101.

<sup>159</sup> They were alleged Socialists, Communists, Zionists, and members of Jewish organisations, deported after the police had created files on the latters, indicating that they were suspicious. This wave of deportation affected entire Jewish families from Arad, Timișoara and other cities in Romania. Ihiel Benditer, Cattle fodder for the victims, in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*...p.187.

<sup>160</sup> On the suggestion of the German Gestapo representative, the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered the introduction as food for detainees dried peas, used as cattle fodder, which had toxic effect on humans. While

stopped due to the courage with which doctor detainees managed to inform through Romanian train personnel and civilian functionaries their colleagues and the Jewish community, who interceded at higher officials in the favour of the detainees.

Although surveillance was very strict, detainees were able, risking their life, to establish contact with people willing to relay their suffering. Examples of humanitarian gestures came even from some Romanian officers.<sup>161</sup> The most important thing for detainees was to get information about relatives in Romania, who might send them money and other necessities. Often these helpers were military and railway employees, who travelled regularly between Romania and Transnistria, providing many similar services for the deportees for humanitarian reason or for money they received from the families in Romania. Some commanding officers with acquaintances among deportees provided similar important services at great personal risk. They carried messages sent from deportees to their families, to the Central Jewish Committee and other organisations.<sup>162</sup> One of these humane officers was Colonel Motora who after the war was even awarded the distinction “Righteous Gentile” for saving the life of 450 Jewish deportees during their march towards Romania in March 1944.<sup>163</sup>

The authors of the memoirs considered important to mention by name, as far as they could recall, the persons who showed compassion and willingness to help them and save lives.

Unfortunately their number was substantially lower than that of the executioners implementing with zeal the discrimination and extermination policy of the Antonescu

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this solution was initially used as a cheap way of feeding the detainees, it shortly became a criminal act. The measure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs might have had caused ~~gradual extermination~~ the death of the detainees through the accumulation of toxins in the body. Ibid, p.189.

<sup>161</sup> One of them was in the ghetto of Shargorod, who helped and supplied the author of an eyewitness testimony with food, as she was still a child, saving practically her life. Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.241.

<sup>162</sup> Ihiel Benditer, *Cattle fodder for the victims*, p.190.

<sup>163</sup> When troops of the pro-German Vlasov army wanted to kill by machine gun the convoy consisting of 450 Jews, Col. Motora prevented the massacre ordering the Romanian soldiers to close ranks around the convoy and to march faster in order to leave the danger zone as soon as possible. Owing to his energetic intervention, he saved the life of the 450 deportees. When Col. Motora learnt that the next day the administration of Transnistria will be transferred to the Germans and becoming aware of what that could mean for the deportees, he took care that the people would cross immediately the Dniester to Bessarabia. Ibid., p.201.

regime. Otherwise, the Transnistrian ordeal would never have taken place. Their names were also in many cases recorded or just memorized by deportees because of their extreme inhuman deeds and behaviour. In the volume *Pogromurile din Basarabia și alte câteva întâmplări* published only three years later after the ordeal by Marius Mircu, containing many eyewitness testimonies, E. Muniu mentioned by name a dozen military men, who were responsible for killing tens of thousands of people.<sup>164</sup> What happened to these war criminals after 1944? Were E. Muniu's records ever taken in consideration as a possible basis for a preliminary investigation on Romanian criminals of war? The book published by Marius Mircu had to be smuggled out of the country at considerable personal risk in January 1950 by a member of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research in Montreal. Probably a similar destiny would have had Arnold Daghani's diary if Daghani spent his detention not among German, but Romanian executioners. Due to the armistice with the Soviets in September 1944 and to the peace treaty from 1947, Romania promised to punish those responsible for the crimes committed by the Romanian Army and Gendarmerie in Transnistria, and many trials against alleged war criminals took place indeed in the period 1945-1955.

Some of the Transnistria survivors are still alive, those who at the time of the deportation were teenagers, others who were mature meanwhile passed away, leaving behind the testimonies about their experience as deportees and labour camp detainees.

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<sup>164</sup> He mentions by name an officer Stoicescu, originally from Constanța, who "was seen kicking a pregnant woman with his heavy army boots and, using a bat, to split open the head of a Jewish lawyer from Zastavna." Other "cruel torturers" are mentioned like the chief agronomist of Balta district (at that time in military uniform), Ștefănescu, and a well-known priest from Bucharest (at that time also serving in the army), Sofian Dumitru. He also recalled (or found it out researching) the names of the gendarmes in charge of the camps from Obodovka, Verhovka, Bershada, Balanovka etc. The names are: Dragomir, Tudoran, Antoniu, Olariu, Ionitescu, Căleanu, Toma, Aurica and the officer Nita Marin. "These military men proudly boasted about their participation in the platoons which shot over 40,000 Bessarabian Jews in Birzula and Terbovca." Platoon leader Nita Marin was a native from Bucharest (Dudești-Cioplea). Chief Officer, Sub-lieutenant Ghineraru, in Bershada shot to death in January 1944 (!) 250 Jews alleging that they were Communist. E. Muniu, *The Mărcușți death market and beyond* in: Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, pp.430-431.

## **2. Beyond the river Bug: Mapping the testimony of Arnold Daghani against other sources**

Already during the campaign of 1941, German regular troops and the SS liquidated most of the local Ukrainian Jews on the eastern bank of the Bug. Those who survived were subordinated to the German civil administration in so called Reichskommissariat Ukraine and Ostland. The Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories ordered on 16 August 1941 all Jews aged between 14-60 years to be subjected to forced labour. In February 1942 the leader of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, charged the commander of the SS in the Ukraine and Southern Russia with the construction of a highway called “Durchgangstraße IV”. The SS commander Prützmann on his turn passed the order on to the “Todt” Organisation (T.O.) which used to carry out infrastructure works, to organise the labour and to provide equipment for the construction of DG IV. Work power was provided both by the SS and T.O. and it consisted of local Jews and later of Romanian Jews since there was not enough slave labour power on the spot when the German authorities began to build the highway.<sup>165</sup> This strategic highway linked occupied Poland with Southern Ukraine. The road commenced at Lemberg (Lvov) and ended at Stalino, northwards from the Azov Sea, eastwards from the town Rostov, the main ‘gate’ towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus. The route of the road approached at certain points also the eastern bank of the river Bug. Situated at distances of 20-25 km from the Bug along the route of the Durchgangstraße IV, the SS set up in many places slave labour camps like in Gaisin, Ivangorod, Uman, Kirovgrad, Mikhailovka, Tarassivka, Nemirov and others. The Jewish ghettos on the western bank of the Bug i.e. in Transnistria administered by Romanians, were the main source of man power for the labour camps situated beyond the Bug. Even the camp of Bratslav, although situated on the western bank, was under German

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<sup>165</sup> Hermann Kaienburg, *Die Wirtschaft der SS*, Berlin: Metropol, 2003, p.448.

administration due to the fact that the highway route passed at Bratslav for a few kilometres across the Bug.

The “Todt” Organisation made the plans of the highway and was responsible for the construction of the highway as well as for the personnel needed for this project. It contracted German building companies that brought to the Ukraine their own engineers, workmen and even guards who were taken over by T.O. and therefore were considered Wehrmacht attendants. However, the T.O. personnel, including that of the building companies was not subordinated to the SS. The task of guarding the slave workers was the duty of the so called “Polizeisicherungsabteilung DG IV” set up in March 1942 in Berlin. The commander of the slave labour camps belonged to this department of the police and employed Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Latvian guards from the so called “Schutzmannschaften-Battaillone”.<sup>166</sup> The SS units in this territory along the Bug were mainly composed of local ethnic Germans and their task was to procure labour power for the more than twenty camps along the DG IV. They used to “recruit” from time to time also slave labour from the Jewish ghettos and camps administered by the Romanian military authorities in Transnistria. In fact, the Romanian authorities, including the civil governor of Transnistria, Prof. Alexianu and the head of state in Bucharest, Marshal Ion Antonescu, knew and agreed to this ‘trade’ of Romanian Jews. So the Romanians got rid of many starving Jews from Transnistria by handing them over to the SS for various kinds of works. It was their initial plan to “evacuate” all the deportees from Bukovina and Bessarabia across the Bug but the Germans agreed to take over only as many as they needed.<sup>167</sup> Beside the highway linking Lemberg with Stalino, Romanian Jewish deportees, many of them native of Bukovina, had to work also at another project led by the “Todt” Organisation. It was the construction of a bridge on the Bug, between Trihati and Ochakov

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.449.

<sup>167</sup> Report of a Romanian officer of 11 October 1941: “...All the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina have been evacuated into the region westwards of Bug where they will stay during this autumn until according to the convention concluded with the German state, it will be possible to push them eastwards across the Bug”. CSIER, File III 1045/14, p.14.

connecting Transnistria with the German ruled “Reichskommissariat Ukraine.” The work at this bridge started in spring 1943 and was completed by the end of the same year. About 4000 Jews, the majority deportees from Romania (especially from Bukovina and Bessarabia), were handed over to the SS as slave labour for this project. They were accommodated in five labour camps. Three of them were situated on the western, i.e. Romanian side of the river (Trihati, Varvarovka, Kolosovka), and two on the German side (Kurievka and Matievka). Although the Germans required only 1500 “civil workers”, the Romania authorities ‘provided’ them with 4000. In certain ghettos of Transnistria the local county chiefs complained that there are barely enough deportees fit for work. A special commission of the Romanian government also came to inspect the working conditions in the camp of Trihati. The inspectors discovered the terrible conditions in which the workers lived. Many of them were almost naked wearing some pieces of sackcloth. There were no bandages or medicines and many of the workers were older than 60 years or younger than 16. The authorities appealed to the International Red Cross for clothes and shoes for the workers. However, only the deportees located on the Romanian side of the Bug could benefit from these measures. Those beyond the Bug, even if they were Romanian Jews, were not taken into consideration.

In the territories under German control there was no sign of such a softening of their situation. Only by the end of 1942 did the SS leadership realise the necessity of improving the work and living conditions of their “slaves”, since the high rate of mortality in the slaves labour camps could jeopardise the economic plans of the SS.<sup>168</sup> In spite of this, units of the local ethnic Germans and SS continued to organise mass killings of the Jews, even of those needed for work. On 6 November 1942 a wave killings engulfed many slave

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<sup>168</sup> Such improvements “according to the available possibilities” meant on paper: a “more tasteful” meal, the permission to receive parcels from relatives or international organisations, a better repartition of the work load according to the physical capability of every detainee, resting hours during day for those who had to work in the night, the abolition of corporal punishments that could influence the efficiency of the worker. Hermann Kaienburg, *Vernichtung durch Arbeit. Die Wirtschaftsbestrebungen der SS und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Existenzbedingungen der KZ-Gefangenen*, Bonn: Verlag J.H. Dietz, 1990, p.328.

labour camps beyond the Bug. Thousands of Jews, many of them native of Romania were killed in the camps of Brailov, Gaisin, and Bar. By September 1943 only about 1500 Romanian Jews were still alive out of the more than 4000 handed over by the Romanian authorities to the Germans for building the *Durchgangstraße IV*. By mid December only about the half of the 1500 Romanian Jews who worked at this highway survived. Between 10 and 18 December 1943 the SS also killed the majority of those who until then were able to survive. In all only 150 Romanian Jews used at the construction of the highway survived.<sup>169</sup> In the history of the Holocaust, Transnistria was for decades forgotten and even less was known about what happened to the Bukovinian Jews deported beyond Transnistria, since historical research in this field had rarely been done. A diary, some journal articles or some paintings alone turned out to be insufficient in order to awaken in the public the awareness of the existence of this particular aspect of the Holocaust.

#### **Daghani's testimony**

One of the survivors of the 'hell' beyond the Bug was the artist Arnold Daghani, the only person who recorded not only in words but also in paintings and drawings the living conditions in the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka situated 12 kilometres eastwards from Gaisin on the road leading to Uman. Owing to the archive material preserved by the Daghani Archive at the University of Sussex (DAUS), containing various documents related to the destiny of people affected by those terrible occurrences, one can reconstruct many aspects of the slave labour camps beyond the Bug. Therefore, Mikhailovka can be regarded as point of reference in analysing the atmosphere in such slave labour camps, which will be further confirmed by reference to later judicial investigation. Through his artistic and literary work Daghani personalised the suffering of the deportees. Recording facts, events and many names of those involved in the ordeal of Mikhailovka, Daghani

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<sup>169</sup> Jean Ancel accepted these figures referring to the investigation the lawyer Matatias Carp carried out shortly after the end of the war, which he published in his "black book" on the Romanian Holocaust. Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască 1933-1944*, vol. II, Part I, Bucharest, 2003, p.310.

lifted the anonymity of the Holocaust.<sup>170</sup> In spite of the fact that he had to endure the worst experience of his deportation not under Romanian but beyond the river Bug under German oppression, he was a Transnistrian deportee, together with all those Romanian Jews transferred from Transnistria across the Bug into the slave labour camps under SS command. Due to the consistency with which the Germans liquidated the Jewish deportees under their control, few of these could bear witness after the war about the crimes this category of deportees endured beyond the Bug. As one of the few survivors, Arnold Daghani committed himself to this task during his life in his diary, in his paintings and drawings, which can be complemented from the judicial records of the court investigation from Lübeck. The memory of this terrible experience, as well as the desire to make people aware of the existence of the slave labour camps beyond the Bug, haunted him for the rest of his life. The ignorance around what happened in these camps in contrast with other well-known extermination camps like Auschwitz irritated him.<sup>171</sup> He found out that “since Mikhailovka, Tarassivka and other death-camps across the Bug did not boast of any furnace of cremation, a gas chamber and all the miscellaneous accessories, they are looked down upon by publisher and journalists.” But the world had to know: in Mikhailovka and in similar places across the Bug “the inmate had to climb down into the grave and wait for the bullet. Then the grave was filled up and covered with lime. That at the time of the incinerator!”<sup>172</sup> Daghani assumed therefore the task to be the voice not only for the survivors but also for all those who perished in the slave labour camps beyond the Bug. His wife Anișoara, a Jewish woman born in the ‘Old Kingdom’ in Piatra Neamț, shared with him the same experience, starting with their deportation to the slave labour camp, the time spent in Bershad after their escape from Mikhailovka in June 1943, and the years of

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<sup>170</sup> Preface by Edward Timms to the book „*Lasst mich leben!*“ *Stationen im Leben des Künstlers Arnold Daghani*, edited by Felix Rieper and Mollie Brandl-Bowen, Lüneburg: zuKlampen!, 2002, p.7.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Timms, Memory of Mikhailovka. Labour camp testimonies in the Arnold Daghani Archive, Centre for German-Jewish Studies: Research Paper no.4, Brighton, June 2000, p.43.

<sup>172</sup> Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, pictorial-narrative album, p.77. The pictorial-narrative album and many other documents related to Arnold Daghani and his experience as a deportee are available in the Daghani Archive at the University of Sussex (DAUS).

searching a place to settle down in the free world after they left Romania in December 1958.

The commemorative-artistic legacy of Arnold Daghani consists of the diary evoking the daily routine and the tragic end of the deportees in the labour camp of Mikhalovka, of the paintings and drawings he secretly produced in the camp, and of the albums containing additional literary and other artistic works related to his experience as a deportee, which he wrote and painted during the rest of his life. This legacy forms the basis of my investigation, providing a description of the mental world of the deportees, helping us to understand in which terms they could explain to themselves the reason for which they were deported or how they adjusted to this fate after the months spent in labour camps and how they regarded their destiny as slave labour camp prisoners. In addition to the commemorative-artistic legacy, Arnold Daghani had also left behind his correspondence during the 1960s and 1970s with the former representatives of the Dohrmann Company involved in the construction of the DG IV, with the prosecutor who led the investigation against the criminals of Mikhailovka, as well as with various other people or institutions involved in his fight for justice. To the Daghani Collection belong also the files of the Court Investigation from Lübeck containing one of the most accurate accounts by Daghani during his witness statement in June 1965 about the crimes committed in Mikhailovka. It provides not only details on his deportation and experience in Mikhailovka during 1942-1943, but also details about Daghani's education before the war.

In the witness statement, Daghani expressed his personal attitudes and feelings towards the "figures" that had different leading positions in the camp of Mikhailovka, like the camp's commanders and the guards. Based on his diary, Daghani bore testimony during the investigations, describing the circumstances of the crimes and their perpetrators. However, he was not eyewitness to all the murders. Most of the murders he talked about were described to him by his fellow inmates who witnessed them but were no longer alive

in the 1960s. Murders occurred quite seldom in Daghani's presence but he could witness several times how the incriminated guards selected and dragged off the victims to the execution place.<sup>173</sup> Generally, shootings of prisoners selected for this purpose took place outside the camp, out of the sight of the detainees. Only those who had to bury the victims had direct knowledge of how the executions took place and who exactly the executioners were. They told their fellow inmates what they witnessed and therefore the information was caught and recorded by Daghani.<sup>174</sup> Owing to Daghani's diary, the names of those involved in this kind of killings could be revealed during the court investigation. Friese, Maass, Intel, Wisotzkas, Zelinkas, Sukerka, Strijenskas spread fear and terror around them in Mikhailovka, being responsible for the death of hundreds of victims. There were also exceptions among those who had power over the slave labourers like Willy Buder, the commander of the camp between 1<sup>st</sup> December 1942 and 14<sup>th</sup> February 1943. He came from Erfurt and was a bookbinder, then policeman before the war. Daghani described him as "honest, kind-hearted" person, stating that as long as he was the camp's commander no actions of violence against the Jewish inmates took place there. Daghani testified of Buder's good intentions for the detainees by mentioning that he wished to the people in the night of the New Year's Eve a healthy new year and that all the detainees should be already back to their homes in the year 1943.<sup>175</sup>

The artistic and literary work Daghani left behind helps to reveal not only the experience of this author but also of his fellow inmates often mentioned by name and portrayed in his pictures. Although Daghani can be considered the 'chronicler' of Mikhailovka, another detainee of the same camp, in fact the camp's spokesman, Nathan Segall, also left behind

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<sup>173</sup> "Korn suddenly felt faint since I saw how dizzy he was. Also Wisotzkas might have observed this because he went to him and ordered Korn to follow him. He followed Wisotzkas. Shortly after that I heard a shot."

Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, DAUS, p.20.

<sup>174</sup> "When we returned in the evening into the camp, I learnt from the shoemaker called Fleischer that he had the duty, similar to others inmates, to fill up the grave in which these 25 Ukrainian women were thrown. The grave was situated in a glade near the camp. While he approached the mass grave, Fleischer heard whispering voices coming of the grave. The watching officer Strijenskas shot immediately in the direction where the voice came from and ordered to fill up the grave." Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p.15.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p.7.

for posterity a testimony in the shape of a report compiled two month before all the inmates were executed. Since Arnold Daghani escaped the labour camp before this report had been written, he learnt about its existence only in 1961.

### **Nathan Segall's report**

Nathan Segall testified to the difficulty of his position as the camp's spokesman in the report<sup>176</sup> he dictated in October 1942. However, after Arnold Daghani read it, he considered the report "untrustworthy" and he had serious doubts whether the report could ever be used as a historical document of reference. The confrontation between Nathan Segall's testimony and Daghani's comments raises the question of the historical interpretation of individual accounts based on personal experience. This is not a singular case since often people who experienced the same occurrences used to remember those in different terms.<sup>177</sup> In this case one might take under consideration also the fact that Segall's position as spokesman in the camp was different of that of Daghani, and Segall, as Daghani stated, had his personal reasons to distort the truth. Daghani discovered also several inaccuracies in Segall's report that suggest a failing memory. However, despite its mistakes and deficiencies, the report caught the general atmosphere in the slave labour camp. Its controversial character contributes to a better analytical approach of the oral and written testimonies provided by the victims of the Holocaust. Daghani considered necessary to correct Segall's errors writing a six pages long footnote to it. But the report contains also sentences accepted by Daghani, which could reflect real facts. Some of these sentences are worthy of being taken under consideration.

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<sup>176</sup> The typed version of Nathan Segall's "Record from Memory of an Eyewitness" with the remarks Daghani made to it is available in English version in the DAUS in the file "*Fragments of Memoirs*", a typescript of 300 pages on which Arnold Daghani and Mollie Brandl Bowen worked in the 1970s, intending to publish a revised and extended edition of the diary *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard*. See the published report in German in: Felix Riepper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, „*Lasst mich leben!*“..., pp.179-187.

<sup>177</sup> Rebecca L. Golbert has recently carried out research observing in her study how eyewitnesses have narrated the same event differently. Rebeca L. Golbert, Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialisation, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol.8, Issue 2, 2004, pp.205-233. See also: E Tonkin, *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; L.L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

The report brings us back to the time when on 18 August 1942 the SS came to the Quarry, the camp on the western bank of the Bug under Romanian authority in order to take over the Jewish deportees selected for slave labour on the highway across the Bug. According to Segall, people were taken indiscriminately for the slave labour: old men and women, sick people, children. This is an important detail confirmed also by Daghani, since the Germans usually preferred only fit labour power and even used to exchange the already deported Jews that became sick for those still healthy. Were those unfit for work from the very beginning “sentenced” to death in the labour camp of Mikhailovka, with the tacit consent of the Romanian authorities? When the deportees arrived on the bank of the Bug, there was a ferry waiting for the women and children, whereas male-deportees had to swim across. However, not all those “recruited” from the Quarry were transported to Mikhalovka. Some of them were sent to other slave labour camps like Krasnapolka, Tarassivka, Ivangorod, Gaisin, and others. The brutality of the German and Lithuanian guards in the camp of Mikhailovka seemed to outdo the arbitrariness of the Romanian soldiers in Transnistria. Weekly raids on Sundays by the SS served to intimidate the people, depriving them of the last personal belongings they could save after they were deported from the Bukovina. Especially the Lithuanian guards turned out to be frightening because they were “illiterate, certainly former peasants at any rate, degenerated individuals for whom a human life did not matter”<sup>178</sup>. Those killed were stripped of their clothing and handed over to the camp spokesman who had to keep the clothes until the SS-man and the highest in rank among the Lithuanian guards came to take the spoils away. Nathan Segall report reveals a painful aspect for the Jewish detainees: Jewish policemen as accomplices of the Germans and Lithuanian guards. There were two of them, aged 22 and 24, and belonged to the group of the Ukrainian Jews. Segall expressed his deep abhorrence: “These two Jews belong to the darkest chapter of our dark life

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<sup>178</sup>To this assertion made by Segall, Daghani gave his opinion against such kind of generalising remarking: “That does not mean that all illiterate peasants are murderers.” Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, p.202.

there".<sup>179</sup> Since Segall used the first person plural referring to all the detainees sent to work on the highway and to the gravel pit including himself, Daghani was obviously irritated because as long as he was in Mikhailovka, Segall was only once told to work at the highway.<sup>180</sup> Analysing the comments Daghani made on the report, one could conclude that Nathan Segall tried to prepare a positive image of himself for the time after the war in the case of a victory over Nazi Germany. Daghani doubted the merits Nathan Segall ascribed to himself in rescuing people from executions or taking care of the detainees' health, or at least of the Romanian Jews. Daghani was certainly disappointed by the report not only because in his view Segall deliberately distorted the truth, but also because there was almost nothing new to him that he could learn from the report, as he initially had hoped. At least, Segall was as a spokesman who had more access to information than the others. Actually, the most 'sensational' discovery was the note on the daily ration of food, which according to Segall consisted also of twenty grams of meat. In fact, as Daghani, his wife and a former inmate who visited them in 1973 remembered, they saw meat in the soup only once.<sup>181</sup> Confronting the report and the footnotes Daghani made to them, the question whether the historian should or should not attach importance to it becomes inevitable. Since post-modern historiography has surpassed the view of seeing in history a series of narrations telling the 'truth', one might consider documents like the report under discussion as part of the frame of mind of an individual torn between his duty towards the sufferings of his fellow inmates and the temptation of using his position for personal advantages once the war was over. The value of this document consists in reflecting such a situation under the terrible psychological pressure of the persecution. Anyhow, the question remains open whether Nathan Segall had indeed an interest in making a gloomier picture about the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka, inventing things and ascribing

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<sup>179</sup>Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, p.198. Philipp Kellmer also confirmed in his interview the brutal character of at least of one of the Jewish policemen of the two Ukrainian Jews.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid, p.203.

<sup>181</sup>The former inmate in Mikhailovka who visited the Daghani in July 1973 in Switzerland was Mizzi Locker who also managed to escape before the camp was exterminated. Ibid, p.200.

himself undeserved merits. Nathan Segall was murdered together with other hundreds of Jews removed in September 1943 to the labour camp of Tarassivka after the camp at Mikhailovka was dissolved. When in November 1943 he accompanied the representative of the Dohrmann Company in Transnistria, he even had the opportunity to escape but he courageously returned to Tarassivka to be with his family and his community. The extermination of the detainees in Tarassivka, including Nathan Segall, took place according to Arnold Daghani on 10 December 1943. However, a document issued in March 1944 by the Jewish Head Office in Bucharest mentioned that “across the Bug about 438 Jews are working in a camp called Tarasivca supervised by Germans where on 3 December (1943) Natan Segall, native from Dorohoi deceased.” This formulation gives the impression that Nathan Segall would have died of “natural” causes one week before the extermination of the camp and could not be among those executed, if the person mentioned in this document is indeed identical with the spokesman of the camp in Mikhailovka and Tarassivka.<sup>182</sup>

Due to the fact that historically the events related to Daghani’s deportation and escape from Mikhailovka and Transnistria occurred only sixty years ago, the historical investigation of the documents could be expanded also by the means of oral history based on interviews with survivors. The accuracy of the information Arnold Daghani provided in his diary was very useful in order to identify and to interview persons who knew, saw or shared with Daghani similar living conditions while he was a deportee. The search for the survivors who knew Daghani or shared the same camp with him led to three persons: Philipp Kellmer, Tvi Zimmel and Shoshana Neuman.

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<sup>182</sup>Report on the situation of the Jews in Transnistria 1944. Probably the Jewish Head Office had no idea yet in March 1944 that the camp of Tarassivka with the 438 Jews had been liquidated in December 1943. The doubts persist whether the person in the document dated March 1944 is identical with the spokesman Nathan Segall or whether the mentioned date is accurate. According to Daghani, Segall was still alive on 4 December 1943 visiting with Heinz Rosengarten the ghetto of Bershad for collecting meal and clothes supplies for the inmates in Tarassivka (F.Rieper, M. Brandl Bowen, *Lasst mich leben!...*p.198). CSIER, File III/309, p.28.

## Oral history

### The testimony of Philipp Kellmer

Philipp Kellmer was born in Czernowitz and deported together with his family in June 1942, when the Daghani were also deported.<sup>183</sup> Like the Daghani, he could also escape the first wave of deportation in October 1941. There is yet no evidence how Daghani and his wife managed to avoid their deportation in autumn 1941, but their situation might have been similar to the Kellmer family's situation.<sup>184</sup> The father of Philipp Kellmer managed to obtain a "permit to remain" through a local Jewish lawyer who knew Philipp's former teacher, a certain Professor Bănăţeanu who was in close contact with Stere Marinescu, the cabinet chief of General Calotescu, the governor of Bukovina. Through close and reliable acquaintances or bribing the authorities, many Jews could still stay in Czernowitz after October 1941, even if they did not belong to those professional categories that the authorities officially permitted to stay.<sup>185</sup> Philipp Kellmer was 18 years old when he met Daghani in the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka. In spite of the age difference of more than ten years between them, they became friends. Their friendship became closer after Philipp caught Arnold Daghani secretly making notes in a little book that was quite deteriorated.<sup>186</sup> These might have been the two practice books for English shorthand in which Daghani made notes about events, dates and people. Based on the notes he made in

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<sup>183</sup> During the first days of the deportations many Jews who had to be deported tried to escape by hiding. According to a nominal list issued by the Romanian police there were 338 persons who did so only during the "evacuation" of 28 June 1942. Many of these Jews were caught or even they surrendered some days later. Among these names was also that of Heinz Rosengarten, an engineer from Czernowitz who became Daghani's inmate at the Quarry and in Mikhailovka. CSIER, file 397/8.

<sup>184</sup> After escaping the deportations of October-November 1941, Daghani and his wife Anișoara were allowed to leave the ghetto. They were able to move back into the town owing to a "provisional residential permit signed by the mayor, Dr Traian Popovici." Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, p.60.

<sup>185</sup> Some of those who could get the "permit to remain" had even the possibility to emigrate to Palestine through Romanian tourism agencies like "Romania", which in May 1942 had a list of 98 persons who get the permit for emigration. The first emigrants left Czernowitz on 20 June 1942 during the second wave of deportation. However, on 23 June 1942 the Ministry of Internal Affairs annulled any transportation of the emigrants "until new regulations". Therefore, those who were waiting for their emigration but did not yet manage to emigrate were deported to Transnistria. USHMM, RG-31M/307, Cernovtsi Regional Archive, reel 9, pp.1-6 and p.42.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Philipp Kellmer made on 16 October 2003 in Paris where he lives. A summary of the interview with him as well as the recorded interview on tape can be found at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton.

the camp, Daghani was able after the war to compile his diary in a more polished form.<sup>187</sup> Thus Philipp Kellmer could confirm and testify that Arnold Daghani had indeed often made notes during his detention in the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka. The fact that, as Philipp Kellmer asserted, Daghani made the notes hidden from the looks of his fellow detainees proves how dangerous it was to keep a diary or to record anything about the conditions in those slave labour camps across the Bug that could have been smuggled out into the free world. Daghani was afraid even of his fellow inmates, asking Philipp Kellmer to keep quiet about the notes he used to make. It is still uncertain if Daghani made these notes in English or in Romanian. There are no doubts that he could speak English pretty well since he worked before the war as an English-Romanian translator in a clerical position in Bucharest. According to Philipp Kellmer, he made notes in Romanian and Romanian was also the language he used when speaking to his wife Anișoara. Other sources indicate that the language of Daghani's notes was English.<sup>188</sup> The latter supposition sounds also plausible taking into consideration Daghani's caution and anxiety that somebody, even of his fellow inmates, could discover and read the lines he wrote. Many of the Jews in the slave labour camp from Mikhailovka and spoke Romanian, the majority were bilingual, although some of them could speak only their native language from Czernowitz: German. Witnessing the brutality of the SS and Lithuanian guards as well as the humiliation they had to endure, Daghani made the notes in his books with the evident intention of publishing them once in a form of a diary. He noted also the names of those who committed crimes and murders during the time he stayed there. One might ask the question whether he was already thinking about rendering justice one day for the victims already while he himself was in danger.

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<sup>187</sup> Edward Timms, *Memories of Mikhailovka*, p.10.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, see also Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen (editors), *„Lasst mich leben!“*..., p.321.

Like in the play “Ghetto” by Joshua Sobol, many of the detainees had a particular ‘role’ to play, but in a much bloodier ‘play’. Whereas Arnold Daghani was the artist of the camp, his inmate and friend Philipp Kellmer was a policeman. However, the Jewish ‘police’ had very limited competence. The duty of Philipp Kellmer was to wake up the prisoners at 5 or 6am for work. The detainees had to leave the barracks in fifteen minutes. Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were housed separately and they had their own ‘police’. As everywhere in the ghettos, labour or concentration camps, the oppressing authority established a Jewish ‘police’. In many cases Jewish councils were often charged to organise such a police, although there was no tradition in the Jewish communities to have this kind of internal security organisation. The Germans laid down some criteria for the selection of Jewish ‘police’ members, but these were often neglected. It was more important for them to create a small group of Jewish men ready to obey their orders. But at the same time the Jewish committee or the ghetto leaders tried to assign reliable men in the Jewish ‘police’ so that they should serve the Jewish community and not the Germans.<sup>189</sup> In the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka there was no Jewish leadership but only a spokesman, Nathan Segall, who perished with his family when the camp was liquidated in December 1943. He was saved from deportation in October 1941 according to a list issued by the evacuation authority, but could not avoid the second wave of deportations in June 1942.<sup>190</sup> Although he was the spokesman for the entire camp, including the Ukrainian Jews, Nathan Segall had less authority among the latter group. One of the policemen who served in the section for Ukrainian Jews was known as a brutal executor of the SS’s orders, in spite of his Jewish origin. In the sector for Romanian Jews there were two Jewish policemen. Nathan Segall recommended Philipp Kellmer as policeman after Edi Weiß, one of the two policemen, became ill. Even if Segall might have felt a certain keenness for becoming the camp’s

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<sup>189</sup>The candidates for the Jewish police had to be healthy, with military abilities and a higher education. *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, Band II, München/Zürich: Piper, 2002, p.699.

<sup>190</sup> CSIER, file 397/11.

spokesman and assuming a leading position in the camp, his situation turned out to be more difficult than that of other detainees. Often he had to decide about life and death since the SS used to ask him to draw up the lists with those who were selected for execution. He strove as much as he could to put on the list the sick and the elderly, thus those who had fewer chances to survive. Under these tragic circumstances Philipp Kellmer lost his father, who was also put onto the “death list” because he was sick for a while in spite of being only 42 years old. However, Philipp Kellmer was aware that Nathan Segall had no choice because the execution quota prescribed by the SS had to be fulfilled.<sup>191</sup> The matter of killing people was a daily problem because nobody could feel safe, due to the unpredictable mood for killing of the SS, Lithuanian guards or even of some OT-men.

### **The testimony of Tvi Zimmel**

Another survivor of the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka is Tvi Zemel, living now in Haifa, Israel, known in Daghani’s diary as Zvie Herschel Semmel, the son of Benedykt Semmel, who manufactured for Daghani the tin tube in which he kept his drawings and paintings. Tvi Zimmel was born in Czernowitz in 1920 and was deported together with his family in June 1942 first to Transnistria and then to the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka. When he was interviewed in February 2004 he was in hospital and his medical conditions seriously affected his capacity of remembering things from that period related to Daghani. However, he could not forget the terrible experience in Mikhailovka<sup>192</sup> and the pain of losing his mother and sister under tragic circumstances, a feeling that resurfaced during the interview.<sup>193</sup> It happened on 26 April 1943 when 55 inmates were loaded on a lorry and transported to the place of execution place. Tvi Zimmel was one of the few detainees in the camp of Mikhailovka who did not obey Nathan Segall’s order

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with Philipp Kellmer.

<sup>192</sup> One of the Lithuanian guards ordered Tvi Zimmel and another of his inmates to dig out the head of a dead man lying in a mass grave and to take out the golden crowns of the corps’s mouth. F. Riepper, M. Brandl-Bowen, „*Lasst mich leben!*“..., p.72.

<sup>193</sup> The interview with Tvi Zimmel was made on 4 February 2004 in the B’nei Zion Medical Centre, Haifa, Israel.

and, together with his father, escaped the camp on the night of 7 August 1943, when the partisans liberated the camp for one night. He joined the partisans and became later a Soviet soldier, returning to Transnistria in order to find his father.

The most extensive and reliable source for the living conditions in the camp of Mikhailovka remains Dagahni's diary. However, it is not a chronicle of endless murders and suffering, but a reflection of the everyday life beyond the barbed wire, also including some horrific episodes. Daghani was far from exaggerating or inventing things. He noted what he saw or heard from the inmates. He could have been wrong on certain details<sup>194</sup>, but many occurrences described in his diary, were confirmed by several eyewitness testimonies officially borne during the court investigations in 1960s. In November 1942 at least 300 detainees originally from Bukovina were held in Mikhailovka, the majority Jews from Czernowitz. During the detention in Mikhailovka Daghani got to know many of his fellows in person, trying to catch aspects of their everyday life, not only in words but also in images. The slave labour camp became the muse for Arnold Daghani's artistic creation in spite of the technical difficulties of drawing and painting behind the bared wire.

### **Arnold Daghani's artistic testimony**

Arnold Daghani started to paint at the time when the tension of the events related to the outbreak of the Second World War and the deportation from Czernowitz began to affect his life.<sup>195</sup> A first painting suggesting the gravity of the situation in April 1942 on the streets of Czernowitz shows Anișoara from the window of their home looking worried for her husband down to the street. When on 7 June 1942 it was their turn to be deported, a Romanian gendarme who came to arrest them persuaded Daghani to keep his watercolours

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<sup>194</sup>For instance, in his interview Philipp Kellmer contradicts Daghani when he mentioned that Philipp would have been sent by Nathan Segall to say a prayer at his father's grave. Philipp Kellmer contests it but he admits that Segall asked him to go to his father's grave in order to cover it better with earth. Arnold Daghani, *Lasst mich leben!...* 1960, p... See also Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, DAUS

<sup>195</sup>Before his deportation Daghani used to paint toys and there is no evidence of artistic activity before the terrible experience of the anti-Semitic persecutions. DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, 2 P Js 1629/64, 9 June 1965, p.2.

and the sketchbook in his knapsack with the few personal possessions he was allowed to take with him.<sup>196</sup> Once in the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka, he dedicated the short spare time a slave in such a camp could have to painting and making notes for his prospective diary. Until the beginning of December 1942 he painted two watercolour pictures depicting the work at the construction of the Highway IV and at the gravel pit. These were the work places where the detainees were subjected to pitiless physical exploitation. The guards and the T.O. personnel soon realised Daghani's talent and asked him to paint them. In December 1942 Daghani had already produced his first portraits in Mikhailovka representing one of the T.O.-men and two of the Ukrainian guards. In some cases his talent was also rewarded: two apples or a piece of bread.<sup>197</sup> But soon Daghani's talent immortalised also the death spreading among the inmates due to typhoid fever. Although he was reluctant to depict death in all its states, he could not resist seeing how the dead body of the young poet Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger was taken down from the wooden bed on two ladders<sup>198</sup>. The scene reminded him of the "Deposition from the Cross". In fact, Daghani's intention was "to depict life in a death-camp, just life".<sup>199</sup> Producing further artistic works, he remained faithful to his artistic credo. His paintings were destined to keep the memory of those times alive, to prevent oblivion. Whereas Daghani's diary contains also events based on hearsay recording, not only what his eyes saw but also what the friends and neighbours who perished during the liquidation of the camp could not transmit to future generations.

Despite the dehumanising treatment to which the detainees were subjected, they tried to keep alive the spirit of family life. Daghani caught this aspect in his paintings showing the

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<sup>196</sup> Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, p.80.

<sup>197</sup>F. Rieper, M. Brandl Bowen, "*Lass mich leben*"!...p.74-75.

<sup>198</sup> Reflecting on the scene, Daghani remarked: "Who would have thought that in the camp I should be confronted with "Nativity" and "Pieta?" Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, p.68.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p.63.

prisoners' sleeping quarters. Twenty years later Daghani could not pass the gate of a former concentration camp.<sup>200</sup> The memories of Mikhailovka were still too vivid.

It was his talent that rescued Daghani and his wife from further daily torture and the final extermination. They were removed to Gaisin and asked to do work on a mosaic representing a German eagle. These circumstances and the gestures of humanity they rediscovered after so long helped them to leave the "death zone" beyond the Bug by the middle of June 1943, finding shelter in the relative safety of the Jewish ghetto of Bershad on the Romanian side of the river, in Transnistria.<sup>201</sup> The precious pictures Daghani painted during his detention in Mikhailovka were also rescued in a metal tube, which he and Anișoara carried above their heads while crossing the river Bug. For the Daghani the experience in the slave labour camp beyond the Bug ended while crossing the river, but the tragedy of those who had not the chance to escape continued since their grievous annihilation was approaching day by day.

Two major events occurred in the camp of Mikhailovka after Daghani's escape: the temporary liberation of the camp and the transfer of the detainees to Tarassivka. But Daghani, the chronicler of the camp was meanwhile in Bershad. Owing to those very few who used the night of the open gates in Mikhailovka or escaped later and therefore could survive, the event of the liberation was recorded and remembered. One of those who left the camp that night was Tvi Zimmel. Other eyewitnesses of that event managed to escape after the camp was relocated from Mikhlailovka to Tarassivka. Among them was Philipp Kellmer, who met Daghani again in the Jewish ghetto of Bershad and told him what

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<sup>200</sup> In May 1964 making a visit in Austria, accompanied by the Austria Consul General Dr Egon Libsch, he was taken to Linz in order to visit the death camp from Mauthausen. Daghani recalls: "We did not enter any building. I just could not..." He painted later the entrance of the concentration camp. Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, p.77.

<sup>201</sup> Even if Transnistria itself was a territory of ordeals for the Jews deported there, by that time owing to the fortunate developments of the war operations, the Romanian authorities gradually changed their policy towards the Jewish deportees in Transnistria, letting them more chances to survive. See the report about the conversation between the deputy Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu and the representatives of the International Red Cross in Romania, Chapuissant and De Praz of 17 May 1943. Nicolae Dinu, Teodor Gheorghe, Ion Calafeteanu, *Emigrarea populației evreiești din România în anii 1940-1944. Culegere de documente*, București : Silex, 1993, p.116.

actually happened on the night of the camp liberation. According to Kellmer, when the Ukrainian partisans liberated the camp, there were only two German SS soldiers and a few guards in the camp. The attack occurred at midnight. The available guards were quickly disarmed without shedding much blood, only one of them was killed during the operation. The pro-soviet Ukrainian partisans came into the stable where the deportees were sleeping and told them that they were free. The partisans opened the gates of the camp but only a few of the deportees left the camp. They were confused because the front line was still far away, the surrounding area were full of German units and all around was a foreign environment. People discussed the whole night what to do. Few of them were of the opinion to leave the camp. Nathan Segall considered that either everybody leaves the camp or none, because the returning SS could expose those who would stay to harsh reprisals for those who would leave the camp. Finally they agreed that there are few chances to survive by hiding in the surroundings and therefore the majority decided to stay. The next day in the morning the SS troops returned to the camp with the Obersturmbandführer Maass, who could not believe his eyes seeing almost all the detainees still there, that in spite of the open gates so few left the camp.<sup>202</sup> Two things related to this unusual liberation puzzled Daghani: Why were the Ukrainian partisans so keen on liberating a Jewish labour camp and what prompted the camp spokesman Nathan Segall to act in the way he did? Only decades later, after examining all the sources available, did Daghani and Anișoara realize that Nathan Segall wanted probably to prevent a trap in which the detainees could have fallen fleeing massively through the open gates.<sup>203</sup> Daghani learnt from Philipp Kellmer years later some further details about that night. His explanation regarding the motives why the camp was liberated at that night and not earlier seems to be based on a very personal motive of one of the villager-guards in the camp called Vanka or Vasia, who became a spy for the partisans. Allegedly, he felt in love

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<sup>202</sup> Interview with Philipp Kellmer, 2003.

<sup>203</sup> F. Rieper, M. Brandl Bowen, "*Lass mich leben*"!...p.91.

with Henia, one of the detained girls and wanted to liberate her with the help of the partisans.<sup>204</sup> Her family decided also to escape and fled to Bershad.

In 1943 the Jewish ghetto of Bershad became a shelter for those who managed to escape the slave labour camps ruled by the Germans.<sup>205</sup> The Daghanis were not the first detainees from Mikhailovka to find shelter in Bershad. Months earlier other inmates managed to flee and had lived since then in the ghetto of Bershad.<sup>206</sup> Others, like Philipp Kellmer, arrived to Bershad two months after the Daghanis, forming together a group of refugees from Mikhailovka. Rumours circulated about new transfers of Jews by the Romanian authorities to the Germans beyond the Bug. Allegedly, in September 1943 about 200 Jews were transferred from Tulcin to Tarassivka. The possibility of such transfers even in September 1943 was quite high since the Romanian leadership carried out a duplicitous policy. On the one hand it improved the treatment of the Jews, including those deported to Transnistria, but on the other hand it had to settle the Germans' doubts on Romania's intention to leave the German alliance. It was under these circumstances that in the year 1943 the above-mentioned transfer took place, but at the same time the chances of survival of many Jewish fugitives from beyond the Bug to Transnistria, like those from the ghetto of Bershad increased. However, this improvement of living conditions and the lenient treatment of the deportees in Transnistria did not guarantee their life. They just had a better chance of surviving.<sup>207</sup> Eyewitness reports of the survivors show how differently they experienced life in these ghettos. There were substantial differences from one place to another, and the living conditions of the deportees often depended on the predisposition of

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<sup>204</sup> Vanka or Vasia arrived after the war in the Soviet-owned Czernowitz to get married to Henia. But Henia's parents were against the marriage. When the frontier to Romania was re-opened, Henia with her family moved to Bucharest and soon emigrated to South-America. Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, p.193.

<sup>205</sup> Shortly after the Daghanis' arrival in Bershad, five children also managed to flee from the German-ruled territory to Bershad. *Ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>207</sup> The delegate of the International Red Cross accompanied by members of the Romanian Red Cross was allowed in January 1944 to make an inspection in the Jewish ghettos of Transnistria. In a confidential report he stated "although the living conditions improved considerably in comparison with January 1943, they are still not good enough." CSIER, file III/361, p.65. Also the Department of State in Washington learnt already in December 1943 that "the conditions of the Jewish people in Transnistria are reported to be in course of substantial improvements". CSIER, file III/361, p.73.

the local commander. Research related to the ghetto of Bershada, where Daghani spent six months, based on eyewitness accounts, reflects also differences between how those who lived there perceived their own situation. For instance, Philipp Kellmer called Bershada “our paradise”<sup>208</sup>. Certainly it was easier to survive in Bershada than in the slave labour camp and it is very likely that those who escaped from Mikhailovka appreciated this chance.

### **The testimony of Shoshana Neuman**

Shoshana Neuman (née Rosa Brenner Engelberg), one of the Transnistria survivors who lived with her mother in the ghetto of Bershada during the time of Daghani’s stay there was only ten years old. However, she could remember the ‘mysterious’ painter she saw several times on the streets of the ghetto and once even in the room where she lived with her mother.

Shoshana Neuman was born in 1933 in Czernowitz in a modest religious Jewish family. When in October 1941 the Romanian authorities started to deport the Jews from the ghetto of Czernowitz, her family could not procure a “permit to remain” as other more lucky families did. They were among the first Bukovinian Jews deported to Transnistria. The deportees believed they would be given land in the Ukraine, moving into the houses of the Ukrainians and Jews who fled before the Romanian and German army occupied that territory. Once in Mărculești on the bank of the river Dniester, the deportees realised what the authorities had in store for them. Gendarmes started to mistreat the people, depriving everybody not only of their valuables, but also of their documents. Those who refused to hand them over were shot on the spot. Shoshana arrived to Bershada together with her mother, father, sister and brother on 16 December 1941, but due to the typhoid fever, she very soon had to experience the death of her father, sister and brother. “While beyond the Bug people were shot dead, in Bershada they died of themselves”, concluded Shoshana

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with Philipp Kellmer.

Nauman in the interview given in February 2004. Men were taken for work, and that was the only way to earn some food. In Bershad there were also groups of German military forces. She often saw them on the streets even in the Jewish ghetto. The Germans ran even a brothel in Bershad. There were very few local Jews; the majority of the ghetto inhabitants were deportees from Bukovina and since they all were directed to Bershad, the ghetto became very crowded. Before the war about 4000 Ukrainian Jews lived in Bershad, whereas in 1942 the number of the Jews exceeded 10,000<sup>209</sup>. The ghetto of Bershad was overcrowded also because during the military operations in the summer of 1941 many houses had been destroyed. Only due to the epidemic of typhoid fever that made hundreds of victims, living conditions in the ghetto became bearable. By the time Daghani and his wife found shelter in the ghetto of Bershad, more accommodation space became available. They could rent a place to live for 10 Marks (probably RKKS<sup>210</sup>) and like everybody else in the ghetto, they had to wear the Star of David.<sup>211</sup>

Daghani continued to make drawings and to paint pictures in the ghetto of Bershad. He used his talent immortalising people and places: portraits, the main street of the ghetto, the Jewish cemetery and interiors. In one of the rooms in which Daghani produced a drawing, lived the ten-year-old Shoshana Neuman with her mother. She still could remember him without knowing who he was. She discovered the identity of the ‘mysterious’ painter only after visiting once the Memorial Centre Yad Vashem from Jerusalem. She accidentally caught sight of a picture that resembled very much one of her pictures she herself painted from memory in 1973.<sup>212</sup> It was the same interior with the two entrances, the wooden bed, the smoking stove, the rack stretched along the wall on which food used to hang, so that

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Shoshana Neuman made on 3 February 2004 in Haifa, Israel.

<sup>210</sup> Reichskreditkassenschein was the official currency not only in the so-called “Reichskommissariat Ukraine” beyond the Bug but also in Transnistria.

<sup>211</sup> F. Rieper, M. Brandl Bowen, *“Lasst mich leben”!*...p.173.

<sup>212</sup> Shoshana Neuman started to paint in the 1970s, thus decades later after her experience as a little girl in the ghetto of Bershad. She felt it her duty to show the world the ordeal of her family and generally of the Transnistria deportees, but it was also a way to come to terms with the painful memories. She produced several paintings depicting her family’s deportation, the living conditions and the atrocities witnessed in Bershad. As she asserted in her interview, she used only her memory and painted as trustworthily as possible all those images she still had very vividly in her mind. She never painted things she did not witness with her own eyes.

rats could not reach it. In the central place of the drawing made by Daghani one could recognise the outline of a little girl. Shoshana realised that was herself. But unlike Shoshana, Daghani was lucky to leave the ghetto of Bershad together with his wife Anișoara. By the end of December 1943 they were determined to return to Romania by any means. In January 1944, at the time of a cruel reprisal in Bershad, the Daghanis were already in Tiraspol near the Romanian border.<sup>213</sup> Shoshana Neuman depicted in her pictures those scenes showing how the Romanian military authorities punished Ukrainian partisans and Jewish men of the ghetto.<sup>214</sup>

Barbarism and art tried to live together in these ghettos. In Bershad there was also an amateur theatre with performances almost every Saturday early in the afternoon.<sup>215</sup> In the ghetto of Shargorod young people initiated a clandestine literary newspaper multiplied by handwriting. Especially intellectuals sought through creative activities a spiritual release from the everyday sorrow they experienced in the ghettos. As the Soviet Army approached the Bug, the Romanian authorities decided to repatriate all the Jews deported from Bukovina, Bessarabia and from the rest of Romania. However, their plan could not be carried out because of the rapid advance of the Soviets.<sup>216</sup> It became clear that those responsible for the crimes in that territory must give account after the end of the war. Under these circumstances the Romanian authorities tried to wash their hands clean giving the world the impression of rescuing the Jewish deportees they had oppressed for three

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<sup>213</sup> F. Rieper, M. Brandl Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*"...p.205.

<sup>214</sup> Before the Russians liberated the ghetto of Bershad there was an attempt of the Jews living in the ghetto, in collaboration with the Ukrainian partisans, to get rid of the German and Romanian guards. The military authorities discovered the plans of the uprising and ordered reprisals. Ukrainian partisans were hanged on the streets of Bershad. About 250 Jews, among them members of the Jewish militia involved in the plans of the partisans were locked in a bunker with water and kept there more than a week until they died of cold and exhaustion. Shoshana painted as she saw these people forced into the bunker. Interview with Shoshana Neuman. In his testimony E. Muniu, who was also detained in the ghetto of Bershad, mentioned a mass killing action of about 250 Jews in January 1944. E. Muniu, *The Mărculești ghetto and beyond*, in Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!* p.431.

<sup>215</sup> Arnold Daghani, *What a Nice World*, p.108.

<sup>216</sup> According to an order of the General Headquarter of the Gendarmerie based on the decision of the Romanian government, there were planned four transit points on the river Dniester where the deportees had to enter the Romanian territory. The gendarmes received the order to let the Jew pass across, but only those with certificates that proved that they were natives of Romania. CSIER, file III/932, p.46.

hard years in the ghettos of Transnistria.<sup>217</sup> In March 1944 Arnold Daghani and his wife Anișoara arrived clandestinely in Bucharest after a long and dangerous journey. Nobody was waiting for them, but they escaped. The paintings were also saved, sent through a messenger to Bucharest. Leaving that land of terror behind Daghani synthesized his experience in a memorable sentence: “The ghost- territory which no geography book ever mapped or listed, yet although unmentioned and outside any normal world, the cradle of a collective traumatism has disappeared altogether after two years and seven months, as the clock struck the hour, only mass graves bear witness of the Inferno that existed during that period.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> The Headquarter of the Gendarmerie in Odessa sent to its subordinates the telephone message based on a telegram from Mihai Antonescu: “Please take all the measures for the evacuation of the Romanian citizens regardless of their origin and be careful that certain deeds committed against Poles and Jews in Transnistria should not be ascribed to us”. CSIER, file III/932, p.118.

<sup>218</sup> Arnold Daghani, *Fragments of Memoirs*, p.128

## Chapter IV: The “new age” in the old homeland

### 1. The repatriation and a new beginning in the post-war Romania

The return of the deportees “evacuated” by the Romanian authorities to Transnistria was a gradual process, which started during the last months of the Antonescu regime and ended months later after it had been overthrown on 23 August 1944. As the chances that the Allies would win the war against the Nazi Germany increased, the Antonescu regime started to soften its harsh policy towards the Jewish deportees.<sup>219</sup> The interventions of the Jewish Head Office, of other leading Jewish personalities<sup>220</sup> from Bucharest as well as the request of the American and British government on behalf of the Jewish deportees were taken in Bucharest under consideration while secret negotiations were initiated with the Allies in Stockholm and Cairo for a possible armistice.

#### **The Antonescu Regime Confronted with its Collapse: Time for Political Opportunism (December 1943-August 1944)**

The Transnistrian deportees could realise an improvement in their living conditions in the ghettos. Those who survived could receive money and goods from relatives and from the Jewish American Joint Distribution Committee. This increased the chance of survival during the last months of their detention. During an inspection the representatives of the International Red Cross made in Transnistria in January 1944, the Romanian authorities had provided them with all the facilities in order to carry out this inspection. A

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<sup>219</sup> I.C. Butnaru, *Waiting for Jerusalem: Surviving the Holocaust in Romania*, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1993, p.139. See also the minute paper of the meeting of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1943 with Antonescu’s participation in: Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961, p.507.

<sup>220</sup> The Jewish Head Office (Centrala Evreilor din România) from Bucharest submitted a petition to the Romanian government on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1943 requesting the repatriation of certain categories of Jewish deportees after the most prestigious leader of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania (1924-1941), Dr. Wilhelm Filderman addressed already in January 1943 a note to the Romanian government in which he described the deploring situation of the deportees. He also requested the repatriation of wide categories of deportees like the orphans, the “offenders to discipline in the labour detachments” and those who were deported because they applied for Soviet citizenship in 1940. *Ibid.*, p.137.

confidential report of the inspection commission sent to the Mission of the International Red Cross Committee from Washington confirms the improvement in the living conditions in the ghettos of Transnistria by the last months of their existence.<sup>221</sup> However, the Antonescu regime rejected a total repatriation of the deportees until March 1944 when the Soviet Army already reached the river Bug. Instead of a general repatriation, the Romanian authorities agreed first to allow certain groups of deportees to return to their homes. These were individual cases and not a collective return, involving all those deported “by mistake”, i.e. who should have been exempted from deportation because of their merits in the Romanian Army during the First World War. This category of deportees was very small, representing only some Jews native of the Old Kingdom, but not Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia, as they were not Romanian citizens during the First World War. In October 1943 a group of deportees classed as “offenders against the order in the labour battalions” received the permit to return to Romania with their entire families.<sup>222</sup> However, the first collective repatriation took place only in December 1943 and affected the Jews from the Dorohoi county also deported “by mistake”, since Dorohoi never belonged to Bukovina but was administratively included into the Region of Bukovina after July 1941.<sup>223</sup> On 20 December 1943 about 1500 deportees native of Dorohoi returned home although the majority of the initial group that was deported, died in Transnistria. Two months later on 21 February 1944 the government issued a new order of repatriation: orphans of both parents under the age of 15 obtained permission to be repatriated by the Jewish Head Office. Due to this order on 6 March 1944 a group of 1846 orphans

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<sup>221</sup> “Sur place, les autorités roumaines lui ont accordé toutes les facilités possible, de sorte qu’il a pu s’entretenir avec les membres des communautés juives des localités visitées et inspecter leur institutions de bienfaisance... Bien que les conditions de vie des juifs roumains déportés en Transnistrie se soient considérablement améliorées depuis l’année passée, elles ne sont pas encore satisfaisantes.” CSIER, file III/361, p.1.

<sup>222</sup> One of the survivors in this group was Sonia Palty from Bucharest whose father “offended” the “discipline of work”. They were allowed to return home in October 1943. Sonia Palty, *Jews! Cross the Dniester!*, in Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!* p.344.

<sup>223</sup> The order of the repatriation of the “offenders of discipline in the labour detachments” was issued on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943. That for the Jews of Dorohoi was issued on 8 December 1943.

originally from Romania who lost their parents in Transnistria arrived at Iași.<sup>224</sup> In fact, the Antonescu regime tried to delay as much as possible the return of the survivors from Transnistria. Answering a petition sent by the architect Clejan on behalf of the repatriation of the Jews in February 1944, Antonescu declared: “It is understandable that in these specific conditions it is for me a moral and political impossibility to accept the return of the Jews from Transnistria.... From those Jews deported to Transnistria should return just those deported by mistake. I mean around 7000 from Dorohoi and 4500 orphans”.<sup>225</sup> The general repatriation order from 16 March 1944 stipulating the repatriation of all Jews deported from Romania came already too late since the Soviet troops crossed at that time the river Bug advancing towards the river Dniester. This order was carried out only to a limited extent and was intended to assure the Allies of the good intentions the Romanian government had towards the deported Jews. However, this measure saved the lives of some Jewish political prisoners in the camps and prisons located in Transnistria since the retreating German SS units had started to exterminate the Jews, as in Râbnița and Tiraspol.<sup>226</sup> A committee set up of representatives of the Jewish Head Office left Bucharest for Transnistria on 17 March in order to assist the repatriation coordinated by the Romanian military authorities.<sup>227</sup> Since rumours circulated about the retreating German troops killing Jews in labour camps and prisons under Romanian control, the committee decided to give priority to these prisoners during the repatriation. Special trains provided by the Romanian Ministry of the Internal Affairs were prepared for the

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<sup>224</sup> In some cases also children who were not orphans or were older than 15 could be included into the group of the orphans in exchange for some “subsidy” for the military commander of the ghetto. Such a case was that of Gerhard Schreiber, an 18 years old boy at that time, who testified in his memoirs how he arrived in Iași with the group of the repatriated Jewish orphans from Transnistria. Gerhard Schreiber, *A Tale of a Survivor* (manuscript), University of Sussex, p.33. The figures related to this transport of orphans are contradictory. A document issued by the General Headquarter of Gendarmerie mentioned 1960 orphans entitled to be repatriated while the number of those repatriated was according to the same document 1975 children. CSIER, file III/932, p.118.

<sup>225</sup> I.C. Butnaru, *Waiting for Jerusalem ...*, p.148.

<sup>226</sup> According to a report of the Jewish Head Office in Bucharest on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1944, the retreating German troops killed 58 Jewish prisoners in the prison of Râbnița on the order of the Gestapo. Same days later other 17 prisoners and about 700 civilians were killed in Tiraspol. CSIER, file III/309, p.1.

<sup>227</sup> The order of repatriation issued by Antonescu had little chance to be completely implemented. The special delegates of the Jewish Head Office could not go farther than Tiraspol and Moghilev because of the military situation. I.C. Butnaru, *Waiting for Jerusalem ...*, p.149.

transportation of the detainees. As some trains were delayed, the committee in cooperation with the local military authorities, decided to evacuate the Jewish prisoners on foot, marching until they crossed the Dniester. For instance, about 600 Jewish prisoners in Grosilovo could be saved by crossing the Dniester before the prison fell into German hands. However, the repatriation for the Romanian Jews imprisoned in Transnistria for political “offences” did not mean their release from detention but only their transfer to Târgu Jiu in southern Romania where a prison for political detainees already existed. Furthermore, other Romanian Jewish deportees who heard about the repatriation order began to move towards the Dniester. The city of Tiraspol on the eastern bank of the Dniester became a collecting point for the deportees who were waiting to cross the river to Tighina situated on Romanian territory. The repatriation took place under difficult conditions because of formal procedures and bureaucracy. About 295 deportees who made a long trek from Trihati to Tiraspol in order to cross the Romanian border were likely to be sent back by the local authorities from Tiraspol. Only the intervention of the committee, having the support of Major Iacobescu, required local officials to approve their departure towards Romania. Most of the deportees waiting for a train or just for the possibility to cross the border of Transnistria were “almost naked, ill, needing clothes, medical assistance and subsistence as well as some cash”.<sup>228</sup> Other representatives of the Jewish Head Office welcomed the convoys of deportees that crossed the Dniester. In Tighina, the deportees received food and money for travel expenses to their destination. Until the end of March, waves of deportees could cross the border at Tiraspol-Tighina before the Romanian authorities, according to a commitment made with the Germans, and had to relinquish control of the border on Dniester to the German military authorities.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> CSIER, file III/309, p.2.

<sup>229</sup> The group of the 600 Jewish political prisoners displaced from the camp of Grosilovo could be passed over the Dniester in the last moment owing to the responsible attitude of Lieutenant-Colonel Motora who realised in time the danger that after the Germans would have taken over the control at the border check point, the prisoners would have scarcely had a chance to survive. Ihiel Benditer, one of those who belonged to this convoy testified of the gesture of Lieutenant-Colonel Motora: “When Colonel Motora learnt that next day the administration of

On the demand of the Jewish Head Office, the Romanian police and gendarmerie accompanied the groups of deportees returning to Romania in order to protect them from possible attacks that could have occurred during their temporary stay in Bessarabia. In Tighina, Chişinău (Kishinev) and other towns of Bessarabia the repatriated deportees were accommodated in cinema halls and hotels where they received nourishment and medical assistance.

However, the majority of the deportees could not leave Transnistria as they were unaware about the repatriation order of the government. The authorities intended to prevent a chaotic return of the deportees but there was not time enough for an organised repatriation of all deportees. Therefore, during the second half of March 1944 only 2411 persons could be repatriated benefiting from the assistance the military authorities and the representatives of the Jewish Head Office. These deportees came from different ghettos and camps throughout Transnistria: Tiraspol, Berezovka, Golta, Domenovka, Odessa, Mostvoi, Trihati, Razdelnaia, Oceakov, Slivina, Shargorod, Grosilovo and Varvarovka.<sup>230</sup> Although the deportees were deprived of their properties at the beginning of the ghettoisation and deportation for the benefit of the Romanian state, the costs of their repatriation had to be covered by the Jewish communities.<sup>231</sup> According to the report sent to Bucharest by the Headquarter of the Romanian Gendarmerie from Odessa on 15 March 1944, 59,916 Jews and 12,083 Gypsies native of Romania were still alive in Transnistria.<sup>232</sup>

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Transnistria will be transferred to the Germans and becoming aware of what that could mean for the deportees, he took care for the people to cross immediately the Dniester to Bessarabia.” For this attitude and other gestures on behalf of the deportees Lieutenant-Colonel Motora was awarded the title Righteous Gentile. Ihniel Benditer, Cattle fodder for the victims, in: Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!...*, p.201.

<sup>230</sup> CSIER, file III/309, p.7.

<sup>231</sup> Already in August 1943 Dr Wilhelm Filderman drew up a project containing also the costs of a total repatriation operation. To implement this action 1 billion lei was needed for transportation from Transnistria to the Romanian border and from the border to the towns in which they had approval to settle; for food, medicines and other necessities during the transportation; for the purchase of the most basic needs for them to organise their new life; for bed clothes, pots and pans, etc. I.C. Butnaru, *Waiting for Jerusalem...*, p.136.

<sup>232</sup> CSIER, file III/932, p.118. According to a report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of 14 March only 46,519 Jews were alive in Transnistria.

In many other places the deportees were desperately waiting to be rescued since news about the atrocities committed by the retreating German troops caused panic and fear. Some of them decided to flee westwards when the Romanian troops started to withdraw because they heard that the Germans, the pro-German Ukrainian militia, the so-called Vlasov Army and the Kalmucks (Mongol people of the USSR who chose to serve in the German army) killed Jews without mercy.<sup>233</sup> The majority of the deportees that neither fled nor could be repatriated survived hiding in cellars and caches where they spent days in darkness coming out of their hiding-places only when they realised that the Soviet Army arrived.<sup>234</sup> These people decided after their liberation to return to their homes in Bessarabia and Bukovina on own risk without ever seeing an “order of repatriation”. The journey lasted weeks since the huge distances had to be covered mainly on foot.<sup>235</sup>

Even though the repatriation order was in operation, not all the deportees were allowed to return to their home from where the gendarmerie deported them. In a telegram of the General Headquarter of the Gendarmerie addressed to all gendarmerie units in Transnistria one called the attention that the repatriated persons are not allowed to settle down wherever they want in the country. For Bessarabian Jews were fixed two counties, Bălți and Hotin, whereas those deported from Bukovina were allowed to return only in Czernowitz and in the surrounding villages. The return to Suceava, Rădăuți or Câmpulung was not permitted.<sup>236</sup> Concerning the smaller groups of deportees native of the Old

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<sup>233</sup> Rubin Udler fled with his family from Transnistria in March 1944, but they did not manage to reach the Dniester in time and decided to wait for the Soviet troops. Encountering the Soviet soldiers they felt a deep relief: “Our liberators! A slavery of eight hundred and ninety-six days of suffering and humiliation, of doubting our belief in the decency and honour of humanity, had finally ended.” Prof. Rubin Udler, *The cursed years*, in: Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!...*, p.387.

<sup>234</sup> Leiza Hoffer described in his testimony the first contact of the deportees from Shargorod with the Soviet Army: “The first military leading person who entered Shargorod, a general, spoke Yiddish to the people encouraging the Jewish deportees and then switched to Russian language. He was himself Jewish.” Leiza Hoffer, *Ordinary people in extraordinary times*, in Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!...*, p.281.

<sup>235</sup> Mirjam Bercovici-Korber recalled in an interview how during the first days of April 1944 the Soviets entered the ghetto of Djurin. Ten young people decided to return to Bukovina among them also Mirjam. Her father was still in Odessa. The journey via Czernowitz liberated meanwhile by the Soviets, lasted two. She arrived in Botoșani on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1944 where other dozens of Jewish refugees from Transnistria found shelter. Her mother and sister returned from Djurin only in June 1944. Interview with Mirjam Bercovici-Korber, Bucharest, 6 June 2003.

<sup>236</sup> CSIER, file III/932, p.118.

Kingdom, inclusive that of Bucharest the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered the repatriation to their own homes.<sup>237</sup> However, deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina who chose other destinations than those stipulated in the above-mentioned documents, were punishable by law. The painter Arnold Daghani and his wife who arrived to Bucharest shortly before the official repatriation operation began were living “illegally” in Bucharest because of this restrictive character of the repatriation order. During April 1944 the front line between the Soviet troops and the German-Romanian army became stable along northern Moldavia and Bessarabia. The Soviet army entered Czernowitz on 28<sup>th</sup> April without military resistance after the German-Romanian troops evacuated the town a few days before. The towns Iași and Chișinău continued to be situated on the other side of the front line until the end of August 1944. By middle of April 1944 the Red Army recaptured Transnistria and northern Bukovina.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, those liberated by the Soviets in Transnistria decided to leave for Czernowitz and northern Bukovina regardless whether they were native of those places or not. In a short time Czernowitz under Soviet control became a point of attraction for the returning deportees, whom the Romanian authorities had failed to repatriate before their withdrawal from Transnistria. The Soviets allowed only deportees native from the Old Kingdom to return to Romania, whereas those who were born in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were regarded as Soviet citizens even if they were actually Romanian citizens at the time of their deportation. The overwhelming majority of the deportees were original of Bukovina and Bessarabia, this resulting that after August 1944 only a small group of deportees could return to Romania. After the overthrow of the Antonescu regime, a second stage of repatriation took place. This time the Romanian government shared the cost of the repatriation with the American *Joint* and the local Jewish communities where the repatriated were provisionally received. Therefore, the Romanian government paid the costs of transportation and provisional

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<sup>237</sup> CSIER, file III/923, p.46.

<sup>238</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, vol. I, p. 156.

accommodation, organised their official reception at which the Prefect, the chief of the local police and the representatives of the Romanian Jewish Union took part. The *Joint* provided financial assistance for the catering and medical care and each of the repatriated family was entitled to apply by the *Joint* for a “starting help” of 75,000 Lei. Since already before August 1944 a part of the deportees from Northern Bukovina or Bessarabia leaved Transnistria for Romania, the Soviets urged the Romanian government to send back to their last place of residence those former deportees who, living in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, became Soviet citizens during the one-year Soviet occupation.<sup>239</sup> However, this Soviet request was toned down after March 1945 when a pro-Communist government was installed in Bucharest, being practically ignored after May 1945. In fact, the decision regarding who was allowed to stay and who had to leave for the Soviet Union was transferred to the Romanian government, which used this occasion in order to keep under surveillance the “reactionary elements” among the former deportees.<sup>240</sup>

### **The Arrival of the Red Army: A New Beginning?**

Most of the deportees regarded their stay in Czernowitz only provisional. In spite of the wave of deportees, Czernowitz did not become overcrowded since the majority of the Jews who populated the town before the war had died in Transnistria and the Romanians also left Czernowitz before it fell under Soviet control by the end of April 1944. During this time the Red Army recruited many male survivors of the camps in Transnistria.

About 16,000 Jewish people who avoided the deportation had family members, relatives and friends among those deported. This was also a reason why the returning deportees preferred to come first to Czernowitz where they could find more support for a new start.<sup>241</sup> People who stayed in Czernowitz “had led a resemblance of normal life” during

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<sup>239</sup> According to this Soviet request also Arnold Daghani would have been liable to be expelled from Romania into the Soviet Union.

<sup>240</sup> Hildrun Glass, *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen: Zur Geschichte der Juden in Rumänien 1944-1949*, München: R Oldenburg Verlag, 2002, p.63.

<sup>241</sup> Klara Ostfeld, *Shadows of my life*, in: Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!...*, p.315.

those days, as one of the survivors described it in his memoirs. Schools re-opened. The children who returned from Transnistria were allowed to jump one or two years of school and to attend classes in Yiddish. Even those Jewish children who had no knowledge of Yiddish but only of German went to the Yiddish school. Despite of the apparent normality, the war was going on and the Soviet war machine needed coal. Since all boys over 18 were usually drafted into the Soviet Army, the troops of the Interior Ministry were taking youngsters from the streets and sending them to work in coalmines if they could not prove that they were legally employed.<sup>242</sup>

Most of them, however, could not imagine any longer a new life in the places of their persecution, deportation and humiliation, with quite gloomy prospects under the Soviet regime. This was especially valid in regard to Czernowitz. It became obvious that the Jewish life in Czernowitz would not ever be restored to what it used to be in the interwar period. The community lost too many members. Therefore, the main goal of the survivors was to emigrate to America<sup>243</sup> or anywhere else it was possible, including Palestine. Parents who could afford prepared their children persuading them to take English and French lessons.<sup>244</sup> But the Soviet regime had a restrictive policy regarding emigration. Soon after in Bucharest the pro-German Antonescu regime was overthrown, but before the new border between Romania and the Soviet Union dividing Bukovina had closed, hundreds of former Transnistria-deportees from the Soviet Bukovina clandestinely moved

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<sup>242</sup> Gerhard Schreiber, *A Tale of Survival*, p.37.

<sup>243</sup> The myth of immigrating to America, where all dreams could become true, was still alive and especially after such a tragic experience, Jewish people of different social and educational background subscribed to this idea. Related to this, Gerhard Schreiber's lines are very suggestive: "...The majority of the Jews in Czernowitz started to dream about leaving the Soviet Union. The war was still going on, but somehow everybody had his or her hopes in the new peace, which this time around, would surely bring freedom of choice to all of us. It was maybe a naïve thought, but...it turned out to be right." Ibid, p.38.

<sup>244</sup> Among those who taught English in Czernowitz during the first months after the liberation was also Rose Ausländer. She lived in the 1920s in the USA and returned in 1931 to Czernowitz. Rose Ausländer became a famous poet in the 1970s in Germany. Isabel Röskau-Rydel (editor), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas: Galizien, Bukovina, Moldau*, Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1999, p.472. On Rose Ausländer see also: Edith Silbermann, *Erinnerungen an Rose Ausländer* (Sonderdruck aus Freiburger Universitätsblätter), Heft 154, Rombach Verlag: Freiburg, 2001 and Edith Silbermann, *Deutsch- die Muttersprache der meisten Bukowiner Juden*, in: *Zwischenspiel*, Theodor Kromer Gesellschaft, Vienna.

to Romania.<sup>245</sup> This process was speeded up from September 1944 as there were rumours circulating that the Soviets intended to expel all the Jews of Bukovina so the number of those legally applying for emigration to Romania considerably increased.<sup>246</sup>

In October 1944 the Soviet authorities arbitrarily started judicial prosecutions against former deportees who had a real or alleged leading role in the camps and ghettos of Transnistria, accusing them of collaboration with the occupiers.

These prosecutions against former Jewish deportees were part of the show-trial strategy of the Stalinist regime in order to reveal “collaborators” and “traitors” also among the Jews from Czernowitz. These trials could have persuaded the repatriated Jews of Czernowitz to leave Northern Bukovina for Romania. Most of those arrested and tried during that time were sentenced to many years of forced labour in Siberia.<sup>247</sup> From April 1945, the Soviet authorities allowed all Jews who had been born outside the borders of the Soviet Union at that time to leave for Romania and the overwhelming majority of them did it. However, the emigrants were not allowed to take with them more than the belongings they could individually carry. Some month later, according to a decision of the Ukrainian government issued in November 1945, based on the decree of the Supreme Soviet from 8 August, the former deportees born in the Soviet territories which in the pre-war period belonged to Romania, were permitted to emigrate. The biggest wave of deportees belonging to this category left Northern Bukovina between February and April 1946. Surprisingly, this time the emigrants had the permission to pack their entire movables and to sell what they could not transport. It seemed like the Soviets changed their previous policy in order to get rid of

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<sup>245</sup> Between March and June 1944 about 14000 deportees clandestinely entered Romania. I.C. Butnaru, *Waiting for Jerusalem...*, p.149.

<sup>246</sup> Isabel Röskau-Rydel (editor), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, p.327.

<sup>247</sup> Gerhard Schreiber’s father was also arrested and kept in jail by the KGB waiting to be tried. He was released only after the family found a way to bribe one of the prosecutors. Gerhard Schreiber, *A Tale of Survival*, p.39.

the Jews willing to leave the Soviet Union. By the end of August 1946 about 40, 000 Jews from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia left the Soviet Union for Romania.<sup>248</sup>

Due to the repatriations, immigrations from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, as well as for economical migration, Bucharest became the city with the largest Jewish concentration in the after-war Romania. Whereas before the Second World War only 10% of Romania's entire Jewish population lived in Bucharest this percentage increased to almost 25% by the end of the 1940s.<sup>249</sup> Many of them did not even have valid documents and could not be officially registered.

For a while Bucharest became very attractive, especially for young Jewish intellectuals from Czernowitz. Well-known figures of the German-speaking Jewish literature of Bukovina who experienced Transnistria, like Alfred Kittner, Immanuel Weißglas and Alfred Gong or have survived hiding in the ghetto of Czernowitz, like Rose Ausländer, moved for a while to Bucharest. Paul Celan, whose parents had also been deported to Transnistria and died in Mikhaïlovka beyond the Bug, moved also to Bucharest. Arnold Daghani, who clandestinely left the ghetto of Bershad, tried his chances also on settling down in Bucharest. Until 1947, when the Communists established a Stalinist dictatorship in Romania, too, emigration was still possible especially with the support of the American Joint Distribution Committee as well as the Romanian Jewish organisations, who worked significantly more efficiently here than in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union, including Czernowitz that became Черновци (Cernovtsi). Paradoxically, the majority of the Jews from Czernowitz and northern Bukovina fled from those who had liberated them, who freed them from ghettos and camps and saved many deportees' life, looking forward to rejoin those who had mistreated, deported and brutalized them. One of the participants of this exodus remembered how the sight of the Romanian soldiers at the border reawakened his fear because he still had a vivid memory of the brutality of the soldiers

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<sup>248</sup>See more details on this issue in: Hiltrun Glass, *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen...*, pp.66-70.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

belonging to the same army, which had carried out the deportations to Transnistria only three years ago.<sup>250</sup> However, under totally new political circumstances, many Jews from northern Bukovina decided to leave the Soviet Union for Romania also because the young were born under Romanian rule, whereas the elderly were already Romanian citizens for twenty years, but Soviet citizens only for one year.

**Life Must Go on: Reintegration and Post-War Romanian Democracy (August 1944-December 1947)**

The reintegration of the former Jewish deportees in Romanian society was different from case to case, as different was also the option of the former deportees whether to remain in Romania or to emigrate to other places. Their decision had been certainly influenced also by the way the regime established after 23 August 1944 dealt with issues like restitution, compensation, and justice. The process of the reintegration not only of the former deportees but of the whole Jewish community of Romania was a process that needed the active political involvement of the Jewish leaders in order to regain not only nominally, but also legally the rights and the status of equal citizens of the country. The total abrogation of the anti-Semitic legislation was passed by the new government through a decree-law issued only on 19 December 1944 i.e. five months after the overthrow of the Antonescu regime. Among the first consequences of this decree was the conscription of the Jewish young men in the army, since Romanian troops were fighting against the German army in Hungary and Slovakia.<sup>251</sup> The Jewish Head Office set up by the Antonescu regime was replaced with a new organisation free of opportunists and all those who in the previous organisation served mainly the interests of the anti-Semitic rulers. The

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<sup>250</sup> Leizer Hoffer, Ordinary people in extraordinary times, , in: Felicia (Carmely) Steigmann, *Shattered!*...p.282.

<sup>251</sup> In a document issued in February 1945 the General Military Headquarter requested from the Jewish Organisation the addresses of members of the Jewish community from Bucharest born in 1929 in order to be conscripted in the army. CSIER, file VII/118, p.1.

new organisation and its leaders had to struggle for the rights and the recognition of the ordeal of the deportees as well as of the whole Jewish community in Romania.<sup>252</sup>

Since many people, especially military staff had profited from the “Romanisation-laws” imposed by the Antonescu regime, there was reluctance in certain political circles regarding a general restitution of the Jewish properties to their owners, although the decree-law of 19 December 1944 expressively stipulated such restitution. In many cases the restitution to the rightful former Jewish owners depended on concretely who was the new owner. If the person who became the new owner of a Jewish house during the Antonescu regime was a former member of the Iron Guard or a representative of the Antonescu dictatorship, there were no impediments for restitution. In the case the property belonged to the state or to an official person, the restitution had little chances to be carried out.<sup>253</sup> In May 1945 the Ministry of Defence received several grievances from different military organs about the “insulting” and “inhumane” behaviour of the Jews entitled to receive back their confiscated properties in which officers and military staff was living at the time. The Minister of Defence himself, Vasiliu-Rășcanu, draw the attention of the Head Office of the Jewish Organisations that Jews should stop claiming their properties since at that time it was neither “opportune” nor “legal” to do so.<sup>254</sup> Whereas the situation regarding the restitution of buildings and houses was uncertain, the authorities agreed only in August 1945 to restore the radios and other goods requisitioned by the previous regime. The restitution procedure required from the legal owner of the property a certificate of procedure issued during the requisition.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> For instance, in a petition dated 27 June 1945, the Jewish Organisation required from the new Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu to intervene with the Soviet authorities in order to obtain the repatriation of 19 Jewish workers taken by the Soviets as prisoners of war while they were working in a forced labour detachment near Iași. CSIER, file VII/118, p.157.

<sup>253</sup> There is a lack of research in this field so it is still difficult to have a general view on this complex issue. See also: Hildrun Glass, *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen...*, p.83.

<sup>254</sup> CSIER, file VII/118, p.120.

<sup>255</sup> CSIER, file VII/170, p.170.

The struggle for political recognition and social compensation continued also through the newly founded Jewish Party. An important issue of the social compensation was the recognition of the Jewish invalids, widows and orphans due to the pogroms, deportations and forced labour, as entitled to receive a pension, as were the Christian invalids, widows and orphans due to the war or internal armed conflicts. There were three main categories of Jews entitled to a pension: the widows and orphans of the Legionary Rebellion from Bucharest on 21-22 January 1941, those of the pogrom of Iași and the successors of those deported to Transnistria. The Office for Invalids, Orphans and Widows of War accepted as a rule to put also the Jewish victims in the same categories with the non-Jewish, but the application of these measures was considerably delayed, while many of those affected had no other source of subsistence. Therefore, the Jewish Party sent several petitions to the competent forums, its representatives even had had an audience with the Prime Minister Dr Petru Groza, but their effort of one year did not succeed by the end of 1945. As they expressively wrote in one of their petition by the end of 1945 addressed to the minister of Social Assistance: “What was recognised under the law was not recognised in fact”.<sup>256</sup>

Besides the Jewish Party and the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Romania, the former victims of the pogroms and deportations set up their own organisations. Their task was to represent the interests of these categories of people, to organise the distribution of the humanitarian aid sent by the “American Joint”, as well as to commemorate the suffering they went through, keeping alive the memory of those who perished during the years of persecution.<sup>257</sup> Two of these organisations were the Association of the Former Deportees to Transnistria (A.F.D.T.) and the Association of the Survivors of the Death-Trains Iași-Podul Iloaiei-Călărași-Ialomița. The A.F.D.T. even had its own office in Bucharest in the Calea Moșilor street and tried to receive more support from the

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<sup>256</sup> CSIER, file VII/16, pp. 13-14.

<sup>257</sup> In October 1947 the Association for the Support of the Jews from Bukovina held a religious ceremony in the Coral Temple, the main synagogue of Bucharest, commemorating six years since the establishment of the ghettos in the Bukovina. CSIER, file VII/39, p.195.

Federation of the Jewish Communities in “the struggle for demanding our rights”, as they stated in a letter from August 1946.<sup>258</sup>

The situation of the former deportees during the first years after the war was alarming since only few of them managed to get a job or some kind of support from relatives or close friends. Most of the former deportees depended on charity services ran by diverse synagogue committees and Jewish communities around the country. A Special Commission for the Assistance of the Repatriated Deportees within the Federation of the Jewish Communities assumed the task of coordinating the distribution of relief among the needy people. This commission repeatedly appealed to synagogue committees for urgent material support, describing the deploring situation of the former deportees. The appeal mentions “hundreds of thousands” of needy repatriated Jews without shelter and employment. Although this figure has been obviously exaggerated<sup>259</sup>, the supplies of aid seemed not to be able to cover the need for warm clothes, shoes, medicines, but also for fuel for heating especially during the winter of 1946-1947. The biggest concentration of repatriated Jewish deportees was in Bucharest where they stayed in overcrowded lodgings, in unhygienic living conditions.<sup>260</sup> In order to improve the living conditions of these repatriated deportees, the organisation of the Jewish community from Bucharest sent a report to the “Joint” section for Romania asking for more efficient involvement in solving the urgent needs of the former deportees.<sup>261</sup> The delay of solving the difficult situation of the former deportees might have been caused also by the conflict of interests between the Association of the Former Deportees to Transnistria and the Federation of the Jewish

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<sup>258</sup> CSIER, file VII/38-39, p.62.

<sup>259</sup> The number of those who survived and returned from Transnistria did not exceed 60,000 and not all of them were dependent on charity services. The commission made the appeal on the eve of the Jewish New Year in September 1945. CSIER, file VII/39, p.65.

<sup>260</sup> In the buildings situated in the Doinii street 400 persons (among them 200 women and 45 children) lived in 32 overcrowded rooms. That meant about 5 to 8 persons in an unheated room due to the big shortage of firewood. There was also no medical assistance, neither sickrooms nor a doctor. The toilets were clogged and very dirty and soap was not available. CSIER, file VII/39, p.66.

<sup>261</sup> The report was issued on 14 January 1947, hinting that although the Jewish Community from Bucharest made known already from May 1946 the difficult situation of the repatriated deportees, very little has been done on their behalf. CSIER, file VII/39, p.84.

Communities.<sup>262</sup> The later had an intermediary role between the “Joint” section for Romania, which was the principal source of relief for the needy former deportees, and other local Jewish charity organisations. One of these organisations in the provinces was the Association for the Support of the Jews in Southern Bukovina, which distributed the aid received from the “Joint” in the towns and villages of Southern Bukovina and Moldavia. Sometimes the distribution caused conflicts and dissensions between local Jews and repatriated Jews native of other places.<sup>263</sup>

However, a certain percentage of the former deportees managed to start a new life without relying on charity aid or any other organised support. The success in this attempt was significantly influenced by the available means, the level of health and the contacts of each person returning from Transnistria. In villages or smaller communities where people knew each other before the war, non-Jews helped their Jewish friends housing them for a while. Closer friendships between Jewish and non-Jewish friends persisted despite of the political upheavals of the time.<sup>264</sup>

Unlike other professional categories of former deportees, intellectuals with good connexions in Bucharest managed more easily to start a new life. Former merchants or retailers who had relations through their businesses before the war could also find a job or a position easier than workers or craftsmen who before the war used to work, for instance, in the countryside. This move to Bucharest characterized mainly the Jews who left the Soviet Northern Bukovina. Those from Southern Bukovina and Dorohoi tried their fortune first in their native places. For a while, even Jews from Northern Bukovina settled down in the little towns of South Bukovina waiting for a favourable moment to move further southwards or to leave Romania. With the support of the new Romanian authorities,

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<sup>262</sup> According to a decision of the Federation of the Jewish Communities from 1 November 1946, the Federation evacuated the office of the Association of the Former Deportees to Transnistria housed until that date in the building of the Federation. The reason for this drastic measure was “the several embezzlements caused by certain members (of the Association) prejudicing the repatriated deportees”. CSIER, file VII/38, p.69.

<sup>263</sup> CSIER, file VII/39, p.97.

<sup>264</sup> The man who helped Sarina (Feyer) Ionescu’s family when they returned from Transnistria was an ethnic German from Dorohoi called Otto Dunkel. Interview with Sarina Ionescu (née Feyer) in Bucharest, 22.05.2003.

Jewish children, including those who moved with their families from Northern Bukovina, attended classes and took exams that helped many of them to register for higher education at universities in Iași or Bucharest. From 1946 former deportees were exempt from registration fees at universities.

### **The Eve of a New Dictatorship: Staying or Leaving Romania?**

The evolution of the internal political system towards a totalitarian regime by the end of the 1940s caused serious concerns among many former deportees, above all among those who emigrated from northern Bukovina just to escape the communist “paradise” since they already had the occasion to learn about it between 1940-1941 and after April 1944. Even if by that time the percentage of the Jewish members in the Communist Party was significant, these persons were not new members but rather ‘old fighters’ who were deported during the Antonescu regime for their political belief but not exclusively for being Jewish. It is hard to define a specific political preference of the former deportees since they were not a separate category of Jews but part of the Romanian Jewry.

Analysing memoirs, interviews, curriculum vitae of contemporaries, one must admit that former deportees native from northern Bukovina were keener on leaving the communist Romania than others (excepting the opportunists and the convicted Communists who were rewarded by the new regime with leading positions in administration, police, etc). This could be also a consequence of their experience with the Soviet regime, even though, as Romanian historians used to reproach them, they welcomed the entering Soviet troops in June 1940.<sup>265</sup> The perspective of emigration was discussed in almost every Jewish family. That was especially true in the case of the former deportees uprooted from their traditional milieu who had to start from nothing. There were neither adequate restitution nor any kind

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<sup>265</sup> The warm reception of the Soviets in June 1940 was due to the belief that the Soviet regime would not discriminate against Jews because of their ‘racial’ origin like the Romanian regime had done since January 1938. However, the northern Bukovinian Jews had to realise that the ‘racial’ persecution was converted into another one, which actually also affected many Jews. On 13 June 1941 the Soviet regime deported from Czernowitz to Siberia about 3500 Jews. Most of them did not survive. Only few could return home after the war like, the writer Josef Burg. Isabel Röska-Rydel (editor), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, p.326.

of compensation for the injustice committed by the Romanian state since the new regime took no responsibility for the measures carried out by the ‘bourgeois-landowner’ regime, including the years of racial persecution during Antonescu’s dictatorship.<sup>266</sup> Only those deportees handed over to the Germans but who later became citizens of other countries could benefit from compensation from the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>267</sup>

In 1947 the authorities still allowed the Jewish Agency to bring two ships, the “Pan Crescent” and the “Pan York” for those Jews wishing to emigrate to Palestine. About 10,000 people managed to leave Romania on these ships. Those who hoped to leave Romania legally to Western Europe were to be disappointed since after 1947 the communist regime in Romania drastically limited emigration.<sup>268</sup> However, after years of privation and oppression, the life under a new constraining regime seemed to be unacceptable for them. Therefore many of them took the risk to leave Romania illegally. There existed many “passers” who helped people to cross into Hungary. Once arrived in Budapest, the Jewish Community helped people with money from the American Joint Distribution Committee to get to Vienna, from where they could leave for the “free world”. Even corrupt civil servants and Soviet officers were involved in the illegal emigration. A “flourishing business” of selling passports for 10,000 US dollars began and thus those who had the money and a valid entry visa to any country could leave quasi legally.<sup>269</sup> During this period personalities like Paul Celan, Rose Ausländer left the country

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<sup>266</sup> Only in 1970 former deportees to Transnistria received for the first time a rather symbolic compensation but not from the Romanian state but from Germany. Although most of the deportees, excepting those handed over by the Romanians to the Germans in August 1942, had scarcely seen a German soldier during their ordeal. Interview with Mirjam Bercovici-Korber, Bucharest 6.06.2003. See also Hildrun Glass, *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen...*, p.99.

<sup>267</sup> A mutual agreement between West-Germany and Romania excluded any possibility of compensation for former deportees used by the Organisation “Todt” as slave labourers beyond the Bug who were Romanian citizens: “Verfolgten des NS-Regimes mit Wohnsitz in Rumänien können grundsätzlich keine Ansprüche auf Entschädigungen geltend machen, weil es an den gesetzlichen und völkerrechtlichen Voraussetzungen für eine solche Entschädigung fehlt.“... „Der Staat Rumänien hat in seinem Friedensvertrag mit den Alliierten von 10.02.1947 für sich und seine Staatsangehörige auf alle Forderungen gegen Deutschland aus der Zeit vor dem 9.05.1945 verzichtet.“ Answer of the German government to the request of the Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen regarding compensations, CSIER, file VII/68, p.208.

<sup>268</sup> Gerhard Schreiber, *A Tale of Survival*, p.43.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

whereas others' attempts failed. However, most of the former deportees did not have this amount of money and hoped to emigrate once the authorities changed on the restrictive emigration policy. Arnold Daghani had to wait many years until he could leave communist Romania with his wife in 1958.<sup>270</sup>

Some of the Bukovinian Jewish intellectuals living in Bucharest rejected the ideology and the means the "dictatorship of proletariat" imposed upon society. They developed a silent resistance against the regime's symbols and ideology.<sup>271</sup> Arnold Daghani refused to take over the style of "socialist realism" in fine art and to become member of the Fine Artist Union that obeyed to the Communist Party. Instead, he produced works with Christian religious themes also openly expressing in his circle of friends his reluctance to serve the regime.<sup>272</sup> But on the other side there were also former intellectual deportees from Bukovina who adjusted themselves to the 'requirements' of the new era and started praising in their works the 'achievements' of the Communism, the 'genius' Stalin and Lenin and the 30th anniversary of the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>273</sup> After the "Iron Curtain" fell in Europe and the Cold War became an everyday reality, the only way for Jews to leave Romania was to emigrate to Israel. Depending on how the political relations between Romania and Israel fluctuated, from time to time the communist regime in Bucharest made 'concession' to Jews. The end of 1958 was such a new favourable short period when emigration to Israel was allowed. From case to case, the Jews, including former deportees to Transnistria used this occasion in order to leave Romania. It is

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<sup>270</sup>After his failed attempt to leave clandestinely the country together with Paul Celan, Daghani applied in 1948 for an emigration passport but his emigration was approved only ten years later. Daghani and his wife Anișoara left Romania for Israel via Athens on 29th December 1958. Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen (editors): „*Lasst mich leben!*“, p.207.

<sup>271</sup>As part of this resistance they intended to "steal" from the municipal library as many "reactionary" books as possible because the rumour spread these books will be removed and burned. See the memoir draft of Daniela Miga (manuscript) in the archive of the Gallery "TOP ART Luchian 12" in Bucharest, p.64.

<sup>272</sup>To Daghani's circle of friends belonged well-known names like the fine art critic Petru Comarnescu or the writer and philosopher Nicolae Steinhard. The latter said, according to Daniela Miga, a close friend of Daghani: "This regime and the intellectuals are not suited to each other". When in November 1956 the Soviet troops defeated the anti-communist revolt in Hungary, Daghani remarked: "It is unfair to impose by force one's own ideas and to keep the gun at the back of so many innocent people under domination." Ibid., pp.65-69.

<sup>273</sup>The poets Alfred Kittner and Immanuel Weißglas belonged to this category. Isabel Röskau-Rydel (editor), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, p.327.

difficult to figure out how many former Transnistria deportees left during this time and how many decided to stay. Fact is that one can find them spread all over the world: in the USA, in Israel, in Latin America, in France, in Germany, in Britain but also in Romania where they have recently founded an association in Bucharest.<sup>274</sup>

## **2. Perceptions of the *domestic Holocaust* in the post-war Romania**

The topic of this subchapter aims to reveal how politics, mass media and education in the first two decades after the war shaped the consciousness of Romanians about the ordeal of Romania's Jewish population between 1940-1944. Until nowadays, historical facts relating to the extermination of Jews by the criminal anti-Semitic policy of the Romanian government under Antonescu continue to be eclipsed by the myth of innocence of the Romanian people<sup>275</sup>. The myth of the national innocence is not specific only to Romanians in this instance. It can be found with many other peoples, especially associated with the self-image of themselves being victims of Nazism or embodying anti-Nazi resistance. Therefore, the Holocaust has been exclusively connected to those who could not have an "alibi" for what happened with the European Jewry in general and with the Romanian Jewry in particular: the Germans. Although the idea of 'concentration camp' became associated with the gas chamber, as the 'standard' conception about the Holocaust, one should not ignore those who perished in other similarly inhuman circumstances due to an identical 'fault' of having been born Jews or Gypsies. However, owing to Romania's policy of tactical hesitation to hand over the entire Jewish population to the Germans, many people were able to survive till the end of the war. It was not a merit of the

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<sup>274</sup>For instance, of those whose written or narrated testimonies have been used for this work Gerhard Schreiber lives in the USA, Shoshana Neuman and Tvi Zimmel in Israel, Philipp Kellmer in France, Ruth Glasberg-Gold lived a while in Bolivia then in the USA, Edith Silbermann in Germany, the Daghanis lived in Britain, Mirjam Bercovici-Korber and Sarina Ionescu live in Romania.

<sup>275</sup> One of the most popular newspaper in Romania in the early 1990s, *Evenimentul Zilei* reflects precisely the dominating mentality in the Romanian society in a statement published on the eve of the inauguration of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington: "As is known, many Jews obstinately maintain that Romania is one of the countries responsible for the tragedy that was the Holocaust. This attempt to indict the Romanian people received a firm rebuke not only from our historians, but also from Romanian society as a whole". *Evenimentul Zilei*, 16 April, 1993.

Romanian government, but a result of its tactical speculations. One of the most important consideration is that while in the summer of 1942 plans were prepared for mass deportation to Nazi extermination camps from all over Romania, the situation on the eastern front became gradually unfavourable for the German and Romanian troops. That made Romanian leaders susceptible to doubts in a German victory, leading them to give up such radical solutions. Therefore, Jews from certain area of Romania could indeed avoid the fate of their co-religionists from other Nazi-allied countries. Furthermore, when in March 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary, the Romanian government tolerated Hungarian Jewish refugees in Romania, facilitating their emigration to Palestine.<sup>276</sup> These facts have been integrated into the myth of national innocence, which still dominates Romanian historiography and public perception of Romania's role in the Holocaust.

Public memory and private perception represent two different concepts. In our context, public memory expresses the way the Romanian society, as a collective body, remember the victims of the pogroms, deportations and arbitrary treatment; whereas perception refers to the image of the Holocaust in moral terms, as how Romanians judged the events related to the domestic Holocaust. Both memory and perception were shaped by the political factors of the country and integrated into so-called "national consciousness". In fact, the perception crystallized under the influences of the ideological indoctrination imposed by the Communist Party after it took over political power. However, the party itself revised from time to time its viewpoints. The question is how far these facts affected public memory.

The term 'domestic Holocaust' serves to define that part of the Holocaust for which the Romanian government was directly responsible. Not only the discourse but also the nature of the measures taken by the anti-Semitic regime led by Antonescu proves the criminal

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<sup>276</sup>This attitude was not necessarily determined by humanitarian reasons. In spite of the laws of that time, which stipulated that Jewish refugees should have been extradited to the countries where they came from, Romanian authorities tolerated this wave of refugees, receiving money from the refugees and hoping to improve Romania's chances at peace negotiations with the Western Allies.

intention of deliberately causing the death of more than two hundred thousand innocent civilians, on a racial basis. The fact that about four hundred thousands Romanian Jews were able to survive can neither attenuate the crime nor revoke the validity of the term 'domestic Holocaust'.

Even if during the first two decades after the war, the concept of the Holocaust still did not exist in the form we use it today,<sup>277</sup> what happened only a few years earlier to the Jewish population, especially to those who were deported, could not have been ignored by the Romanian society. After the war, Romania's Jewish population numbered less than 50% of its original size, including in this loss the deportations of Jews from Northern Transylvania under Hungarian rule. Some aspects related to the 'domestic Holocaust' (pogroms, individual physical aggressions, deportations) were happening in public places where Romanians could easily have become aware of the dimension of this policy. It is true that the majority of Romanians could not directly witness other aspects, such as the living and detention conditions of the deportees in Transnistria, the brutality of the gendarmes towards deportees and the executions that took place. The real dimension of what happened with a part of the Romanian Jewry during 1940-1944 had to be revealed by the survivors who wanted to make Romanians aware of what their Jewish fellow citizens had to experience in the ghettos and labour camps of Transnistria and the Ukraine, due to a policy carried out in the name of the same Romanian people.

The issue regarding the awareness of the majority population of the criminal measures taken by its leaders and implemented by the military and the police against the Jewish population is one of the principal issues in the history of Holocaust. The literature related to this topic is huge, representing many points of view. From Daniel Goldhagen's disputed

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<sup>277</sup>The term "Holocaust" gained currency in the 1950s, defining the suffering and intended genocide of European Jewry. Alvin H. Rosenfeld: *Thinking about the Holocaust: After Half a Century*, Indiana University Press, 1997, p.121.

book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* to the "revisionist"<sup>278</sup> interpretations of Robert Faurisson, one can find multiple opinions. In the case of the Romanian domestic Holocaust, this issue was treated only marginally or even was not mentioned at all, since the existence of a 'domestic Holocaust' itself has been denied.<sup>279</sup> However, international historians like Jean Ancel, Radu Ioanid, I.C. Butnaru, Randolph L. Braham, but also a few Romanians like Dinu Giurescu and Andrei Pippidi, revealed the involvement of the Romanian authorities in the extermination of Jews.

During the first two decades after the war Romania underwent major political changes, gradually becoming a state politically and ideologically subordinated to the Soviet Union, although developing by the late 1950s its own national-communist ideology. Like in all countries "liberated" by the Soviets, the first decade was the decisive one in the process of establishing a communist dictatorship. Therefore, one must distinguish between two periods during which public opinion had access to information and during which two ideologically different political systems interpreted the Holocaust in the public discourse. One period is that of a democratic, pluralistic political system established after Antonescu's overthrow on 23 August 1944, which lasted until 1948, when the Communists managed to get full control over the country. The second period is that of a dictatorial one-party political system and of a press entirely under ideological subordination, alongside with the public discourse and education. In our analysis of the perception of the Holocaust by the Romanian public opinion, three major elements will be

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<sup>278</sup>Revisionism in that case refers to the movement developed during the 1970s, which strives to revise historical understanding of the Nazi destruction of the Jews in Europe. According to its doctrine, the genocide practiced by the Nazis against Jews and Gypsies did not exist, but is to be regarded as a myth. The mentor of this ideology, the French Robert Faurisson, summarized his ideas in a radio interview from 1980. "The alleged Hitlerian gas chambers and the so-called genocide of the Jews form a single historical lie whose beneficiaries are the State of Israel and international Zionism and whose principal victims are the German people, but not its leader and the Palestinian people." Pierre Vidal-Naquet: *Assassins of Memory. Essays on the Denial of Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>279</sup>Victor Eskenasy: *The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography*, in: Randolph L. Braham, *The Tragedy...*, p.198. The Romanian minister for Cultural Affairs, Răzvan Theodorescu, declared in August 2002 that one cannot speak of Holocaust in Romania because no extermination of Jews was carried out on Romanian territory. (The assertion is very questionable, since Romanian authorities administrated Transnistria, not to mention the victims of the pogroms in Iași and Dorohoi). Two months earlier he declared that "in Romania there was no Holocaust, but Romania participated to the Holocaust". <http://www.mediafax.ro> Monday, 27 May 2002.

taken under consideration: the attitude of the main political parties (until 1948), the message transmitted by press articles and publications, and the reflection of the Holocaust in education.

After years of anti-Semitic propaganda, resentments against Jews could not disappear overnight. On the contrary, during 1945-1946, one could even observe increasing anti-Semitic feelings. These feelings were related to the restitution claims submitted by Jewish deportees returning home. In order to avoid the amplification of these kind of anti-Jewish feelings, but also from electoral considerations, the authorities delayed solving the cases of restitution and therefore also delaying an improvement in the status of Jews. Since Romania signed the armistice with the western allies' coalition, Jews were obviously not persecuted anymore. Those who survived Transnistria were allowed already under the last months of the Antonescu regime to return home. On 31 August 1944 the liberal Constitution from 1923, which stipulated equal rights to all citizens regardless of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation, was re-introduced. However, the new Romanian government adopted only on 19 December 1944 a law that abolished the former racial legislation, re-establishing the civil and political rights of the Jewish citizens of Romania. During the few years of pluralistic socio-political development, political parties adopted a policy that was meant to satisfy first of all the Romanian masses. In summer 1944, the National Democratic Block was created. It brought together parties with various political doctrines, from the traditionalist conservative Peasant Party, through the nationalist National Liberal Party (both formed the so-called "historical parties") to the left wing Social-Democratic Party and the pro-soviet Communist Party. Even if this combination of "democratic parties" soon dissolved, becoming adversaries during the electoral campaign of 1946, they were the representative political parties in the after-war Romania. Although all agreed to a minimal official condemnation of anti-Semitism and with the outlawing of discriminative laws, the official or semi-official positions of these parties reflected a more

nuanced approach relating to Jewish issues. Dwelling a little bit more on their political messages, one can recognise the mentality not only within the parties, but also of the society in which they were active and whose votes mattered on the electoral battlefields.

Until the elections of November 1946, the two “historical parties” were the most respected political players in Romania. Having a significant tradition in the political life, the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party dominated the democratic political scene of the 1920s and 1930s, until 1938. Like all the others political parties, they were outlawed when King Carol II established his personal dictatorship and still remained outlawed during the Antonescu regime. Both parties had an important role in Antonescu’s overthrow, enjoying popularity among the masses afterwards. Although they condemned the anti-Semitism of the Antonescu regime, they promoted a nationalism based on anti-Semitic stereotypes. Leaders like Iuliu Maniu and Dinu Brătianu, who at that time intervened with Antonescu for stopping the deportations of Jews, rejected anti-Semitism as a political programme, but nevertheless could not get rid of their old anti-Semitic prejudices.

In 1944-1946 the Peasant Party was the most representative mass party. Therefore, the escalation of their nationalist propaganda into anti-Semitic agitation was much more significant. Their manifestos and appeals published after 1944 did not contain any reference about regrets or measures for restitution concerning the treatment of Jews by the previous regime. On the contrary, in their view, it was the Jews who had to be forgiven by the Romanians and not the other way round. A good example in this sense is Mihail Fărcașanu’s declaration, leader of the Youth Organisation of the National Liberal Party, that Jews had after the war once again the chance to gain the trust of the Romanian people by supporting its national fight. Otherwise the question of the restitution would have to be

postponed until times would be calmer, he concluded.<sup>280</sup> When in October 1944 Zionist politicians visited I. Maniu in order to find out the point of view of the National Peasant Party about the grievances of the Jewish organisations, he asked them for patience regarding the restitution issue because rushed and impulsive measures would only intensify anti-Semitism. Actually, both “historical parties” tried to play down the moral and material prejudice endured by Jews by eluding the question of restitution. The profiteers of the plundered Jewish properties represented a higher elector potential than the Jews.<sup>281</sup> The lack of historical sources about the attitude of the political parties towards the Jews in the after-war years can be bridged by analysing contemporary speeches and pamphlets. Documents are very rare relating to this issue. One exception is the memorandum on Romania’s socio-political situation drawn up by younger members of the National Peasant Party’s leadership. The document was handed over in October 1946 to the British Embassy in Bucharest. About fifteen pages out of a hundred-page document deal with the Jewish issue. Although the authors ensure in the introduction their intention to make a well-balanced and impartial presentation, they could not avoid making use of the well-known anti-Semitic stereotypes. It is true that they expressed regret and compassion for the fate of the European Jewry, whereas in the same time they were trying to give an extenuating explanation about the reasons which had led to the persecution of the Jews in Romania: Jews have allegedly hindered the establishment of a Romanian middle-class; Jews formed an exclusivist, closed group pursuing an unfair competition; Jews are basically ruthless, recent immigrants and cannot be loyal towards the state in which they live. The memorandum cynically plays down the pogroms and discriminations against Jews, asserting that Romanian anti-Semitism was always “passive” and that only

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<sup>280</sup>“Politically and psychologically the right moment for solving the Jewish question is in the present situation, which, after my opinion, is also the most complicated and the most important as well: regaining the mutual confidence, the cohesion in the context of the national struggle. And this solution depends today only on the Jews”. Mihail Fărcășeanu, *Atitudinea evreilor*, in: VIITORUL, 3 September 1944, p.2.

<sup>281</sup> Hildrun Glass, *Die Rezeption des Holocaust in Rumänien (1944-1947)* in: M. Hausleitner, B. Mihok, J. Wetzel, *Rumänien und der Holocaust. Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien*, Berlin: Metropol, 2001, p.156.

isolated violence against Jews took place. “Speaking of anti-Semitic ‘atrocities’ in Romania, every objective observer must remember that since the time of a certain Jeremiah, exaggeration and complaint are part of the Jewish tradition. In most cases, it was only a matter of some scuffles and broken windows”.<sup>282</sup> The aim of the authors of this memorandum was to exonerate Romania of any responsibility regarding the measures taken by the Antonescu regime against Jews. In their opinion, it was not the Romanian anti-Semitism, but the German pressure, which led to deportations and anti-Jewish legislation. The myth of national innocence was once again enforced by the assertion that even if the former government might be responsible for some excesses, the Romanian people is not responsible for anything that happened to the Jews. Continuing in this vain, the memorandum estimated the figure of the Jewish victims who perished under Antonescu at “less than 10,000”, emphasizing that in the same time many Romanian opponents to the regime as well were imprisoned or had to face the same treatment like “some” Jews. The authors compare the loss of human lives in the Romanian army with those in the Jewish labour battalions,<sup>283</sup> concluding that Romanians suffered during the war much more losses than the Jews. The memorandum also complains about illegal immigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews<sup>284</sup> during the first months after the war, which might have destabilised the country. Eventually, the conclusion of the authors is that “the only solution could be a population transfer, similar to those decided in Potsdam for the German minority from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.” It becomes clear that the idea of the memorandum was to get British support for “cleansing” the country of Jews and possibly Hungarians. Once the Jews had left Romania for Palestine, all the problems related to restitution and “national security” would have been automatically

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>283</sup> During the war, Jews were forbidden to serve in the Romanian army. Therefore, they were all over the country enrolled in labour battalions, which for Jewish men substituted the military service.

<sup>284</sup> Such an „illegal immigration“ could not be historically proved. The authors probably referred to the Romanian Jews deprived of their citizenship and deported to Transnistria, from where they tried to return home after military operations ceased.

solved. However, the leadership of the National Peasant Party was aware that spreading anti-Semitism could put at risk their attempts to gain the sympathy and support of the Western powers under the circumstances of an increasing confrontation with the communists. Therefore, they adopted in 1946 some resolutions condemning anti-Semitism. But as the contradictions in speeches of party officials from those days reflect, confronting anti-Semitism was not their deep conviction.<sup>285</sup>

In opposition to the ambiguity of the “historical parties”, was the position of the Social Democrats. They rejected on ideological grounds any kind of anti-Semitism and nationalism, regarding anti-Semitism and the crimes committed by the Antonescu regime against Jews as a phenomenon of the bourgeois system, which they were fighting against. Romanian Social Democrats considered the Jews as part of the whole Romanian society. A Jewish section of the Social Democratic Party had been set up already in September 1944, allowing their members to be active also in the Zionist movement. On many occasions they pointed out the crimes of the former regime against the Jews, demanding comprehensive compensations for the victims and the punishment of those responsible for those crimes. However, the Social Democratic Party had fewer adherents than the “historical parties” put together, even if its popularity was increasing from 1946 due to the fact that many people were looking for a mid-way political solution between the “historical parties” and the Communists. For those who became supporters of the Social Democrats the Jewish issue played a minor role<sup>286</sup>. In spite of the fact that the Social Democratic Party was also co-opted into the governing coalition, their influence on the government’s policy was limited.

It was the Communist Party that year by year seized more and more power, managing through electoral fraud to monopolise political power by the end of 1946. However, until 1948 the Communists had to work within a pluralistic political system. Ideologically, they

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<sup>285</sup> Hildrun Glass, *Die Rezeption des Holocaust...*, p.159.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* p.161.

regarded the Jews as victims of Fascism, itself a product of the reactionary bourgeois society. Because of the suffering caused to Jews by the “old social system”, Communists expected that Jews would support now the “progressive” forces embodied by the Communist Party, which could halt a revival of anti-Semitism. The fact that among the members of the Communist Party the representation of the national minorities, especially of Jewish origin, was higher than in any other political parties, engendered the hope that they would fight against chauvinism and anti-Semitism, obtaining justice for those whose property had been confiscated or had to endure other sorts of discrimination. In spite of the similarities with the Social Democratic Party relating to a need for restitution and a penal condemnation of those considered guilty for the extermination of Jews, the Communists had the same apprehensions like the “historical parties” that they could become unpopular if they supported Jewish grievances. However, in December 1944, the communist Minister of Justice, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu,<sup>287</sup> abolished the former anti-Semitic laws and provided the Jews with a legal way to recover some categories of their confiscated properties. Real estate properties, however, could not be reclaimed. The procedure of restitution prescribed that restitution can be made only if it had been officially adjudicated in a court of law. A new law on the Romanian citizenship was adopted only in 1947. Their initial promises regarding restitution and prosecution against war criminals had been considerably curtailed. In many cases Communist leaders denied satisfaction to Jewish grievances, arguing that the frame of mind of Romanian society would not allow a satisfactory resolution to them at that point. Because the Communist Party aimed to increase its power, careerists and opportunists could join easily the party, and many of them had anti-Semitic attitudes.

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<sup>287</sup> Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (1900-1954) was a distinguished personality among the Communist officials. His exceptional character made him later “suspect” to his comrades who, in 1954, after a typical Stalinist trial, imposed a death sentence on him. He secretly wrote during the years 1942-1943 an analysis on the political evolution in Romania, in which he approached also the historical evolution of the Romanian anti-Semitism. The analysis has been first published shortly after August 1944, containing very hard value judgments on Romania’s role in the Second World War and the domestic policy towards the Jewish population. Victory Eskenasy, *The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography*, p. 175.

Anti-Jewish feelings became more evident in the early 1950s during the internal struggle within the party's leadership between the "domestic faction" and those who came from Soviet exile, like Ana Pauker.<sup>288</sup> The leader of the party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a domestic communist himself, complained to Soviet leaders that Ana Pauker seemed to have more power than he had and that party members were saying that Romania was actually led by a Jewish woman.<sup>289</sup> In spite of this, one cannot speak of anti-Semitism in Ana Pauker's purge since other communists of Jewish origin could retain their high positions in the party. However, none of them jeopardized Gheorghiu-Dej's position as allegedly Ana Pauker was. The remarks on her Jewish origin were rather superficial gibes or malicious slurs. Nevertheless, two other close collaborators of Ana Pauker were also purged at the same time: Vasile Luca (Luka László) and Teohari Georgescu, the first was Hungarian, the latter Romanian.<sup>290</sup>

The Holocaust was barely perceived by the main political parties in Romania in its real dimension. The "historical parties", representing the inter-war period, denied from their nationalistic point of view, any responsibility of the army and society in the *domestic Holocaust*. Although they condemned the Antonescu regime and its policy, they did not recognise its criminal character. Illustrative in this sense is Iuliu Maniu's gesture at the "Great Trial of the National Betrayal"<sup>291</sup> in 1946, where he had to appear as witness, when he expressed his respect and consideration for Antonescu shaking hands with him. Anti-

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<sup>288</sup> Ana Pauker (néé Rabinsohn, 1893-1960) was until 1952, beside the party general secretary Gheorghiu-Dej, the most influential person in the Communist Party. In 1947 she became minister for external affairs and from 1949 until 1952 she worked as deputy prime minister as well. Her political career ended abruptly in 1952, when an investigation committee of high party officials accused her of "careerism" and "deviation" from the party's principles. She lived afterwards in Bucharest until her death, degraded to a simple librarian. Erhard Roy Wiehn, William Totok (ed.), *Marcel Pauker: Ein Lebenslauf. Jüdisches Schicksal in Rumänien 1896-1938; mit einer Dokumentation zu Ana Pauker*, Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1999, pp.141-172. See also Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej*, București, 1995, pp.210-212.

<sup>289</sup>Victory Eskenasy, *The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography*, in: Randolph L. Braham: *The Tragedy...* p.164.

<sup>290</sup>Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania 1944-1962*, London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp.210-214.

<sup>291</sup>In May 1945 the pro-communist Groza government decided to bring Ion Antonescu and its close subordinates to trial. The juridical procedure lasted until 17 May 1946, when the court made known the sentences. (On judicial inquiries against war criminals in Romania see chapter V.) Ibid, p.114.

Jewish feelings among the supporters of the “historical parties” had been maintained also by the fact that proportionally in the Communist Party members of Jewish origin was higher than in other parties and many of those, who after 23 August 1944 joined the Communist Party were Jews as well. Due to the famine caused by a terrible drought in the summer of 1946, anti-Jewish feelings associated with distrust towards the communists, spread also to ordinary people, especially in the most affected region of Moldavia<sup>292</sup>.

The Social Democrats and Communists were ready to acknowledge the responsibility for the events of the inter-war Romanian society, but only for ideological reasons. They considered the “previous” social system a product of the nationalist bourgeoisie, which made possible the establishment of Antonescu’s dictatorship, with all the consequences for those persecuted, including the Jews. Thus, a new society had to be built on new principles, by new leaders. However, the ordeal of the Romanian Jewry under Antonescu had been integrated in the general framework of the persecutions of opposition groups committed by the Antonescu regime. The Communists hesitated to recognise it as a *domestic Holocaust*. The final countdown between the Communists and their adversaries, represented by the “historical parties”, began in 1947. After a show trial put on by the Communists against the leaders of the National Peasant Party and National Liberal Party, both political organisations were outlawed.<sup>293</sup> In December of the same year King Michael was forced to abdicate and left the country, going into exile. On December 30, the Romanian People’s Republic was proclaimed. Through the “merger” of the Social Democratic Party with the Communist Party in February 1948, the last independent political organisation ceased to exist. Once the Communists became the only rulers of the

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<sup>292</sup>Rumours were spread that Jewish merchants and millers were profiteer with cereal prices, exploiting the needs of the starving peasants. Jews have been accused of smuggling out of the country big quantities of corn and maize to Palestine. Another rumour was that even Ana Pauker herself is leading this action. Starving Moldavian peasants travelling throughout Romania in order to buy cereals at lower prices consequently spread all these rumours in the whole country. Florian Banu: *Foametea din '46 și creșterea antisemitismului în Moldova*, in: Kurt W. Treptow (ed.), *Romania: Crossroads of Europe*, Iași, Oxford, Portland: Centre for Romanian Studies, 2001, pp.245-258.

<sup>293</sup> Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania*, p.133.

country under the new name of Romanian Workers Party (PMR),<sup>294</sup> the entire Holocaust issue was subordinated to the party's propaganda and an independent approach on the *domestic Holocaust* had become impossible. As the historian Victor Eskenasy formulated: "Romanian historiography entered an ice age period of accentuated ideological deprofessionalisation".<sup>295</sup>

Nevertheless, before this change took place, there were a number of publications revealing the facts of the *domestic Holocaust* that had been published. The most relevant and well-documented is Matatias Carp's work in three volumes *Cartea neagră. Fapte și documente. Suferințele evreilor din România, 1940-1944 (The Black Book. Facts and Documents. The Suffering of the Jews of Romania, 1940-1944)* published between 1944 and 1947. He managed, in a short time, to collect an impressive number of documents, supplementing them with testimonies of witnesses in the trial of Antonescu's collaborators. Even if his work is rather a primary source for historians than that of a professional historian, it continues to be a reference point in the history of the Romanian Holocaust. It is worth mentioning that Matatias Carp showed objectivity in his book, when he concluded that over 300 000 Jews were able to survive due to the fact that Romanian public opinion was only sporadically and temporarily attuned to the ideas and especially to the methods of Nazism.<sup>296</sup>

After 1948, books incriminating the Romanian Army and authorities for deportations and extermination of Jews could not be published anymore. Authorities blocked public access to the books already published, like Matatias Carp's *Black Book* or Marius Mircu's *Pogroms from Bessarabia*. Even Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's *The basic problems of Romania*, published first in 1944 in original version, had to be revised for its second edition in 1946.

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<sup>294</sup> About the establishment of the communist regime in Romania see Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp.500-547.

<sup>295</sup> Victor Eskenasy, *The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography*, in: Randolph L. Braham, *The Tragedy...*, p.165

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

As minister of interior and then minister of justice in the post-war coalition governments, Pătrășcanu initiated a “denazification” programme that was never carried out. Being a lawyer by profession, he analysed in his work, written during 1942-1943, the political evolution of the last decades in Romania, dedicating a special chapter to Romanian anti-Semitism. His very sharp observations on the whole ordeal of Romanian Jewry, including the living conditions and the atrocities committed in Transnistria, raised two main questions: was it possible during the hardest years of persecution to get news about what was going on in Transnistria; and whether the public opinion in Romania had any knowledge of what happened with the Romanian Jews beyond the country’s borders. Surprisingly, Pătrășcanu knew already in 1942, even though he was under house arrest at the family’s villa from Poiana Țapului, about the “tens of thousands of people, men, women, children, and the elderly, who were deported in the depth of winter, across the Dniester into completely devastated areas...condemned to death by hunger and cold”. He characterised the measures taken by the Romanian authorities against Jews as “acts of cruelty and barbarity”, which no reason could justify. Actually, he was the only Romanian official who openly spoke about a “systematic and methodical extermination” of Jews in Romania.<sup>297</sup> The leaders of the Jewish community in Bucharest had quite precise information about the living conditions of the deported Jews in Transnistria, as several memorandums written by the chief of the Central Jewish Committee, Wilhelm Filderman and sent to Antonescu can prove it. These were not published but Antonescu’s answer in which he justified the deportations, was. Military and railway employees also who, for money or simply of humanitarian reasons, carried messages from deportees to their families living in Romania and to the Central Jewish Committee transmitted information about the unbearable living conditions. Another source of information about atrocities and harsh living conditions beyond Dniester and Bug was the espionage activity of some

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p.176. One could assume that Lucretiu Pătrășcanu’s righteous approach to the Jewish issue was influenced by his Jewish wife, Elena Pătrășcanu (née Herta Schwamen, who converted in 1936). See more about her in: *Dosarele Istoriei*, no. 9, București, 1998.

Romanians who acted for intelligence services of the Allies, like the case of George Tomaziu<sup>298</sup> However, the few who were ready to state the facts by name could not change the general view of the Romanian public opinion on the *domestic Holocaust*. Mass media and propaganda had a greater impact on masses.

Analysing how the mass media contributed to the perception of the *domestic Holocaust*, we will take under consideration four main strands: the reaction of the press to the publications dealing with the discrimination and atrocities committed against Jews; the comments and articles on contemporary debates about restitution, emigration, naturalisation etc.; the attitude of the Romanian publishers and publishing houses regarding the publication of articles, memoirs, literature about the labour or extermination camp experiences of the former deportees, and finally, the educational system.

The real dimension of the atrocities and injustices the Jewish people of Romania, especially those from Bukovina and Bessarabia, had to endure could be revealed only after the political change on 23 August 1944. Zealous intellectuals belonging to the Jewish community started collecting data and information about the crimes and Jewish victims of the Antonescu regime. The best known are the works of Matatias Carp and Marius Mircu who were able to publish shortly after the war during the few years of freedom of expression. In 1947 a diary kept by Arnold Daghani was also published, describing the harsh detention conditions in the labour camp of Mikhailovka, beyond Transnistria's eastern border. The Jewish press assumed the task of publishing articles and reports of survivors, hoping that non-Jews would read their columns, too. But in spite of the political change and democratisation, the Romanian public was reluctant to admit that Jews had

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<sup>298</sup> Although the main task of this informer was not to observe the treatment of the deportees by the Romanian and German army, but to gather information of any kind about the German positions in Romania, Tomaziu witnessed how a column of Romanian Jews handed over by Romanians to the Germans was slaughtered by the Germans at the northern border of Transnistria near the Rov river in July 1942. Dennis Deletant, *Transnistria 1942: A Memoir of George Tomaziu. An Eyewitness Account of the Shooting of a Column of Jews near the Rov River in 1942*, in: Kurt W. Treptow (ed), *Romania: A Crossroads of Europe*, p.23.

more to suffer under the previous regime than themselves. Romanians were quite sceptical that all the cruel things described or documented in those books did really happen.

In an article published in the Jewish cultural magazine “Răspântia” (The Crossroads) Marius Mircu<sup>299</sup> depicted ironically the attitude of the Romanian public regarding the pogroms in the years of the ‘young democracy’<sup>300</sup>. He concluded that Romanians would have rather congratulated those who organised the pogroms than feel sympathy for Jews. Reflecting on his recently published book about the pogrom in Iași of June 1941, Mircu expressed his deep disappointment at the mentality that could be ascribed to many Romanians.<sup>301</sup>

Initially, publishing houses choose to refuse on fallacious reasons to publish these books. However, after it became clear that, especially in America, the interest in these kinds of books was so high that publishing on anti-Jewish pogroms could become a lucrative “business”, they dropped their initial refusal to publish them.<sup>302</sup> Once Marius Mircu’s book was published, many of the booksellers refused to distribute it, saying, “We don’t do politics” and those sellers who made an exception for Mircu and agreed to sell the book, hid it under the counter. Very few sellers put the book at a visible place. Regarding the reaction and comments in the Romanian press to his recently published book on the Pogrom in Iași, Mircu bitterly found out that the local newspapers were very cautious in mentioning the publication, let alone commenting on it. The few non-Jews who wrote

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<sup>299</sup> His real name was Israel Marcus but he adopted the pseudonym Marius Mircu because he worried that publishing under a Jewish name could disadvantage him to find a publishing house but also because he alleged that non-Jews will not read the book if the author’s name disclosed his Jewish origin.

<sup>300</sup> The term of ‘young democracy’ was often used in the first years after the war by the left-wing press as well as by the officials suggesting that only the ‘people’s’ democracy propagated by the left-wing parties would be able to establish a tolerant and equitable society without anti-Semitism and racial discrimination.

<sup>301</sup> “I had the illusion that the next day after my book *The Pogrom of Iași* has been published those whom I so often mentioned would be arrested and a momentous trial will be staged. It is now some months since the book was published and nothing happened. From the very beginning when I showed the manuscript I have been told: ‘It would be better not to publish this book. Let’s forget these things!’ And responsible people (a famous Romanian writer) appalled when he learnt that I intend to publish such a book, said: Why don’t you leave these things for later? Why do you provoke? Anti-Semitism is going to grow now stronger than ever’. They spoke to me like that, only because I wanted war criminals and bandits to be punished.” Marius Mircu, *Concluzie la un pogrom popular* in: *Răspântia*, I, no.5, 15.02.1945, p.13.

<sup>302</sup> Marius Mircu, *Alte pogromuri, aceleași concluzii*, in: *Răspântia*, I, no.8, 15.05.1945, p.5.

about the book described it rather as a literary work than as a document revealing the ferocity of the pogrom. Seeing that only Jews showed any interest in buying the book, the author realised that “the book had no resonance with the Romanian public” and decided to send the book free to those to whom the book first and foremost was dedicated: to the Romanian public. He sent the book to the members of the cabinet, to politicians, to journalists, to the members of the Academy, to magistrates, to priests, to professors and army officers, but no reaction came from any of them. After this experience, Mircu wondered whether it was still worth finishing the other two books about the pogroms in the Bukovina and Dorohoi, on which he was working, since the reception of this first book did not have the expected effect. The moral authors as well as the executioners of the pogrom in Iași could still walk unpunished on the streets.<sup>303</sup> Although he went on to investigate the cases of Dorohoi and of other places in the Bukovina, revealing the tragic events that occurred there just a few years earlier. In a couple of month he was able to publish this second book also, but the conclusion was the same: Romanians were not interested in knowing the truth, everybody involved in the edition and distribution of the book was only interested financially and the criminals continued to be free. A trial against those responsible for the pogrom in Iași took place only some years later in 1948.

The dispute around Romania’s role in the Holocaust, which continues until today, began shortly after 23 August 1944. In this dispute one could distinguish between two camps: 1) those who advocated the “innocence of the Romanian people” which means that in Romania there was no organised anti-Jewish persecution but only sporadic, individual attacks against Jews committed by a few fascists; and 2) those who asserted that persecution, deportation and racial discrimination could have not been possible without the support and participation of the Romanians. In this last perspective, persecution happened because the regime enjoyed the people’s support. Once the freedom of speech

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<sup>303</sup> Marius Mircu, Concluzie la un pogrom popular, in: *Răspântia*, I, no.5, 15.02.1945, pp.13-14.

enabled Jewish publications to relate the tragic fate of ten thousands of Jews persecuted in various forms by the Romanian authorities with the complicity of ordinary Romanians during the Antonescu regime, the first reactions to these publications came from sympathizers of the “historical parties” who were in important social positions. The disputes took place mainly in the press.

In an article published in a Jewish newspaper but written by a Romanian professor from the Law Faculty at Bucharest University, he intended to demonstrate that the fascist movement in Romanian was an artificial phenomenon and that neither the Romanian peasantry nor the Romanian bourgeoisie were anti-Semitic. He denied that at universities, “with few exceptions”, Jews were persecuted. Professor Ion Zamfirescu compared the “disadvantages” Jews had to endure due to the anti-Semitic regime of Antonescu with those the Romanian had to face during those years: “For the Jews the last years meant privation, loss of proprieties, professional interdiction, restrictive measures in education, and compulsory material obligations and generally, a period of offences and indignities. For us, Romanians these years meant harsh war years with the mutilation of the national territory, with hundreds of thousands of our youth sacrificed on the battlefields, with a ruthless foreign control, with the wasting of the country’s economic production, with the interdiction of the principal liberties, with exodus and the grave internal disturbances due to the terrorist methods of that time. Thinking fairly, none of us was happier than the other. Each of us had to pay in his own way for the historical fatality of the epoch we had the bad luck to live in or for the collective or personal mistakes, which we committed or not.”<sup>304</sup>

Another supporter of the ‘minimizing thesis’ concerning the role that Romanians had in the Holocaust was Theodorescu-Braniște who regarded the pogroms and the “awful deeds in the camps of Transnistria” as being “the action of a tiny evil minority only”, but having

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<sup>304</sup> *Curierul Israelit*, 15.10.1944.

nothing in common with the “Romanian soul”. In his opinion, many Romanians could not believe what the Nazis did to the Jews because the mind of the common Romanian could not imagine and conceive such outrage. Those Romanians who participated in atrocities were in his opinion “a few uncommon Romanians”<sup>305</sup>. The pro-dean of the Law Faculty in Bucharest, professor Constantin A. Stoeanovici considered it necessary to render an account of the Jews who perished due to the persecutions and those of the Romanian soldiers who fell on the battlefields during the war, suggesting that Romanians had more losses than the Jews.<sup>306</sup> Those who denied the Romanian participation in the Holocaust often used this kind of ‘proof’, but they deliberately ‘forgot’ to make the obvious distinction between civil victims and military casualties. However, even comparing the two figures representing 400,000 Jewish civilians<sup>307</sup> and 600,000 Romanian soldiers, one can easily realise that the percentage of the perished Jews compared to the entire population of Romania was much higher than those of the Romanian soldiers who fell on the battlefields. Whereas about 50% of the Jewish population of Greater Romania perished in the Holocaust (28% due to the Antonescu policy and 22% as a consequence of the German occupation of Hungary including Northern Transylvania in March 1944) only 3% of the Romanians lost their lives and those were almost exclusively soldiers on the battlefields.

The issue of “defending the honour of the Romanian people” in relation to the treatment of the local Jewry was strongly supported by the “historical parties”. The case of an alleged rabbi from Cluj, I. Glasner, shows how these circles tried to make use of an opportunistic Jewish voice in order to demonstrate “the objective and human attitude of the Romanian people towards the Jews during the dangerous years of the war”. I. Glasner’s name

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<sup>305</sup> *Curierul Israelit*, 24.12.1945.

<sup>306</sup> He accepted that about 400,000 Jews could have perished during 1940-1944, but emphasised that during 1941-1945 more than 600,000 Romanian soldiers died on the battlefields, the „flowers of the youth of our nation”. *Jurnalul*, 23.12.1944.

<sup>307</sup> The figure of 400,000 Jews refers to the Jewish victims in the entire territory of Romania as it was until 1940, including the Jews deported in 1944 to Auschwitz and Birkenau by the German and Hungarian authorities from Northern Transylvania. I. Ludo, Cum trebuie privită o lege, in: *Răspântia*, no.3, 1.01.1945, p.14.

appeared in February 1946 in the newspaper *Dreptatea*, which reported the declarations made by him for Swiss journals on his journey to the International Jewish Congress in the USA. According to his declarations, Romania and its King had firmly opposed the German plans regarding the extermination of the Romanian Jews and had hindered the deportations. Furthermore, Romania had protected not only the local Jewish population, but had given refugee status to the persecuted Jews from the neighbour countries and therefore the Jews should be grateful towards the Romanian nation and its King. *Dreptatea* considered that the declarations made by Glasner had a large echo in the Romanian public opinion. “After so many partial testimonies, which intended to lay the excess and savageness of a minority incompatible with our hospitable and humanitarian character to charge of the entire whole Romanian population, one can finally hear a voice, an authorised voice trying to re-establish the truth”, wrote *Dreptatea*.<sup>308</sup> One month later another newspaper *Jurnalul* took up Glasner’s previous declarations full of praiseworthy phrases about the Romanian innocence during the Second World War. This time *Jurnalul* wrote of the task of the “International Jewish Organisation” to analyse the suffering of the Jewish population and the culpability of those responsible for this suffering in every country affected by the Second World War. In this context, the author of the article depicted Romania as an island of peace for the Jews: “In a time when Romania itself was occupied by the Hitler’s army, in a time when the SS detachments operated on the territory of our country perhaps more intensively than in the neighbouring countries, the King and the Romanian nation- as rabbi Glasner stated- vigorously opposed the extermination plans of the Germans.” The article suggests that Jews should be thankful to the “Romanian people” for escaping the fate of their co-religionists from other Nazi-ally countries.<sup>309</sup>

Reaction to these kinds of comments came above all from Jewish publications written by those who directly experienced what was going on with the Jewish population in Romania

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<sup>308</sup> *Dreptatea*, 3.02.1946.

<sup>309</sup> *Jurnalul*, 03.03.1946.

during the war. One of these publications was the magazine *Răspântia*. Its editor in chief, I. Ludo, proved that numerous supporters and accomplices of the former regime could not have carried out the vast proportion of crimes and atrocities committed against Jews only by a „tiny minority“. He agreed that one cannot generalise and extend the guilt to the entire Romanian population, but it was totally untrue to speak about the “innocence of the Romanian people” since the crimes were committed by many individuals who must be tried. Ludo emphasized that Romanians must know the truth about the real proportion of the atrocities in order to come to terms with this chapter of their history. Regarding the declarations of the alleged rabbi from Cluj, he found out that this person was not a rabbi but a twenty-four years old Jewish young man who wished to become a rabbi but the Jewish community did not trust him. He eventually joined a group of neolog Jews led by a certain Weiss, who canvassed the Jews from Cluj into voting at the general elections for the National Peasant Party. Hence the National Peasant Party made use of Glasner and entrusted him with the “defence of Romania’s interests”.<sup>310</sup>

Whereas the conservative press like the above-motioed *Dreptatea* and *Jurnalul* strove ‘to spare’ their readers from knowing about the tragedy of the deported Jews, the left wing journal *România Liberă* related during February 1945 the sad story of two orphan Jewish girls from Bukovina deported with their family to Transnistria. These series of articles were launched by Lelia Rudaşcu and were intended to attract the attention of the Romanian public to the tragic fate of many Jewish children deported to Transnistria, thus urging the penal condemnation of those responsible for the ordeal. The report contained also excerpts from the notes the two girls made in the ghettos where they lost their beloved ones. One of the girls, age thirteen at the time, was Ruth Glasberg Gold, the later author of the book *Ruth’s Journey*, a memoir focusing on her experience in Transnistria. The other girl, called Edith Kertzmann, was fourteen years old. There were only two

<sup>310</sup> I. Ludo, Cine a construit Piramidele? in: *Răspântia*, II, nr.16, 15.04.1946.

articles of this series, although Lelia Rudaşcu initially intended to publish more such kind of children's testimonies from Transnistria. The reason why these articles were not published is still unknown.<sup>311</sup>

In the summer of 1945 *România Liberă* published under the name of Liana Maxy more reports about the ongoing trials against Romanian war criminals, describing the cruelty, which the executors of the Antonescu regime used against Jewish deportees. It was the same *România Liberă*, which initiated a series of interviews with Romanian and Jewish public figures dealing with the "Jewish question" during the year 1945.

With few exceptions, the Romanian press was not 'keen' on promoting the image of the suffering Jews under the Antonescu regime. Due to this restraint of the Romanian press only sporadic articles or comments were published on Jewish issues, whereas publications about the deportation and persecution of Jews were largely ignored. As Marius Mircu remarked, the newspapers were very cautious in presenting or reviewing books from Jewish authors, which showed the Romanian Army in an unfavourable light and revealed the participation of many Romanian civilians in pogroms and plundering. It was mainly the left wing press, which showed more interest in the testimonies of persecuted Jews but paradoxically, once the communist regime established its own dictatorship, books dealing with anti-Semitic pogroms and deportations could not be published anymore and the existing items were restricted.

The only 'valid' history had to become the official history written by the Communist Party activists in which there was no place for too many pogroms and suffering of the Romanian Jews. However, the restriction regarding publications about the Holocaust affected only those works that dealt with the Romanian involvement in the Holocaust. The purpose of the restriction was not to hide the atrocities committed by the Nazis, the concentration

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<sup>311</sup>One of the article was published in *România Liberă*, no.168 from 16.02.1945 having the title: "Aşteptând judecarea criminalilor de război" (Waiting for the trial of the war criminals); the other one was published in nr.171 from 19.02.1945 under the title: O fetiță de patrusprezece ani scrie despre ororile din Transnistria (A fourteen years old girl writes about the ordeal in Transnistria.) CSIER, file III/962.

camps ran by them and all aspects of the anti-Semitism connected with Nazi-Germany, but to deflect Romania's responsibility in the Holocaust, even at a time when many Romanian war criminals were still imprisoned.

The diary that Arnold Daghani managed finally to publish in Romania in 1947 under the title "Groapa este în livada de vișini" (The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard) reflected, due to the specific circumstances of the author, a 'collage' of Romanian responsibility and German action concerning the fate of thousands of Jews deported by the Romanians, physically exploited and shot by the Germans beyond the river Bug. In contrast to Marius Mircu and Matatias Carp, Daghani conjures up in his diary a very specific aspect of the Romanian Holocaust: the consequence of the reckless measures taken by the Romanian authorities to hand over to the Germans about five thousand Romanian citizens of Jewish faith. Even if in Daghani's diary the oppressors were not Romanians but Germans and Lithuanians, it was the Romanians who decided the fate of this group of Transnistrian deportees banished beyond the Bug.

For those of the younger generation, who grew up during the first two decades after the war, education played a primary role in their perception of the Holocaust. Due to the reform of the educational system, from 1946 onwards education became a state institution. Therefore, the Ministry of Education authorised all textbooks used in schools. These were identical textbooks for each subject and level of study, so that pupils in the whole country could be taught the same thing. The only opportunity for pupils and students to learn about Romania's role in the Holocaust was the history class at school. The analysis of history textbooks used between 1946-1966 for primary, secondary and higher education reveals a different approach of the policy of the communist Romanian regimes towards Jews. This different approach is more evident between the various educational levels and less noticeable from an earlier edition to a later one. Whereas in textbooks for primary schools nothing is mentioned about racism, anti-Semitism or the Holocaust, textbooks for

secondary and especially higher education refer in specific terms to discrimination and crimes against Jews. During the whole period of 1946-1966, there were no significant changes in the presentation of the historical period between 1938-1944. From time to time, new elements and nuances may have been added to complete the image about the anti-Semitic, oppressive character of the royal, respectively “military- fascist” dictatorship, however always emphasizing the constant opposition put up by the communists. In secondary school textbooks published in 1947, students learnt that the origin of anti-Semitism as state policy goes back to the period of Kings Carol II personal dictatorship. However, anti-Semitism in inter-war Romania is presented as a passive phenomenon, rather on the level of propaganda and discourse. The period of the Legionary dictatorship, during which Antonescu co-opted the Iron Guard into the government, allowing them to carry out maltreatments, confiscation of property, crimes and pogroms against Jews, although none of this is mentioned. The Antonescu regime is presented as persecuting anti-fascist and democratic militants. The term “Transnistria” appears surprisingly not in connexion with Jews and Gypsies, but with “anti-fascist” militants, who were deported to that province. The authors of the textbook also omitted to mention the pogroms from Bukovina and Bessarabia. Thus, the Holocaust is only alluded but never explicitly referred to.<sup>312</sup> However, the textbooks dating from 1952 and 1956 contain an excerpt describing the position of the Communist Party towards the attitude of the Antonescu government on the question of nationalities<sup>313</sup> and the massacres committed by the Romanian Army against the civilian population in Bessarabia and Bukovina. This manifesto of struggle against fascism, written in September 1941 in the attempt to rally all the anti-fascist social and political forces, was used as teaching material in the 1950s. It stated that “an end must

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<sup>312</sup> Alexandru Florian, *The Holocaust in Romanian textbooks* in: Randolph L. Braham, *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, p.260.

<sup>313</sup> In 1952 the Party adopted a new constitution paying more attention to the issue of „co-habituating nationalities“. At that time was also set up a Hungarian autonomous region in Transylvania. The actualisation of this topic in the textbooks edited between 1952-1956 could be in connexion with the aims of the Party to present itself as friendly towards nationalities.

be put to the slaughter and plundering of the population in Bessarabia and Bukovina. An end must be put to the barbaric persecution of the Jews and to any national oppression". Furthermore, the textbook edited in 1956 compares the situation in Romania under Antonescu with that in Hitler's Germany: "The arrest, the trials, and executions became more frequent during the anti-Soviet war. Some of the arrested were sentenced to death and executed while others met their death in prison. Many were transported to camps in Transnistria where they were killed (Andrei Bernat, Lazăr Grünberg, and others). Such criminal acts prove the similarity between Antonescu's legionary dictatorship and the crimes committed by the German Nazis in the death camps of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Mauthausen".<sup>314</sup> The very severe judgement and the comparison between Auschwitz and Transnistria is exceptional. The emphasis of the book is clearly on the repression of the anti-fascist, communist fighters, however, one of those mentioned by name had a Jewish origin. But taking under consideration who the author of this textbook actually was, the tone of this lesson should not surprise anyone.<sup>315</sup>

One can conclude that textbooks gave quite a confused and distorted image of what happened to the Romanian Jews between 1940-1944. The evil character of the Antonescu's regime is attributed not to its inherent anti-Semitism, but to its merciless actions against the communists, presented as protectors of all the politically or even racially discriminated by the "military-fascist" regime. It becomes clear that the authors of textbooks were determined to present the communists as "first class victims" of the former

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<sup>314</sup> Alexandru Florian, *The Holocaust in Romanian textbooks*, p.262.

<sup>315</sup> The textbook of 1956 was edited by the disputed Romanian Jewish historian Mihai Roller. He was at that time assistant at the Department for Science and Education under the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party and received the task to write a new history of Romanian People's Republic. His work "guided" by party activists emphasizing the Slavonic elements in Romanian ethno genesis, the Romanian-Russian friendship during the centuries and the role of the "heroic" Soviet Union and the local communists in the "liberation" of the country from Antonescu's fascist and Nazi-collaborationist regime. A few years after his work was published, the Party revised some of its points of view related to the historical past and to the relation with the 'bigger brother from the East' as Romanian Communism became more national. Consequently M. Roller fell into disgrace with the party leaders, who banned him from his position. He committed suicide in 1958. Teșu Solomonovici, *România Iudaică. O istorie neconvențională a evreilor din România. 2000 ani de existență continuă*, vol.II, București: Ed. Teșu, 2001, p.59. See also Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp.178-179

regime, to emphasize the social and political oppression, thus minimising the proportion of the anti-Semitic oppression. These would be the reasons why the systematic and methodical destruction of Bukovinian and Bessarabian Jews by the Antonescu regime was concealed from the pupils and students, who could learn only at world history lessons about the Holocaust, presented as a deed of the German Nazis.

The question is what determined Romania's communist authorities to dismiss the evidence of the *domestic Holocaust* from the Romanian public memory. The German historian Mariana Hausleitner believes that Romanian authorities simply adjusted themselves to Stalin's anti-Semitic policy initiated at end of the 1940s, excluding any debates on the destruction of the Jews.<sup>316</sup> Two historians, Teodor Wexler and Mihaela Popop from Romania, are of the opinion that the anti-Jewish campaign, which climaxed in March 1954 with the trial of thirteen members of the Zionist movement was launched by the secret police "Securitate" in order to divert the attention of the population from the political confrontations within the Communist Party taking place at the time. The purge of undesirable elements, many of them of Jewish origin, had to be justified somehow and the accusation of Zionism was very near at hand.<sup>317</sup> But even in that case, one cannot speak of a communist anti-Semitism along the same lines as of a racial policy against Jews, but rather of intrigues so typical for the communist regimes during the 1950s. An analysis of the historical, ideological and political aspects exposed above indicates that a more complex series of factors contributed to this development. Before the communists came to power, they theoretically admitted the rightness of restitution claims of former Jewish deportees and even recognised the injustice committed by the racial policies of Antonescu's "military-fascist" government. But once having established their own regime,

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<sup>316</sup>Mariana Hausleitner, Grossverbrechen im rumänischen Transnistrien, in: *Rumänien und der Holocaust*, p.20.

<sup>317</sup>Already in 1947 Gheorghiu-Dej was sure that Ana Pauker's brother, the Zionist Solomon Zalman Rabinsohn, had secret money accounts in Swiss banks. The prosecutors of the anti-Zionist campaign assumed that "the Zionist leaders, besides the others remnants of the former exploiting bourgeois-landowner's regimes, offered their service unconditionally to the Anglo-American imperialism". Teodor Wexler, Mihaela Popop, *Anchete și procese uitate 1945-1960*, vol.II, București: Fundația W. Filderman, 2002, p.668.

the issue of restitution and reparation was shelved. Furthermore, many of the Jewish properties, which were not confiscated during the “Romanisation” policy of the Antonescu regime, were subject to be “nationalised” under the communist regime. The fact that many of the Communist officials were of Jewish origin is less relevant since they did not identify themselves with the Jewish community but carried out the party’s policy, even when it was to the prejudice of the Jews. Although a pro-communist Jewish organisation had been set up for the purpose of making anti-emigration and pro-communist propaganda among the Romanian Jews,<sup>318</sup> the main trend of the Jewish population was to emigrate for Palestine, respectively Israel. After the state of Israel has been proclaimed in 1948, Romanian Jews became more suspicious of the communist authorities. The ‘anti-Jewish’ attitude adopted by the Communist Party by the end of 1940s and in the early 1950s had neither racial nor religious but political content, similar to the anti-Serbian attitude, which led in 1951 to the deportation to Bărăgan of thousands of ethnic Serbs who were living along the Romanian-Yugoslav border.<sup>319</sup>

The communists tended to play down the anti-Semitic aspects of the persecution by the Antonescu regime, emphasizing its anti-Communist character in order to present themselves as the most persecuted victims. Therefore, public commemorations put on by the communist authorities during the first two decades after the *domestic Holocaust* remembered only the “sacrifice” of the communist victims of the “military-fascist” regime, whereas the ordeal of the Jewish population from Bukovina and Bessarabia was deliberately ignored.

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<sup>318</sup> Liviu Rotman, *The First Decade After the Holocaust*, in: Randolph L. Braham: *The Tragedy...*, p.302.

<sup>319</sup> Because the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito refused to obey to Moscow’s policy, a virulent anti-Yugoslav campaign was launched by all the Soviet satellite states, including Romania. Ethnic Serbs living on the Romanian side of the province Banat have been accused of “Titoism” i.e. collaboration with the Yugoslavs and sympathy for their leader. About ten to fifteen thousand deportees were resettled by police in the middle of the most arid region of Romania: the Bărăgan steppe. Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, p. 185.

### 3. The public memory of Holocaust in the post-war Romania

The public's memory of the Holocaust during the first decade after the war was closely connected with the perception of the Holocaust and the ideological doctrine of the new regimes.

'Public memory' is a complex concept. In general terms, it represents an index of common symbols that stand for a culture's relationship to the past. The American historian John Bodnar defined public memory as a "body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future".<sup>320</sup> However, public memory relating to the Holocaust both in Romania and in other countries where Jews were persecuted with the complicity of their non-Jewish co-inhabitants has a different meaning. The former allies of Nazi-Germany refused to accept their own responsibility for the extermination of the local Jewish population. This denial happened in Romania, too; in spite of the many condemnations pronounced by the "People's Court of Justice," public memory ignored the crimes committed during the Antonescu regime in the name of the Romanian people. Therefore, Romania formed its public memory based on selected historical events and symbols.

The Second World War left behind human tragedies and a huge potential for a new national ideology; events, symbols, geographic places and national heroes all became part of public memory on a universal scale. In particular, each nation selected for itself those outcomes of the Second World War which once fitted into the public memory and now had to shape the self-image of the nation and to re-define its role during the war. Approaching the topic relating to public memory of the Holocaust in Romania, one must take under consideration that for Romanians the Holocaust represented none of those 'outcomes' of the war that would serve to consolidate the common identity or the national

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<sup>320</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p 15.

cohesion of the Romanian nation. The Holocaust was regarded as a strictly Jewish issue, even if many of those affected were Romanian Jews. These Jewish communities in Romania developed their own public memory of the Holocaust, which reached certain elements within the Romanian society, but it has only recently been integrated into a general public memory of the Second World War in Romania.

The public monument is the most recognisable and permanent embodiment of symbols, events and feelings linked to either glorious or tragic historic moments or a certain period. Such monuments force a community to agree upon a set of symbols that embody what they are trying to express. Monuments are designed to last for centuries and therefore an effective monument is an important expression of the deep levels of a culture's identity. A specific feature of monuments dedicated to the Holocaust in Romania is their unequivocal Jewish character. Even if the texts engraved in the monument or memorial plaques is in Romanian, a Hebrew text or even just a short religious quotation written with Hebrew letters, indicates the cultural identity of the victims as well as of those who erected the monument. Unlike other monuments dedicated to the Second World War<sup>321</sup> erected in central areas of towns and villages, Holocaust monuments and memorial plaques were placed within Jewish cemeteries, courtyards or inside the synagogues. The first Holocaust monuments had the aspect of a grave located in Jewish cemeteries and were inaugurated in the period 1945-1947 during the ritual ceremonies of burying soap pieces considered at that time to be the human remains of the Jews who perished in German concentration camps. Later on, local Jewish communities, in association with the central Jewish organisation (the Union of Jewish Communities of Romanian People's Republic), erected monuments to honour the memory of Romanian Jews killed under specific circumstances on Romanian territory. For instance, in Dorohoi, a marble plaque was set on the funeral stones of the graves containing the said soap pieces some years later, probably during the

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<sup>321</sup>Monuments erected by the state authorities dedicated to the Romanian and Soviet Army or for local Romanian heroes who were engaged in the military operation against the German troops.

1950s, to remember the victims of the pogrom that occurred in Dorohoi on 1 July 1940.<sup>322</sup> However, in the 1950s, the name Transnistria still continued to be omitted even on Jewish monuments. Only a third monument with a more recent plaque dated after 1990, “dared” to refer to the ordeal endured by the Jews of Dorohoi in Transnistria.<sup>323</sup> In Iași, a monument erected to the victims of the massacre, which occurred on 29 June 1941 was erected in the city’s Jewish cemetery in front of the graves where most of the victims were buried, whereas the town was “spared” of having such a monument in a public place. But not all the Jewish citizens of Iași who had been killed could have been brought back and buried in the cemetery of their ancestors. Many of them lay in mass graves along the route of the “death trains”. Most of the corpses were discharged from these “trains of death” in the county Roman near the villages Mircești and Săbăuani. In memory of their tragic end, the central Jewish organisation erected a monument in the town of Roman, although again not in a public place, but in the Jewish cemetery.<sup>324</sup>

Symbols can be wide ranging in their variety. A controversial symbol was the so-called RIF soap, which allegedly was produced from Jewish bodies kept by the Nazis in the concentration camps. Although an industrial production of such items manufactured of corpses is doubtful, one cannot exclude that some experiments were made to research such a possibility.<sup>325</sup> The initials RIF, however, stood not for ‘Rein Jüdisches Fett’ (Pure Jewish Fat) as it was believed during the war and in the after-war years, but for ‘Reichsstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung’, a German government office, which oversaw the production and distribution of soap and detergent products. The detainees in the concentration camps spread the allegation that RIF meant ‘Rein Jüdisches Fett’ since they received also this

<sup>322</sup> The text of the inscription: “Here are buried the unidentified Jews, victims of the fascist massacre carried out on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1940 during the royal dictatorship”. *Martiriul evereilor din România; documente și mărturii* (CSIER), Bucharest: Hasefer, 1991.

<sup>323</sup> The text of this inscription: “In the memory of more than 5,000 Jews belonging to the communities of Dorohoi, Mihăileni, Săveni and Rădăuți-Prut deported to Transnistria on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1941 who died there by bullets, starvation and terrible diseases. Other 5,000 survivors were repatriated on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1943. The memory of our beloved martyrs should be for ever blessed.” *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, 1967, p.624.

soap for their own use. The rumour reached the free world during the war. Knowing the proved bestialities committed by the Nazis against concentration camp detainees, such as “scientific experiments” carried out on human bodies or the extraction of golden plates of the dead detainees’ mouth, the rumour about soap made of human bodies seemed credible at that time.<sup>326</sup> The RIF soap became a symbol of the Holocaust and Jewish communities in Romania procured it for commemorations. In several places, the local Jewish communities buried coffins containing more pieces of RIF soap and erected monuments and funeral stones with inscriptions incriminating “the Nazi barbarism” for transforming Jewish bodies into soap.<sup>327</sup>

The burial of the legendary RIF soap meant also a relief from the pain for those who lost their beloved, but who were either in mass graves or had been cremated. By burying the soap pieces, they felt like they were burying their parents, children, relatives, friends or just their fellow Jews. For instance, the Jewish community of Bacău organised in January 1946 a similar ceremony, which was attended by about 8,000 participants. A coffin containing “the remains of Jewish martyrs transformed into soap by the science of the German civilization” was carried to the Jewish cemetery after a religious service held by the local chief rabbi. Romanian officials, such as an Orthodox priest, the vice mayor, the prefect of Bacău county and even a colonel of the local military garrison, gave speeches during the ceremony. Political parties and organisations like the Communist and Social Democratic Parties were also present. The speaker representing the pro-communist

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<sup>326</sup> After the concentration camps were liberated, the Soviet army found in many of them stocks of human hair, which was shaved from prisoners and used to be sold cheaply to private firms. These used the human hair to make felt slippers, bumpers for boats and stuffing for mattresses. See the permanent exhibition in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington.

<sup>327</sup> The texts on the funeral stones are similar and refer to the victims of the Holocaust who perished in Nazi concentration camps like the tomb stone from Dorohoi: “Here are buried the victims of the Fascism transformed into soap by the hitlerist barbarism; 1941-1954; May their sacrifice prevent Fascism ever being re-born”. CSIER, 2/III.

Democratic Jewish Committee called for unity in the fight against Fascism in order to eradicate “its last remains”.<sup>328</sup>

One month later, on a Sunday of February 1946, a similar but more extensive ceremony took place in Dorohoi, a place where the *domestic Holocaust* created several victims. The commemoration started on the square where the local synagogue was situated. First, a religious service was held in the open air near the Jewish temple “for the rest of souls of millions of Jewish martyrs killed in Hitler’s concentration camps and crematoria around Europe”. Local and regional Romanian officials often attended the Holocaust commemorations in the post-war time, making speeches at such occasions, as it also happened at the meeting held in Dorohoi. Among the official participants were the prefect of the Dorohoi County, the mayor of the town, the chief of the local police, the leader of the local branch of the National Liberal Party, the chief prosecutor of the local Court of Justice and the chief of administrative service of the prefecture. The commemoration was also attended by the members of the Association of the Jews “returned” from Transnistria. After the religious ceremony that opened the commemoration, rabbi Schächter addressed the meeting and spoke first about the ‘bestialities of the Nazi hyena’ and about the crimes of the ‘Hitlerist cannibals.’ The chief executive of the local Jewish community followed with a speech that claimed that the punishment of those who were involved in this ‘Teutonic barbarism’ should act as an example to prevent such barbarity from ever happening again. The prefect expressed condolences in the name of the county Dorohoi and his bewilderment of the cruelty used against Jews by “some beasts called Hitlerists.” He added that “the entire county Dorohoi deplores the death of millions of Jews, deported and gassed in the famous ovens of the Nazi imperialism”. Furthermore, the representative of the Zionist movement accused the wartime British government of contributing indirectly to the destruction of the European Jewry by its refusal to “open the gates of

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<sup>328</sup> În mormântarea săpunului RIF la Bacău, in: *Viața Evrească*, no.74, 26.I.1946, p. 3.

Palestine before 1940". Finally, the memorial meeting concluded with the speech of the mayor. Afterwards the participants formed a funeral march accompanying the coffin with the RIF soap to the Jewish cemetery where it was symbolically buried.<sup>329</sup>

Surprisingly neither the officials nor the representatives of the local Jewish community mentioned in their speeches Transnistria or at least the pogroms, which occurred in June 1940 in and around Dorohoi.<sup>330</sup> After only a few years after those tragic events, the local Jews were certainly much more sensitive to what they personally experienced during the pogrom of June 1940 and the ordeal in Transnistria than what happened in the Nazi concentration camps far away in the German Reich. However, in spite of the effort of the local authorities to suggest that the people of Dorohoi felt deep compassion with their Jewish fellow citizens, only a few weeks later after the commemoration, anti-Semitic attacks were reported from Dorohoi where unknown persons devastated and then tried to set the local synagogue on fire.<sup>331</sup>

A few weeks later still at the RIF soap burial in Bârlad in March 1946, Transnistria was also omitted and the entire ceremony focused on the RIF soap pieces expressing the German cruelty towards the Jews. During the commemoration, seven bags containing 5,000 pieces of RIF soap and shoelaces manufactured of torn Thora pieces were buried in the Jewish cemetery. The ceremony was attended also by Romanian officials such as the prefect of the county Tutova, the vice mayor of Bârlad and the representative of the Communist Party.<sup>332</sup> Instead of coming to terms with the recent past, however, the authorities preferred to suppress the inconvenient past. The leaders of the Jewish communities who had organised the commemorations considered it was better not to refer

<sup>329</sup>Morminte fără morți: impresionanta înmormântare a săpunului RIF la Dorohoi, in: *Neamul Evreiesc*, no.3, 18.02.1946, p.2.

<sup>330</sup>In December 1943 after Antonescu realized that it would be to Romania's advantage to gradually disengage from its alliance with the Nazis, the Romanian government allowed the repatriation of the Dorohoi Jews. After all, they have been deported "by mistake". Of 10 368 deportees from Dorohoi only 6 430 survived in Transnistria until December 1943. Dr. Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!*, p.299.

<sup>331</sup>Tulburări antisemite la Dorohoi, in: *Viața Evrească*, no.80, 10.03.1946, p.4.

<sup>332</sup>Înmormântarea săpunului RIF la Bârlad, in: *Viața Evrească*, no.82, 23.03.1946, p.2.

to Transnistria because such negative references could have jeopardised Romania's position at the ongoing peace negotiations in Paris. Therefore, the main focus of the public memory relating to the Holocaust in Romania was to remember the victims of Nazism or those of the Romanian pro-Nazi Iron Guard as it happened at the commemoration of the victims of the 'legionary rebellion'<sup>333</sup> of January 1941 in Bucharest.

At the ceremony for the memory of those killed during the 'legionary rebellion', which was held at the city's Coral Temple, the minister for propaganda, Constantinescu-Iași, declared that, 'the overwhelming majority of the Romanian people played no part in the outrages committed by the Iron Guard.' He admitted however, that "all that happened will be a spot of shame in the history of our people that will never be cleaned".<sup>334</sup> The commemoration of the 'legionary rebellion' of Bucharest and the 'legionary pogrom' of Iași continued during the next decade, always referring to the anti-Semitic atrocities in Romania and omitting the main aspect of the domestic Holocaust: Transnistria.

The first commemoration relating to the pogrom of Iași took place already in autumn 1945 during the exhumation and interment of the victims buried in three mass graves near Stâncă Rosnoveanu. These mass graves contained the remains of about 560 Jews killed by Romanian soldiers in the little town of Sculeni. The exhumed corpses were transported to the Jewish cemetery of Iași and buried with a religious ceremony.<sup>335</sup> A committee of the Jewish Community of Iași contacted the local authorities in the town of Roman to rebury the victims of the 'death trains' inhumed without a religious ceremony at the railway stations in the villages of Hălăucești, Mircești and Săbăuani near Roman. The committee's intention was to bring the remains of those Jews to Iași to be laid to rest in the Jewish

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<sup>333</sup>The members of the fascist Iron Guard were called "legionnaires" because of the name the Iron Guard before 1933 was "The Legion of Archangel Michael". On 21 January 1941 they attempted a coup against Antonescu but failed to seize the state power because Germany preferred to maintain Antonescu in power, refusing to support the legionary rebels. During this event, irregular gangs belonging to the Iron Guard slaughtered about 120 Jews in Bucharest.

<sup>334</sup> *Neamul Evreiesc*, no.39, 4.02.1946, p.1.

<sup>335</sup> Triste ceremonii la Iași, in: *Viața Evreiască*, no.56, 22.09.1945, p.3.

cemetery according to the tradition.<sup>336</sup> However, the official commemoration of the victims of Iași pogrom took place on 13 July 1946, at a time when the Jewish community of Iași still could commemorate and remember ‘that bloody Sunday’ without any ideological manipulation. Comparing the Romanians and Jews of Iași to Cain and Abel, the president of the local Jewish community pointed out in his speech that there was a punishment for “Cain who killed his brother Abel”. A huge crowd of more than 40,000 participants attended the first commemoration of the Iași pogrom. During the procession to the Jewish cemetery, where most of the victims were buried, both Jewish and Christian shops closed as a sign of respect. The procession made stops at every point in the city where mass killing of Jews had taken place. Justinian, Metropolitan Bishop of the Orthodox Church of Vaslui, the prefect of the county Iași, the mayor of Iași, Colonel Filipescu representing the Armed Forces, the Trade Union representative, a representative of the pro-Communist coalition (BPD), a survivor of the “death trains” and the Polish writer Hanna Kawa<sup>337</sup>, as well as rabbis and representatives of the Jewish community were all present. It seems that the local authorities co-organised the commemoration. They were certainly interested in showing to the world that in Iași, Jews and Romanians mourned together the victims of the pogrom. It is relevant to mention that these commemorations took place at a time when Holocaust denial was not common practice.

Two years later, after the Communists seized power and proclaimed the country the Romanian People’s Republic, the commemoration of the Iași pogrom had to follow the official propaganda line. On 20 June 1948, there was no procession but an indoor meeting organised by the Democratic Jewish Committee with the participation of all ‘democratic’ mass organisations, which were in fact merely formal organisations subordinated to the Communist Party. The political manipulation of the commemoration ensured that the speakers, accusing only the Iron Guard and the Germans of carrying out the pogrom,

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<sup>336</sup> Știri din Iași, in: *Viața Evreească*, no. 65, 10.11.1945, p.2.

<sup>337</sup> Pioasă pomenire a victimelor pogromului de la Iași, in: *Viața Evreească*, no.98, 13.07.1946, p.4.

exposed the ‘guilt’ of the King Michael I for the atrocities. The ceremony occurred six months after the forced abdication of the King and the communist regime wished to discredit the monarchy and the former King. The representative of the Communist Party (rebranded in 1948 as the Romanian Workers’ Party) stated that “the massacre in Iași was a diversionist act in order to divert the attention of the people from the unjust war against the Soviet Union.” The participants passed a motion assuring the government that “the Jewish people [of Romania] will work and fight for the consolidation of the people’s democracy exposing the reactionary elements.” The document accused ‘Anglo-American imperialism’ of incitement to a new war that could generate anti-Semitism, while in Britain and the United States ‘Fascism and anti-Semitic diversions increased day by day.’ The meeting ended in the typical Communist way of acclaiming the government and the Communist Party.<sup>338</sup> At the ceremony a commemorative plaque was unveiled at the ‘Cultural’ secondary school in Bucharest in the memory of the students sentenced to death and executed in 1942 because they distributed bank notes stamped with anti-Nazi and anti-war slogans, and this was used by the representative of the Democratic Jewish Committee to praise the achievements of the “democratic regime in the Romanian People’s Republic”.<sup>339</sup>

Gradually, public memory became a tool in the hand of the new regime for making its own propaganda and did not hesitate to make use of the Holocaust memory to forward its aims. The administration manipulated the Democratic Jewish Committee into forcing notable personalities of the Jewish cultural and political life like Wilhelm Filderman and Alexandru Șafran to go into exile.<sup>340</sup> The message of the speeches held at commemorations after 1947 became a reflection of the official ideological point of view. In July 1949, during the inauguration of the first monument in the memory of the pogrom

<sup>338</sup> Comemorarea victimelor pogromului de la Iași, in: *Viața Evrească*, nr.193, 28.06.1948, p.4.

<sup>339</sup> Desvelirea plăcii comemorative la liceul “Cultural”, in: *Viața Evrească*, nr.196, 25.07.1948, p.2.

<sup>340</sup> A. Andreescu, L. Nastasa, Varga,(editors): *Minorități etno-culturale. Mărturii documentare. Evreii din România 1945-1965*, Cluj: Centru de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, Cluj 2003.

victims of 29 June 1941 in Iași, the Jewish press emphasised that the monument should be an ‘impulse for continuing the fight against the Fascists and the instigators of a new war’ and explained the pogrom in the typical Communist manner: the fascist regime organised the pogrom because the people of Iași, realising the unjust character of the war against the Soviet Union, were ready to oppose its fascist leaders.

This manner of interpreting those tragic days of June and July 1941 in the Jewish papers epitomised the total control the Communist Party achieved over the Jewish press and the implementation of the official version concerning the *domestic Holocaust*. Whereas worldwide the term ‘Holocaust’ gained an international recognition, the tendency in Romania was to downplay the dimension of the atrocities and to present the anti-Semitic ‘measures’ during the Second World War as a ‘natural’ consequence resulting from the alliance with Nazi Germany. This presentation raises a contradiction. The evidence of the crimes and the national affiliation of the criminals in Transnistria made it difficult to deny or to deflect the crimes. On the other hand, Transnistria became a symbol of territorial conquest and subjugation of other peoples that stood in flagrant contradiction with the propagated image of the ‘peaceful, non-aggressive and righteous Romanian people.’ Therefore, Romanian society preferred to ignore completely Transnistria, whereas the regime expected the Jews to ‘forget’ this chapter of their suffering during previous regimes. In a few years, Transnistria gradually disappeared from the columns of newspapers and the phenomenon of denying the domestic Holocaust received two specific features: denying through trivialisation and deflective denial.

The deflective denial became common in Romania in a manner that was similar to other former Nazi-allied countries shortly after the war. The responsibility for the physical and psychological destruction of the Jewish population rested with the Germans and local Fascists, even though the pogrom from Iași carried out by the Romanian police and gendarmerie, helped out by German military individuals and accompanied by local

Romanians of all social and professional categories<sup>341</sup>, took place only a few years before. During the delayed trial in 1948 of the criminals responsible for the pogrom, the prosecuting authorities tried to deflect the accountability of the Romanian state leadership and local Romanians, instead suggesting that responsibility for the pogrom was with the German regime and some Iron Guard supporters.<sup>342</sup> This version was later officially adopted by the totalitarian communist regime and taught in schools and universities. Deflective denial became the most common form of the Holocaust denial. It dominated public memory in many Central and Eastern European Countries and still continues to persist to this day; in Romania deflective denial became almost a state doctrine. However, it is not atypical of other former communist countries, but it is interesting to note that the same mechanism functioned for decades after the war in Western Europe as well.<sup>343</sup>

After the communist regime was established in 1948, despite the judiciary processes in Romanian courts that continued up to the mid 1950s, resulting in guilty verdicts against war criminals that carried out the *domestic Holocaust*, little was known about them in the public sphere.

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<sup>341</sup> Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască 1933-1944*, vol.II, București: Hasefer, 2003, p.93.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. p.100.

<sup>343</sup> Michael Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare prin comparație. Negarea Holocaustului în țările postcomuniste din Europa Centrală și de Est*, Iași: Polirom, 2002, p.49.

## **Chapter V: Dealing with war crimes**

### **1. The judicial aftermath of the domestic Holocaust: trials against Romanian war criminals**

During the Communist period as well as after the fall of Communism, Romanian historiography avoided approaching a subject that could have recalled the atrocities committed mainly by the Romanian military during the Second World War. Therefore, there is no specialized literature related to the prosecution and sentencing of Romanian war criminals because it would have compromised the image of the “brave” Romanian Army promoted by the Communist Party after 1950, an army fighting on the side of the allied Soviet troops, and which liberated not only Romania, but also Hungary and Czechoslovakia from Hitler’s yoke. In spite of the fact that Romania took part in the Second World War three years on Germany’s side and only one year on the side of the Allies, articles, studies and publications were exclusively dedicated to that one-year of fighting against Nazi Germany. This image was consequently cultivated not only in historiography, but also in literature, art, cinema and after 1957, on television. In the same way, the facts about the domestic Holocaust were distorted and denied and the issue of the Romanian war criminals gradually disappeared from public consciousness.

Since the collapse of the Communist regime, due to the freedom of expression, the view on Romania’s role in the Second World War has changed. On the one hand, the image of the anti-fascist Romanian army fighting against the German invaders kept its relevance to the present. On other hand, the participation of the Romanian Army on Germany’s side in the war against the Soviet Union was depicted as a liberation war in order to liberate Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from the Soviet occupation and to fight Bolshevism. Exceptionally, the Romanian Army, and therefore Romania itself, had to fight against

Bolshevism as well as against Fascism! The inscription on a monument in the Central Park of Timișoara erected during the Communist regime “in the honour of the Romanian soldiers that fought against the fascist hordes” was extended with “that fought against the fascist *and Bolshevik* hordes”. Also more and more Romanian historians approached the topic about the role of the Romanian Army on the Eastern front, but with very few exceptions they maintained a similar nationalist perspective. It was the historians, researchers and scholars outside Romania who attracted the world’s attention to the crimes carried out by the Romanian military and civil authorities in Transnistria, Bessarabia and Bukovina.

Practically, there are no relevant studies on prosecutions, court investigations and trials concerning Romanian war criminals. Apart from the Antonescu trial when besides Antonescu, other twenty-three of his close collaborators were indicted and sentenced by the so-called “People’s Court” in May 1946, very little is known about the trials of hundreds of Antonescu’s executioners, that pitilessly and overzealously carried out the criminal orders or acted on their own initiative.<sup>344</sup> Some information on these trials is only available in the contemporary press up to 1948, as a relatively free press still existed until that point, but nowadays there is a serious lack of information on this topic, which throws doubt upon the existence of such trials. But the results archive researches I carried out for this study dispels any doubts and gives a convincing image not only about the sequence of the investigations, but also about the dimension of the crimes committed. The documents issued by Romanian judicial authorities confirm the ordeal endured by the deportees as testified in many eyewitness testimonies of the survivors. This chapter refers only

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<sup>344</sup>The process of coming to terms with the own past during the Second World War had more success in Romania’s neighbouring country, Hungary, since historians were not that reserved approaching topics related to Hungarian criminals of war. Owing to their research we know that in Hungary the “People’s Courts” have pronounced approximately 27,000 sentences against persons found guilty for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Until 1<sup>st</sup> March 1948 there were 322 sentences to death and 146 of these had been already carried out. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, Tony Judt (editors), *Procese în Europa. Al doilea război mondial și consecințele lui*, Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2003, p.298. Original version in English: István Deak, *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and its Aftermath*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

marginally to the Antonescu-trial, not only because the details of this trial are altogether well known, but also because of the obvious differences between the Antonescu trial and the rest of the trials that went on until the mid 1950s. Whereas those indicted in the Antonescu trial were basically authors of criminal orders, the majority of war criminals put on trial were essentially executioners. Most of them were soldiers and officers, former gendarmes and guards at the labour camps and ghettos in Transnistria and committed murders or atrocities of their own devices. Higher rank officers acted mainly as satraps of the Antonescu regime. Even if they did not kill themselves, they worked out the details of the orders received from Antonescu or from his ministers and implemented them through their subordinates. Often life and death depended on these details. But the majority of those indicted had to give account before the court for killing and torturing civilians in the occupied territory, including the Jews deported to Transnistria as well as political prisoners and prisoners of war. Several officers and guards that led the Jewish labour detachments in Romanian territory as well as those who were responsible for the pogrom in Iași were also called to account.

The trials against war criminals involved in crimes committed in Transnistria and Bessarabia, i.e. in the territory occupied from the Soviet Union seemed to have priority for the Romanian courts. During the first three years after the war, trials dealing with crimes committed beyond the country's border predominated. Also those suspected of collaborationism with the former pro-German regime were brought before the court already during 1945, like the group of the five leaders of the Jewish Head Office.<sup>345</sup> Later on at the end of 1940s, alleged criminals were put on trial also for atrocities committed on Romanian territory against the Jewish population, like the trial against those responsible

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<sup>345</sup> The Jewish Head Office (Centrala Evreilor din România) was the Jewish council set up in 1942, by the Antonescu government after the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Romania have been abolished. Its tasks were to implement all government orders regarding Jews to act as the representative Jewish body and to deal with the spiritual and material needs of the community.

for the pogrom of Iași, which started on 14 July 1948. However, these criminals have been condemned after other judicial stipulations.

The fact that the trials against war criminals took place in a period when the Communists gradually took over the power in the state until they achieved total control over the judiciary and prosecution, complicates the research on this topic and makes it more difficult to distinguish between real war criminals and opponents within the army against the communist regime who were put on trial and condemned for alleged war crimes. Only a serious investigation of every case could make a clear distinction between real war criminals and opponents of the regime. The cases included in this chapter were processed on the basis of court and prosecution material existing in different archives. The task of this investigation is to present the judicial process involved in judging alleged war criminals, but not to establish whether those sentenced as war criminals were indeed war criminals or not.<sup>346</sup>

The prosecution against Romanian war criminals was based on the decree-law emitted on 21 April 1945 by the Minister of Justice Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and given royal assent by the King. A previous decree from 31 August 1944 already stipulated prosecution against those responsible for the “country’s disaster”. The new, more detailed decree-law 312/1945 replaced the decree from August 1944, extending the definition for “prosecuting and sanctioning those responsible for the country’s disaster or war crimes”. This legislative regulation had to satisfy the obligations Romanian assumed in the armistice of 12 September 1944 as well as later in the peace treaty from Paris concerning the prosecution of war criminals. One could distinguish two main categories of offences: article 1 first refers only to those “responsible for the country’s disaster” discussed in the following two

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<sup>346</sup> After the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 some of those condemned for war crimes have been considered and presented in various articles and speeches as anti-communist opponents. It was the case of Dumitru Beu sentenced to twelve years forced labour. He was released from prison due to the amnesty decree 421/1955. Cora Rodica Radu, Tatăl meu Dumitru Beu, in: *Memoria*, no. 43 (no.2/2003), Fundatia Culturală Română, p.57.

paragraphs. According to these paragraphs, were considered responsible for the country's disaster "those who militated for Hitlerism or Fascism and having the effective political power, permitted the German troops to march into the country" as well as "those who after 6 September 1940 militated for the preparation or fulfilment of the above mentioned acts through speech, writing or any other means." The article 2 of the decree-law mentions besides the term of the "country's disaster" also that of "war crimes" and enumerates fourteen offences defined as war crimes. Further articles state the penalty and procedure of the investigation concerning the offences of both categories. Some of the paragraphs of article 2 refer precisely to acts that became elements of the Holocaust: Art 2; § d): "Are culpable for the country's disaster and for war crimes, those who ordered or carried out acts of terror, cruelty or suppression of the population in the territories of war operations; § e) ordered or carried out collective or individual repression for reasons of political or racial persecution; § f) ordered or organised exhausting labour or displacement and transportation of persons for the reason to exterminate them; § l) enriched themselves illicitly during their participation in the war, profiteering from their links with such persons or from the hitlerist, fascist, or racial measures; § m) ordered or initiated to set up ghettos or concentration camps or deportations for political or racial reasons."<sup>347</sup> The decree-law stipulated the death sentence, life imprisonment or hard labour and detention between 3-25 years. The authors of the decree-law 312/1945 sought on one hand to punish Antonescu and some of his collaborators for the attack and war against the Soviet Union (art.2, § a.), but on the other hand one can see also the will of the lawmaker to call to account the moral authors and many executioners of the *domestic Holocaust*. Whereas the accusations against the Antonescu-group concerned the circumstances under which Romania joined the alliance with Germany, the war against the Soviet Union and the persecution of opponents, especially of Communists, the court instances set up in order to

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<sup>347</sup> *Procesul Mareşalului Antonescu. Documente*, Bucharest: Europa Nova, 1997, pp.54-59.

deal with cases of murder, torture, plunder, were dealing effectively with acts related to the Holocaust.

Investigations that aimed to put on trial Romanian war criminals started even before the decree-law 312/1945 came into effect, being founded on the decree from August 1944. Some of the accused were in Romania, like General Nicolae Cepeleanu who in January 1945 committed suicide when he discovered his name among those accused of war crimes. It was alleged, as the left-wing newspaper *Victoria* reported that Cepeleanu used to punish excessively the Jews who came late to work and arbitrarily increased the labour quota for the Jews working in the forced labour detachments.<sup>348</sup> Another article in *Victoria* that blamed Cepeleanu of being a “brute who sent to death thousands of innocent Jews for insignificant departures from labour discipline”, turned the public’s attention to the fact that the investigation and prosecution in Cepelanu’s case must go on even after his death in order to find and punish all accomplices who helped General Cepeleanu to carry out his “foolish and murderous operations”.<sup>349</sup> Other officers accused of war crimes were still in military service at units stationed in Czechoslovakia after the armistice of 12 September 1944, as the Romanian Army took part in military operations abroad in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in cooperation with the Soviet troops fighting against the German army. Some of these units were still in Czechoslovakia even after Germany’s capitulation. That was the case of captains Eugen Bălăceanu and Radu Ionescu from the headquarter of the infantry unit of the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Army. Their unit was situated in Kuřim, a little town in Czechoslovakia, when they learnt from newspapers that their names were on a list of alleged war criminals. Captain Bălăceanu was arrested and held at a military court prison until his transfer to the competent judicial authorities. Captain Ionescu first learnt by mid May 1945 about the charge that was brought against him in Romania. One week later on

<sup>348</sup> Owing to General Cepeleanu 212 Jews, entire families of the men working in the forced labour detachments in Bucharest were deported in September 1942 to Transnistria for “disciplinary reasons”. Sonia Palty, *Jews! Cross the Dniester!*, in: Felicia (Steigmann) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*, p.329.

<sup>349</sup> USHMM, RG-25004M, reel 28, file 38882, vol.2; See also: I.G., *Procesul Cepeleanu nu s’a terminat*, in: *Victoria*, 17 January 1945.

22 May the court from Bucharest sentenced him to death in his absence. Persuaded by his superiors to return to Romania in order to be re-tried since the trial that led to his condemnation to death took place in his absence, he left the unit. But the prosecuting office from Bucharest, which learnt that Ionescu was alive, required the commander of the unit in Kuřin to arrest Ionescu and to transfer him with escort to Bucharest. But Ionescu left the unit before the prosecuting office's request became known. He left three letters behind addressed to different officers stating that he went to kill himself in the river Vág. But Ionescu was allegedly seen one week later at the railway station Zvolen. Therefore, the military authorities started the search for captain Ionescu considered a deserter, whereas Bălăceanu was sent to Bucharest to be tried by the "People's Court" for war crimes. Captain Ionescu was accused of participation at the massacres in Odessa on 24-25 October 1941.<sup>350</sup>

Once the decree-law 312/1945 came into effect, several trials were set up during the summer of 1945 that eventually pronounced nearly one hundred sentences. There were several groups of people indicted for war crimes involved in different cases in which the Court had to pronounce sentences. Few of those put on trial were acquitted. For instance, the sentences pronounced against the group no.5 of war criminals consisted of ten condemnations to hard prison between three and fifteen years, three condemnation to correctional prison between one and three years and two acquittals.<sup>351</sup> Against the group no.6 the sentences were harder, reflecting also the gravity of the case: eight condemnations to lifelong forced labour, two sentences to twenty-five years forced labour, one sentence to twelve years of forced labour, and one to ten years of forced labour. Three accused were acquitted.<sup>352</sup> In the case of group no.8 seventeen sentences were

<sup>350</sup> USHMM, RG-25004M, reel 27, file 39181, vol. 6: Report issued by the Martial Court of the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Army in Kuřim (Czechoslovakia) at 30 May 1945.

<sup>351</sup> *România Liberă*, no.297, 25.07.1945, p.1.

<sup>352</sup> *România Liberă*, no.301, 30.07.1945.

pronounced<sup>353</sup>, whereas the court had already made the preparations for the trial of the next group of war criminals. The newspapers, especially the left-wing and the Jewish press, often used to report about these trials. The readers of such reports could learn about the savagery the detainees and deportees had to endure from their torturers in the military. There were trials not only against those who served in Transnistria, but also against officers and guards that were in charge of guarding the Jewish forced labour detachments around the country.<sup>354</sup> The left-wing newspaper *România Liberă* published also the names of Jewish eyewitnesses summoned by the prosecution to bear testimony at the trials. The articles about the ongoing prosecution against war criminals published in the columns of these newspapers also helped to reveal the dimension of the crimes committed in Transnistria. In an article from July 1945 reporting about the trial against the group no.6 *România Liberă* pointed out how Leonid Pop the prefect of Berezovka handed over to the Germans 30-40,000 Jews. The accused lieutenant Hergheliu declared that he participated at the execution carried out by the Germans of 300 Jews and handed them over other 1,000 Jews. According also to *România Liberă*, the accused Dumitru Terteleanu admitted he handed over to the Germans 900 Jews and executions took place without any concerns. The prefects in Transnistria considered that “the life of the Jews is worthless”.<sup>355</sup>

In the category of “collaborationist” were included also some Jews. In August 1945 five of the former leaders of the Jewish Head Office were put on trial according to article 8 of the decree-law 312/1945. In the act of indictment they were called “traitors of the Romanian people and of the Jewish population” as they agreed to head the Jewish Head Office established in accordance with Gustav Richter’s<sup>356</sup> conception. They were accused of denouncing their Jewish fellows unable to pay the burdening taxes the government imposed on the Jewish community, of accepting without any protest the deportation from

<sup>353</sup> *România Liberă*, no.16.07.1945.

<sup>354</sup> Liana Maxy, A început judecarea lotului 5 de criminali de război, in: *România Liberă*, no.290, 15 July 1945, p.5.

<sup>355</sup> Cincisprezece călăi ai Transnistriei dau socoteală poporului, in: *România Liberă*, no.295, 23.07.1945, p.2.

<sup>356</sup> German attaché dealing with the Romanian “Jewish question”.

Bucharest to Transnistria of about two hundred Jews, of corruption and arbitrariness in relation with their Jewish fellows as well as of pro-German and anti-Allies propaganda.<sup>357</sup>

The great amount of files concerning prosecution and condemnation of Romanian war criminals and the lack of specialized literature on this topic does not enable our limited study to offer a general overview on how the justice apparatus of the post-war period in Romania acted towards accused war criminals. Only a separate research and a meticulous examination of the available archive material related to Romanian war criminals could shed more light on this matter. Our purpose is confined in this chapter to presenting some judicial cases, which concern several accused war criminals, in order to make an assessment of how the Romanian justice apparatus dealt with alleged war criminals in the post-war period. The selected cases should also reflect on the ordeal that took place in Transnistria or elsewhere during those dark years. Whereas the guilt or the responsibility of the persons put on trial could be uncertain, the facts described in the indictments, confirmed by eyewitnesses during the trials and even decades later in memoirs and interviews provide clear proof of the crimes.

Analysing some of the most significant cases during the period 1945-1957, one can realise the growing ideological influence of the Communist Party in the prosecution and the actual writing of the indictments. Putting the cases in chronological sequences one can bring better out in relief this increasing influence of the politics on Justice. Among the court decisions during the first trials in 1945, several death sentences had been pronounced but apart from the trial against Antonescu and his close collaborators, these were not

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<sup>357</sup> When in 1942 students of the Jewish high school in Bucharest were arrested because of distributing bills on which were stamped anti-war and anti-governmental slogans, the accused Dr. Nandor Gingold asked for the hardest punishment of the students to serve as an example for all that refuse to obey. Three of the students were sentenced to death and executed. He also made a list of hostages in order to frighten the Jewish population to obey the orders given by the government. The accused Adolf Gross-Grozea, former chief executive of the financial department, abused his position by extorting money from the Jewish population in exchange for forced labour exemption certificates. The accused Matei Grünberg-Willman was the editor of the "Jewish Newspaper" and the chief of the Jewish Head Quarter's press. He wrote several pro-German and anti-Allies articles. In one of them, he concluded that the Jews must accept the establishment of a Jewish state but with Hitler's aid (!), not in Palestine but somewhere else. CSIER, file VII 555, pp.4-39.

carried out. These trials took place according to the decree-law 321/1945 that set up the “People’s Court” stipulating also the sentence to death. The majority of these cases deal with crimes committed by Romanian military of various ranks in the territory ceded in June 1940 to the Soviet Union and “liberated” by the Romanian and German army in July 1941 i.e. Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, excepting the case of the trial of the pogrom in Iași and that of the “reprisals” in Odessa. In the case of the massacre of Odessa<sup>358</sup> two generals, Nicolae Macici<sup>359</sup> and Constantin Trestoreanu, were sentenced to death as well as other officers involved in the cruel “reprisals”. During the same trial also the former governor of Bukovina General Cornel Calotescu was convicted of “racial persecution”, ordering to set up the ghetto in Czernowitz and the deportation of the Jewish population. However, the latter was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment but was released in 1955 after an amnesty decree, whereas his former chief of staff, Stere Marinescu, sentenced to death was still in 1957 in detention, asking for Calotescu’s help for bearing testimony on his behalf at his appeal trial in October 1956.<sup>360</sup> Beside the massacre of Odessa, the Court brought sentences also against the former commanders of the concentration camps of Târgu Jiu, Vapniarca, Smerinca, Slivina, Vârtujeni, and other officers and officials of the Antonescu regime charged with guarding or administration of the labour detachments and ghettos in Transnistria. In spite of the fact that the concentration camp for political prisoners only of Târgu Jiu was set up in Romania (the Old Kingdom) and not in Transnistria, those convicted for the detention conditions in the camp of Târgu Jiu were

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<sup>358</sup> After the NKVD had blown up the Headquarter of the Romanian Army in Odessa on 23 October 1941, Antonescu ordered reprisals against the Jewish population. About 22,000 people had been machine-gunned, burned alive, crowded in four sheds near Odessa that were blown up in the following days. Others were shot or hanged on the street of the town. Gen. Macici and Gen. Trestoreanu were charged to organise and carry out the reprisals. Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască 1933-1944*, vol.II, Bucharest:Hasefer, 2003, pp.180-189.

<sup>359</sup> Nicolae Macici participated after 23 August 1944 in the battles against the German and Hungarian troops in Transylvania. However, this fact could not absolve him of the crimes of Odessa. Certain groups of Romanian intellectuals consider him a victim of the communist regime. He died in prison in 1950.

[www.aliantacivicabucuresti.ro](http://www.aliantacivicabucuresti.ro) (viewed on 16 September 2004). See also *România Liberă*, 8 October, 2001.

<sup>360</sup> In a statement written by Calotescu on the request of Marinescu’s lawyer addressed to the County Court Pitești, he tried to absolve Marinescu of any responsibility for the deportation of the Jewish population, declaring that Marinescu had no competence in giving orders or executing any orders relating the “evacuation”. CSIER, file 4411, vol. III, p.202.

tried together with those responsible for the death and mistreatment of the Jewish deportees in other camps like Smerinca, Slivina, Vapniarca situated in Transnistria. The latter was run as a camp both for political prisoners and for Jewish deportees detained there for “disciplinary reasons”. Some of them were sentenced to death, including Modest Isopescu, the prefect of the county Golta, Vasile Mănescu, chief of the police in Dumanovka, major Romulus Ambrus and lieutenant Florin Ghineraru, commander of the ghetto of Bershad. The last remained in the memory of many survivors as a very cruel person.<sup>361</sup> However, in this case also, the death penalty was not carried out. Similar to other trials that took place later on, some of the accused were declared “disappeared” and were sentenced in absence. For instance Captain Cristodor Popescu, commander of the concentration camp of Vapniarca who was also sentenced to death could not be found, arrested and brought before the court.<sup>362</sup>

The so-called “People’s Court” initiated investigations and trials even against journalists who “prized the Antonescu regime, have written on the behalf of Germany’s victory or instigated racial hatred”.<sup>363</sup> In June 1945 the editor in chief of the notorious anti-Semitic magazine *Porunca Vremii* (The Time’s Order), Ilie Rădulescu, a kind of Romanian Julius Streicher<sup>364</sup>, was arrested for instigating murder and blackmail as well as for “betraying his country”.<sup>365</sup> However, in most such cases the accused were acquitted. The “People’s Court” that had only a temporary competence in trying war criminals according to the decree-law 321/1945 which was abolished on 31 May 1946. Therefore further trials concerning war crimes, which took place after May 1946, were within the competence of the military and civil penal courts.

<sup>361</sup>The cruel crimes imputed to Lieutenant Ghineraru are mentioned also by a survivor of the ghetto of Bershad, Freda Rosenblatt in her memoir but she is wrong asserting that Ghineraru was sentenced only to 12 years prison. Freda Rosenblatt in: Dr. Felicia (Steigman) Carmelly, *Shattered!...*p.371.

<sup>362</sup> USHMM, R-25004M, reel 19, file 4011, vol. I, p.128.

<sup>363</sup> USHMM, R-25004M, reel 19, file 4094, p.231.

<sup>364</sup> Julius Streicher was the founder of the German Jew-baiting magazine *Der Stürmer*. He was tried and sentenced to death by the International Court of Justice in Nuremberg being hanged in October 1946. Israel Gutman (editor), *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, Band III, München, Zürich: Piper, 2002, p.1375.

<sup>365</sup> *Renașterea noastră*, no. 30, 7.06.1945, p.3.

The penal court of Bucharest issued on 12 August 1949 the sentences related to the trial of thirty-three accused of war crimes, respectively of murder and complicity to murder. Two further accused were put on trial for destroying official documents and breaking professional secrecy related to the prosecution against war criminals. In this trial one can distinguish four cases of breaking the law according to the law 291/1947, modified by the decree no. 207/1948. The crimes the majority of the accused were responsible for consisted of maltreating and ordering the murder of Jews or killing Jewish civilians in the territory occupied by the Romanian Army. Most of these accused were former army officers of various ranks, from general to sergeant, whereas the civilians put on trial were local civil servants in the time the crimes had been committed. The age of the accused varied between 30 and 58 years. About half of those convicted were declared disappeared and wanted by the police. The court pronounced the sentences in their absence. There is still no evidence where these accused disappeared. One could allege that some of them left the country when they learnt about the prosecution against them, others hid within the country's border<sup>366</sup> or joined the anti-communist resistance guerrillas in the mountains.

From the indictment written by the prosecutors and based on the declarations of other army officers, emerges that General Olimpiu Stavrat and major Gheorghe Vartic were responsible for the execution of about 8-10 elderly Jews in the little town of Siret. The group of the old, Orthodox Jews wearing traditional caftans was brought to the army headquarter, being accused of espionage and of attacking the Romanian Army. The same day they were executed without any investigation. Major Vartic was involved also in the crimes committed in Herța on 5 and 6 July 1941. First he installed the new Romanian local authorities, appointing the accused Panait Chifu as new mayor, Mihail Ștefănescu as deputy mayor, and Ilie Sticlaru as chief of the local police. Then he worked out in

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<sup>366</sup> The "People's Court" asked in April 1945 the police of Tulcea to check whether according to an information the wanted Ștefan Solomon, former commander of a Jewish forced labour detachment was hiding indeed in the Danube Delta after he learnt about the ongoing investigations against him. USHMM, RG-25004M, file 4011, vol.II, pp.48-60.

collaboration with the above mentioned accused the plan of a local civil guard whose members were also the accused Costică Bejenaru, Mihail Stoleriu, Ignat Costică, Iancu Alexandru, Constantin Popescu and Victor Pitei. It was the same major Vartic who ordered the concentration of the Jews of Herța in the four synagogues of the town and in the cellar of Avram Rosen's house. This action was carried out by the soldiers of the Division 7 Infantry under the command of Gen. Stavrat, coordinated by members of the local civil guard who were extremely brutal towards the Jews. Due to this action, about 1,500 Jews became hostages, being kept locked by the army. The houses and the goods of the Jews were plundered under the sight of Gen. Stavrat. The accused Constantin Popescu who knew very well the houses where Jews were living, showed the plunderers the houses of the Jews. On the same evening of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1941, during a meeting at Ignat Costică's place major Gheorghe Vartic, Panait Chifu and Mihail Ștefănescu drew up lists of "suspects", alleged Jewish Communists, supporters of Communism or former local Soviet officials. Their list had been completed with other names added to it by the accused Ilie Sticlaru, Costică Popescu, Iancu Alexandrescu, Victor Pitei, Costică Ignat, Haralambie Basarabeanu, and Mihail Stoleru. The next day Popescu Constantin personally identified the Jews put on that list who were to march to the execution place. The accused Pitei, Ignat, and Stoleru selected from this group Jewish girls and young women who were then repeatedly raped by soldiers. About 100 Jews, men and women were escorted to the place called "Kislinger's mill" and the other 32 were led into the garden of a certain Chirulescu, behind the city hall. The executions that took place at those places were carried out by the accused Motrici Gheorghe who, according to the eyewitness accounts, fired into the crowd with a machine gun, Leonte Vasile shooting with a German machine gun and Istrate N. Acic. These accused chased the groups of Jewish men, women, children and elderly to the place of execution. They were forced to dig their own graves and shot from behind. Eyewitness Burcă Ioja declared he saw the accused Vasile when he shot a woman holding

her child in her arms. Further eyewitnesses summoned by the court testified that at Kislinger's mill there was a heap of corpses guarded by a tall soldier, unidentified during the prosecution who from time to time shot into the heap of bodies when he observed that some were still moving. Also the four meter-deep pit in Chirulescu's garden was full of corpses. According to these testimonies a five years old girl was thrown alive into the pit and people had been shot not only at the execution places but also while marching there. The accused tried to absolve themselves of the crimes, stating that they had to execute orders but the court rejected their objections, proving that they acted voluntarily.

Another case was the slaughter of 880 Jews and 5 Christians and the execution of 45 Jews on 6 July 1941 and the execution of 37 Jews on 8 July 1941 in Noua Suliță. The main responsible for the crimes committed in Noua Suliță was considered the commander of the Battalion 9 colonel Vasile Cârlan as well as the already mentioned Gen. Stavrat. After the Romanian troops entered Noua Suliță, colonel Cârlan ordered reprisals because of alleged Jewish attacks against the Romanian Army. Fourteen eyewitnesses, among them even a colonel, testified that soldiers of the battalion 9 started at colonel Cârlan's order a real man-hunt that ended with the killing of 885 people. During this ordeal a group of 45 Jews was presented to colonel Cârlan. He ordered sub lieutenant Radu, commander of the pioneer platoon, to execute all of them. The order was carried out unwaveringly near a pond. Both Cârlan and Radu had been seen shooting the victims. But the ordeal of the Jews of Noua Suliță continued also during the following days. On 7 July it was Gen. Stavrat with his division who entered Noua Suliță. The small town looked already devastated with burning houses, corpses in the streets and in the courtyards. Instead of cleaning the place of corpses, gendarmes commanded by major Vartic Gheorghe, who received orders from Gen. Stavrat, concentrated about 3,000 Jews in the local spirits factory. On the 8 July major Vartic informed Gen. Stavrat that "a Jew who could not have been identified had attacked the Romanian Army but nobody was injured". This pretext

determined Gen. Stavrat to order immediately the execution of 50 Jews concentrated in the spirits factory. He charged lieutenant Costea Emil to carry out his order. But the lieutenant refused. Due to this, major Vartic appealed to the Gendarmerie commander of the town Hotin, major Traian Drăgulescu who accepted the order and charged the gendarmerie chief of the village Marșelnița, officer Gheorghe Hotea with the details of the execution. Among those who took part in the execution platoon were also Ion Rădulescu, warrant officers Gheorghe Grigore and Alexandru Viziru. The consequence of this order and its execution was the death of another 37 people. The court refused once again the excuse of the accused that they were acting under military command and referred to lieutenant Costea who was able to refuse to carry out the criminal orders.

In the same trial during the summer of 1949, sentences were pronounced against those who arrested and tortured 18 Comsomolists and were responsible for the execution of five of them, sentenced to death by the Martial Court of the Antonescu regime. There is no evidence how many of them were Jewish. However, the main reason for which they were arrested was their political activity during the Soviet regime. Once again, the Court tried racial and political crimes without making any distinction between them.

To this trial belonged also an interesting case of violating professional secrecy, which could have favoured one of the accused during his trial. In a Moldavian village the sergeant of the local police office stole the files of the prosecution related to Vasile Leonte and told him about the ongoing prosecution against him, which was secret at that time in July 1947. They even contacted and determined the eyewitness Vasile Gherghilaș to replace from the files his initial deposition that mentioned the crimes committed by Leonte with a deposition that failed to contain such references. However the police chief noticed the violation of law and ordered the arrest of the sergeant Dumitrache and of Vasile Leonte.

All the accused that could have been found, were arrested during 1948. There were issued 35 arresting orders but only 23 of them appeared at the trial. The other 12 were declared disappeared and sentenced in absence. The trial took place during the months of July and August 1949. The sentences were pronounced at the last session of 12 August 1949. The court sentenced six of the accused to life- long hard labour detention, thirteen to 25 years, five to 20 years, two to 15 years, other two to 10 years hard labour detention, one to 5 years and another one to 3 years correctional prison, whereas two were sentenced to 3 years hard prison. Because one of the accused, lieutenant colonel Drăgulescu Traian was ill in the Jilava prison hospital, no sentence was pronounced against him that time.

In spite of the high number of the trials, especially during 1945, the process of doing justice to the victims of the domestic Holocaust slowed down after 1946. In some cases the investigations were prolonged and the trials were all the time postponed. One such case was the investigation and trial of those accused of being responsible for the pogrom of Iași and the death of thousands Jewish citizens from Iași on the “trains of death”. Investigation on the pogrom of Iași had been initiated shortly after Romania changed sides joining the alliance with the Coalition of the United Nations in the war against Nazi Germany. Especially in the Jewish press there was an increasing number of articles demanding the punishment of those responsible for the massacre in Iași at the end of June 1941. In 1947 the authors of these articles still could reproach the political leadership of the country that six years since the tragic events and two years of “democratic” government, the criminals of Iași still can walk free on the streets of the city. “Our country must purge itself of its shame, it must recover its reputation punishing those who mocked the Romanian humaneness.”<sup>367</sup> Those who were waiting for a punishment of the criminals of Iași became more and more suspicious that certain groups and political circles were interested in the final trial while the Jewish citizens of Iași had to live along those who

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<sup>367</sup>I. Petz, Asasinii de la Sculeni și Iași trebuie judecați, in: *Neamul Evreesc*, no.2, 22.02.1947, p.1.

pitilessly murdered Jews in June 1941. “The Jewish population of Iași did not take revenge against the murders when the Soviets entered the town on 20 August 1944 because it still had hope that legal justice will be done”.<sup>368</sup> In March 1947 the entire editorial office of the Jewish newspaper *Neamul Evreesc* addressed an open letter to the country’s Prime Minister, Dr Petru Groza. The letter began with the usual appreciations regarding the “democratic” achievements of the Groza government but the authors of the open letter rhetorically asked the prime minister, what became of the murderers of Iași since they were still free, while in other neighbour countries like Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia such criminals were already in prison.<sup>369</sup> One month later, in April 1947, the beginning of the Iași trial was announced but shortly before it could have begun, it was postponed to 9 May. However, the military court postponed the trial once again to 28 May, invoking that of 303 witnesses of the accusation only one was present, whereas of 623 witnesses of the defence only three came to Court.<sup>370</sup>

For the Communists the year 1947 was a decisive one in the process of seizing the state power. Some evidence indicates in the direction of the instrumentalisation of the trials against war criminals for the political prestige of the regime. However, the Communists accused the “right-wing elements” that allegedly still persisted in the Justice and Police apparatus, for protecting the criminals and deliberately delaying the trials.<sup>371</sup> The delay of the trial related to the pogrom of Iași made even a suicide victim. A lady aged 26 living in Bucharest but native of Iași, who became depressed after the pogrom of Iași, had poisoned herself leaving behind a letter in which she explained her desperate deed.<sup>372</sup> In April 1947 the minister of Justice, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, explained in Parliament why the trial could

<sup>368</sup> M. Rudich, Dreptate, in: *Renașterea Noastră*, no.125, 22.02.1947, p.1.

<sup>369</sup> *Neamul Evreesc*, no.3, 25.03.1947, p.1.

<sup>370</sup> *România Liberă*, no. 835, 5.05.1947, p.4.

<sup>371</sup> Lothar Rădăceanu, communist labour minister, denounced in March 1947 the tendencies of whitewashing the criminals of Iași, promising at the meeting of the Jewish Socialists to take actions in order to change the anti-Semitic mentality in society. *Cronica internă*, in: *Renașterea noastră*, no.129, 22.03.1947, p.4.

<sup>372</sup> In her letter Licia Taler wrote: “While I am struggling with my life enduring the most horrible pain, the murderers of my parents and brothers are walking freely on the Lăpușneanu Street and on Bucharest’s streets, defying the Justice and their terrible deeds they have committed. Because of that I prefer to die, begging the competent authorities to do their best. Ibid.

still not take place. He asserted that those found responsible for the pogrom had been arrested and held under arrest but investigations were not yet closed. In May 1946 the case was transferred from the “People’s Court” to the Martial Court, but the military court released some of the accused during 1946 without his consent. Pătrășcanu promised that those released will be arrested again assuring that their trial will soon begin.<sup>373</sup> The trial of Iași moved to Bucharest but it took place only in 1948, after Romania became officially a communist country and any political opposition had been repressed. After the constitutional monarchy had been abolished some articles incriminating the Royal Palace had been published, presenting the forced abdication of the King Mihai as the elimination of the last obstacle in trying and punishing the murders of the Iași pogroms.<sup>374</sup> On the eve of the trial, the new minister of Justice Bunaciu explained how a series of complicities in which the King himself would have been involved, had hindered the Court to do its duty. Proudly he emphasized: “Only the people’s democracy made it possible to try and to sentence those responsible for the pogrom of Iași, throwing light on this whole matter.”<sup>375</sup> The trial of the pogrom of Iași was opened at the court session of 15 June 1948 and ended on 26 June 1948. The figure of those accused at the first session of the court in May 1947 was much higher than of those tried.<sup>376</sup> Among the accused was also Aurel Triandaf who was responsible for the painful death of the Jews transported with the “train of death” from Iași to Călărași in July 1941. He was arrested at the beginning of the investigations but later released after the case was passed from the “People’s Court” to the Martial Court. However, he was arrested again and sentenced to lifelong forced labour together with other 24 accused.<sup>377</sup>

<sup>373</sup> Începe procesul de la Iași, in: *Renașterea Noastră*, no.131, 5.04.1947, p.4.

<sup>374</sup> G. Spina, Dinastia și pogromul de la Iași, in: *Viața Evreească*, no.172, 8.02.1948, p.1.

<sup>375</sup> Th. Loewenstein, Documente despre procesul de la Iași, in: *Viața Evreească*, no.209, 24.10.1948, p.1.

<sup>376</sup> In May 1947 there were 94 accused, while in June 1948 only 56. Among the accused were also some “fascist journalists” like Ion Fr. Botez, the editor in chief of the local newspaper *Moldova. România Liberă*, no.835, 5.05.1947, p.4.

<sup>377</sup> The Court sentenced fifty-one accused and acquitted four. Of the accused twenty-four were sentenced to lifelong forced labour, one to lifelong hard prison, six to 25 years forced labour, twelve to 20 years forced

During the year 1948 a new wave of cases against alleged war criminals was launched. The prosecution office opened new investigations, some of them based also on testimonies published by Marius Mircu in his book *Pogromurile din Bucovina și Dorohoi* (The Pogroms of Bukovina and Dorohoi)<sup>378</sup>. In January 1948 Vladimir Rusu, the man accused of organising and taking part in the execution of 73 Jews in Sadagura in July 1941, was arrested and sentenced in September of the same year to lifelong forced labour.<sup>379</sup> The Penal Court of Bucharest pronounced further sentences in October 1948 in the case of Albu C. Ion, former policeman in Czernowitz, who in June 1942 was responsible for the deportation of 30 Jewish patients of the local hospital that were classified as non-transportable. The medical authorities of the hospital had drawn lists containing the names of those suitable for deportation but because the accused Albu C. Ion did not find these persons, he took the ill and the elderly. Many of these people waiting for surgery died shortly after their arrival in Transnistria. He also deported “brutally and pitilessly” the Jews from the old people’s home.

The investigation procedure after the establishment of the Communist regime reflects the increasing role of the Romanian Secret Service “Securitate” in revealing and catching alleged war criminals. It was the Headquarters of the State Security (Direcțiunea Generală a Securității Statului) that collected evidence and compiled files against alleged war criminals. These were sent to the prosecuting office with the Court of Justice in Bucharest that ordered the arrest of those affected. Trials against alleged war criminals continued also in the early 1950s, some of the cases tried during the previous years were retried due to the appeals the sentenced made to the Court. However, during this time the figure of the trials against anti-Communist opponents increased and one could allege that the regime used the evidence of the war crimes in order to get rid of the opponents of the regime.

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labour, one to 20 years hard prison, six to 15 years forced labour and one to 5 years forced labour. During the trial one of the accused deceased. Ultimul act al tragediei de la Iași, in: *Viața Evrească*, no.193, 4.07.1948, p.4

<sup>378</sup> USHMM, RG-2004M, reel 15, file 582, vol. I, p.51.

<sup>379</sup> *Viața Evrească*, no.204, 19.09.1948, p.1.

According to a minute paper dated May 1951 by the prosecuting office of the Court in Bucharest, an arresting order was issued on 21 April 1951 against the former mayor of Czernowitz, Octavian Lupu. He was mayor of Czernowitz from July 1941 after the Romanian troops occupied the town until mid of August of the same year, before Traian Popovici became mayor. However, Lupu had also the position of the chief of the Department for Health in Bukovina from 1941 until 1944. Having this function he was made responsible for the deportation to Transnistria of the mentally ill patients hospitalised in the mental asylum in Czernowitz. In a report of the prosecuting office it was mentioned that years ago Lupu was under arrest during previous investigations but he was found not guilty. In September 1952 the "Securitate" informed the prosecuting office that "there are no relevant proofs" to put Lupu on trial again.<sup>380</sup> In 1952 new investigations were carried out in the case of Dumitru Diaconu, former Gendarmerie officer in Răuțel-Bălți who was already sentenced to four years correctional prison for illegal appropriation of goods. The new investigations revealed that Diaconu, fulfilling the order of the commander of the Gendarmerie in Bălți, Mihail Boulescu, executed 80 Jews. The Jews were led to a pit, stripped of their valuables and shot by soldiers commanded by sergeant Sprânceană. The investigation also revealed that similar executions in Bălți took place even before the case mentioned above. On 12 July 1941 German troops executed 10 intellectuals and three days later another 30 people were executed. Although these executions could not be ascribed to the accused, they were nevertheless those who set up the Jewish ghetto and selected the persons for execution.<sup>381</sup> Also in 1952 the Penal Court of Bucharest reopened case of the gendarme Ion Haraga accused of killing the Jewish veterinary surgeon Max Rosenberg who was serving as a volunteer at the same battalion where also the accused served as a guard. Haraga Ion was first imprisoned for this crime on 20 May 1945, but he was released one year later after the Court retried his appeal and

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<sup>380</sup> USHMM, RG-2004M, reel 15, file 7107.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

found him not guilty. In March 1952 he had been arrested again and put on trial because of killing the Jewish veterinary surgeon in the battalion charged with guarding the river Bug and the railway portion between Râbnița und Bershad. One of the witnesses at the trial was even the former commander of the battalion, major Ioan Robescu, who remembered the accused Haraga reporting to him that the veterinary surgeon was a spy who often spied on the military equipment and positions of the battalion. One day the commander learnt from another Jew maltreated by Haraga that Haraga killed the veterinary surgeon. As a disciplinary measure, Haraga was removed from the battalion. According to other witnesses Haraga often used to exclaim, "I like Jewish flesh and I have already killed several Jews" and once he killed a Jew who was simply walking on the street, robbed all the valuables of the victim as he used to do with other Jews from Bershad. The accused was sentenced to 12 years forced labour but the Court found extenuating circumstances due to the "facts" that the accused committed the crime under the influence of "the tendentious education the bourgeois-landowner regime provided for him at that time, himself being a young person educated in the spirit of race hatred who could not regard the deported Jews as anything but spies".<sup>382</sup> The sentence was pronounced on 4 July 1953 when the Stalinization of the country was already a *fait accompli*. After Stalin's death the internal fights within the Romanian Communist Party were favourable for the so-called "national Communists". They were interested in reviving a latent Romanian nationalism. The crimes against the Jewish population during the Second World War became meanwhile crimes against the working class and anti-fascist elements. This tendency can also be traced to the Court files of the last trials against war criminals.

In a sentencing document issued on 12 March 1957 by the Military Court related to the trial of five war criminals, the word "Jews" or "Jewish" is only sporadically mentioned and always linked to the anti-fascist movement, suggesting that the reason for their

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<sup>382</sup> USHMM, RG-2004M, reel 15, file 7107, pp.42-45.

deportation was not their Jewish origin, but their political attitude. In the indictment one can often read about the crimes of the accused described as an “intense activity against the working class and the revolutionary movement”. The trial of 1957 took place because the accused that were already sentenced by the “People’s Court” in 1945 initiated an appeal requesting the Military Court to retry their case. Some of the accused like Stere Marinescu and Gheorghe Zlătescu, mentioned some paragraphs above when dealing with the first trials, were sentenced in 1945 to death but later the sentence to death was commuted into lifelong imprisonment. Due to the trial of March 1957, their sentences were cut down to 20 respectively 25 years imprisonment. Grigore Trepăduș, sentenced to lifelong forced labour in 1945, was sentenced in 1957 to 25 years imprisonment. However the time they had already spent in prison since 1945 was deducted from their new sentences.<sup>383</sup>

The history of the judicial aftermath of the crimes committed against civilians by the Romanian military and civil authorities as well as by common Romanian citizens in the eve and during the Second World War still raises many questions. What happened with those accused war criminals that could not be found at time they were tried? To what extent was justice done to the victims of the domestic Holocaust? Did the Justice apparatus of the communist regime serve the truth or rather the interests of the Party? The significant number of the trials and the sentences pronounced by different Romanian courts proves a certain readiness of the regime to punish the criminals. Many of these criminals were for the communist regime not only murder of Jews but also fervent anti-Communists. Therefore it was also in the interest of the Party to get rid of these right-wing elements. Both prosecutors and judges made no special distinction between politically and racially motivated crimes since the same persons convicted for torturing or killing Communists were tried within the same cases in which also those convicted for the deportation or killings of Jews were tried. According to the law 312/1945 on which most

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<sup>383</sup> USHMM, RG-2004M, reel 19, file 4001, vol. III.

of the sentences were based, racial persecution as well as persecution against political opponents was regarded as part of the oppressive pro-Nazi regime. Romania simply could have not avoided the punishment of the war criminals, regardless of the racial or political character of the crimes, since the armistice agreement of September 1944 as well as the Peace Treaty from February 1947 stipulated it. However, the trials and the matter of war criminals disappeared quite soon after 1950 from the public debates and later from the public memory, too. Romanian war criminals could not fit into the image the new nationalist ideologists of the Party prepared for Romania as a country that never harmed anybody. Denying the domestic Holocaust meant implicitly keeping silent about war crimes. It was not the country or the Romanian people as an entity that committed these crimes, but individuals, confirming the fact that there are no innocent or guilty peoples but humane and inhumane individuals regardless of the nation they belong to.

## **2. A Personal struggle for justice and reconciliation: Arnold Daghani and the investigations at Lübeck**

After the war there was a strong anti-German reaction in Europe not only among the victims of Nazism but also among people less affected by war and persecution, mainly due to the revelations about Nazi war crimes. Under these conditions, it was especially commendable for someone to seek reconciliation. Arnold Daghani was such a person. There were three main features to his endeavours of paying tribute to the victims and survivors of the slave labour camps beyond the Bug: keeping their memory alive, pursuing justice and calling for reconciliation. He took upon himself the first and the last task, through his artistic and literary creation and his conciliatory attitude towards Germans and Romanians. Daghani clearly made a distinction between peoples and individuals and knew that an entire nation cannot be punished, but those individuals who planned and carried out the murders of the Second World War had to be brought to Court to answer for their

crimes. This refers not only to the notorious war criminals, like those sentenced by non-German, i.e. Allied Courts in Nuremberg or elsewhere, but to all those ‘obscure’ executioners who were keen on killing innocent people on a massive scale.

In 1955, after the occupying powers transferred the entire judicial authority to the German courts, an important event in the process of coming to terms with the past took place. The Trial at Ulm in 1957-58 of members of Einsatzgruppe A and Gestapo, responsible for crimes in Lithuania, drew the attention of the German society, as well as of the judicial authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to the until then unknown scale of the crimes committed by Germans in the occupied territories in Eastern Europe. Due to this trial, Ministers of Justice and judicial senators of the different Lands of the FRG decided to create in Ludwigsburg on 1 December 1958 the Central Office of the County Courts Administration for the Elucidation of Nazi Crimes (Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen).<sup>384</sup> Therefore, beginning with the end of the 1950s, throughout to the 1970s, a series of investigations and trials concerning crimes committed by SS, SD, Police, auxiliary personnel of the death camps and even the German civil authorities etc., have been initiated and held by German prosecutors and judges. After former survivors brought charges and made legal depositions in German Courts against those responsible for the suffering and the death of hundreds of thousands, the German public prosecutors’s offices initiated a larger investigation in order to bring to Court those responsible for the killings and mass executions in the slave labour camps of South-western Ukraine.

Through the translation of Daghani’s diary *The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard* into German in 1960, Arnold Daghani made it possible that also the crimes in Mikhailovka and

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<sup>384</sup> The use of the terms ‘war crimes’ and ‘war criminals’ by Allied courts, and the continued use of these terms by the press, has complicated discussions about Nazi criminality. The German courts have always used the terms ‘Nazi crimes’ and ‘Nazi criminals’, dropping the adjective ‘war’, because the overwhelming majority of Nazi crimes were legally unrelated to wartime conditions. The war was used by the Nazi leaders only as an excuse, and by their apologists today as a rationalization, to hide the ideological basis of their crimes. Adalbert Rückerl, *NS-Verbrechen vor Gericht. Versuch einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Müller: Heidelberg 1982. See also online: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwigsburger\\_Zentrale\\_Stelle](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwigsburger_Zentrale_Stelle) (viewed on 23 July 2005).

Tarassivka could be included in this larger investigation. It is uncertain whether it was just a coincidence or it was Daghani's deliberate decision to publish his diary in German right at that particular time, but his decision to allow the translation of the diary into German obviously played a decisive role in opening the investigation procedures in the case of the murders and mass executions not only of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka, but also of other similar places of terror. Shortly after the German version under the title *Lasst mich leben* (Let me live) was published in Israel, the translator of Daghani's diary, Dr. Siegfried Rosenzweig, who lived in Munich, sent a copy of the book to the Chief German Prosecutor, E. Schule, in Ludwigsburg,<sup>385</sup> where the Head Office of the German County Courts Administration was located. Daghani's translated diary made a significant impact, precipitating the judicial inquiry into the crimes committed in the slave labour camps of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka. Dr Siegfried Rozenzweig also sent Daghani's diary to others personalities in Germany, like the Catholic prelate of Heidelberg, Dr Hermann Maas, who considered it "a historical document about the most awful renunciation of God and about the most dreadful sins", as well as "a call to the Germans whose tyrants and their subjects had committed such shameful deeds."<sup>386</sup> Thus, after almost twenty years, the crimes of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka became known in Germany through the translation of Daghani's diary. A further victory against oblivion and for the memory of the victims had been therefore won, but the pursuit of justice had only just begun.

The starting point of the investigation relating to the crimes committed in the slave labour camps of South-western Ukraine was based on seven documents obtained by the Head Office of German County Courts Administration (Zentralstelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen) in Ludwigsburg. Among these, the most important document was Daghani's diary, followed by an affidavit of Jewish forced labour survivors from 17

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<sup>385</sup> Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*" *Stationen im Leben des Künstlers Arnold Daghani*, Lüneburg: zuKlampen, 2002, p.211.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid*, p. 212.

May 1955, the charge of Julius Kronenfeld against the construction company Horst & Jüssen, which similarly to the Dohrmann Company, also used the labour of Jewish prisoners, the affidavit of Jewish forced labour survivors from 28 March 1960, another affidavit of other former slave labourers in SS ‘custody’, the claim for legal proceedings of Jewish forced labour survivors of 23 March 1960 and another claim dated 31 March 1960, as well as the affidavit of forced labour survivors of 3 April 1960. However, it was quite difficult to collect data about all the crimes committed in dozens of different places. Public prosecutors paid attention to every indication or evidence that could have led to a possible judicial investigation, being therefore interested in every clue or piece of evidence.

The increasing efforts of German society in the early 1960s to come to terms with the Nazi past awakened Daghani’s hopes that the murderers of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka would be put on trial. He followed these cases with interest and accumulated considerable new material. After the Head Office of the German County Courts Administration decided that the incriminatory material was sufficient for starting the investigations in the case of the slave labour camps in the South-western Ukraine, the investigation was forwarded to the Federal Court, which allocated it to the respective County Public Prosecutor Offices, to which the accused persons belonged according to their place of residence. In their turn, these Public Prosecutor Offices had to decide whether all conditions were met for a detailed investigation. Therefore, from the summer of 1960, the public prosecutors’ offices in Hildesheim, Koblenz and Lübeck opened the investigations regarding mass executions and Nazi crimes carried out under SS and SD command in the South-Western Ukraine. Later on in January 1964, the office of Hildesheim transferred its competency regarding this investigation entirely to the office in Lübeck.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file I, pp. 33 – 34.

**The crimes in Mikhailovka**

The Public Prosecutor's Office in Lübeck was led by Dr Dieter Joachim who during the investigation built up close contacts with the Daghani, even visiting them in 1974. After the investigation had been officially opened, it took years until the public prosecutor's office collected sufficient material and data relating to the suspects and eye-witnesses. The documentation contained hundreds of names, classified in card-index as well as maps, showing where the slave labour camps had been located.

By 1965 the collected material seemed to be sufficient for beginning the recording of the testimonies of the eye-witnesses. Daghani came to Lübeck in June 1965, invited by the Public Prosecutor Dieter Joachim, in order to make a formal legal deposition. It was his first official appearance before representatives of the German Court. He must have had the feeling of being on the right track in his pursuit of justice, even though it took more than twenty years to get there. Daghani himself was surprised to learn new facts about this case. What he believed about the highway as being just a connection between Gaisin and Uman, turned out to be in fact a much larger roadwork at which thousands of slave labourers had a similar fate as the inmates of Mikhailovka. He also learnt about what happened to some of the members of the personnel belonging to the Dohrmann Company and to the T.O. In a document signed by two hundred Jews, one of the T.O. man who worked as a lorry diver known by Daghani as Ernst Joseph Hennes, but whose real name was in fact Hans Emil Wippenbeck, was accused of being responsible for shooting dead one of Daghani's fellow inmates. However, not all the individuals who might have committed crimes and were mentioned in Daghani's diary, could be identified or found. Karl Ulrich, one of the T.O. men whom Daghani mentioned in his deposition as one who killed a Jew<sup>388</sup>, had meanwhile died. Daghani's deposition was one of the many depositions made by other former slave labourers or by the former employees of the

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<sup>388</sup> DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p.8.

Dohrmann Company. Especially significant is the fact that all employees of the Dohrmann Company who worked during that time at the highway gave evidence confirming the authenticity of what Daghani reported in his diary. The investigation aimed to clarify what happened to the Jewish detainees in Mikhailovka, as well as to identify who ordered and carried out their mass execution in Tarassivka on 10 December 1943.

A primary source for the events of the period between 19 August 1942 and 21 June 1943 was Daghani's diary and the statement recorded in his public deposition. The public prosecutor also owned a copy of the report written by Nathan Segall, the former spokesman of the camp, and the testimonies of some other former fellow inmates of Daghani who had been able to escape and had survived. Some of them could therefore provide information on what happened after 21 June 1943 until the beginning of August when also these eye-witnesses left the camp after pro-Soviet partisans liberated it for some hours. There is even less information about what happened after the removal of the camp from Mikhailovka to Tarassivka. Nathan Segall's report written in October 1943 barely mentions the special events in the camp of Tarassivka, only notes that at that time there were 178 Bukovinian and 170 Ukrainian Jews in the camp.<sup>389</sup> A letter written by Heinz Rosengarten to his mother on 14 September 1943, smuggled out of the camp before his tragic death, was later discovered at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, also precipitating the investigation. Without containing concrete facts or events that might have happened in the camp after 7 August 1943, Rosengarten's letter reflects the bitterness and desperation felt there due to the dreadful living conditions and the terrifying prospect of the liquidation of the camp.<sup>390</sup> What happened in Tarassivka during this time could not be recorded and neither Daghani nor other inmates could bear testimony since he had never been in Tarassivka, as none of the Jews survived the massacre. But following the leads provided

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<sup>389</sup> He managed to write this report in Moghilev, Transnistria on an authorised trip when he could leave Tarassivka for some days. DAUS, Nathan Segall, Gedächtnisprotokoll eines Augenzeugen, 21 October 1943, p.5.

<sup>390</sup> Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*", p.189.

by Daghani, the Prosecutor succeeded in tracing eye-witnesses both to the crimes committed in Mikhalovka, as mentioned in Daghani's diary, as well as to the massacre of 10 December 1943 in Tarassivaka. Since not a single Jew survived the massacre, only the T.O. men and employees of the Dorman Company were in a position to give evidence about the mass killing carried out in the morning of 10 December 1943 in Tarassivka.

During the period 19 August 1942 – 20 June 1943 there were at least twenty killing incidents. Daghani re-confirmed his accusations in his legal deposition made at the public prosecutors office in Lübeck on 9, 10, and 11 June 1965. Several killings occurred after Daghani and his wife Anișoara escaped the labour camp of Mikhailovka on 20 June 1943, for the comparative safety of the Bershad ghetto in Transnistria. The crimes committed during this time could not be witnessed by him in person, but he learnt about them in Bershad from refugee inmates who succeeded in fleeing to Bershad later on, before the liquidation of the camp. For this period the investigation took into account also the report written by the former spokesman of the camp, Nathan Segall killed during the liquidation of the camp in December 1943.<sup>391</sup> It was also difficult to witness the scenes of killings in Mikhailovka itself since the guards carried them out in most cases hidden from the views of the victim's fellow inmates, but Daghani eye-witnessed how the victims were picked up by force and were taken away, only hearing afterwards the cracking noise when the rifles went off<sup>392</sup>, he also could realise that people disappeared<sup>393</sup> and he knew the character of those members of the SS or even of the T.O. who gave orders to kill people, as well as of

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<sup>391</sup> See more details about his report in my dissertation on page 76, chapter III, Beyond the river Bug: Mapping the testimony of Arnold Daghani against other sources.

<sup>392</sup> On 21 September during work at the highway two elderly former nurses were ordered by the Lithuanian guard Wisotzkas to follow him into the cornfield. Shortly after that Daghani heard two shots. A pit for the killed women had already been dug. On 28 September 1942, two other female inmates were forced by the Lithuanian guard Wisotzkas to get off a cart. They were shot dead some hundred meters apart obviously by Wisotzkas. The scene was repeated on 5 October when the Lithuanian guard called Sukerka picked from the cart and shot dead two elderly female inmates. DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, pp. 16-17; See also Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, pp. 431 – 433.

<sup>393</sup> On 11 September a man came to the camp of Mikhailovka from the camp of Uman with special permit from the GESTAPO in order to take his relatives from Mikhailovka to Uman. Next morning Daghani realised that the man had disappeared after a young Ukrainian Jewish woman asked him about her brother. Shortly after this conversation Daghani learnt that the man was picked up by Zelinkas and Mintel and killed. DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p. 14.

their executioners (Ukrainian and Lithuanian guards). Daghani was often told about the executions when he was not at the place where it happened, but learnt about who carried them out, since inmates eye-witnessing the murder or obliged to bury the corpses<sup>394</sup> could not keep secret such shocking experiences. In some cases described by Daghani he was uncertain who the killer was and he could only allege the identity of the person who carried out the execution. However, many of these executions were ordered by superiors, and those in the line of command had even a higher responsibility than the guards themselves, who pitilessly carried them out. Sometimes the commanders, i.e. members of the SS themselves, executed the detainees.

Besides the several cases of individual murders, also selections and mass executions took place, considerably increasing the number of the victims and the gravity of the crime. Such a case occurred in November 1942 when Romanian and Ukrainian Jews, sheltered until then in a horse stable, had to be removed into the building of the local school. But because the number of the detainees was much higher than the capacity of class-rooms, about 107 Ukrainian Jews were executed. No eye-witnesses of the execution itself could be found. Daghani learnt about this killing through hearsay since such news spread always rapidly in the camp.<sup>395</sup> The execution of sixteen Jews, fourteen Ukrainian and two Bukovinian Jews on 29 August 1942 was eye-witnessed by Nathan Segall through the hole of the roof of the stable but again, no names were mentioned, only that the execution was carried out by Lithuanian guards.<sup>396</sup> On 26 April 1943 about 50 to 55 Jews were selected, transported to Krasnapolka and executed by “alien” volunteers, i.e. Ukrainian and Lithuanian guards. However, eye-witnesses gave evidence that SS officers also

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<sup>394</sup> On 14 September 1942 during the march to the Highway, a Lithuanian guard selected 24 Ukrainian men and women who had to stay back. In addition a further woman was also pulled out by force of the convoy and sent to the group of 24 people. When Daghani returned from the Highway he learnt from one of his fellow inmates, Fleischer, that he and other inmates had the task to fill up the mass grave. DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p. 15; See also Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, pp. 426 – 431.

<sup>395</sup> DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p. 9. See also Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, “*Lasst mich leben!*”..., p. 71.

<sup>396</sup> DAUS, Zeugenschaftliche Vernehmung, p. 13. See also Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, “*Lasst mich leben!*”..., p.42.

participated in the selection and killing of the Jews. The operation took place as ‘reprisals’ to the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto. Similar killings occurred also in the neighbouring camp of Ivangorod.<sup>397</sup> Obviously, somebody in a command position must have ordered these mass murders and this person might have been the camp commander at the time or the SS officer responsible for the construction works at section Uman of the DG IV, to which Mikhailovka also belonged.

The killing of 16 Jews on 29 August 1942, the selection and execution of 25 Ukrainian Jews on 14 September 1942, as well as the mass execution of 107 people in November 1942, were carried out during the time while Arthur Kiesel was the commander of the camp. The events of 26 April 1943 took place only two weeks after the command of the camp was taken over by a triad composed of Louis Glasbrenner, Emil Hartmann and Hermann Lannois. Individual crimes perpetrated by the guards occurred mainly in the period August-December 1942 and after 16 April 1943. In comparison with the previous period, from December 1942 till April 1943, while the commander of the camp was Willi Buder, only one murder happened, namely the execution of a Ukrainian Jew by the T.O. man Karl Ulrich, denotes an evident connection between the number of committed crimes and the commanders of the camp at the time.<sup>398</sup> It seems improbable that Ukrainian and Lithuanian guards would have shot labourers without the camp commander’s permission or without receiving an order from the camp commander.<sup>399</sup> However, besides the camp commanders at Mikhailovka, there were other accomplices to these crimes, such as Franz Christoffel, the supervisor of the section Uman of the DG IV (SS-Bauabschnittsleitung), who had the task to procure manpower, to ‘protect’ the camps against possible attacks by

<sup>397</sup> The names mentioned in connection with this operation are those of Franz Christoffel, Bernhard Mass, Georg Freuerstein, Ludwig Hacker and the police officer Paul Paetel. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, p. 459.

<sup>398</sup> Commanders of the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka were the following: Arthur Kiesel (18 August - 23 November 1942), Willi Buder (1 December 1942 – 14 February 1943), Willi Kustin (14 February – 16 April 1943), Louis Glasbrenner, Emil Hartmann, Hermann Lanois (16 April – 7 August 1943). DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, p. 409.

<sup>399</sup> According to eye-witnesses before two nurses have been shot dead obviously by Wisotzkas, the camp commander Kiesel had a conversation with him, probably ordering him to shoot the two nurses. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, p. 431.

the partisans, as well as to organise the quarters of the slave labourers.<sup>400</sup> Also the chief of the police protection forces (Polizeisicherungsabteilung) in the region of South-western Ukraine, the Gendarmerie senior lieutenant Walter Gieske, who was responsible for how his subordinates Christoffel, Kiesel, Glasbrenner, Hartmann, Lannois but also the Lithuanian guards, treated the Jewish slave labourers of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka.<sup>401</sup>

The names mentioned by Daghani in his legal deposition relating to the crimes of Mikhailovka are those of the Lithuanian guards Wisotzkas, Zelinkas, Sukerka, Strijenskas, of the camp commander Arthur Kiesel, of the SS officer Bernhard Mass, Walter Mintel, Oskar Friese, of the T.O. men Hans Emil Wippenbeck (known in the camp of Mihkalovka as Ernst Joseph Hennes), Karl Ulrich and Hermann Kaiser, the later being involved in the selection of the Jews who had been afterwards executed. One of the most significant agents related to the crimes at the DG IV, the SS officer Franz Christoffel, chief of the Uman section of the DG IV (SS-Bauabschnittsleiter), who had the direct command line over the camp commanders in Mikhailovka and Tarassivka, the Lithuanian and Ukrainian guards, as well as over his SS subordinates, was at the time of the investigation already deceased, whereas the identity of Arthur Kiesel could not be determined and remained unknown. As the documents of the investigation show, beside Daghani's legal deposition, also others amongst his former inmates from Mikhailovka who survived, gave evidence: Philipp Kellmer, Tvi Zimmel, Bertha Loebel, Arie Zuckermann, Efraim Fruchtel, Pepi, Mizzi and Marian Dolberg, Saharia and Amalie Sipperstein. Even the representatives of the Dohrmann Company, Josef Elsässer and Werner Bergmann, made statements for the investigation. However, the public prosecutor investigated not only the case of Mikhailovka / Tarassivka but also of other camps. Therefore former slave labourers of

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<sup>400</sup> Christoffel was involved also in other mass killings, like in Autumn 1942 near Krasnapolka where he 'supervised' a mass execution, witnessed by an T.O. man. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file I, p. 96. About the mass execution near Krasnapolka see Ibid., pp. 68-70.

<sup>401</sup> The „Polizeisicherungsabteilung“ led by Walter Gieske officially called “Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer der Ukraine – Einsatzstab Gieske” was located in Dnjepropetrovsk and had under command several battalions and companies spread out on a distance of 1300 km, cooperating with the local agencies of the Todt Organisation. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, vol. I, pp. 83 – 87.

neighbouring camps and the personnel of the construction companies which belonged to the section Uman of the DG IV, gave evidence against those responsible for crimes in or around their camps.<sup>402</sup> In fact, these local executioners of the Nazi policy did what their superiors decided in most general terms in Berlin. One can observe that the crimes of Mikhailovka as well as the miserable living conditions in the camp meant in fact the implementation of the decisions formulated at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, namely the idea to exterminate Jews ‘while constructing roads...in the course of which a large proportion of them undoubtedly would perish as a result of natural reduction.’<sup>403</sup> The eagerness of local camp commanders to accelerate the “natural reduction” caused the selection and execution of several inmates considered less efficient or useless for the construction of the road, so that besides the directives of Berlin and the policy of extermination through exhaustion, these local ‘satraps’ and their subordinates were responsible for every violently extinguished life.

#### **The liquidation of the camp in Tarassivka**

After the attack of the Ukrainian pro-Soviet partisans on the slave labour camp of Mikhailovka on 7 August 1943, the SS decided to remove the camp to Tarassivka, an obscure place, probably a collective farm. It was the last such camp in the region in which Jewish slave labourers were detained. The commander of the camp was SS-Sturmführer Laubach, who a few days before the liquidation of the camp received an order from the chief of the SS department office in Gaisin, Sturmbannführer Karl Burger, to build a defence system including some bunkers around Tarassivka for the retreating German troops.<sup>404</sup> Twenty slave labourers dug the pit which was approximately 8 meters long, 4 –

<sup>402</sup> See the case of the mass execution at the gravel pit in Friedrichowka in August 1942. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, vol. I, pp. 155-158.

<sup>403</sup> „In großen Arbeitskolonnen, unter Trennung der Geschlechter, werden die arbeitsfähigen Juden straßenbauend in diese Gebiete geführt, wobei zweifellos ein Großteil durch natürliche Verminderung ausfallen wird.“ Andrej Angrick, *The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy after the Attack on the Soviet Union*, June 22, 1941, in: *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. XXVI, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 236.

<sup>404</sup> According to the evidence given by the T.O. man Hermann Kaiser, Laubach intended to charge the T.O. personnel with the construction of the bunkers, but they refused to be involved in this matter since they

5 meters broad and 2 meters deep, situated at a distance of 150 meters from the camp. According to Laubach, on the morning of 10 December 1943, during the morning roll-call ‘suddenly’ – and for Laubach ‘totally surprisingly’ – two ‘strangers’ in grey, respectively in black SS uniform belonging to the SD<sup>405</sup> appeared and took over the command of the camp, ordering the Lithuanian guards they brought with them in a lorry to encircle the camp and to drive the Jews towards the pit. Afterwards the ‘mysterious’ two SD men started shooting the Jews, while these had to descend naked into the pit. After the bunker pit was full, the rest of the Jews were driven to a second pit used for storing potatoes during winter. In about two and half hours all the Jews were executed. The estimated number of the executed Jews varies between 235 and 500, but the most likely figure is about 400 victims.<sup>406</sup> The pits full of corpses were open for two days until local Ukrainians covered them.<sup>407</sup>

The Public Prosecutor was preoccupied with the question whether Laubach had any knowledge of the liquidation of the camp before it actually happened and who else was involved in giving the order for the mass murder. According to the evidence of Josef Elsäßer, the day before the liquidation, the SS-Hauptsturmbannführer Franz Christoffel from the department of the Uman section of the DG IV, handed him a letter asking Elsäßer to forward the letter to the commander of the camp in Tarassivka, Laubach. Since Elsäßer presumed that the letter could contain the order for the liquidation of the camp, he opened it being surprised to read the opposite, namely that ‘the action will not take place’. He forwarded the letter to Laubach in the belief that the Jews would not be executed. All the

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presumed that the pits for the bunkers would be used in fact as mass graves for the Jews. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, vol. III, p. 393.

<sup>405</sup> The SD (Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS) was the Nazi Intelligence Service, led in 1943 by Heinrich Himmler, which from 1939 on was active within the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), mobilizing special units in the occupied territories.

<sup>406</sup> The eye-witnesses mentioned in their evidence different figures. The camp commander Laubach stated that when he took over the command of the camp, there were 235 Jews in the camp. O.T. employees mentioned figures between 320 and 500 victims shot dead in the pits. Nathan Segall mentioned in his report at the end of October 348 slave labourers detained in the camp. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, vol. III, pp. 389, 394, 400, 401, 402.

<sup>407</sup> See about the liquidation of the camp: *Ibid.*, pp. 387 – 407.

greater was his astonishment when he learnt next day about the liquidation.<sup>408</sup> Was this matter just a ruse intended to alleviate the fears of the Jews, thus preventing possible escape attempts, since Christoffel suspected that through Elsäßer the message of the letter would spread among the slave labourers? Was SS-Hauptsturmbannführer Karl Burger (meanwhile mentioned as head of department within the Uman section at the DG IV) the person who ‘arranged’ the liquidation? Who were the two SD men and following whose order had they exterminated all the Jews of the camp? The only person who could remember the name of one of them was Elsäßer, after he heard how the SD man was called by the others: Fröhlich. However, no evidence indicates that this Fröhlich could have been identified.

Taking into account a letter written on 17 December by Werner Bergmann to his boss, the managing director August Dohrmann, it seems that the local SS leadership disagreed with the liquidation of the camp because of a shortage of labour. But the SD was in fact part of the SS, it was its Intelligence Service. Were the relations between the different departments of the Nazi oppression system by the end of 1943 so chaotic that the SS lost the control over its own Intelligence Service?<sup>409</sup> There is no doubt that the decisions to liquidate the last slave labour camps run with Jews before the retreat had been taken on a higher level, since the Nazi leaders preferred to exterminate the Jews rather than to let them fall into the Allies’ hands, as they were also quite reluctant to transport them westwards into German territory after ‘cleansing’ Germany of Jews.

Such an extreme measure to exterminate all the slave labourers in the camp, depriving the Dohrmann firm and the Uman section of the DG IV of labour, could not have been carried out without an order that surpassed the limits of the investigation led by Public Prosecutor Dieter Joachim. Even without consulting the construction companies and the O.T., the

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<sup>408</sup>Ibid, p.391.

<sup>409</sup> A similar case occurred in October 1942 in Brest-Litovsk where the local SS-Standortführer Rohde tried without success to hinder or at least to delay the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto that provided work power for a manufactory firm. Andrej Angrick, *The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy...*, p.701.

liquidations of the slave labour camps in the Ukraine, thus including also the extermination of detainees still fit to work, began toward the end of 1942, since it became evident that due to the military setbacks on the southern front, the construction project of the DG IV would have to be abandoned.<sup>410</sup> The camp of Tarassivka was the last ring in the chain of forced labour camps in the South-western Ukraine sentenced to annihilation by the Nazis. The SD had clear aims in this regard and did not fail to fulfil its gruesome ‘duty’. Therefore, the main responsibility for these mass murders was on Ernst Kaltenbrunner, chief of the SD by the end of 1943, on Hans-Adolf Prützmann<sup>411</sup> the Higher SS and Police Chief for the occupied Ukraine, as well as on Walther Bierkamp, former commander of the Einsatzgruppe D, who from March 1943 led the so called ‘Kampfgruppe Bierkamp’ in the South-western Ukraine.<sup>412</sup> Obviously, the general extermination order was issued by Heinrich Himmler like in the case of the ‘Erntefest’ Operation, when forced labour camps situated in Galicia were liquidated. Walther Bierkamp died or committed suicide in April 1945. Prützmann and Kaltenbrunner were sentenced to death as main war criminals in 1946, while Himmler committed suicide before he could have been tried. However, they were rather “Schreibtischtäter” (the brains behind the scenes of the crimes), conceiving or ordering the murders whereas many of those who carried them out, liquidating during 1943 the forced labour camps along the DG IV, could remain unknown without having to face the consequences of their crimes.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>411</sup> Prützmann had his headquarter in Kiev. Einsatzgruppen C and D, two of the mobile killing units belonging to the SD that exterminated hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Soviet Union, were active until summer 1943 in both the ‘Reichskommissariat Ukraine’ and in the part of the Ukraine that was controlled by the German military administration. Even if the Einsatzgruppen were already inactive by the end of 1943, the SD continued to dispose of special units like the Kampfgruppe Bierkamp. See the material available on the web site of the Shoah Resource Centre, the International School for Holocaust Studies:

[http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205785.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205785.pdf) (viewed on 24 July 2005)

<sup>412</sup> Andrej Angrick, *The Escalation of German-Rumanian Anti-Jewish Policy...*, p. 693.

<sup>413</sup> There is no evidence that anyone was sentenced by West or East German Courts between 1945-1970 and 1950-1990 either in the case of the mass execution of Tarassivka nor in the case of the crimes at Mikhailovka. See the web site of the Institute for Criminal Law of the University of Amsterdam containing a brief overview of all war criminal trials in East (until 1990) and West Germany (until 1970): <http://www1.jur.uva.nl/junsv/inhaltsverzeichnis.htm> (viewed on 24 July 2005).

The technical subtleties of the investigation, as well as the fact that in many cases the crimes had not been witnessed directly by those who gave evidence, reduced the chances of a possible indictment of the suspected individuals. In certain cases when the crime had been eye-witnessed, the offenders were already deceased.<sup>414</sup> The investigators had also difficulties in determining the liability of the suspects for possible charges because they considered the evidence given by the eye-witnesses too ‘vague’ and ‘insufficient’. Many assertions based on hearsay could not be proved in the way the procedure required it. Some of the statements made by witnesses turned out to contain errors regarding persons, dates and places. The conclusion of the investigators was that in the majority of the cases, the investigation should be abandoned because of ‘insufficient evidence’.

Despite the willingness of public prosecutors and judges to bring to Court the executioners who carried out the orders of the Nazi “Schreibtischtäter”, their attempts largely failed because of the complicated specific judicial requirements of the investigation, but also due to the so-called Statute of Limitation (Verjährungsgesetz). This stipulation was in force until the middle of the 1970s, offering the chance for many of those enlisted in a preliminary investigation to escape justice.<sup>415</sup> Due to this Statute of Limitation, as well as to the ‘insufficient evidence’ ascertained during the preliminary investigation against former SS officers or T.O. members, the majority of the cases were abandoned. The Public Prosecutor’s Office could advance the pre-trial hearings only for two suspects, namely against Oskar Friese and Hans Emil Wippenbeck.<sup>416</sup> A third person, Walter Mintel, remained under investigation until 1976. Some of the cases were transferred to other

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<sup>414</sup> That was the case of Gustav Knerr from the police station in Krasnapolka who deceived the inmates into believing he would allow them to escape. As they attempted to flee, Knerr shot them dead. DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, file III, p. 459.

<sup>415</sup> In East Germany the Statute of Limitation was abolished by law in 1964, while in West Germany this juridical stipulation was many years subject to intensive debates. Its meaning consisted in the fact that a suspected person investigated for any offence, excepting murder (which could be barely proved by former camp inmates since executions often took place hidden from their view) could avoid an indictment if the offence occurred many years ago. Jürgen Weber, Peter Steinbach, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung durch Strafverfahren? NS-Prozesse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, München : Günter Ozlog Verlag, 1984, pp.48-49.

<sup>416</sup> DAUS, Staatsanwaltschaft bei dem Landgericht, 3 J 1428/65 StA Itzehoe, Antrag auf Eröffnung und Führung der Voruntersuchung, Lübeck, 26 May 1970.

public prosecutors' offices, which probably also quashed the investigation since there is no evidence of any convictions against those investigated in this case.

### **The Dohrmann Company and the slave labourers of Mikhailovka / Tarassivka**

Looking at the exploitation of the slave labourers by the SS, one cannot neglect the role played by the German firms that made huge profits by collaborating with the Nazi oppression machinery during the Second World War. There was a hierarchical connection between the different departments of the Nazi bureaucracy which made hundreds of German firms accomplices to the Holocaust.<sup>417</sup> Even small family firms like the Dohrmann Company contributed to the Nazi economic 'Neuordnung' in Europe, and implicitly, to the German war effort, being just one of the several other family firms charged with the construction of the DG IV. To what extent was it responsible for the tragic fate of the inmates of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka?

This question preoccupied Arnold Daghani, who could not come to terms for a long time with the duplicity of the local representatives of the Dohrmann Company in Mikhailovka regarding the treatment of the inmates. They obviously became aware of the crimes committed in the camp and at the highway. The company had even protested, but not against killings as such, but against executions taking place on the site, arguing that any execution carried out well away from the highway would have a far less depressing effect on the slave labourers' inclination for work.<sup>418</sup> That explains why many of the executions could not be directly witnessed by the inmates, an essential issue which eventually had a crucial impact on the results of the investigations. The role of the Dohrmann Company in

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<sup>417</sup>The construction of the DG IV was requested by the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) since the Germany Army needed good transportation roads towards the front lines. After negotiations between the OKW and the minister for Armaments and Munitions, Fritz Todt (until his deadly accident in February 1942), Todt's department was charged with the construction and maintenance of the roads in the occupied territories. In his turn, Fritz Todt entrusted Albert Speer (General Construction Inspector at the time) with the implementation of this task. Speer assigned construction companies Germany wide in order to carry out the work. F.W. Siedler, *Die Organisation Todt. Bauen für Staat und Wehrmacht 1938-1945*, Bernard & Graefe Verlag: Koblenz, 1987. See also: DAUS, Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Friese und andere wegen Mordes, vol. I., p.80.

<sup>418</sup> Edward Timms, Memories of Mikhailovka. Labour Camp Testimonies in the Arnold Daghani Archive, Centre for German-Jewish Studies, Research Paper no. 4, June 2000, p.40 See also: The Grave is in the Cherry Orchard, in: Adam, no. XXIX, London, 1961, p.8.

Mikhailovka raises the question of the implication of German civilians in the perpetuation of the Third Reich and in its criminal policy. During his detention in Mikhailovka, Arnold Daghani remarked on both the ignorance and the gestures of compassion shown by Dohrmann employees towards the inmates under certain circumstances. However, the attitude and behaviour of the company's employees differed from person to person as well as from one situation to another. Werner Bergmann himself, according to Daghani, did not hide his point of view that the Jews of Mikhailovka were slaves owned by the road-making company, with a death sentence over their heads. T.O. men belonging to the company were also involved in criminal operations, like the selection of the Jews or even the killing and mistreatment of some of them. They knew very well about the detention and living conditions of the detainees, as well as the terror practiced by the SS. The majority of them had an 'Übermensch' mentality, accepting and approving the injustice done to the Jewish slave labourers as something natural. In their view, the Jews had nothing to complain about. This mentality was certainly supported by the firm belief in the German victory, disregarding the fact that one day they might have to answer at least to their own conscience for the humiliation and the exploitation endured by the slave labourers. It remains questionable to what extent the Dohrmann employees, especially Werner Bergmann and Josef Elsäßer, who had leading positions at the site, acted on the behalf on 'their slaves' against the despotism of the SS. And if they did so, was it out of a purely humanitarian motivation?

### **Reconciliation**

In the early 1970s Arnold Daghani decided to resume contact with some of those who had participated in events at Mikhailovka, but were not directly involved in the crimes. It seems that his wish to revisit the ghosts from the past was primarily motivated by his endeavour to discover the precise role and motives of those who ran the slave labour camps. As is clear from his diary, especially the expanded version, as well as of his

attitude reflected in various correspondence, Daghani made a clear distinction between those who killed and tortured people and those who abstained from crimes or sometimes even showed compassion for the inmates. He avoided the kind of general statements made by so many persecuted Jews, Poles, Czechs, etc. about the 'German character'. One can barely find in his narrative of events in Mikhailovka generalisations regarding nationality or social origin. He rather revealed a spectrum of personality types among the Germans, from the sadistic SS men to the professional engineers of the Dohrmann Company, who from time to time even showed sympathy for the inmates. But even among the SS men, there were individuals whom Daghani did not reproach for anything. On contrary, he noted in his diary, as he also stated in his legal deposition, how the camp commander Willi Buder, an SS officer, entered the prisoners' quarters on New Year's Eve, wishing them a Happy New Year and hoping that all of them would be back home by the end of 1943.<sup>419</sup> At the same time, Daghani made it clear that the Lithuanian and Ukrainian willing collaborators of the Nazis were just as sadistic as their German superiors. It is obvious that in his view not 'only' Germans were responsible for the sufferings of the Jews, just as it was not only Jews who were victimized.<sup>420</sup>

The correspondence he started in the early 1970's with former employees of the Dohrmann company led to a personal encounter and cordial contact with some of them. Between 24 and 28 May 1973 Daghani and his wife visited Werner Bergman in Freudenstadt and Martha Fischer, the secretary of Bergmann who lived in Mainz. The principal subject of their discussion was the past, the time spent at the DG IV, and Daghani's diary, which had also been read by Werner Bergmann. Obviously Bergmann deflected any responsibility of his own as well as of the Dohrmann Company for the suffering of the inmates. In a previous letter to Daghani, he emphasised that the Dohrmann Company itself was surprised to realise that the labourers with which it had to build the

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<sup>419</sup> Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*", p. 89.

<sup>420</sup> Edward Timms, *Memories of Mikhailovka*, p. 22.

DG IV were not Ukrainian paid workers or Soviet prisoners of war, but Jewish civilians.<sup>421</sup> However, in spite of the different points of view that still might have existed between Daghani and Werner Bergmann, he and his wife Anișoara made their farewell from him 'like from a brother', with the feeling of being reconciled with the past.<sup>422</sup>

On 22 August 1974 it was Josef Elsäßer's turn to visit the Daghani's at their home in Jona, Switzerland. Elsäßer was 32 years old while working for the Dohrmann Company in Mikhailovka, only few years younger than Daghani. His attitude towards the slaves labourers was not always fair (Daghani was shocked to discover that he still kept his T.O. uniform in the wardrobe), but after so many years Daghani was now ready to drop the subject, showing a real feeling of reconciliation. In fact both were touched by this encounter under totally different circumstances. The Daghani's had the satisfaction of being seen by Elsäßer und Bergmann in their 'real life' as 'human beings', not as dehumanised slaves, 'starving, full of vermin and trembling'. These encounters had for them the effect of a 'rehabilitation'.<sup>423</sup>

Thus Daghani stretched out his hand to the former 'enemies' and made them his friends. He succeeded in reconciliation, but failed, not of his fault, to pursue Justice in the judicial meaning of the term. Nevertheless, he pursued a moral justice for the victims of Mikhailovka, Tarassivka and other places of horror by naming and shaming the perpetrators, even if they could not be convicted and imprisoned. He did not cease to follow further developments in Germany regarding Nazi criminals, although he could not do anything more for the conviction of those responsible after the case against the last investigated person related to the crimes in Mikhailovka, Walter Mintel, had been dropped in March 1976.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*", p. 246.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, p.260.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p.264.

<sup>424</sup> His interest in the case of Walter Mintel was reawakened by an article published in the magazine *Stern* in September 1980 which in fact paid tribute to the poetess Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, who died in Mikhailovka

It was not the feeling of vengeance but that of pursuing justice which gave Daghani the strength to continue his struggle for justice and reconciliation. Through his contribution the tragic destiny of the Bukovinian Jews deported to Transnistria by Romanian authorities, handed over to the SS and exploited by a German road-construction company, gained a vivid dimension, being taken out of anonymity. He succeeded in drawing the attention of the successor of August Dohrmann, Dr Walter Spelsberg, to the unfortunate role the firm Dohrmann played during the Holocaust in South-western Ukraine. In contrast to the attitude of other directors of several companies also involved in the exploitation of slave labour under the Nazi regime, Spelsberg openly assumed the responsibility of his firm, contributing to the Compensation Fund for former forced labourers.<sup>425</sup> Arnold Daghani died in 1985 in his adoptive town Hove, in Sussex leaving behind an important moral, spiritual and intellectual legacy, which remind us that certain human values could triumph over oppression, injustice and hatred.

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in 1942, but it tackled also the present life and the past of Walter Mintel. Daghani responded to this article writing a letter addressed to 'Herr Walter Mintel' containing a list of eighteen dated entries from his diary in which Mintel's criminal activities are recorded, since Mintel denied in the mentioned article that he ever was in Mikhailovka. Edward Timms, *Memories of Mikhailovka*, pp. 27-29. See also *Der Stern*, 8 September 1980.

<sup>425</sup> In a letter of 20 December 1979, he wrote to Daghani: "I learnt of conversations had with Mr Elsäßer, who passed away just few months ago, about the dreadful, inhumane occurrences during the mission of our firm in the Ukraine. These occurrences are to us Germans deeply shameful." Felix Rieper, Mollie Brandl-Bowen, "*Lasst mich leben!*", p. 17.

## **Conclusions**

### **Why Romanian Fascism and the Romanian ‘Domestic Holocaust’ were different**

The world of the Bukovinian Jews, including the multi-ethnic culture of Czernowitz, irreversibly disappeared during the upheavals of the Second World War. By focusing on the case of the German-speaking Jews, this dissertation traces the long-term implications of the striking changes that occurred with the Bukovinian German-speaking Jews once their homeland became part of Greater Romania. It was above all the German-speaking Jews that gave this region its distinctive cultural and religious identity, a culture irretrievably destroyed by the tragic events of the Romanian Holocaust. During the interwar period outstanding writers, journalists and politicians of Jewish origin began their careers in the Bukovina, including Rose Ausländer, Paul Celan, Alfred Margul-Sperber, Meyer Ebner and Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger. After describing this culture and the political events that destroyed it, the dissertation focuses on the testimony of Arnold Daghani, a less well-known artist born in Southern Bukowina, who experienced the dramatic events in Czernowitz, Transnistria and the Ukraine after the German-Romanian attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. His artistic and literary works represent a compelling struggle for justice and for the commemoration of his fellow citizens deported and killed during the Holocaust. By retrieving his neglected testimony, especially about the silent Holocaust beyond the river Bug, and contrasting it with the post-war public record in Romania, this investigation enlarges the range of historical research, making its own contribution to a more critical form of public memory. In this context, the chapters about the investigation of war crimes break new ground. The dissertation also attempted to identify the distinctive

features of Romanian anti-Semitism, especially the combination of religious and political prejudice exploited by the Iron Guard.

### **Regime Changes and the Rise of Anti-Semitism**

In the period 1920-1950 the German-speaking Jews experienced five major changes of political regime: once when Bukovina became part of Romania after 1919 according to Peace Treaty of Saint Germain, under the regime of a constitutional Monarchy. The second change occurred in January 1938 when King Carol II enforced the “monarchic dictatorship” and appointed anti-Semitic governments which, under the circumstances of a rapprochement between Romania and the German Reich, adopted the first anti-Jewish laws. The 1930s were characterised by a gradually more and more aggressive anti-Semitism, the feeling of insecurity and the loss of trust in state authority. In only two years the regime of King Carol II collapsed being followed by an openly fascist regime under the dictatorship of Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard in the so called “national-legionary state”. This was the darkest period for the Jews living in Romania especially for those from Bukovina and Bessarabia. The elimination of the Iron Guard by Antonescu in January 1941 did not change the main features of the regime regarding the hard anti-Semitic policy which continued to calm victims until this regime too collapsed on 23 August 1944. The initially democratic, parliamentary regime under King Mihai I was marked by the successive taking over of the power in state by the Communists. The horrible experience in Transnistria during the Second World War determined the majority of the Jews of Bukovina to refuse to start of a new life in their native place. The Soviet regime in the northern part of the province established after 1945 was also unfavourable for a flourishing Jewish life, and the chances of emigration were limited. The post-war period was an important time for the aftermath of the Holocaust in Romania and for the perspectives of the survivors. Finally the fifth change of political regime within thirty

years occurred in December 1947, when King Mihai I was forced to abdicate and Romania was proclaimed People's Republic. A new dictatorship, in this case a left-wing one, prompted many Jewish survivors to leave Romania, as Arnold Daghani did in January 1958.

The story could have been so different. Attracted by the economic advantages provided by the Habsburg authorities as well as fleeing the persecutions from Russia the number of the Jews settling in Bukovina increased decade by decade during the 19th century. Within two generations many of the Jewish settlers acculturated linguistically and culturally to the dominant language of the state: German. Keeping only their religion these groups of Jewish merchants, clerks, doctors, lawyers, and other liberal professions gained a respectable social position. In return they developed solid affiliations to Austria and the Habsburgs. The germs of modern anti-Semitism in the region appeared in the last decades of the 19th century when the professional competition between Jews and non-Jews increased. The Romanian and Ukrainian intelligentsia that hoped to move into the economic and social positions of the cultivated Jews. They started to spread and to adapt the anti-Semitism to local conditions. However, anti-Semitism was directed not only against Jewish professional competitors but also against Jews in general. The upswing of Nationalism among Ukrainians and Romanians contributed to the intensification of the anti-Semitic rhetoric, targeting also the Jews from the countryside who used to sublet vast areas of land to Romanian and Ukrainian peasants that lived in poverty. However, the co-habitation of Jews and non-Jews in the Austrian Bukovina was relatively peaceful until 1920, when Romania incorporated the province. The cause of this development can be found in the general evolution in Central and Eastern Europe of the extremist, anti-Semitic political tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s with special regards on the Romanian specificities.

With the incorporation of Bukovina to Romania the German-speaking Jews had to face new challenges regarding the adjustment to the new state and its language, political life and practices. The influence of the new official language and culture as well as the Romanisation policy from Bucharest created to a certain extent and especially in the southern part of Bukovina the premises for a new Bukovinian Jewish identity expressed in the willingness of the German-speaking Jewish young generation to take up more elements of Romania culture, to identify themselves with their new country in which they grew up. Increasing aggressive nationalism of Romanians and the upheavals of the war block the development of this new Bukovinian Jewish identity offering for those who did not feel comfortable in their German-Jewish identity individual ways for developing new identities. Arnold Daghani was an example in this sense. His national, religious and linguistic identity represents rather a collage of cultural elements he was during his life in contact with.

However, the majority continued to be German-speaking Jews and were not only a religious minority like under Austrian rule, but also a linguistic one, together with other 800,000 German speakers in Romania but of Christian faith. The rapidly increasing influence of the Nazis on the German ethnic group in Romania made impossible any further contact between the representatives of both minorities. The organised persecution of the Jews in the Third Reich generated and amplified the conflict between Jews and ethnic Germans also in Bukovina. Boycott and counter-boycott, malicious press articles and defamation poisoned the atmosphere of the peaceful co-habitation. However, people who did not care about the daily politics, stayed unaffected by this artificially incited conflict between German-speaking Jews and ethnic Germans in Bukovina. But in fact, the safety and daily common feeling of the Jews especially in Bukovina and Moldavia started to worsen after the radicalisation of the extreme right-wing movement in Romania represented by the Legion of Archangel Mihail and its successor organisation, the Iron

Guard. Despite of the still democratic political system and the will of the parliamentary regime to combat the fascist movement the anti-Semitic atmosphere increased due to the adherence of respectable intellectuals to the legionary ideology. It would be wrong to allege that the entire Romanian society was poisoned with anti-Semitism or that the Romanians were more anti-Semitic than other peoples in Central and Eastern Europe. There were regions like Moldavia and also Bukovina where the higher proportion of Jewish population sharpened the concurrency for liberal professions, in commerce and industry. The main agitators against Jews were lawyers, doctors, professors and students who strove to get these jobs. The false suppositions about a "Jewish invasion" in Romania after the First World War sustained by conservative and right wings politicians representing the so called "moderate anti-Semitism" but also by scientists like the geographer Simion Mehedinți gave a new impulse to the old anti-Semitic stereotypes and religious prejudices towards Jews. Anti-Semitism in Romania had no special features but some particularities. The main propagator of hatred against Jews, the Legion of Archangel Mihail exploited the religiosity and the proclivity for superstitions as well as the fear of "Judeo-Communism" of the Romanians combining social, racial, religious and political elements in its "struggle" against Jews. Anti-Semitism became part of the state policy already in 1938 even before the Legionnaires came to power paving the way for more and more radical anti-Jewish laws and measures. Among these notorious laws were the Law regarding the revision of the Romanian citizenship and the Law about the legal status of the Jews living in Romania. Both laws affected especially hard the Jews originally from Bukovina and from other territories incorporated by Romania in 1919. The tragic development of anti-Semitism in Romania towards the institutionalised discrimination, plunder and destruction climaxing with the deportations to Transnistria was the result of the convergence between the old anti-Semitic tradition of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the new radical anti-Semitism propagated by the

“Generation 22” and the concourse of the European political events pushing Romania under the influence of the Third Reich. Even if Romania was an independent state, the simple existence of Nazi Germany and its increasing political influence had an encouraging effect on Romanian anti-Semitic policy. Romanian radical anti-Semites came to power and adopted the series of anti-Semitic laws because of this influence under the circumstances of serious territorial losses and imminent external threat. They could carry out their unscrupulous discriminatory policy because they had nothing to fear for their inhuman measures as long they enjoyed the protective umbrella of the Third Reich. Often will be emphasised the distinction between Antonescu and his collaborators, the Iron Guard and the Legionnaires, and the high officials under the dictatorship of King Carol II. There is no doubt, they had different goals and means for the implementation of their anti-Semitic policy but they had an important thing in common: scorn for Jews and other minorities.

The series of discriminatory laws and decrees against Jews initiated in 1938, amplified in 1940 and completed during the war reached its most severe character through the ordinances regarding the deportation of the Bukovinian and Bessarabian Jews to Transnistria in summer and autumn 1941. This event can be considered a crucial moment in the process of the destruction of the German-Jewish communities of Bukovina including the community of Czernowitz. The Romanian regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu had the main responsibility for this part of the Holocaust carried out on Romanian soil as well as in the occupied Ukrainian territory under Romanian rule called Transnistria. As so many eyewitnesses confirmed in their oral or written testimonies, it was the Romanian gendarmerie who forced them to leave their homes, who terrorised them along the exhausting marches as well as who kept them under strict surveillance in the ghettos and labour camps of Transnistria. However, one can not deny that the chances of the Jews to survive the Holocaust were bigger in Transnistria under Romanian authority than beyond

the Bug in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, especially from autumn 1942 on when many members of the Antonescu cabinet started to have doubts in a German final victory. After 1942 Transnistria became for many deportees handed over to the SS a place of refuge, where in ghettos like Bershadt they could hid waiting for the hoped repatriation or liberation. However, almost 75% of the deportees to Transnistria perished due to the hard living condition, especially during the winter 1941-1942 when most of the victims died of typhoid fever. But executions and mistreatment also increased the number of the victims. The latest figures on this topic<sup>426</sup> show that the total number of the Romanian and Ukrainian Jews who perished during the Holocaust in Transnistria is between 280,000 and 380,000. Therefore it can be no doubt about the existence of a Romanian domestic Holocaust despite of all other aspects like the limited permission to emigrate or the refusal of the Antonescu-regime to deport all the Jews of Romanian into the German death camps. These facts can not be regarded either as a “merit” of the regime nor can absolve the Antonescu-regime from the guilt of the crimes committed. In fact the ideological origin of the tragic events during the Holocaust goes back to the emergence of modern Romania. For over hundred years many of the country’s most respected political and cultural personalities embraced anti-Semitism and with consistency and perseverance inserted it into the rich mixture of action and inspiration that came to constitute modern Romanian political culture and modern Romanian intellectual life. Although their anti-Semitism was not dramatically altered by the political developments towards fascism and Nazism in other European countries the Holocaust did not occurred in Romania distinctively from Nazi Germany. The rise of fascism and Nazism in Germany, Italy and other central and East European countries have increased the confidence of Romanians with radical anti-Semitic views as well as their chances that they might play a role in government. Hitler’s

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<sup>426</sup> See the Final Report of the International Commission on Holocaust in Romania from 11.11.2004 available in Internet:  
<http://www1.ushmm.org/research/center/index.php?content=presentations/programs/presentations/2005-03-10/>.  
(Viewed 25.10.2005)

rise did not substantially change Romanian antisemitic ideology but it opened the door to the possible implementation of antisemitic programs that had been discussed in principle for decades. The anti-Semitism of the National Christian Party and the Iron Guard, as well as the genocidal regime of Ion Antonescu rested firmly on the foundations of a century of antisemitism preached at the highest levels of Romanian politicians and intellectuals. The separation, expropriation, deportation, and murder of Jews were possible also because of this tradition of anti-Semitism and the lack of mass support for those who rejected it. Therefore the domestic Holocaust had deep Romanian roots being part of Romanian history.

### **Public Memory and the Pursuit of Justice**

Doing Justice and coming to terms with the past meant also bringing to court those responsible for the crimes committed by the representatives of the Romanian army, gendarmerie and civilians who acted in Transnistria. However, one of the specificity of the deportations to Transnistria was often ignored, namely the fact that about 5000 Romanian citizens of Jewish faith were handed over by the military authorities to the SS, which put them in slave labour camps and together with German companies and the Organisation "Todt" physically and psychically exploited them in order to build the so called "Durchgangstraße IV" beyond the river Bug. The executioners were Lithuanian and Ukrainian guards under SS command and the final killing action was carried out also by these units but it was the Romanian government, which handed over these people to the SS even knowing their methods of dealing with Jews. Therefore the responsibility for what happened beyond the river Bug under German control was not only of the Germans but also of the Romanian government. Bringing to court war criminals the new regime

evinced readiness in implementing the stipulations of the Armistice from September 1944 between Romanian and the United Nations. Antonescu and his close collaborators were sentenced to death and executed. Hundreds of sentences pronounced between 1945-1957 suggest that the Romanian justice has done its duty. However, the trials against Romanian war criminals took place in a period when the Communists gradually took over the power in state until total control over justice and prosecution. After 1947 it became more difficult to distinguish between real war criminals and opponents within the army against the communist regime who were put on trial and condemned for alleged war crimes. The topic of the trials against war criminals in Romanian was not sufficiently researched and therefore still raises many questions. In this process of doing Justice for the victims and survivors Arnold Daghani played an important role keeping alive the memory of those who suffered and perished in Transnistria and beyond the river Bug in Mikhailovka, Tarassivka, and other places of horror. He brought into the awareness of the world the existence of the camps beyond the Bug and kept the hope alive that the criminals of Mikhailovka and Tarassivka would be brought to Court. He has done his best in order to start a prosecution as it happened indeed in 1965 when the Prosecution Office from Lübeck took this initiatives but it was beyond his capability to do more when the prosecutor decided after five years of investigations to close the case because “lack of evidences”.

After such dreadful events affecting the life of hundred thousands of Romanian citizens, my dissertation identifies the tendentious distortions of public memory which prevented these historical events from being properly investigated, highlighting the political and social circumstances under which these commemorations took place and the message they were intended to convey, not least through memorials and monuments. In Romania the public memory related to the Holocaust had in fact two players. The Jews and the state authorities. The latter tried to put the public memory of the Holocaust under their tutelage,

adjusting the messages of these commemorations to the ideology they represented. Amazingly at these commemorations Transnistria and the fate of those deported by the Romanian authorities was barely mentioned. Instead of this, it was the “RIF soap” as the symbol of Nazi barbarism that dominated the public commemorations of the 1940s in Moldavia and Bukovina although the Jews of these regions were not deported to the German death camps but to Transnistria. Allegedly the leaders of the Jewish communities did not want to worsen the situation of the Romanian official delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris, ignoring in public the victims of Transnistria. It was the first step towards a silence that lasted over fifty years about the ordeal in Transnistria, which could be re-brought into the centre of public memory only after the fall of the nationalistic communist regime in December 1989.

Spread all over the world as also some of them within Romania German-speaking Jews native from Bukovina continued to cultivate not only their native German language but in many cases also the Romanian language as a proof of an uncompleted acculturation that influenced them since Bukovina became part of Romania. The downfall of the German-speaking Jewish culture in that corner of the world was a direct consequence of the ideology stimulated by the Nazi Germany and implemented by the Antonescu regime. Once the war was over this island of German-Jewish culture ceased to exist any longer.

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## Appendix

### Maps

1. Ethnic map of the Austrian Bukovina according to the census of 1910 by Ion Nistor
2. Political map of Greater Romania (1920-1940)
3. Romania after the territorial amputations of June-August 1940
4. Romania after the Agreement of Tighina (30 August 1941) and the route of the “Durchgangstraße IV “
5. Bukovina and Transnistria in 1942-1943. Red points show Jewish ghettos and forced labour camps in Transnistria
6. A) Transnistria and the neighbouring region beyond the Bug with the most important ghettos and forced labour camps (1942-1943)  
B) Bukovina (1942)
7. Map showing the route of Arnold Daghani and his wife. The red line shows the route of their deportation through Ataki, Cariera de Piatra, Mikhailovka. The green line shows their escape and return to Romania through Gaisin, Bershad, Tiraspol.