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NARRATIVES OF SURVIVAL. TRACING THE LIVING MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST IN ROMANIA (1944-1947)[1]

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Narratives of Survival. Tracing the Living Memory of the Holocaust in Romania (1944-1947)

The article adopts a predominantly descriptive approach, seeking to recover the manifestations of the "living memory" of the Holocaust in Romania from 1944 to 1947, as they can be found in documents, testimonies, investigative volumes, journals, memorial prose, visual representations and early fictional or theatrical works. This mapping aims to identify how survivors, communal institutions, and cultural milieus attempted, in the immediate aftermath of the war, to inscribe the experience of persecutions, deportations, and massacres into a plural, heterogeneous corpus not yet subjected to ideological filtering.

The descriptive undertaking is designed to observe how this direct memory was subsequently blocked, rewritten, or marginalized, primarily through its incorporation into a strongly ideologized discourse aligned with the Soviet model, which subsumed Jewish suffering under the generic paradigm of "anti-fascism."

The central conclusion is that, between 1944 and 1947, a genuine "mnemonic community" of the Holocaust in Romania emerged in a spontaneous and multifaceted manner ways, grounded in the voices of survivors and in the ethical imperatives of testimony. This living memory was, however, rapidly marginalized, selectively archived, filtered, and resemanticized by successive ideological regimes, a dynamic that explains the fragile integration of the Holocaust into Romanian cultural memory up until the post-2004 period.

KEYWORDS:

Holocaust in Romania; Holocaust literature; memory studies; cultural memory; living memory.

The Ideological Distortion of the Holocaust Memory in Romania

The memory of the Holocaust in Romania, i.e. the involvement of Romanian authorities in the heinous crime of the Holocaust, was ideologically hijacked shortly after the end of World War II. The mechanisms of communist censorship not only obstructed the retrieval of historical truth but also suppressed the expression of living memory (journals, memoirs) and artistic representations of this recent historical tragedy. Only in the last two decades, particularly after the initiation of discussions within the Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, chaired by Elie Wiesel, and more

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significantly, following the publication of its *Final Report* in 2005 (Friling et al., 2005), has the acknowledgment of the guilt of the Romanian state timidly entered public discourse.

The causes of this "distortion" were diverse, varying according to the era and prevailing ideology. For instance, the primary cause between 1948 and 1960 was the "Sovietization" of Romania, which prevented a genuine debate about Romanian fascism (Friling et al., 2005, p. 319) and imposed the Soviet explanatory narrative on the Holocaust: the victims were categorized as anti-fascist fighters or Soviet citizens (partially true, as a significant portion of victims of Jewish identity or ethnicity were, in fact, Romanian citizens). The main guilt was attributed to the Legionnaires or the Antonescu dictatorship, described as an atypical fascist dictatorship for the Romanian context, which acted criminally due to unnatural ties with Nazi Germany. During this period, the ethnic, religious, and cultural identity of Jewish Holocaust victims was mentioned only in discussions about the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania, "externalizing guilt" (Shafir, 2002, p. 49) towards Nazi Germany (and Hungary), and giving rise to a strand of "deflective negationism" (*ibid.*) that would persist in the Romanian public sphere until today.

Between 1960 and 1989, spanning the latter years of the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej regime and the entirety of the Nicolae Ceaușescu dictatorship, the prevailing ideology underwent a shift towards national communism (Verdery, 1994). During this era, there was a revival of an ethnocentric conceptual framework for portraying Romanian identity, involving the reconstruction of connections with previous historical periods, particularly the interwar era. This revival included the resurrection of significant figures from literary and cultural traditions, some of whom were associated with the Romanian far-right. Within this timeframe, a heroic-tragic narrative of Romanian history emerged, depicting the "Romanian" primarily as a victim of historical circumstances, while avoiding any discourse on the Holocaust that might highlight Romania's involvement in those events. Concurrently, efforts were made to rehabilitate controversial figures from recent history, such as Ion Antonescu (Verdery, 1994, p. 207, 336), contributing to the overall silence on the subject.

Between 1990 and 2003, a tentative acknowledgment emerged that something had happened, yet substantial obstacles hindered the memorial recovery of this dark chapter. Notably, the focus during this period predominantly centered on revisiting the traumatic history associated with Romanian communism. This emphasis can be understood within the context of post-December 1989 society attempting to distance itself from the preceding era. There was a compelling need to address the recent and poignant experiences of Romanian communism, which were closely interwoven with the national identity narrative, portraying Romanians as victims of history. Throughout the 1990s, public discourse witnessed a surge in memoirs about communist detention, accompanied by extensive discussions on this subject. Simultaneously, there was a phenomenon of reclaiming figures from the Romanian far-right of the interwar or World War II periods as anti-communists. Or any dialogue about the Holocaust in Romania would have inevitably involved discussing interwar far-right extremism in its political and intellectual dimensions, as well as addressing the widespread anti-Semitism in Romanian society.

During this period, various manifestations of Holocaust denial or trivialization began to emerge in the Romanian public discourse, drawing comparisons with the communist

"gulag" (Shafir, 2002). Key points of discussion involved downplaying the number of victims and the responsibility of Romanian authorities, denying the role of the Romanian state in crimes in the east (beginning with the Iași Pogrom and extending to atrocities in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Odessa, or Transnistria), avoiding discussions about the responsibility of the Romanian state in the systematic persecution of Jews, and maintaining silence about victims of Roma identity. These explicit negationist expressions by public figures, including politicians, stood in stark contrast to the values upheld by European and North Atlantic institutions that Romania aspired to join during that period.

Under external pressure from various structures within these institutions, the Romanian public discourse gradually began to acknowledge and address the Holocaust more openly. A significant development was the establishment of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, led by Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor from Northern Transylvania. The publication of the commission's report in 2004 rigorously documented not only the details of atrocities and the direct responsibility of the Romanian state under Ion Antonescu, but also the ideological and cultural background that contributed to this tragic history.

Subsequent to the report's publication, which included educational and institutional recommendations, the official initiation of the memorial recovery process occurred through legislation, educational programs, a growing interest in the historical discourse on the subject, museum exhibitions, and, to a limited extent, artistic representations.

Living Memory, Its Representations, and Cultural Memory

As noted in the synopsis above, from 1948 to 1990 ideological barriers impeded the incorporation of Holocaust memory into Romanian public discourse and, consequently, its integration into Romanian cultural memory. Cultural memory is an interdisciplinary concept in anthropology, sociology, history, and cultural studies. It refers to how a community's history, traditions, and values are represented and absorbed into its identity. Cultural memory is a key component of cultural identity, shaped and transmitted through language, public discourse, art, and other forms of expression. This transmission occurs through representations of the past woven into the rhythms of social action.

To trace the concept's origins, we should recognize Émile Durkheim's (1912) analysis of how ritual fosters group cohesion and, subsequently, the formulation of "collective memory" by his student Maurice Halbwachs (1992). This concept stems from examining the social (collective) influence on an individual's recollection of the past. Jan Assmann (2011, 2008), a key theorist in this field, defines cultural memory as a variant of collective memory that serves as a community's shared frame of reference. It preserves and reinforces the group's identity over time and emerges from distinctive markers of collective historical experience. This form of memory is transferable and evolves over time, with transmission occurring through symbolic or mnemonic media such as texts, public images, social rituals, "sites of memory" (Nora, 1996), museums, artistic forms, etc.

In contrast to Halbwachs's view of collective memory as an inflexible monolith, Assmann (2008, p. 110) distinguishes two components: communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory comprises the living recollection of recent

events but lacks institutional structures for management, learning, transmission, or interpretation. It exists in everyday interaction and communication and has limited temporal depth—usually not exceeding eighty years, roughly the span of three directly interacting generations. Nonetheless, communicative memory includes frameworks, communicative genres, traditions of communication and thematization, and, above all, the emotional bonds that tie families, groups, and generations (p. 111). By contrast, cultural memory, according to Assmann, is tied to the temporal framework of a "significant" past—the distant historical past manifested in representations that guide a group's collective actions. The temporal distance between these two types of memory is described by Assmann—borrowing the term from Jan Vansina (1985, pp. 23–24)—as a "floating gap," a period of tentative knowledge of the past at the group level. It functions as a mnemonic filter through which only elements destined for cultural memory pass. Here, a concentration of symbolic and mythical representations is found, connected to historical facts but diffuse and requiring critical reception (Assmann, 2008, pp. 112–113).

Anthropologist Jan Vansina focused his studies on oral African communities. In the context of "written" cultures, the concept of the "floating gap" is less uncertain but remains prone to generating "mythic" representations, serving as defining identity narratives. Additionally, in "written" cultures, this temporal interval becomes the phase of selecting artifacts or emblematic representations that solidify images of the past with mobilizing or educational potential. The selection process occurs within ideological frameworks and with the aid of transmission tools, or more fittingly for the modern era, through media (see Erll, 2008, pp. 389-398). Below, we provide an example related to the global memory of the Holocaust, which will be useful for the discussion on the memory of the Holocaust in Romania.

Testimonial accounts of the sufferings in Nazi ghettos and camps began to surface shortly after the war's conclusion. These accounts predominantly emerged during war criminal trials or were provided by those involved in liberating concentration camps, as well as those who uncovered mass graves left by Nazi Germany, its allies, and collaborators. Following this, journals and memorial texts gradually entered the public sphere, with only a fraction gaining widespread attention over an extended process lasting until the '60s and '70s[2].

For instance, Anne Frank's diary was initially published in Dutch in 1947. Translated and edited in America in 1952, it only gained significant recognition in the '60s through a dramatic adaptation for Broadway (1955[3]) and a film released in 1959[4]. Primo Levi completed his account of detention at Auschwitz at the end of 1946. After facing rejection from major publishers like Einaudi, he succeeded in publishing *If This Is a Man* in 1947 with an obscure publisher (Thomson, 2002). It wasn't until 1958, after reediting and promotion by Einaudi, that the volume started circulating, with its impact on the public unfolding in the latter half of the 1970s. A similar trajectory surrounded Elie Wiesel's work, *Night*. His extensive memorial narrative (800 pages), written in Yiddish (*Un di velt hot geshvign*), was published in 1956 in an abbreviated version by an obscure

[2] "[…] in most countries in Europe the first frenzied years of memoir writing were followed by a decade or more of silence", notices Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi (1980, p. 22), the author of one of the first academic volumes on "Holocaust literature".

[3] Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

[4] *The Diary of Anne Frank*, directed by George Cooper Stevens.

publisher in Argentina. Public attention followed much later, after its publication in French in 1958, in a further condensed and radically revised version in terms of tone[5]. These texts, now emblematic in Holocaust literature, required time to permeate the collective memory of the Western world.

This occurred nearly two decades after the conclusion of the war, likely influenced by globally impactful media events, such as the capture and trial of Eichmann (1960-1962, see Cesarani, 2005). The media's emphasis on the concept of historical justice, particularly the trial's focus on the victims and their testimonies, not only made the awareness of historical trauma acceptable but also highly desirable for a broad audience. Following this, Western public discourse actively engaged in reconstructing the historical narrative of the tragedy and embraced philosophical reflection, turning the Holocaust into a subject for moral contemplation and anti-totalitarian analysis. The Holocaust's memory began evolving into a "global memory" (Assmann, 2010, pp. 97-117). Within the amalgamation of elements from survivors' living memory, writings that had previously gained little attention were incorporated into cultural memory, especially those mentioned earlier. This attention was attributed to their qualities, primarily their testimonial value[6]. While some additional texts will be rediscovered, only a portion will be linked to the recognized core of Holocaust "literature". In contrast, the global cultural memory of the Holocaust will increasingly draw upon supplementary tools, notably a range of more or less formalized memorial artifacts: museums, exhibitions, media productions, films, literature, etc. (Tucan, 2020, pp. 11-12).

The selection, medialization, and channeling of elements from communicative memory into cultural memory (Erll, 2008, p. 389ff.) is a lengthy process, as discussed above, and it requires time—even if, in the case of recent history and in cultures with a strong media imprint, its duration tends to be shorter. Nonetheless, as noted, cultural memory is grounded in communicative memory. In the case of the Holocaust, this means the living memories of persecuted communities—a traumatic repertoire tied to survivors and their experiences. A defining feature of such trauma is its dual character, both individual and collective: individuals are persecuted in the name of an identity (ethnic, religious, etc.), and the traumatized subject suffers alongside or for others like them. Because the remembrance of trauma is linked to both personal and collective dimensions, its integration into the community's "collective memory" presupposes a memorial disposition. This need for integration generates a "Conversation" within communicative memory—one aimed at facilitating understanding and healing and at exploring its relevance to the present and future. Questions such as "What happened?", "Who is responsible?", and "Can life return to what it was?" serve as scaffolding for this "Conversation," enabling it to crystallize into public-facing discourses.

[5] The initial versions conveyed a tone characterized by bitterness and a desire for revenge in response to the humiliations and suffering in the camps. In contrast, the French version, while equally "dark" in its visual representation, adopts a reconciliatory tone (see Magilow, Silverman, 2015, pp. 53-60).

[6] I understand the concept of "testimonial value" as the inherent quality of narratives (texts) that recount historically traumatic events, and that aim to prompt ethical reflection through the act of remembrance. The testimonial value of a text serves to ensure that the human dimension of historical trauma is not forgotten, and that the moral lessons derived from those experiences continue to resonate with future generations. At the core of the discourse characterized by testimonial value is the figure of the "moral witness", a distinctive agent within the realm of collective memory (see Margalit, 2002, pp. 147-182). Analogous to the role undertaken by the "survivor", the moral witness assumes the responsibility of serving as "the spokesperson for all those killed, bringing back into memory their vanished names" (Assmann, 2014, p. 42).

Documentary Representations of the Holocaust in Romania (1944-1947)

Regarding the Holocaust in Romania, things do not unfold differently, at least initially. Describing the process of ideological concealment outlined above, which occurred in Romania between 1948 and 1990, we have set aside a significant period for the "living" memory of Jewish communities in Romania. This period spans from August 1944 (the removal of Ion Antonescu and the denunciation of the alliance with Nazi Germany) to December 1947 (the removal of the king and the proclamation of the People's Republic).

During this relatively brief interval (1944–1947), a substantial and generically diverse body of writing on the Holocaust appeared. For Romanian Jews, the period of uncertainty, persecution, and violence had begun even before the war, with escalating antisemitic legislation and attacks; it is therefore understandable that, once the immediate danger seemed to recede at the war's end, a strong need to narrate emerged. Numerous accounts and testimonies of atrocities were published in the press, particularly in Jewish community newspapers such as *Curierul Israelit* and *Viața Evreiască*. In parallel, there was significant editorial activity producing volumes with testimonial or documentary aims—diaries, memoirs, reports, document collections, legal depositions, and so on. Taken together, these works, spanning multiple genres, could have provided a solid basis for constituting a "mnemonic community" of the Holocaust in Romania. Yet ideological constraints under communism soon relegated them to scarce documentary artifacts, seldom cited or discussed in subsequent decades.

One of the most well-represented categories during this period was that of documentary texts—volumes grounded in survivors' testimonies, documents, or witness accounts. A notable figure in this regard is Matatias Carp, who assumed the role of secretary for the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania from 1940 to 1942, when this institution was dissolved. Working closely with the Federation's president, Wilhelm Filderman, Matatias Carp foresaw the challenging times ahead during the anti-Jewish persecutions in Romania. From 1940 to 1944, he diligently gathered information, documents, and testimonies. The outcome of this documentation effort was the compilation of a highly detailed history of the Holocaust in Romania[7], published in three volumes between 1946 and 1948, generically titled *The Black Book: The Suffering of the Jews in Romania, 1940-1944*[8].

The discursive and thematic model of the "Black Book" originated during the war. In 1943, under the direction of Jacob Apenszlak[9], a volume documenting the genocide and destruction of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland was published, drawing on information available up to that point from Central and Eastern Europe. By 1945, the manuscript of the Soviet *Black Book* (Чёрная книга), coordinated by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily

[7] Matatias Carp's documentary efforts yielded their initial public results in 1945 with the publication of a book focusing on a Holocaust episode in Northern Transylvania: *Sărmaș: una din cele mai oribile crime ale fascismului* (Sărmaș: one of the most heinous crimes of fascism, 1945). This work emerged from the author's involvement in the investigation of the Sărmaș massacre (September 1944), during which Hungarian gendarmes and locals were responsible for the deaths of 126 Jews, including 39 children under 15.

[8] Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România. 1940-1944*, 1946-1948. Volume I (*The Legionnaires and the Rebellion*), describing the period of the "national-legionary state", was published in 1946. Volume II, focusing on the *Iași Pogrom*, was released in 1948. Volume III (Transnistria), documenting the horrors of the camps in Transnistria and detailing anti-Jewish violence in Bukovina and Bessarabia, was published in 1947.

[9] Jacob Apenszlak, *Black Book of Polish Jewry: An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry Under the Nazi Occupation.*

Grossman within the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, had been assembled. Based on eyewitness testimonies and the authors' investigations, it extensively documented Nazi massacres in the East (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and the Baltic states). Although galleys were prepared in 1947, publication was suppressed in 1948 under Stalin, in part because the work foregrounded specifically Jewish suffering and local collaboration—contradicting the emerging state narrative of undifferentiated "anti-fascist" (Soviet) victims. That narrative would soon circulate in Romania as well.

Interestingly, a significant portion of the first volume of the "Чёрная Кни́га" appeared in Romania in 1946, published by the Romanian Institute for Documentation and translated by R(otislav) Donici: *The Black Book on the heinous killings of Jews by German fascists during the 1941-1945 war, in the regions occupied in the Soviet Union and in the extermination camps in Polish territory*[10]. Equally noteworthy is that the volume's chapter on crimes in Ukraine includes texts documenting atrocities in Odessa, across Romanian-administered Transnistria, and in the Cernăuți region (Northern Bukovina)—acts in which Romanian authorities were implicated. Elements of the living memory of the Holocaust in Romania thus also reached the public through this channel. It is therefore reasonable to infer that the "Black Book" model was already circulating in the closing years of the war, serving Matatias Carp as a template—if not for composition, then at least for the title.

Carp's *Cartea neagră...* is structured as a starkly factual narrative, meticulously accounting for horror and crime, supplemented by supporting documents. Notably, these volumes later served as a documentary resource for historians of the Holocaust in Romania (e.g. Friling et al., 2005, Ioanid, 2000). Matatias Carp's work goes beyond its documentary value, embodying an ethical commitment to memory. The author explicitly positions himself as the "archivist and recorder of Jewish pains in Romania" (Carp, 1946, p. 12), dedicated to preserving the apocalyptic dimensions of the collective trauma experienced by Jewish communities in the Romanian territories. The palpable urgency in the composition reflects a profound need to safeguard the memory of those lost—an imperative for truth and justice, invoking the spirit of "civilization".

> "No thoughts of revenge consume me. I identify with the people of the book and culture, taking pride in the civilization we've contributed to humanity—a civilization that cradled figures like Moses, the Prophets, Christ, Spinoza, Einstein, and many others. This civilization has purged us of many base sentiments, particularly the desire for revenge. Therefore, I harbor no inclination for revenge, be it for the torments I've endured, the mistreatment that separated me from my father[11] forever, the massacre on the Bug River of the parents of the two children from Transnistria—now my children[12], whether by blood or soul—or the sufferings of my numerous brothers worldwide. Instead, I seek justice. I wish for the punishment of anyone who has tortured, robbed, or killed the innocent, in alignment with the sacred justice derived from common sense and the sentiments of civilized humanity. My aim is to extricate Jewish pain from the shadows it has been confined to. I desire that the truth, only the truth, and the complete truth be universally known." (Carp, 1946, 13[13])

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[10] *Cartea neagră asupra uciderilor mişeleşti ale evreilor de către fasciştii germani în timpul războiului de la 1941-1945, în regiunile ocupate în Uniunea Sovietică şi în lagărele de exterminare de pe teritoriul Poloniei* (in Romanian).

[11] Horia Carp, a senator during the interwar period, emigrated to Palestine at the beginning of World War II. He died in 1943.

[12] Ella and Matatias Carp adopted two orphans whose parents perished in Transnistria.

[13] My translation, D.T. All translations from Romanian primary sources belong to me.

Matatias Carp's documentary volumes did not have the impact one might have expected. Soon afterward, amid a climate shaped by Stalin's hostility to Israel and by "anti-Zionist" and "anti-cosmopolitan" campaigns, state persecutions of Jews resumed, prompting early waves of emigration, including members of the Carp family. Because the regime was ideologically indifferent—even hostile—to their subject matter, the books were consigned to library special collections (Laignel-Lavastine, 2009, 33; see also Fisher, 2020). They remained largely unknown even after 1990, except within specialized circles focused on Holocaust studies. A 1996 reissue prepared by Lya Benjamin and Ion Ionescu likewise circulated only in limited fashion.

A similar fate befell the documentary volumes authored by Marius Mircu. He, recognized as one of the most dynamic journalists of the interwar period (Țâgșorean, 2019), wrote three volumes detailing the most horrifying episodes of the Holocaust in Romania, all published in Bucharest within a span of less than three years: *The Pogrom in Iași* (1944), *Pogroms in Bucovina and Dorohoi* (1945), *Pogroms in Bessarabia and Several Other Incidents* (1947). While Matatias Carp's approach is that of an archivist presenting and documenting raw facts, Mircu's tone is more reportorial and alert, even though the brutal facts of this horrific history are prevalent. All three volumes meticulously document the major massacres, list victims and perpetrators, and raise questions about the moral responsibility involved in confronting this bloody history—an "orgy of crime" perpetrated not only by authorities but also by ordinary people incited to hatred against their Jewish neighbors, suddenly perceived as enemies[14].

Furthermore, the author posits that his volumes serve as "contributions to the history of the attempt to exterminate the Jews" (Mircu, 1947[15]), functioning as "materials for the historian" (Mircu, 1945, p. 16), drawn from eyewitness accounts or replicated from received letters, notebooks, and testimonies presented during the trials of war criminals. Within the pages of his volumes, the author compiles the living traumatic memories of survivors for future generations. Notably, in the last volume focused on crimes in Bessarabia, several journals and notebooks from survivors like Editha Kertzaman (14 years old), Ghizela Herșcovici (18 years old), and Ruth Glasberg[16] (13 years old) are reproduced.

As we can see in the paratextual elements of their volumes, both Matatias Carp and Marius Mircu have a broader project. Carp aims to draft at least six volumes, including those on the persecution of Jews in the Old Kingdom, the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania, and probably the crimes that occurred with the advancement of the war in the eastern territories. Marius Mircu also expresses his determination to gather new material or correct previously published content with the help of new testimonies and documents. Both Carp and Mircu adopt a cautious stance toward the USSR and the impending communist order. Despite this calibrated tone in their works, the period's public discourse shows little willingness to integrate survivors' traumatic suffering into collective memory.

Falling within the realm of documentary texts is also F. Brunea-Fox's journal-

[14] For an insight into the attitudes and actions of non-Jews toward their Jewish neighbors in Bessarabia and Transnistria, see Dumitru, 2019.

[15] The 1947 volume *Pogromurile din Basarabia* (The Pogroms of Bessarabia) bears the subtitle "Contributions to the History of the Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Romania."

[16] Ruth Glasberg, who later immigrated to the United States, published her memoirs fifty years after these events: *Ruth's Journey: A Survivor's Memoir*, 1996 (translated in Romanian as *Timpul Lacrimilor secate*, 2003).

reportage. He was a well-known avant-garde writer during the interwar period and a prolific reporter for the newspapers *Adevărul* and *Dimineața*. His work, titled *Orașul măcelului. Jurnalul rebeliunei și al crimelor legionare* (*The City of Massacre: The Journal of the Rebellion and Legionary Crimes*), was first published in 1944. I've referred to it as a journal-reportage because Brunea-Fox focuses on real-time recording and immediate transcription of the events, adopting a journalistic approach to document the crimes against the Jewish population in Bucharest during the "Legionary rebellion" of January 1941. Drafted between January 21, the day of the first manifestations of "rebel" violence, and February 1, 1941, Brunea-Fox's text serves as an act of revolt by an involved observer committed to capturing the horror of the moment. In his own words, "the following pages are raw, unpolished notes—the 'unrefined film', as they say in photographic jargon—of those few days of maximum legionary confusion, the so-called rebellion" (Brunea-Fox, 1997, p. 11).

During the first days of the January 1941 "Legionary Rebellion," the author was confined by the violence to his apartment on Vasile Lascăr Street in Bucharest and thus was unaware of the full extent of the atrocities unfolding outside. However, starting on January 24 Brunea-Fox ventured into the streets, accompanied by the photojournalist Iosif Berman[17], driven by the desire to document the horrors. This included capturing images of the dead gathered at the morgue, the mutilated corpses in the Jilava forest, the devastation of the Jewish neighborhoods of Dudești and Văcărești, the destruction of shops, and the synagogues engulfed in flames. He also documented shattered destinies, such as that of Rabbi Guttman, miraculously spared from execution but faced with the loss of both children. Ultimately, through his text, F. Brunea-Fox becomes an essential witness to one the first violent episode of the Holocaust in Romania. His work exhibits a remarkable balance between attention to detail and stylistic mastery, authentically reflecting the emotions and tensions of the recorded or reconstructed events, making it a valuable documentary source and a significant testimony to the human tragedy of that period.

A comparable work to *Orașul măcelului*, this time centered on the deportations to Transnistria, is the book *La braț cu moartea* (*Hand in Hand with Death* - 1945) by M. Rudich[18], a colleague of Brunea-Fox in the field of reportage. Notably, Brunea-Fox pens the preface for this volume, once again underscoring his commitment to preserving the traumatic memory of survivors. Falling within the documentary reportage genre and echoing Brunea-Fox's stylistic approach, albeit without the razor-sharp precision of his rhetoric, the descriptions in this work focus on the hardships faced by Jewish communities in Cernăuți and Northern Bukovina, deported to the hostile and perilous landscape of Transnistria. The narratives delineate convoys pushed to their limits, the wretched ghettos established in villages or war-ravaged collective farms infested with typhus. The text vividly portrays the brutality, cynicism, and corruption of the authorities. The overall tone leans toward lamentation, with the emphasis not on intricate details, although present, but rather on presenting a comprehensive view of collective suffering. The conclusion expresses the frustration in encapsulating all the traumatic

[17] Berman's photographs accompany the text.

[18] Mayer (Mircea) Rudich (1913-1991) was a poet and journalist. He held an official position in government structures after 1948. From 1951 to 1955, he faced arrest by communist authorities due to his involvement in Zionist activities. In 1959 he emigrated to Israel, where he continued his journalistic work. He was also known to use the pseudonym H. Heller.

experiences of ordinary people enduring, dying, or losing loved ones in this harrowing situation. Additionally, it conveys the belief that the volume could serve as an essential document for comprehending the truth and holding the guilty accountable, imprinting the text with a distinct testimonial character.

Also possessing a testimonial-documentary value, articulated with direct urgency[19], is Fabius Ornstein's[20] concise pamphlet, *Suferințele deportaților în Transnistria / Gândiți-vă la tot ce s-a petrecut în Transnistria* (*The Suffering of Deportees in Transnistria / Reflect on Everything That Happened in Transnistria*), published in 1945 by the Publishing House of the Association of Former Deportees from Transnistria. Designed as an introduction to a more extensive work, yet to be released during more peaceful times, this 88-page brochure endeavors to draw the broader public's attention to the sufferings of Jews in the hellish reality of Transnistria. This encompasses both the part of Transnistria administered by Romanian authorities and the labor camps situated beyond the Bug River under German administration. Ornstein employs a simple yet emotionally compelling writing style to depict emblematic images of the Transnistrian ordeal: the terror of deportation, the harrowing journey in cattle cars or along mud-clogged roads claiming innocent lives at every step, mothers drained of strength collapsing beside their children in frozen mud, mass executions, rapes, and mass graves encountered by deportees foreseeing their grim future. The narrative delves into the dehumanization of survivors, along with the camps and ghettos where deportees succumb to hunger, typhus, or fall victim to the inhuman brutality of guards. Joining emblematic images framing patterns of collective suffering and concrete examples extracted from testimonies, the book assumes a fragmentary structure, likely a consequence of the immediacy of events and the inherent challenge of organizing the traumatic responses to a not-so-distant experience. The author is conscious that many of the depicted images may appear almost unbelievable.

> "Dear Reader, as you delve into these lines, I anticipate your skepticism, perhaps perceiving them as exaggerations. This is what intensifies our pain. Our tragedy is vividly depicted, like dark paintings on an already dark canvas. The extent of what we endured is beyond belief. The horrors of our experiences in Transnistria were truly harrowing." (Ornstein, 1945, p. 48)

However, the testimony must be shared. The book is saturated from start to finish with a tone of lamentation that encompasses both the recently endured traumatic past and the uncertain present. Poignant pages vividly depict the nearly complete annihilation of communities in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, leaving behind only a few spectral remnants. Notably, an analogy is drawn between Transnistria and the infamous death camps in Poland (Auschwitz, Majdanek). The book concludes with an appeal to aid the survivors, whose sufferings seem to garner little interest at that moment[21]. It is a cry for assistance, much like the entire book serves as an appeal to preserve the traumatic memory of those lost in the hell of Transnistria.

Another work born out of a testimonial imperative is Aurel Baranga's *Ninge peste*

[19] This is the author's dedication at the beginning of the small volume: "Dedicated to the souls who perished in the inferno of Transnistria, victims of obscurantism and deception that betrayed humanity in the twentieth century by a gang of executioners, murderers, villains, adventurers..."

[20] Fabius Ornstein served as the chosen leader among the deportees in the Kopaigorod ghetto. At the time of writing the book, he was the president of the Association of Former Detainees from Transnistria.

[21] For the majority population's attitude in Romania towards Holocaust survivors, see Fisher, 2020, pp. 109-151.

Ucraina (*It Snows over Ukraine*). It is a volume crafted from testimonies presented during the early war crimes trials that commenced in 1945[22]. Baranga reconstructs the horrors of Transnistria by faithfully narrating, in the first person, the survivors' testimonies that might otherwise have languished only in judicial archives. The book takes on the semblance of a literary report, outlining the overarching framework that organizes the patterns of traumatic experiences it aims to make public. Within this construction, the pathos and intensely emotional style of the author's interventions notably reveal the young author's empathy toward the sufferings recounted by the witnesses. Since the volume, initially published in 1945 (by Veritas Publishing House), reappears in a second edition (in 1946, by Scânteia Publishing House), we infer that it wielded some influence at the time, even though it was subsequently overlooked.

During this period, there are other types of texts addressing the Holocaust issue in Romania, many of them implicitly documentary: reports, lists of the deceased, manifestos, propagandistic brochures, volumes of investigations, and tributes to "martyrs". The publication dates of these texts in 1944 and 1945 indicate their likely compilation during the wartime, highlighting the urgency to break the silence surrounding the anti-Jewish persecutions of the preceding years. Among these texts are notable examples such as the registry of victims of the Legionary rebellion (*Crimele legionarilor*,1945), a memorial volume dedicated to the brothers Iancu and Iosif Guttman, who lost their lives in the Jilava forest massacre during the same Legionary rebellion[23], and an investigative volume by Eliezer Fraenkel titled *Problema evreiască* (published in Iași, at the "I. L. Peretz" Jewish Literary Circle, November 1945), featuring responses from notable figures like Felix Aderca, Tudor Arghezi, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, N. D. Cocea, Petru Groza, and A. L. Zisu[24]. Additionally, the parliamentary inquiry by social-democrat Dumitru Pop (from April 1, 1947) concerning the Pogrom in Iași adds another layer to this collection.

Moreover, memoir reports by individuals involved in coordinating Jewish communities during this tumultuous period are significant. These texts, initially published in the press before being compiled into volumes, serve dual purposes. Firstly, they function as activity reports justifying the successes or failures of leaders in Jewish organizations during challenging times. Secondly, they provide details, either directly or implicitly, related to the persecutions endured by Jewish communities in Romania.

Misu Benvenisti, president of the Zionist Organization between 1941 and 1943, compiles a brochure containing articles from the organization's activity report, previously published in four issues of *Viața Evreească* (*Jewish Life*): *Sionismul în vremea prigoanei* (*Zionism During the Persecution*, 1944). This concise volume primarily offers documentary material, narrating the efforts made by representatives of Jewish organizations to preserve the communal life of the persecuted.

In a more extensive and personal account, S. Cristian, president of the Jewish

[22] Several of the reports and testimonies collected in this volume were first published, beginning in April 1945, in the communist daily *România Liberă* ("Free Romania").

[23] It is a volume dedicated to the memory of these promising young individuals by their father, Rabbi Zvi Guttman, who miraculously escaped that massacre. The volume primarily gathers the ethical and axiological articles of Iancu Guttman, including his undergraduate thesis from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest, which he completed in 1935.

[24] The volume includes a comprehensive discussion of what is generically referred to as the "Jewish question" (antisemitism, discrimination, and barbaric anti-Jewish violence during the war) and its solutions (Zionism, emigration to "Palestine"). The central theme of the volume is the establishment of a Jewish state as a solution to the recent tragic history.

community in Iași between 1940 and 1941, presents *Patru ani de urgie* (*Four Years of Persecution* - 1944). Subtitled *Notele unui evreu din România*" (*Notes of a Jew from Romania*), the 157 pages strive to recover crucial events of the persecution of Jews in Romania. S. Cristian is acquainted with these events in his capacity as the president of the Jewish community in Iași, as a close collaborator of Wilhelm Filderman, as the Inspector of Jewish Communities in the Old Kingdom, a position within the Central Office of Jews (the Romanian Judenrat), and last, but not least, as a political prisoner. For his activity as a representative of the Jewish community in Iași, S.C. Cristian is arrested in May 1941, investigated by the local police, and later (in early June 1941) interned in the camp at Târgu-Jiu until September 1941. It is noteworthy that one of the adjacent accusations is related to communism, but this should not be surprising given the myth of "Judeo-communism" propagated by the official anti-Semitic discourse of the time. The author himself analyzes and refutes this "accusation" on several occasions, which would have otherwise benefited him in the context of Romania's occupation by the U.S.S.R. (Cristian, 1944, pp. 21-22).

S. Cristian deliberately adopts a sober style, personally undertaking the act of recollection, with the aim of collective utility:

> "What prompts me to gather and preserve this material is also a confessional relief because significant events in life must be told. I feel compelled to make them public as documentary material for the chronicler of tomorrow, who will have to establish the so-called historical truth" (Cristian, 1944, p. 5).

Personal memories align with the need to represent the collective suffering and are occasionally supplemented by documents, especially memorials addressed to authorities to improve the lives of Jewish communities. A particularly emotional section of the narrative is dedicated to the Pogrom in Iași, an event witnessed from afar by the author, who was interned at the political detainees' camp in Târgu-Jiu at that moment. Despite the physical distance, the impact of the event is vividly conveyed: "It was indeed a massacre. A massacre that spared neither women, nor children, nor mothers with children in their arms. Entire families were exterminated" (Cristian, 1944, p. 63). Other tragic events, such as the massacres in Bessarabia and Bukovina and the deportations to Transnistria, are also documented with the clear intention of capturing and directly communicating the profound tragedy of the Holocaust in Romania.

Artistic Representations of the Holocaust (1944-1947)

In the succinct descriptions provided earlier, we observe that between 1944 and 1947, there is a notable body of documentary – testimonial "literature" addressing the persecution and violence against Jewish communities in Romania and the occupied Eastern territories. Although predominantly found in specialized journalism, particularly within Jewish community newspapers, the need for systematic documentation is evident in the creation of volumes that focus on portraying recent tragic events. These volumes exhibit diverse discursive styles, including documented narratives with a historical treatise aspect (Matatias Carp), reportage (Marius Mircu, F. Brunea-Fox, M. Rudich), testimonial narratives (F. Ornstein, A. Baranga), memorial reports (M. Benvenisti, S. C. Cristian), and more. Beyond the personal motivations of the authors, which may involve justifying their participation in events, there is a shared motivation: the imperative to

document and convey the horror and collective suffering. Consequently, these texts serve a dual purpose, being both memorial and testimonial. They not only preserve the memory of those lost but also bear witness on their behalf. This duality is evident in the passionate writing, forceful language, rhetorical questions concerning the need for assistance and justice, and, crucially, in the recognition that the act of remembrance serves the cause of historical truth and future chroniclers.

Another notable category of representations, well attested in the relatively brief period under consideration, concerns artistic—or potentially "literary"—depictions of Romania's recent Holocaust trauma. Primarily, there is an emerging form of memoir writing. Memoirs, serving as a discourse of memory representing personal experience, navigate the boundary between factual and aesthetic realms. The inclusion of references to the time and historical events that trigger the act of remembering imbues memoirs with a documentary character. Concurrently, memoirs employ narration as a perspectivist instrument to vividly depict the personal experience of historical events. This narrative strategy not only provides opportunities for reflection but also permeates memoirs with emotional depth, thereby situating them more closely to "literature".

I have identified at least two such volumes, a notable occurrence considering that memorial discourse typically acts at a considerable temporal distance from the events being remembered. In this instance, however, there appears to be an urgent pressure to communicate the traumatic experiences and contribute to the development of a living memory. Leon Loewenton, an engineer, inventor, and professional chess player (representing Romania at the Chess Olympiad in 1924), independently publishes *Urmăriți de Gestapo. Amintiri din Franța* (*Hunted by the Gestapo. Memories from France – 1940-1944*) in 1944 at the Curierul Printing House in Bucharest. This book recounts the experiences of a Jewish refugee in France. In January 1940, prompted by the formalization of anti-Semitic policies in Romania following the establishment of the Goga government (December 1937), the memoirist and his family embark on a journey to France, a country symbolizing freedom at the beginning of this adventure. However, as France swiftly succumbs to the war, the journey turns into a challenging struggle for survival in a suddenly hostile territory. Loewenton remarks,

> "Freedom and generosity! No! France from 1940-1944 did not demonstrate such qualities. On the contrary: many, very many [French] followed the Teutonic example and proved that they were no longer worthy to be given as a model of true humanity, as we were accustomed to whenever we spoke of France and the French." (Loewenton, 1944, p. 21)

The book details an ongoing escape, leading the memoirist from the Nazi-occupied zone to the region controlled by their collaborators, the Vichy government of Petain: Marseille, Nice, Monte Carlo, and subsequently back to Paris. It chronicles the notorious "raids", arrests, and mass deportations of the Jewish population, instilling terror in refugees wherever they sought sanctuary. The memoir records alarming rumors about the horrifying events across Nazi-controlled Europe, including Romania[25]. The narrative of events is interspersed at every turn with reflections on the barbarity that has engulfed humanity, expressed in forceful language reflecting anger in the face of the tragic

[25] "The miseries multiplied in old Europe. [...] The news coming from Romania only increased our worries; we had enough relatives left in Bucharest! Despite the censorship of correspondence, we could learn a lot about the horrors committed by the Legionnaires" (Loewenton, 1944, p. 35).

absurdity of history. This fury appears to serve as a wellspring of energy for the memoirist, resolute in surviving[26], resisting, and bearing witness—a personal testimony perceived as emblematic of the assumed collective identity.

> "And if I were to give too much development to the events related to my person, I can assert that I understood to proceed in this way, convinced that I depict the adventures of most of those who have gone through identical circumstances [...]. [...] My life from 1940 to 1944 represents nothing but a characteristic episode of the days experienced by the Jews in France." (Loewenton, 1944, p. 13)

The other memoir volume of the period, titled *Viață, reprimește-mă!* (*Life, take me back!*) and authored by Nora Diamantștein, was published in 1948 by Universul Publishing House. Nora, a young Jewish woman, chose to stay in Cluj to care for her mother when Northern Transylvania was ceded. In a broad sense, Nora's experiences reflect the typical fate of Jews from this region, who were deported to Auschwitz starting in May 1944. This encompassed the escalating persecutions against the Jewish community in Cluj, the transfer to the well-known ghetto at the Brick Factory for the ultimate journey to Auschwitz, the notorious "selection" upon arrival, the struggle with death and suffering in the Nazi concentration camp, the mass deaths, and the fortunate survival of a few.

Nora, alongside her mother, faced deportation, with her mother tragically sent to the gas chamber upon arrival. This marked the moment when the narrator comprehended that she had entered a realm of terror, and from this juncture, her narrative evolved into a tale of survival, enduring months of illness, suffering, and terror. The account is filled with horrifying images, with one of the most poignant being the discovery of Nora's own mother in the heap of corpses she had to burn (Diamanștein, 1948, p. 156).

However, the encyclopedic nature of Nora Diamantștein's narrative poses challenges and raises doubts about the authenticity of the story. While the author provides ample personal details, including information about family members or acquaintances from Cluj who were deported alongside her, there is also an abundance of information about the geography and "historical" figures of the Auschwitz camps. Nora appears to have been present at various locations in Auschwitz (crematoriums, pits where corpses were burned, rooms for medical experiments, etc.), having encounters with nearly all subsequently infamous individuals (Mengele, Irma Grese, Victor Capesius, among others), and witnessing nearly all significant events in the last months of Auschwitz. This seems unrealistic for a simple Jewish inmate, even one with privileged status. It is plausible that the author enriched her narrative with details learned later from the experiences or testimonies of other detainees in similar situations.

The two memoir texts previously mentioned are closely tied to the European Holocaust. Loewenton discusses the persecution of Jews in France, while Diamantștein delves into the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania, addressing deportation and genocide in the camps in Poland. Despite the evident need to narrate the horror in both cases, it appears that in Diamantștein's situation, the Romanian authorities played a

[26] In the end, the Loewenton family is repatriated to Romania in early 1944, as part of the Romanian government's decision to safeguard and bring back its citizens, including those of Jewish identity. This move is essentially a response to the Romanian authorities' realization of the unavoidable defeat in the war. For more details on this matter, see Klarsfeld, 2007).

political role, especially after the official establishment of communism on December 30, 1947. This involvement encouraged narratives about the Holocaust in territories under Hungarian/German jurisdiction, marking an incipient process of deflective negationism (Shafir, 2002, p. 49). Nora Diamantștein herself mentions being encouraged to write by Petru Groza, the prime minister at that time, whom she considers a close family friend[27]. This explains why Nora's memoir aims to be all-encompassing, attempting to bring to the attention of the Romanian public a panoramic picture of the sufferings of the Jews in Northern Transylvania.

Furthermore, during this period, a substantial body of Holocaust literature in Hungarian is present, albeit published in the Northern Transylvanian territories that were regained by Romania. Among the Jewish communities in Transylvania, there is a rapid manifestation of living memory, reminiscent of that in the Old Kingdom of Romania. After the liberation of the camps in Poland, the very few survivors were interviewed by the Hungarian-language press, and details begin to emerge from early 1945, as seen in the newspaper *Világosság* (see Tibori-Szabó, 2017). By late 1945, comprehensive reports on the Nazi genocide in Polish camps, particularly Auschwitz—where Transylvanian Jews had been deported—started emerging in Hungarian.

The memoir volume *Füst* (*Smoke*), written by Cluj lawyer Ottó Kornis (1945), provides a sober account, coupled with a bitter reflection on the absolute horror of this crime—a traumatic event unsurpassable by survivors. Anna Hegedűsné Molnár's work, *Miért? Egy deportált nő élményei a sárga csillagtól a vörös csillagig* (*Why? Experiences of a Deported Woman from the Yellow Star to the Red Star* - 1945[28]), will be published at the same time in Arad. In 1946, memoirs by Dóra Ferencz (*Kápó voltam - I Was a Kapo*) appear in Arad, and in Oradea, József Gréda publishes a volume of poetry (*Fogózz a semmibe – Clinging to Nothing*), a poignant lyrical confession about the impossibility of overcoming the trauma suffered in the Nazi concentration camp. Also in Oradea, in 1946, Béla Katona's book of reports, *Várad a viharban* (*Oradea in the Storm*), detailing the tragic dissolution of the Jewish community in Oradea, is published. However, perhaps the most well-known book about the tragic fate of the Jews in Oradea, coupled with an "inside" account of the mechanisms of the Auschwitz crime, is Miklós Nyiszli's work, *Dr. Mengele boncoló orvosa voltam az auschwitzi krematóriumban* (*I Was the Autopsy Doctor of Dr. Mengele in the Auschwitz Crematorium*), published in Oradea in 1946. The volume, written by the one who could directly observe, as he was Mengele's autopsy doctor, the atrocity and magnitude of the crimes at Auschwitz, is constructed as a raw, documentary testimony. Parts of the book will be translated into the West very quickly, and in 1947, Dr. Nyiszli became one of the witnesses in the famous Nuremberg Trials against Nazi war criminals.

The titles mentioned above represent only a fraction of the Hungarian writings about the Holocaust published in Transylvania during the immediate post-war period[29]. The consistency of these writings suggests that among the survivors of the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania, there is also a compelling need to communicate the horrors they experienced, and an early environment is emerging that fosters the expression of

[27] In the final sections, the narrative shifts to a tone of "grateful piety" towards the Soviet Union and the, otherwise real, act of liberating Nazi concentration camps, which, however, brings another oppressive and totalitarian power to Eastern Europe.
[28] In 2014, the volume will also be published in English translation: *As the Lilacs Bloomed* (2014).
[29] For further details see Tibori-Szabó, 2017.

living memory. However, these expressions are likely to be short-lived, facing interruption by ideological barriers that will contribute to the eventual fading of these memorial accounts from collective memory. Just one of these volumes, Miklós Nyiszli's, will be translated into Romanian in the near future (1965). This translation is likely intended to uphold the narrative of the exclusive guilt of Nazi Germany for the Holocaust in the Romanian public consciousness.

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Similar to memoirs and straddling the line between fact and literature is the diary. Arnold Dagani's diary, titled *Groapa e în livada cu vișini* (*The Pit is in the Cherry Orchard*), initially published in 1947 by Editura Socec, stands as a representative example from this period. Writing a journal during the Holocaust posed a challenging and perilous task, laden with high chances of failure due to both psychological and pragmatic obstacles. Amid an environment saturated with violence, persecution, threats, deportations, and isolation in ghettos, the diarist required extraordinary determination and resilience to withstand overwhelming despair. Additionally, the lack of tranquility, writing materials, and paper constituted formidable hurdles. The fear of divulging too much was another concern, with diarists fearful that their journal, if discovered by persecutors, could expedite their demise and that of their loved ones. These challenges were further compounded by the grim prospect that, upon arrest, transportation to a camp, execution, or gassing, the journal would be lost or destroyed, rendering all efforts to document suffering seemingly futile.

Due to these challenges, camp journals are scarce, with the majority of Holocaust journals originating from individuals deported to ghettos or those evading authorities. Arnold Dagani's (Arnold Corn) journal is particularly noteworthy. Born in Suceava in 1909, he settled in Bucharest in 1932 and later in Cernăuți in 1940. In 1942, he and his wife were deported to Transnistria, handed over by Romanian authorities to the Germans across the Bug River. There, deported Jews were used as slaves for German army infrastructure projects, and those deemed expendable faced execution. Dagani spent a significant portion of the deportation period in the Mihailovka camp and its associated forced labor groups. In the summer of 1943, he successfully escaped with his wife, returning to Transnistria under Romanian administration. In 1944, he managed to return to Bucharest. The Mihailovka camp was liquidated on December 10, 1943, with the estimated number of victims buried in a cherry orchard reaching around 500.

Dagani's ability to document his camp experiences was facilitated by his talent as an artist, enabling him to create drawings and paintings commissioned by various figures in the camp administration. This activity provided him with limited access to paper and writing instruments, as well as the opportunity to secretly document camp experiences despite imminent dangers. One of the striking features of the journal is Dagani's almost accounting-like way in which he records the shootings of prisoners, a true routine for the executioner guards:

> "It seems that SS Unterscharfuhrer Walter Mintel found a solution to the housing problem [of slave-prisoners]. He ordered that all those who were weak or sick be shot. One hundred and seven fell victims." (Dagani, 1947, p. 84)

> "Around noon, the Lithuanians arrived on the road with a cart, whistling cheerfully. They reeked of brandy. They shook hands with the Germans. ... Sixteen people were shot, fourteen of the martyrs were Ukrainian Jews" (Dagani, 1947, p. 25)

In addition to the raw and un-stylized recording, thus authentic, of the atrocities he witnessed in the camp, Dagani managed to save about 50 drawings and watercolors created in secret, visually representing camp life and detainees. The drawings avoid the direct depiction of violence, rendering instead portraits, camp interiors, or work scenes. The image of suffering emerges more from background elements (barbed wire, confined spaces, graves) and from the facial expressions, sketched against the backdrop of a somber setting, outlined with hesitant lines, generating shadows. Sixteen of these, reproduced in black and white, accompany the journal in published editions, thereby enhancing the value and authenticity of the diary document, which becomes a „visual" testimony as well.

A. Dagani, *The Column of Prisoners and the Stables* (watercolor, 1942)

A. Dagani, *Stone Quarry* (watercolor, 1942)

A. Dagani, *Pietá* (pencil, 1942)

Indeed, visual testimony—that is, depictions of the persecutions in the plastic arts—is well represented during this period. Particularly poignant is the work of Sol Omovici, titled *Duminica aceia...* (1945) (*That Sunday...*[30]), published in 1945 under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress. Prefaced by Professor Iorgu Iordan, to whom the album directly evokes the atmosphere of the "Dantean inferno" in Iași during the pogrom, where the "most horrifying massacre" unfolded, the volume reproduces in black and white nineteen oil paintings by this artist about whom little is known. From the scant available information, we deduce that the painter, originally from Iași, was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Iași, and likely one of the survivors of the "death trains",

[30] "That Sunday..." refers to the Sunday of June 29, 1941, the bloodiest day of the Iași Pogrom.

probably the one from Podul Iloaiei. According to a Zionist newspaper of the period[31], we learn that the paintings, created urgently to depict his own trauma and that of the community to which he belonged, were exhibited in Iași and Bucharest without triggering any significant resonance.

In this album, we encounter an eyewitness's artistic representation, evident both in the thematic nuances of the reproduced paintings and in a technique derived from expressionism, hovering at the edge of the figurative. The human figures are recognizable, yet integrated into a visual narrative that elicits strong emotions. The images are assembled to depict emblematic scenes of the pogrom: the convoys of the arrested, atrocities in the courtyard of the Police Station (Chestură) and on the streets, the corpses of elderly people, women, and children lying on the pavement, and the collaborationism of non-Jewish residents of Iași, among other scenes. A significant part of the images (8 out of 19) is dedicated to scenes from the death trains: individuals disfigured by thirst, whose bodies seem to liquefy in the heat intensified by the crowding of dark wagons ("For a Drop of Water"), faces decomposed by pain that suggest madness and hallucination, the excruciating pain of a father holding his suffocated son in his arms ("Death of the Child"), the "mockery" of the soldier pouring water in front of the thirsty ones, and more. Some images carry a touch of personal commentary, such as the one titled "The Great Culprit," which depicts, in the foreground, an elderly rabbi collapsed on the pavement with a broken skull, and, in the background, corpses of women and children; or those portraying the suffering of those who survived (for example, "A Grieving Mother" or "Reunion with the Son"). The album gives the impression of the plastic materialization of a traumatic memory that demands communication not only through visual representation but especially through the evocation of authentic suffering. Thus, Sol Omovici's album, in addition to its apparent documentary value, possesses an experiential dimension, appearing capable of sublimating the suffering of that time.

Sol Omovici, *The Great Culprit*

Sol Omovici, *For a Drop of Water*

Another graphic testimony from that period is Aurel Mărculescu's (Aron Marcovici) Ghetto și lagăr (Ghetto and Camp), published in 1947 by Continent Publishing House.

[31] *Tineretul nou*, no. 22/1946.

A skilled engraver, Mărculescu was affiliated with socialist circles before the war, contributing illustrations, including political cartoons and social depictions, to various magazines. These illustrations often portrayed social outcasts and Jewish ghettos. As the war began, Mărculescu sought refuge in Botoșani. Witnessing the persecution of the Jewish population, he turned to his friend Sașa Pană for assistance in publishing an album of engravings that would capture "the misery of a population doomed by the rulers of the time to destruction. Landscapes of tears and humiliation" (Pană, 1967, p. 17). Unfortunately, this endeavor was thwarted as he was deported to Transnistria, spending 16 months in the Vapniarka and Savrani camps. Despite the harsh conditions, he continued to create engravings, collecting images for the album that would be produced after his liberation.

The resulting album comprises 18 engravings, prefaced by contributions from friends such as Sașa Pană, Ury Benador, and Scarlat Callimachi. These presentations underscore the documentary nature of the images, imbued with poignant signs of suffering. Mărculescu's artistic vision draws inspiration from expressionism. The engravings, characterized by a dark tone, a tense interplay of black and white, and specific contrasts inherent to this technique, convey emotionally charged images evoking suffering. Examples include cadaveric faces seen behind barbed wire ("After the Barbed Wire"), the disarticulated and somber geography of the ghetto ("The Savrani Camp") and the camp itself ("The Vapniarka Camp – The Last Journey"), and the direct violence of executions ("The Massacre at Rîbnița").

Although the album serves as a noteworthy visual testament, its distribution did not reach beyond leftist circles, where it was primarily appreciated as a depiction of "fascist" cruelty. Due to deteriorating health during his internment, Mărculescu passed away in December 1947. His name and art would later be cited as relatively minor aspects in the "revolutionary" and "anti-fascist" struggle within Romanian communism.

Aurel Mărculescu, *The Vapniarca Camp – The Last Journey*

During this period, there is also an emerging fiction literature about the Holocaust. This belongs either to experienced writers who were previously interested in the identity issues of Jewish communities, such as Isac Peltz or Sergiu Dan (Isidor Rotman), or

to young writers, some of whom have socialist/communist sympathies.

The most ambitious fictional undertaking is Sergiu Dan's novel, *Unde începe noaptea* (*Where Night Begins*), released in 1945 by Editura Națională Mecu. The author, affiliated with both avant-garde circles and the "modernist" group at *Sburătorul* before the war, garnered relative acclaim for several novels with modernist aspirations and a psychological perspective (such as *Love and Death in the Province*, *Arsenic*, and *The Veniamin Sisters*). Dan's political engagement leaned towards a liberal-democratic stance, evident in his editorial work in the 1930s for the National Peasant Party newspaper *Dreptatea*. As a notable figure in the Romanian-Jewish intellectual elite, he faced anti-Semitic persecution starting from 1938, enduring expulsion from the Writers' Union, a ban on signing rights, and deportation to Transnistria.

Where Night Begins directly draws from Dan's experience of persecution and deportation but transcends a simple autobiographical-documentary narrative in terms of construction, style, and thematic significance. Employing narrative techniques rooted in realism (including a diverse cast of characters, multiple narrative threads, and encyclopedic focalization), the novel aims to depict a comprehensive picture of the years of anti-Jewish persecution from 1938 to 1944.

The initial section paints a panorama populated by characters representative of the Romanian-Jewish world before the Holocaust. Key figures include the prominent merchant (David Bainer), the communist intellectual (Nelu Gold, Adamov), the lawyer (Fred Natanson), the vaguely talented musician (Cer(novitzki)), the young dreamer (Mad Bainer, Nina Haber), the perpetually indebted poet who turns out to be an unscrupulous legionary (Lucifer), the "jew-lover"[32] Romanian (Grig), and others. In the background, the setting is convincingly populated with elements of a complex and well-structured world—a world where Romanians and Jews are friends or fiancés, sharing ideas, living life, enduring hardships, and celebrating together. Nevertheless, this world begins to crumble as the presence of evil, namely anti-Semitic intolerance and hatred, becomes more visible.

As announced by a character—a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany—early in the pages of the novel, night is approaching: "Don't you see, blind ones? A night, like never before, is coming. And don't you hear, deaf ones, anything? Can't you hear people with axes in their hands approach?" (Dan, 1945, p. 59). The first step in depicting this insidious evil is the imaginative reconstruction of persecution experiences: the loss of jobs, the economic exploitation of "Romanization," the bitterness arising from the passivity of Romanian friends in the face of individual and collective suffering of the Jews, or even the villainy of some. However, persecution transforms into direct violence. Presented psychologically by portraying the fear of the persecuted, the pages dedicated to the Bucharest pogrom of January 1941 are tense. The atmosphere of terror that seeps through the words illustrates the dramatic events, capturing the devastating impact on the community and conveying to the reader the harsh reality of human suffering in the face of "people with axes."

The second part focuses on the Transnistrian ordeal. Certain characters from the initial section (David Bainer, Mad Bainer, Nina Haber, Fred Natanson), accused of

[32] „jidănit" in Romanian. It is a pejorative term from that era that designated a non-Jew taking a stand against anti-Semitism and discrimination.

engaging in subversive communist activities, find themselves confined to a camp in Transnistria, Romanovka. Within this setting, the narrative introduces new and emblematic individuals. On one side, we encounter the victims, each bearing a harrowing tale: Isac Stein, whose family (wife, two sons, and a daughter) fell victim to the Iași pogrom; Rudi Baron, a forger of checks who transforms into a savior for Bessarabian orphans Sașa and Lisa in the camp (whose parents perished in executions and the forced march of deportation); Niura, an affluent woman from Bucharest whose husband met his end in one of the massacres at Akmecetca; Nuhăm, an upholsterer from Galați mistakenly brought to the camp due to identity confusion; the poet Valdman-Focșa and the actor Iloveanu, who yearn for their pre-camp lives; Calman, the brutish informant turned aide to the camp authorities, and others. On the other side, there are the perpetrators: Major Căluș, the camp leader, an indifferent anti-Semite oblivious to the suffering around him; Sergeant Capră, dubbed "The General," a former convict and voluntary purveyor of violence; Cazachievici, a local policeman, a bloodthirsty brute barely restraining his criminal impulses. Additionally, there are a few shining figures—Lieutenant Brudariu, who endeavors to enhance the detainees' lives, even opposing directives from higher-ups, and the simple soldier Negoiță, aiding the detainees by conveying messages and providing food.

The representation of the camp world is dominated by dark images. As in all accounts of Transnistria, death lurks for the internees: hunger, disease, unsanitary conditions, the threat of execution, or being sent to a German camp beyond the Bug River. In addition to illustrating the camp world, Sergiu Dan is invested in crafting a traumatic psychology for the characters that captures some essence of the authentic suffering in concentration camps. By imagining how the atrocity of the camp experience is mirrored in the "soul" of the characters, the writer seems to attempt to literary mediate such an experience for a broader audience. The novel appears to function as a platform for generating empathy towards the sufferings of Jewish communities. Unfortunately, due to the memorial boycott that will follow after 1948, this will not happen. It is noteworthy that Sergiu Dan has authored another novel set during the war, titled *Roza and the Others* (1946). It is a tragic farce that originates from the image of Judith in the Old Testament (Book of Judith, 11-14), addressing the tensions within the Jewish communities in Romania at the war's conclusion.

Another significant writer from the interwar period, Isac Peltz, carries on his literary pursuits after the war with the novel *Bloodied Israel*, published in 1946. In this work, he continues to explore his earlier themes related to the Jewish world, incorporating images from the recent history of Jewish communities' suffering. Written between August 1944 and September 1945, the novel seems to have its roots in an earlier project, adapted to directly address the recent tragedy of the Holocaust. This assertion is based on the observation that the initial part of the novel appears to be a fictionalized autobiography. Through the central character, Israel Schwadron, one can identify elements from Peltz's own life, including his close ties to Jewish neighborhoods inhabited by marginalized individuals, a theme he depicted in his interwar novels[33], his creative struggles, and his relationship with Macedonski, the Romanian symbolist poet, portrayed in the whimsically absurd character of the "Maestro", and more.

"What is he ultimately? A young man sick with desires, poor, anemic, frail, with a feverish

[33] *Calea Văcărești* (*Văcărești Road* - 1933), *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* (*Fire in the Linden Tree Inn* - 1934).

> mind, a young man born and raised in that Jewish quarter where the Synagogue is next to the butcher shop, and where you encounter the yellow figure of the scraggly-bearded one daily heading towards the paradise of Talmudic disputes in which he buries his life. But there, breathing the same air and treading the same cobblestones, you also encounter the portly cloth merchant, ruddy and happily grunting from the entire abundance of his being. It's a mixture of sanctity and sycophancy, celestial and earthly, with pure eyes in snow-white cheeks and thieving glances in faces like anuses, a spectacle of black and white." (Peltz, 1946, pp. 25-26)

The initial part of this autobiography is imbued with observations from the Jewish "ghetto" world, revealing the intricacies of those inhabiting this marginalized yet profoundly human universe, upon which the full force of historical violence will be unleashed. It depicts a world where characters endure persecution, marginalization, and later, violence, all under the collective name of Israel. For Peltz, the name Israel becomes the metonymy of Jewish suffering. The novel's second part serves as a literary reconstruction of the key moments of anti-Jewish persecutions in Romania: the Bucharest Pogrom, the Iași Pogrom, and deportation to Transnistria. Even the Odessa massacre is referenced through the character of the gendarme Mitică (Peltz, 1946, 322). Peltz's primary narrative tool is the focalizing character, almost always an Israel (Schwadron, Lazarovici, Goldberg, etc.), around whom documentary-like images and events are arranged, recognizable in historical accounts. For instance, the character of Rabbi Gutman (mentioned earlier in connection with the journal-reportage of F. Brunea-Fox) is transformed into the fictional character Rabbi Israel Goldberg. Nevertheless, the specific details—such as the abduction by the Legionnaires and the massacre in the Jilava forest where he loses his two sons but manages to escape—stay consistent with historical documentation. Surrounding the character Israel Lazăr, introduced during the Bucharest pogrom episode, details of the Iași Pogrom (mass arrests, the massacre in the Police Station courtyard, death trains, and the unleashed violence of ordinary people against Jewish neighbors) are subsequently evoked. Concise details about the Transnistria camps (mass executions, the decimation of deportees due to misery, hunger, and disease) are also included. In this way, Isac Peltz practices a form of documentary fiction, with a dual effect: on one hand, the preservation of the historical memory of the Holocaust through the narrative of historical events, and on the other hand, the empathic reconstruction of suffering by imagining the characters' experiences at the core of those events[34]. Both effects are grounded in the living memory of the events and fiction's potential to convey them to future generations, especially as historical details are skillfully reconstructed, creating a cinematic impact. The episodes depicting Holocaust events possess a vivid and poignant dynamism, effectively conveying the human tragedy of that historical period. Personal stories, viewed through the eyes of well-defined characters, become a compelling means of connecting the audience to history.

During the studied period, two additional novels with strong ideological themes emerge. *Vapniarca. Lagărul morții* (*Vapniarka: The Death Camp*, 1945) is authored by Sergiu Lezea, a member of the Communist Party and an emerging socialist realist writer. It presents a stylistically awkward and heavily ideologized narrative about the Transnistrian camp where, starting from September 1942, around 1,000 Romanian Jews with communist sympathies or suspected of having such sympathies are interned, alongside

[34] Peltz was among the victims of the Bucharest pogrom. Like the character Israel Schwadron—an alter ego of the writer—he saw his house devastated during the Legionnaires' Rebellion.

Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews, as well as those from the Odesa region (Ioanid, 2019, pp. 356-358). Sergiu Lezea, being one of them, offers a self-proclaimed "romanticized" account (Lezea, 1945, p. 8) that functions more as a report on the organizational efficiency of the communist apparatus in the camp than a depiction of human suffering. This "novel" stands out as one of the initial works related to the Holocaust in Romania that identifies the victims in Transnistria as "anti-fascists," thus obscuring their Jewish identity. Allusions to this identity surface only in two contexts: one referencing the massacre of Bessarabian Jews by "fascist beasts", and another mentioning a few stereotyped Jewish figures (Lemnișor, Menașel) who, inspired by the organizational example of the communists in the camp, adhere to their principles. In contrast, references to "anti-fascist heroes" are abundant. Many years later, additional communist inmates will characterize Vapniarca as a "totalitarian republic in miniature" (Rosinger, 2022, pp. 83-114), governed with an iron hand by a communist nomenclature that will later replicate on the scale of the entire Romania.

A relatively similar ideological novel is *The Jew Ion Ionescu* by Maur Săveneanu, published by the Romanian Institute for Documentation in 1946. Written in a romantic style and featuring schematic characters, the narrative revolves around themes exploring the persecution of Jews in Romania. This includes the inherent and irrational anti-Semitism of the majority population, exacerbated by demagogic politicians, institutionalized persecutions, forced labor, and, notably, alignment with communism. While references to key Holocaust episodes (such as the pogroms in Bucharest and Iași or events in Transnistria) are not abundant, didactic themes are explored in dialogues between characters discussing the causes and effects of anti-Semitism. Additionally, subtle Zionist elements reflect the author's affinity with these ideas. The plot, somewhat fantastical in relation to historical truth, follows Ion Ionescu, a Christian anti-Semitic student and Legionary sympathizer, whose mother is of Jewish descent. Authorities consider him Jewish and send him to a forced labor battalion. While enduring suffering alongside those he previously despised, Ion has a revelation about his own Jewish identity, linking it to the humanity and collective spirit of his fellow Jews in distress. Observing this world of suffering almost passively, Ion discovers something unexpected: communism. The true epiphany unfolds towards the novel's end as Ion Ionescu, dying from Romanian Secret Police („Siguranța") tortures, passionately recites the communist creed for over four pages: "from the workers' international based on the brotherhood of working people from all countries, the international of love will be born" (Săveneanu, 1946, p. 214).

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The last two novels discussed illustrate the ways in which literature begins to transform trauma into a didactic and ideological instrument. This dynamic of ideologization becomes even more evident in the field of drama and the stage during the period in question. The reason is clear: the public and institutional dimension of the theatre renders this syncretic art form more directly connected to official ideology, especially in its coercive forms, as is the case in Romania in the late 1940s.

According to the research of Corina L. Petrescu (2009, 2011), the first coherent forms of theatrical remembrance of the Holocaust in Romania take shape within the Yiddish-language stage, particularly in the cultural network of IKUF (Idisher Kultur Farband), before and immediately after 23 August 1944. In Botoșani, an improvised troupe

affiliated with IKUF stages *Naht-Tog* (*Night-Day*), a collage-type production that symbolically opposes the "darkness of the past"—represented by songs originating from the labor camps in Transnistria—to the promise of liberation brought by the Red Army, illustrated through interwar Yiddish hits (Petrescu, 2011, p. 212).

After the legalization of IKUF in July 1945, the IKUF-Theater was founded in Bucharest under the direction of Iacob Mansdorf. Its official opening took place on 17 October 1945 with the performance *Ikh leb* (*I Live*), by Moshe Pinchevski, centered on the experience of a group of Jews who survive in a Nazi camp in Ukraine. The production combines a commemorative dimension with a political one, glorifying the liberating role of the Soviets and promoting the idea of Jewish solidarity.

The process of accelerated Sovietization of cultural life significantly transforms this institutional framework. In March 1948, the authorities decree that all troupes wishing to perform in Yiddish must be integrated into the IKUF-Theater, which is subsequently converted, on 1 August 1948, into the State Jewish Theater (Teatrul Evreiesc de Stat, TES). This step marks the transition from a semi-autonomous Jewish cultural network to an institution placed under direct state control, entrusted with the mission of disseminating the regime's ideology among the Jewish population (Petrescu, 2011, p. 215).

Within this new framework, on 1 October 1949 TES premieres Ludovic Bruckstein's[35] play *Nahtshiht* (*Night Shift*), written in 1947 and considered the first indigenous postwar Yiddish dramatic text. The narrative follows two former Auschwitz inmates, Lana and Mira, who, in a workers' apartment in the People's Republic of Romania, recall the traumas of the camp and their rescue by a Soviet communist. In the present frame, they await the return of their husbands from the night shift, thereby illustrating the integration of Jews into the new socialist society (Petrescu, 2011, pp. 215–216; see also Lukács, 2019, pp. 17–21).

Petrescu (2011, p. 206; 2019) argues that this mode of remembrance is increasingly shaped by ideological imperatives. Whereas *Ikh leb* still preserves elements of Jewish identity-based autonomy, in *Nahtshiht* the perspective is dominated by the paradigm of class struggle, and ethnic solidarity is replaced by class solidarity. The figure of the liberator is attributed exclusively to the Soviets, while responsibility for the Holocaust is transferred entirely onto Nazi Germany; the Antonescu regime and the role of the Romanian administration (1941–1944) remain outside the field of representation. In this phase, therefore, Holocaust-related theatre in Romania begins to function as an instrument of socialist pedagogy.

Conclusions

The analysis of the corpus of texts published between 1944 and 1947 shows that this period is not one of silence, but of a remarkable abundance and discursive diversity concerning the Holocaust in Romania. Two major categories of manifestations of this

[35] Born in Munkács (interwar Czechoslovakia, today Ukraine) and raised in Sighetu Marmației, (Joseph-Leib Arye) Ludovic Bruckstein (1920–1988) survived the Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen camps. After 1945, he established himself as an author in Romanian, Yiddish, and Hungarian. During the years of socialist realism, he was a playwright at the State Jewish Theater and a theatre chronicler (Bercovici, 1998). In 1972, he emigrated to Israel, where he continued to publish consistently. Among the works that are defining for the memory of the Holocaust is the short novel *Capcana* (*The Trap*) (completed in 1988 and published posthumously in 1989): the story of Ernest, a Jewish student from Sighet, who hides in the mountains, witnesses the deportation of his community in May 1944 to Auschwitz, and, after "liberation," is arrested by the Soviets and sent to Siberia—an allegory of the double trap of Nazism and communism (Bruckstein, n.d.).

"living memory" take shape: on the one hand, documentary and testimonial-documentary writings (investigative volumes, reports, testimonies, lists of victims, journalistic investigations, memoirs with a legal or communal function), which approximate an emergent historical discourse and are driven by the ethical imperatives of witnessing; on the other hand, artistic or potentially artistic forms (memoirs, diaries, prose with documentary stakes, plays, graphic albums), which translate traumatic experience into multiple narrative and visual registers without effacing its factual dimension. Taken together, these texts configure a spontaneous "mnemonic community" of survivors and Jewish institutions, in which individual trauma is programmatically articulated as collective trauma.

Empirically, the writings examined precisely record the moments and mechanisms of persecution: antisemitic legislation, compulsory labor, the Bucharest and Iași pogroms, deportations to Transnistria, massacres in Bessarabia and Bukovina, deportations from Northern Transylvania, the universe of camps and labor detachments. They name places, actors, institutions, and those responsible; they describe both extreme violence and its everyday logic; they explicitly indicate the role of indigenous antisemitism and of Romanian state structures, even when official discourses sought to shift all blame exclusively onto Nazi Germany. From this perspective, the period 1944–1947 appears as the moment in which the potential infrastructure of a robust communicative (living) memory of the Holocaust in Romania is constituted, with the capacity—had it been allowed to develop—to transform into an acknowledged cultural memory.

The subsequent obstruction of this potential—through the "antifascist" universalization of suffering under communism, the defensive re-nationalization of memory after 1960, and the ambivalences and delays of the post-1989 period—explains the fragile integration of the Holocaust into Romanian public memory until well after the Wiesel Commission Report. For this reason, the systematic recovery of these early texts is not merely an archival exercise, but an essential condition for the critical reconstruction of collective memory and for restoring the interrupted continuity of survivors' "living memory."

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