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Oltean, Anca

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THE CONDITION OF JEWS IN THE TIME OF HOLOCAUST AND ITS AFTERMATH AS REFLECTED IN PUBLISHED MEMOIRS

Anca OLTEAN*

Abstract: *The present study presents a few from the most well known Jewish memoirs written by Jewish intellectuals, active in the life of Jewish Community from Romania during the Holocaust years and in its aftermath, after the setting of communism in Romania. The books come with a personal note, an inner vision about the condition of Jews in fascist and early years of communism, about the ideal of “liberty” in a world of storm, of military confrontation, racism and anti-Semitism. From these memoirs, it emerges the particular spirit of Jewish Community with his fight for survival, between adaptation to the politics of spheres of influence and emigration.*

Keywords: *Jews, community, communism, war, Holocaust, social activism, survival, Israel.*

The theme ‘The history of Jews in Romania and Hungary (1945-1953) in the Romanian and Hungarian historical writing’ was the topic of PhD thesis, a very important, actual topic whose continuous reinterpretation and analysis from different angles is required. During the communist regime, in Romania the condition of ethnical minorities and their particularism were totally neglected. The book written by the rabbi of Romania, Moses Rosen, comes to confirm the existence and continuity of Jewish community in Romania during the communist years. (Rosen, 1991)

In spite of ongoing, continuous process of emigration from the communist times, the Romanian state did not succeed to erase completely the existence of Jewish community from Romania from the national spectrum. Only in contemporary times, in the endless process transition of Romanian society towards the democratic values, it seems that there are not left in Romania the Jews, excepting a merely community of a few thousands of people. Even so, the remaining Jews try to administrate the Jewish patrimony in Romania and to preserve the religion and the community spirit of a disappearing community.

In local archives especially, there is a lot of materials concerning the Jews that urges to be researched further. But, in what concerns the written volumes, after the Revolution from December 1989, it has been published a lot of valuable material, volumes of documents, memories and specialized and general papers that make reference to the Jewish minority in the space of Romania and Hungary.

In our scientific itinerary, an important role was played by edited memoirs. Their writers suffered as a consequence of Nazi opprimation, in their *memoirs* their life experiences being reflected by a subjective manner, but full of advice. Such *memoirs* are

* Research assistant PhD, Institute of Euroregional Studies, University of Oradea. E-mail: olteananca@hotmail.com

written by Moses Rosen, Tereza Mozes, Carol Buium Beniamini, Serge Moscovici, Şlomo Şitnovitzer, Valentin Saxone, Emil Dorian, Arnold Schwefelberg.

In addition the *memoirs* are together with other first hand sources, the questionnaires that we only remember here, are completed by some Jews from Oradea, survivors of the Holocaust, or relatives of Jews who survived to ghettoization and deportation, important sources of my PhD thesis, revealing important moments from Jewish life. Thus were questioned Hommonai Maria who filled in the questionnaires in the name of her deported parents Schwartz Iosif and Schwartz Ileana, Braun Vioara (survivor of Holocaust), B. Sz. (refugee), Steier Elisabeta, Bone Gabriela (deported), Kincses Ecaterina (had more deported relatives), Varady Judith (deported), Somogyi Livia (who completed the questionnaire in the name of deported father). These Jews did not emigrate in Israel after the war, but remained in Romania. Concerning their reactions with the Romanian ethnics, at the end of the war, the opinions differ. Some consider they were received back with coldness, others with friendship. Their material properties, they had recuperated only to a small extent.

An important category of papers which present from “the source”, by means of personal experience of the authors, a state of fact that happened in a certain historical circumstance, local or international, *the memoirs* are an important source of information. Of course, they can have an important dose of subjectivity due to exceptional *moments* by which the author had passed, be them happy or hard. Together with other sources of information: original archival documents, specialized papers written by specialist historians, oral history data, published Jewish memories contribute to the deepening and widening of historical truth, giving a particular note to its understanding.

Moses Rosen, in the book *Primejdii, încercări, miracole. Povestea șef-rabinului Dr. Moses Rosen / Dangers, tries, miracles. The story of chief-rabbi Moser Rosen PhD*, (Rosen, 1991) describes his own life. Moses Rosen was the chief rabbi of Romania during the communist years. His journal covers also the period that interests us, the years 1945-1953. In his memories, he details his fight of mediator between the communist power and the large masses of Jews with the view of the facilitation of the emigration in Israel. The rabbi disposes of a very special power of persuasion in front of communists, convincing them that the emigration of the Jews in Israel is a necessity. He plays a dangerous role, risking in every moment his liberty. The rabbi tries to prevent the Jewish local leaders who worked for the Judaic cult to leave the country in order to stay home and to provide the religious service to the ones who did not want to leave the country.

Tereza Mozes published her journal *Decalog însângerat/ Bloody Decalogue*. (Mozes, 1995) Her memories present a personal vision on Holocaust of a Jewish woman, deported from Oradea, who lost several members of her family in the storm of Holocaust, who found the interior resources that, after her return from the detention, to continue her studies in art history and ethnography and to make a family, to start a new life, choosing to remain in Romanian communist state.

Tereza Mozes describes the years spent during the period of the ascension of Nazis Germany, in the time of detention in the ghetto from Oradea, respectively the period of detention in German concentration camps. She came from a family of business men; she was a graduate of a theoretical high school, real profile, working as a tailor in the period of the anti-Semite legislation. She supported the nightmare of deportation to Oradea by the Hungarians with all the privations and weaknesses to which the Jews from Oradea were subjected during the passing through several concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Their setting free by Russian soldiers and their way home are only a few

stages through which the author had been through. The dramatic character of the memories is given by the fact that the author was the subject of Horthy's persecution and witness to the drama of those days, but also because of the fact that she had lost numerous members of her family in the storm of Holocaust. Tereza Mozes succeeded to recall the events she had been through, getting involved, personally, on the wire of her memoirs influenced by the experience she lived.

The volume of Emil Dorian entitled *Cărțile au rămas neterminate /The books remained unfinished. Journal 1945- 1948*, (Dorian, 2006) starts its story right after the end of the war, in 1945. His quality of writer is revealed also with the occasion of this volume and alternates with the quality of participant to a political world in the process of change, with significant changes in the life of the Jews, but also in the one of the Romanian ethnics, in general. The volume is a painting of postwar years, the years of transition to communism. Thus, the author describes the state of Jewish Democratic Committee and foresees its end since 1947, this Committee representing the communism and its subversions and not the majority of Jewish population more concerned by exodus than by the building of the socialism. Anti-Semitism grows also in the postwar period and the idea that the Jews are helped by Americans threatens a lot of them. Also, Joint is seen with negative eyes. The communism is seen by the author as a "moral annihilation" in the continuation of physical annihilation from Iași which had to be beared by the Jewish community.

The second volume of Emil Dorian entitled *Cu fir negru de arnici. Jurnal 1949-1956/ With black wire of arnics. Journal 1949- 1956* (Dorian, 2012) describes the life of the author, poet and doctor in communist Romania. In the first years of communism, the poet was active, as long as he could, as a clerk of Jewish community and of its leaders and he is aware, slowly, its more and more profound comunizatōn. The Journal is also a journal of his tryings as a poet, this ars poetica that it was so dear to him. He appears as a main intelectual of those times trying to escape by the cenzorship of the time, maybe also because of the fact he writes several books for children. It is a literary journal being made references not only a single time to the literature of the poet or the universal one, and also a journal of events with references to the political and cultural of the time. Slowly, the Jewish identity of the author, so unusual in the communist period, is replaced by the quality of progressist writer.

Carol Buium Beniamini, in the paper *Un sionist în vremea lui Antonescu și după aceea/ A Zionist in the time of Antonescu and after that* (Buium Beniamini, 1999) describes his activity as a Zionist. The author developed his activity in the most tensed period for the Jewry, before and after the Second World War in the framework of Zionist organisation Hašomer Hazair. A part of Jewry belived, with naivety, in the communist ideals, while the majority tried to emigrate in their historical country, making alia. Hašomer Hazair was one of the most numerous Zionist movements appeared after the war.

The memmoirs of Carol Buium Beniamini are reviewed by university professor Solomon Vaimberg PhD who describes the context in which he knows the author after the war, after the recreation of the organization Hašomer Hazair. In the same time, professor Solomon Vaimberg makes a portrait of the situation of Jews from postwar period, that were aspiring in spite of the difficuties existent, to emigrate in Israel: "For the regime, the Jews were becoming a minority hardly assimilated which did not frame nor by social origin among the privileges categories of the new order. The ones who dared to make requests for allay were severely sanctioned with the loss of working place, elimination from schools and universities, exclusion from the political life in general. Dissimulated

discriminated as “Zionists” or non- dissimulated in the framework of the measures named cynically of “improvement” of national composition, marginalized as “small – bourgeois”, pushed towards the status of some citizens of second category, the Jews were frustrated even of the perspective of promotion in their specific domains of activity”. (Apud Buium Beniamini, 1999: 14) Solomon Vaimberg considers that the Jews did not count themselves among of the favorite persons of communist regime, amongst the ones prejudiced by this regime. In what concerns Carol Buium Beniamini, this was detained together with other Zionists from the movement Haşomer Hazair in the prisons Malmaison, Jilava and Văcăreşti in the period of antonescian regime (14 March 1942–august 1944). The leaders of Zionist movement, once liberated, contributed to the remaking of Zionist organizations after the war: Haşomer Haţair, Bnei Avoda, Mişmar. In a time when the movement of resistance against the fascism was reduced in Romania, the organization Haşomer Hazair played an important role.

Carol Buium Beniamini shows the main directions of action of the youth of the organization by describing his personal experience: “As a lot of other people, boys and girls, at the age of adolescence what kept us united as members of youth organization was the sincere friendship, the happiness of life, the songs, dances and trips; the youth ambiance; the discussions about <<the platonic love>> and the expectation of the ten commandments of the movement Haşomer Hazair. In the same time, we listened to the conferences, *sihot* in our dialect, about Freud and Adler, who tried to find the secrets of the consciousness and subconsciousness, the secrets of the human soul. We discussed and commented the problems of the evolution and of the revolutions which were on the basis of dialectic development of the society of history – since the French Revolution and until our days. We tried to deepen the profundity of the philosophy and of the historical determinism, discussing with passion about the personality in history. I did a huge effort to explain and to interpret the existance and development of Jewish people during the two thousands years of history of diaspora [...] We created the synthesis between Zionism and socialism whose culminant point must have been the achievement of a society based on equality and fraternity, deprived of the exploitation of man by the man: this ideal society was for us the kibbutz, built by us, in the country of our people, Israel”. (Buium Beniamini, 1999: 20)

In his Memories, Carol Buium Beniamini furnishes also a few documents which accuse by communist orientation the members of the movement Haşomer Hazair. The movement Haşomer Hazair organized several summer camps during the postwar period with the purpose of instruction of Zionist youth concerning the emmigration. :”The summer camp in the year 1945 was at Tazlău, in the Neamţ country; a few series of wooden cabbans – that served or were built to serve to the German army – they were used by us as shelter. The war ended before the end of the construction of cabbans. In the year 1946, the summer camp took place near Reghin, in Transylvania, in one of the palaces, almost in ruins, of some Hungarian nobleman, the owner of a great farm. The house was built in the middle of a beautiful park, pretty spacious to be the shelter of a few hundreds of young people şomrim”

In the year 1947, the movement of youth Haşomer Hazair knew an impressive development. In May 1947, I foreseen the participation of more than 1000 of adults. It must have found a sufficient space and pretty spatious to include us all”. (Buium Beniamini, 1999:129) In the end, the author emigrated illegally in Israel.

Serge Moscovici, in *Cronica anilor risipiţi (The cronical of dissipated years)* (Moscovici, 1999) describes his own life. Having Jewish origins, Serge Moscovici is an

interesting character that suffered before the war the consequences of anti-Jewish laws, being a witness of the pogrom from Bucharest in 1941, actioning as a communist in illegality before August 23, 1944. Dissatisfied by the communists, after their installation to power, he helped the Zionist dissidents to pass the boundary illegally. For his activity, he was involved in 1947 in a trial and, later, he emigrated illegally in France.

A very special writing is the memories of Arnold Schwefelberg, a Jewish intellectual who played a very important role in interwar period and even in the first years after the war, in the years of transition to communism, having the title *Aminirile unui intelectual evreu din România/ The memories of a Jewish intellectual from Romania*. (Schwefelberg, 2000) He was a jurist as a profession, he had been studying in Romania and abroad, close collaborator with W. Fildeman, he was a leader of Jewish Community from Romania, representing with success the prototype of exceptional Jewish intellectual, who imposed professionally and at the level of community in the interwar period time. Son of a teacher, Schwefelberg inherited from the side of the family, aptitudes for study, having in the same time also an enterprising and organising spirit and he was less a religious Jew, as his father was. After exceptional studies in highschool, once arrived in Bucharest, Schwefelberg participated to the *Academy of commercial and industrial studies*, where he was a meritorious student. He participated at the First World War, he fought on the front in the first line, getting at the end of the war, Romanian citizenship. He activated as a good Jew among the prominent members of the Jewish Community from Romania, this community knowing also moments of tension starting with 1937, once with the coming to power of the government Goga-Cuza. During the legionary rebellion, Schwefelberg and his family is aggressed by a band of legionaries, but they escaped alive. Leon Volovici, in the foreword to the volume briefly characterizes the activity of Schwefelberg during the period of leadership of marshal Ion Antonescu: „During the years of the war, he was very active in the Jewish organizations of assistance of the Jews who lost their working places after the setting up of the legislation of Romanization of the employees from the enterprises; organizations of helping the refugees from Czechoslovakia; of the families of the victims of the pogrom from Iasi, of the deportees in Transnistria or of the returned from deportation; in the organization of some emigrations towards Palestine; in the salvation of some Jews from Hungary evaded on the eve of deportation and refugees in Romania”. (Schwefelberg, 2000: 14) At the end of the war, Schwefelberg launched Zionist activities and supported the emigration of Jews in Palestine (Israel), motif for which he is arrested by communists in 1952. After the liberation from prison, he tried to adjust to the conditions from Romania. He writes his memories in the years '60 with an epilogue in 1973, being reflected from these memories a detachment from the life lived by Jews in Israel and an adaptation to the realities from communist Romania.

Șlomo Șitnovitzer in his book *Documentul autentic sau amintiri din închisorile comuniste din România (The authentic document and memories from communist prisons from Romania)* (Șitnovitzer, 2003) describes the years he spent as a Zionist dissident in the communist prisons from Romania „at Jilava, Malmaison, Pitești, Caransebeș, Rahova”. (Șitnovitzer, 2003: 10) His arrestment happened in 1950, during a trip to Bușteni when some individuals from the Security take him to Bucharest in order to make some verifications. Imprisoned, he describes the atmosphere from the prison asserting that the purpose of the interrogations “was to force, with any price, the interrogated person to acknowledge the accusations, namely the fact that he activated against the state order and, moreover, he was a spy [...]”. During the interrogations, the officer was trying also a

psychological pressure of threatening his victim, showing to him that he was not an ordinary prisoner, but “the great chief of the great organization Bather who had a severe military discipline being enough that me, the authoritarian chief and leader of this movement to push on a button so that the thousands of botanists to start a <<revolution against the state order>>. (Șitnovitzer, 2003: 18-19) About the enquettes of the Security the author asserts that their extreme form was the sending of the accused in the caves of the Security, genuine places of terror. In fact, the novel, a diary of the years spent into prison, mentions that: “They were times when the enquette <<was not advancing>> as the officers said, when they did not succeed to get out from you not only what they would have wanted, but not at least a part of it; and this after a period of months and months of days. Then they sent you down, in the caves of the Security with the slogan “you are going to stay there until you will die”. And they were leaving you there for a while with the hope (of the interrogator) that passing the time you will get tired and, finally, you will decide to speak out. It was a kind of punishment from the side of interrogators because, normally, everybody wanted to finish this terror, to be judged and sent to prison where the life was a little more bearable”. (Șitnovitzer, 2003: 43) But not all the days were so terrifying. The prison was also a good opportunity for socializing and for the discussions with the colleagues from the cell.

In the work, *Speranțe în întuneric. Memorii (Hopes in the dark. Memories)*, it is shown that Valentin Saxone (Jew) was deprived of his right to exert his profession of lawyer at April 20 1948, fact that the author is explaining by “the reason that it was pursued the suppression of the right for the fascist elements of not exerting this profession – they were set apart from the exercise all those they were not wanted by the communist regime, all those that were not regimented or they were not working – as I sad under the clothes of << long way comrade>>” (Saxone, 2004: 13-14). Ulterior they found out that he was pursued by a member of the Security which approached his family in his purpose. He was suspended from profession during the ten years. The author dedicates a chapter of his activity after August 23, 1944. The King Mihai abrogated the discriminatory existent measures during the regime of Ion Antonescu. The author is one of the initiators of the Group “Ideea” that was grouping several intellectuals who wanted, this way, to approach the Christian population to prevent the setting of Fascism and anti-Semitism. But the activity of the Group “Ideea” was of short time, because at the end of the year 1947 the Communist Party forbade the activity of political organizations with a cultural character. Another chapter is dedicated to the Romanian Popular Party and to the elections from 1946, when, together with a friend, Petre Ghiță “we started in the year 1944 to the creation of Popular Party of Peasants, denomination that changed later in <<Popular Romanian Party>>, not to be confounded with <<Social Peasants Party>> led by university professor Mihail Ralea or with <<National Party of Peasants>> led by Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache, great, historical party, of which we tried to be different”. (Saxone, 2004: 47) Among the principles of the party on the bases they competed at the elections from 1946, was also “the firm devotion towards the Crown”. Not only once there have been made innuendos to “his bourgeois origins” and, from 1962 he was detained to Jilava under the accusation of counter- revolutionary and spy.

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