



Research Article

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Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in an Independent Romania

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Abstract

The history of antisemitism in Romania is strictly connected to the religious and cultural framework of those territories, as well as to their political integration from the age of emancipation and independence to the establishment of a Greater Romania after World War I. This article aims to analyse the different intersections of this historical process and the continuity between the old forms of anti-judaism and their re-interpretation according to modernist dynamics during the first half of the Twentieth-Century. The Romanian case illustrates the transformation and re-adapting of old religious prejudice in new doctrines of xenophobia, nationalism and antisemitism.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Anti-Judaism, Nationalism, Romania, Marginalization

1. Introduction. The Birth of Romania and the Question of Citizenship

When studying Romanian contemporary history, a scholar is inevitably destined to meet with the question of anti-Semitism and the Jewish conditions in Romania. This is quite obvious when considering the interwar years or the Second World War, but a serious analysis could not help focusing attention on the previous century, when Romania became independent. This State was formed by two Romanian principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, which had been under Ottoman sovereignty until the nineteenth century, when they fell under Russian influence and experienced the national awakening that led to the 1848 revolution in Wallachia and to the first union under Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1859 (Georgescu 1992; Hitchins 1994).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Jewish communities in the principalities were quite small: a number of 5-10,000 Jews (principally Sephardi) resided in Wallachia and about 12,000 (mainly Ashkenazi) in Moldavia. In both countries, anti-Jewish regulations had existed and occasional episodes of violence had taken place, but the reduced Jewish presence limited these problems and more favourable measures were issued under rulers such as Constantin Brâncoveanu and Nicholas Mavrocordatus.

More serious problems began after the union, when Romania was supposed to have become a modern Nation-State based upon constitutional and democratic principles. More precisely, it was during the process of emancipation, when Russian influence replaced the Turkish one, that a first important regulation was approved. Unfortunately, article 94 of Chapter III of the Statutes that were adopted in the principalities in 1831-1832 introduced an element of utmost importance for further developments: the legal identification of Jews as foreigners.

After some years, the first *domnitor* (lord) of a united (though still not recognized as such by the international powers) Romania, Cuza, inaugurated his rule with the promulgation of the 1864 Civil Code, whose art. 16 was referred to the issue of naturalization, and began to draft a constitution promising universal suffrage. In 1866, however, Cuza was obliged to resign owing to the "excessive" rights he was granting to Romanian serfs and peasants. He was replaced by Charles von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, who retook the project of a constitution. The draft stated that religion was no obstacle to citizenship but foresaw the publication of a special law with regards

to the Jews and their naturalization. This provisional solution was a compromise between the position of the government, which was under international pressures, and the majority of the assembly, which supported the Valeanu amendment prohibiting the naturalization of non-Christians.

But the people were not favourable to Jewish naturalization and expressed their resentment on June 30, 1866, when the Bucharest Synagogue was assaulted and many Jews were beaten and robbed. A new text was prepared and the art. VII of the 1866 constitution finally decreed that "only such aliens as are of the Christian faith may obtain citizenship" (*numai străinii de rit creștin pot dobîndi naturalizarea*). In that moment, some Romanian Jews still thought that such provisions were not directed against them (Stern 1915, pp.58-61).

It was a radical political U-turn: as a matter of fact, many Jews had participated in the 1848 revolution and in the liberal movements that contributed to the creation of an independent Romania. Probably, art. VII was a combination of different factors: the persistence of anti-Semitism in large parts of the population, the perverted effects of nationalism, and the rapid growth of Jewish population. The latter was increasing substantially as a consequence of immigration from Russia and Galicia, as showed by the census of 1899, when 266,700 Jews (4.5%) were living in the Romanian Kingdom (Eberhardt 2003, p. 278).

In that political context, when independence was finally obtained and a foreign King represented the guarantee for the recognition of Romania as a new State in the international scenario, anti-Semitism became a leitmotif of Romanian intellectuals such as Mihai Eminescu, Vasile Conta or Bogdan P. Hașdeu. This was particularly paradoxical because many of them professed liberal ideas. One example is very significant to understand this paradox: Cezar Bolliac, a famous poet who had participated in the 1848 revolution, on one hand dedicated his poems to the campaign for the emancipation of Romanian Roma, on the other was fiercely anti-Semitic and labelled the Jew as *un adevărat parazit*, a real parasite.

In a similar way, Mihail Kogălniceanu, another patriot who fought against gypsy slavery, strongly opposed Jewish emancipation, Simeon Barnuț celebrated the principle *adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas* and other well-known authors represented exactly the sentiments prevailing among the Romanian public opinion, both at the highest levels and within the populace. Costache Negri compared the Romanian Jewry to the worst leprosy that affected the country, while, according to Parliamentary Deputy I. C. Codrescu (1870), the term Romanian Jew was an insult hurled at the nation:

"Whatever the Jew is, Jew he will remain... Gentlemen, the growth of this element has always proven so dangerous for all countries that no people has hesitated to take the most energetic steps, and often the most crude, to get rid of them" (Iorga 1913, p. 202).

The King himself partially absorbed the sentiments prevailing among his new subjects:

"The newspapers again accuse us of persecuting the Jews, because the recent licensing law forbids a Jew to keep a public-house in a village. This is a reasonable measure; and we are determined to repel any representations or interventions in this matter. One must know the villages of Moldavia to be able to judge the noxious influence exerted on the rural population by the Jew with his adulterated brandy" (Whitman 1899, pp. 153-154)

2. International Discussions

The foreign observers were brutal when describing Romanian anti-Semitism, which was not a simple though widespread opinion, but a passion to be found in all the political and intellectual circles, with very few exceptions (Morar 2012, p. 9).

As a consequence, the situation of Romanian Jews was monitored by international diplomacy well before the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when Romanian independence was finally recognized after the Russo-Turkish War. Many appeals were launched since 1866 and were signed by Jewish activists such as Adolphe Crémieux, president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and Moses Montefiore, but also by important political men such as Napoleon III, who sent a personal telegraph

to Prince Charles in 1867, after that a group of Jews was expelled from Galați and left on an island, and two of them were thrown in the Danube.

The US President Ulysses Grant instructed Benjamin F. Peixotto, a descendant of Spanish Jews expelled from Spain after 1492, and sent him, though unremunerated, as US Consul in Romania with the explicit purpose to press the authorities in order to improve Jewish conditions. Peixotto left New York in December 1870 and arrived in Romania at the beginning of 1871, causing by his only presence the harsh protests of intellectuals such as Bolliac and Hașdeu. He soon had to witness the intricate Silberman affair, a case of theft that was presented by the local police as a Jewish plot involving the Rabbi and other Jews. This case generated violent attacks against the Jews in Ismail and Cahul, and caught the attention of many foreign governments, causing the intervention of Peixotto himself and of the Austrian Consul-General. Furthermore, the Jewish conditions in Romania were discussed at the international conferences in Brussels (October 29-30, 1872), in Paris (December 11, 1876) and at the Congress of Berlin, in 1878, when the Jewish question finally became a real "European question" (Kohler-Adler-Wolf, 1916, p. 18).

The Alliance Israélite Universelle sent its delegates (Charles Netter, Sacki Kann and Emmanuel Veneziani) to Berlin, where the Congress, with the only exception of Russia, unanimously took the decision to focus attention on the conditions of Romanian Jews. International diplomacy decided to condition the recognition of Romanian independence to a formal change of Romanian constitution, suspending the ratification of the treaty until the Romanian State formally engaged in recognizing the equality of the Jewish subjects (art. 44). As Lord Salisbury remarked on July 24, 1879, the powers in Berlin "adopted somewhat unusual, if not unprecedented course of making their recognition of a great political change dependent upon certain modifications of the internal laws of the country" (Kohler, Adler, Wolf 1916, p. 77).

Since the Congress of Berlin, where a central role was played by Otto von Bismarck, Romanian independence was deeply intertwined with the attention of international powers on the conditions of Romanian Jewry, and this special interest was considered as a threat to the nation and to national sovereignty. These reactions were quite common and were evident also in the case of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, but were particularly alarming in Romania because the protests were expressed in a time when the international powers were recognizing Romanian independence, namely in a moment of glory and celebration.

Though the same formula was adopted with regards to Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, the imposition of Jewish naturalization caused the vibrant protest of Romanian authors such as Vasile Alecsandri, who defined the Treaty of Berlin as a humiliation and a loss of dignity: Romania was sleeping in a bed that resembled a tomb. The Romanians should wake up from this state of apathy and understand that the Talmud was the only homeland of the intruding Jews (*năvălitori*). Their power was represented by international masonry and by gold. It seemed, according to Alecsandri, that the Jews were a persecuted minority escaping Russia and Austria, but it was not true. Why were the Jews arriving in Romania? To find a new homeland? In Alecsandri's opinion, their real aim was to find a social position. As the other European people were too strong, in Romania the Jews could find a population easy to conquer and possess thanks to their capital (Alecsandri 1879, p. 6).

The same hatred, by the way, was expressed against other foreigners. Mihai Eminescu, for example, attacked the Greeks even more bitterly than the Jews, and this widespread hostility against minorities has been interpreted as a consequence of the lack of a Romanian middle-class: the Jews and the Greeks had played in the past the social role of the native bourgeoisie and this position in Romanian society could no longer be tolerated when the country became independent and a middle-class was in process of formation: Anti-Semitism was thus the expression of a general xenophobia, a product of reactionary traditionalism, a reaction of the autochthonous element against strangers and foreign economy (Lovinescu 1992, p. 19; Weber .1966, p. 505). As explained by Ion Slavici (2000, p. 12), the Jews were a sort of intermediaries, the agents of foreign capital, and were thus destined to grant only the interests of the elites in London, Berlin or Vienna and not those of the Romanian State.

The Romanian politicians and intellectuals expressed their fear that the recognition of Romanian Jews could function as a "Trojan Horse" for the spread of Germanism, the so called *Drang Nach Osten*, and this problem was associated to the fact that the King was of German origin

and could easily become was a *Domn ludo-German în România*. At the same time the flow of Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia was compared to a stream entering a country and destroying it. On September 27, 1878, Mihail Kogălniceanu even talked about a possible civil war between pro and anti-revisionists (Stern 1915, p. 294).

The Romanian governments perceived the international pressures as a real ultimatum and, though they paid the price of independence and changed the constitution, they made the naturalization of aliens very difficult: it was established that the applicants were to be evaluated in a period of ten years and that every single act of naturalization was to be licensed by Parliament. At the same time, the Romanian authorities showed their good-will granting the naturalization to 883 Jews who had participated in the war against the Ottomans. On the other side, many restrictions remained in vigour and the prohibition to acquire rural estates was confirmed.

Numerous bureaucratic and administrative hurdles were fixed before obtaining the naturalization (Basilescu 1897, pp.63-66). As a matter of fact, in the following years, the number of Jewish individuals who were recognized as Romanian citizens rapidly decreased: 75 in 1880, 10 between 1881 and 1883, 18 from 1886 to 1900. At the eve of the First World War, only 529 Jews had been recognized as Romanian citizens (Oldson 1994; Ornea 1996, p. 391). The situation was well explained by the British consul in Bucharest, John Walsham, who in 1893 commented on the Jewish conditions in Romania:

"They are regarded as Aliens, and subject, precisely as all Aliens domiciled in the country, to whatever laws may be applicable to residence, payment of taxes, tenure of real or other property, the right of naturalisation, and kindred matters... unless the first paragraph of Article 44 of the Berlin Treaty was supposed to oblige the Roumanian Government to admit Aliens to the enjoyment of civil and political rights as well as to public employment, functions, and industries upon the same footing as Roumanians or naturalised Roumanians, so long as difference of religious creeds was not made a bar to such admission, I do not see that the existing legislative measures in this country can be said to have been framed in contravention of the conditions on which the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin recognised the independence of Roumania" (London Committee of Deputies of the British Jews and Anglo Jewish Association 1893, pp.13-14).

In the same period, various laws were passed in order to subdue the exercise of many professions to the possession of political rights or to limit the right of Jewish students to be educated in public schools. Jewish activists such as Elias Schwarzfeld were expelled as unwanted aliens and in Romanian tribunals the Jews were requested to respect the oath *More Judaico*, which during the nineteenth century was abolished practically in all Europe but survived in Romania until 1902. As the *American Jewish Yearbook* critically pointed out, all the rights were converted into political privileges: "If the air is not turned into a monopoly, and bottled for the exclusive use of Roumanians and Christians, it is because Roumanian statesmen, in spite of their ingenuity, have not yet invented the means of doing it" (Schwarzfeld 1902, p. 70).

In 1902, the persistence of the discriminations in Romania caused a new intervention of the US Secretary of State John Hay. The interest of American diplomacy was not only the result of the American Jewish organizations' activism, but also a consequence of the increased immigration, which was undoubtedly stimulated by religious persecution.

The strict relation between Romanian elitist patriotism and anti-Jewish feelings was once again manifested in 1910, when Nicolae Iorga and Alexandru C. Cuza, two important intellectuals who would play a crucial role in the political future of Romania, created the Nationalist Democratic Party, which was openly anti-Semitic and has a swastika as a symbol. The party advocated the dismissal of Jews from the army and the *numerus clausus* in schools and universities. In other words, as stated by art. 45 of the party program: to solve the Jewish problem with the elimination of the Jews, not a physical elimination but the deportation. This could be done only with the help of the State, which should defend its own interests.

If Cuza was and is still known as a radical anti-Semite, Nicolae Iorga, who would become prime minister, is instead celebrated as the most important Romanian historian, but shared with the former a common vision of the Romanian State. It is clear by analysing Iorga's parliamentary interpellation against the "Jewish agitations", when he explained that the Romanian people had the

mission to re-conquer what they had lost, and the State had the duty to help them to do so through conscience, work and economy: a national State could not be converted into an un-national State (Iorga 1910, p. 14).

According to Iorga, the Jews had no historical rights in Romania, they were just 12,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth-century and in the twentieth-century they were more or less 500,000 (statistical data referred to 350,000 but according to Iorga the Jews always found a way to hide during the statistical inquiries of the census). One of the main problems was that the Jews were greatly over-represented in the press, while the right to write and express public opinions belonged to Romanians and not to strangers. Iorga polemically asked to the deputies: Jewish houses were burnt down in Tîrgul-Cucului and soon afterwards the journal of the liberals began a subscription to rebuild the houses: was this fact a persecution? It was a scandal, Iorga insisted, to find a theatre announcement entirely in Yiddish (*evreiesc*) and to tolerate the gathering of a Jewish congress representing strangers' interests in Bucharest. After all these agitations and a continual provocation, it was natural that the Romanians could lose their patience and generosity.

While Iorga's and Cuza's political careers would soon diverge and in 1923 Cuza founded the League for the Defence of the Christian Nation, while Iorga chose a more moderate approach, this "bastion of conservatism", as argued by Radu Ioanid, (1992) served as a *trait d'union* between the nationalistic and anti-Semitic mentality of the nineteenth century and the ideology of the new Romanian Fascism (Ioanid 1992). Both Cuza and Iorga were considered by the future generations of anti-Semites as a model and, under this point of view, Iorga's assassination by the Iron Guard could be correctly considered as a "parricide" (Armon 1980).

In Iorga's anti-Semitism and in fascist radicalism as well, an important role was played by xenophobia, which was present in Romanian nationalism and was irremediably alimeted by the intervention of foreign powers in defense of Romanian Jews, as happened after the Congress of Berlin (1878), with Hay's note (1902), after the Balkan Wars (1912-13), during the First World War, when Romania signed a peace-treaty with Germany, and once again after the conflict, when president Wilson succeeded in adopting Henry G. Hodges' doctrine of intervention and imposing his idealism to the peace conference (Hodges 1915, pp. 93-96).

At Versailles, the interference of foreign powers in defense of Romanian minorities provoked a great resistance. Though Ion I. C. Brătianu compared the Jewish problems in Romania with the "yellow question" in the US and argued that his country had already assured the minorities large concessions, in his famous speech of May 31, Wilson responded that the minority rights were in accordance with European public law:

"Nothing, I venture to say, is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to minorities. And, therefore, if the great powers are to guarantee the peace of the world in any sense is it unjust that they should be satisfied that the proper and necessary guarantee has been given?" (Temperley, 1921, p. 130)

This context did not record any serious episode of violence, except for the anti-Semitic attacks in Bucharest and Braila immediately after the withdrawal of German troops in November 1918, but according to the American consul Charles Vopicka, a disquieting feeling could be perceived in Romania (Vopicka 1921, pp.271-272). As happened after the Congress of Berlin, in a moment when Romania was becoming a Greater Romania and celebrating the war effort, such international pressures were badly digested, possibly, even more tragically than in the past.

3. Theory and Practice of Antisemitism in a Greater Romania

After WW1, Romania acquired many new regions where new socio-economic and linguistic patterns added further differences, resulting in a situation that was probably more complex here than anywhere else in Eastern Europe.

If the Old Kingdom could be reconsidered a solid National State, the new State was a Greater Romania, *România Mare*, and included numerous substantial minorities, encompassing "at least five distinct Jewries". The Jews of Wallachia had experienced a considerable degree of integration

and acculturation, while those of Moldavia and Bukovina shared many characteristics with the Eastern-type community of Galicia; the Jews of Transylvania and Banat were instead Magyarized or in some cases Germanized, as well as those of Bukovina. As underlined by Ezra Mendelsohn, these new groups had never had close contacts with Romanian culture and their history was radically different from the history of Wallachian and Moldavian Jewry (Mendelsohn 1983, p. 174). The socio-economic situation also differed significantly from one region to another and the wealthy communities of Wallachia and Transylvania were different from the poor groups of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Crişana-Maramureş.

Though after the war the conditions of Romanian Jews were not optimal, it should be observed that Romania was not affected by the terrible pogroms that characterized other countries such as Ukraine, Poland and Hungary. The Liberals, who dominated the political scene in the twenties, disliked violent anti-Semitism and were not interested in exacerbating anti-Semitic feelings.

The main problems of Romanian Jews, therefore, derived from the old question of citizenship and were still generated by the idea that Romanian society should be a product of Romanian people excluding all those who were not Romanians or could not be assimilated. A new important factor was the accusation of Bolshevism, which was particularly important considering that Soviet Russia had clear revanchist dreams over Bessarabia and that, in 1919, Transylvania was united to Romania only after a military confrontation against the Magyar Soviet Republic. A great number of Jewish refugees was fleeing from Russia and this flow was described by the Romanian anti-Semites as a Galician invasion and considered as a threat to national security.

The persistence of the old problem of citizenship confirmed the idea that Romania was reluctant to respect the international commitments. As a matter of fact, while the minority treaty that was signed in 1919 intended to recognize *ipso facto* as Romanian citizens the Jews inhabiting any Romanian territory who did not possess any other nationality, the implementation of this article was never fully accomplished. A contradiction between the minority treaty and the peace treaty of Saint Germain permitted the Romanian government to continue to avoid a general naturalization. As a matter of fact, the principle of *ipso facto* citizenship was not mentioned in the new constitution, which on the contrary included a very peculiar article enlisting the numerous decrees concerning citizenship and naturalization.

The 1923 constitution ratified the idea that Romanian progress was to be granted and developed only by Romanian nationals, 'through ourselves alone' (*prin noi înşine*), and the Jews were naturally not to be considered as a part of the nation. On the contrary, the economic problems of the twenties alimanted the hostility of Romanians against their Jewish co-nationals, who were viewed as rivals challenging to gain a prominent role in economy and society.

These problems began to be extremely evident in the universities. Young Romanian students were growing up thanks to the lectures of Romanian intellectuals, and shared the same anti-Semitic ideas. As a matter of fact, the political situation was increasingly characterized by the birth of radical student movements, which animated many brutal attacks against Jews in the streets, at theatre and in the universities. In 1922, the association Acţiunea Română began its activities at Cluj, protesting against the concession of citizenship to foreigners and advocating the *numerus clausus* in the university system. At Cluj, Iaşi and Bucharest the students of medicine launched a violent protest against the Jewish students, in order to forbid them to dissect Christian corpses, and this campaign soon converted into a wide movement of protest against the government, guilty of supporting Jewish students instead of young Romanians. These protests rapidly gave way to serious problems that obliged the government to close down the universities at the end of 1922 and in 1923.

In 1925, as a response to the students' demands, the authorities promulgated a law introducing an additional set of exams on Romanian literature, history and geography in order to be admitted to university. The government scholastic policy, as well as the economic one, was conditioned by the idea that Romanians had to be helped to replace the role that Jews and foreigners had played in the past in the development of the country. The problem was particularly evident in some faculties, where non-Romanian students represented a great majority: the faculties of law and philosophy at Cernauţi were attended respectively by 174 Christians and 574 Jews, and by 361 Christians and 506 Jews; 546 Romanians and 831 Jews were enrolled in the faculty of

medicine at Iași, 97 Romanians and 199 Jews attended the faculty of pharmacy (Vasiliu 1923, pp. 84-88).

Partially, the problems derived from the fact that the State was not capable of employing its graduates in remunerative positions, and incidentally created a new class of dissatisfied intellectuals who alimented the fire of anti-Semitism. During the twenties, this mass of frustrated students animated a wave of increasing violence against the Jewish students and the Jewish population in general.

The most striking episode occurred at Oradea, in December 1927, when an anti-Semitic congress was organized under the presidency of Cuza and Goga, with the participation of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who was a passionate student of professor Cuza and would soon emerge as the leader of the Romanian Right. In 1927, Codreanu created the Legion of the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*), later known as the Iron Guard (*Garda de Fier*) or Everything for the Country (*Totul pentru Țara*). At Oradea, Magyar and Jewish shops were attacked and sacked, while many Jews were assaulted and beaten, causing a great turmoil in Romania and abroad (Motta 2006, pp. 117-118). But in those years the wave of violence was widespread and led to the death of a Jewish student, David Falik, at Cernauți in 1926, and to many aggressions in various localities, especially along the frontier with Russia, where many cases of violence and torture by the police were recorded by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency or by the *American Jewish Yearbook*.

The political representation of the anti-Semites was assured by the National-Christian Defense League (Lanc, *Liga Apărării Național Creștine*), which was founded by Professor Cuza in 1923, and by Codreanu's legionaries, who soon replaced the influence of their old mentor and became a *de facto* ruler of the universities and of the whole country. The political ideology of this movement was something unusual, combining religion and patriotism in a strange mixture of anti-capitalism, anti-Occidentalism and love for martyrdom: a mystical attachment to nebulous historical glories, most unusual mass movement of interwar Europe (Payne 1995, pp. 277-289).

In Codreanu's political manifesto, *Pentru Legionari*, 'For the Legionaries', the most common expression was 'Jewish parasites' (*jidanii paraziți*), while the necessity of cleaning Romania from the Jewish presence was justified according to natural law (*legea teritoriului*). God gave a territory to every people, while the Jews arrived in Romania as Huns, Tartars and Turks before them: as invaders living a parasite existence owing to an anachronistic conception of civilization, undermining the peace of the nations that could not stand them no more.

As a real student, Codreanu quoted Cuza, Paulescu, Xenopol and Iorga, for example when focusing on the need of Romanizing the towns, the economic and cultural centre of the nation, or reporting statistical data. Hence, even Codreanu's work proves that in the Romanian case the refusal of Jewish admission into Romanian society was not the exclusive product of radical rightist political doctrines but was on the contrary a widespread belief that could be conjugated in the most racist and virulent language, as made by Alexander Cuza and his disciple Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, but also in a subtle and refined manner.

The Jewish question was almost unanimously considered a problem of national survival. It could be proved by analysing a moderate journal such as *Clujul*, which was edited at Cluj and was owned and directed by Alexandru Anca, a local business-man who possessed a typography and a firm of religious objects and clothes, which had been founded by a non-Romanian, Efraim Andrásófszky. *Clujul* showed a strong ecclesiastical inspiration and was a typical expression of Transylvanian local interests, representing at the same time a perfect example of how anti-Semitism was used as a factor of integration between the Romanians of Transylvania and the Old Kingdom.

Numerous articles could be quoted to understand the attitude of this journal, which considered the minorities as undesired people who had to be expelled as being at odds with Romanian interests: it was the moment to "clean ourselves" in the interest of Romania (Motta 2014).

Another article stated that the Jewish plan was to destroy every non-Jewish national government, to exploit every conflict in order to make money, to support international Jewish rights to the detriment of the non-Jewish people, to weaken non-Jewish States, to destroy the social and economic existence of the Christian States, to create chaos in order to establish a Jewish dictatorship, first of all thanks to the control of press and education (Motta 2014).

Clujul supported the student nationalist movement and its requests that the Jewish students of medicine should use only Jewish corpses for the dissections, and celebrated the anti-Semitic struggle of these groups, which was appreciated as a sincere Romanian national movement (Motta 2014). Many other articles contained personal attacks against the Jewish “smugglers and bank-robbers” or against a Jewish football player, Bornstein, was defined as a simple “parasite” (Motta 2014). On February 8, 1925, in an article entitled *Carne otravicioasă* (poisoned meat), the pharmacist Pavel Roman affirmed that the meat of animals that had been killed in a barbarian way (for example following the Jewish slaughtering practices) could be dangerous for the health.

In August 1923, another article explained the practise of the ritual homicide: in the villages, in the cities, everywhere in the world everybody knew that this crime derived from the need of using Christian blood for Jewish celebrations. At Mihaifalau the synagogue had not been sanctified, because nobody left the children alone in the streets and the Jews subsequently lacked the Christian blood they needed according to the Talmud: “What the ritual homicide is for the Jews has not to be explained... Middle Ages are full of Christian revolts which had been provoked by this kind of crimes even if until today – despite the cases are rare – Jews had not been released for this fact” (Motta 2014). These articles confirm what Mendelsohn stated in his well-known *The Jews of East-Central Europe Between the World Wars*: the seeds of Romanian anti-Semitism were sown during the twenties and its circulation was not confined among the large masses of unsatisfied students and rural peasants (Mendelsohn 1983, p. 203).

While in the twenties anti-Semitism was alimanted by the resentment of students and peasants, in the thirties, the moderates tried to placate the extremists by adopting anti-Semitic measures as a source of legitimization in internal as well as in foreign affairs. From this perspective, a very interesting testimony is represented by Rudolf Hess' message to the leader of the Germans in Romania, Fritz Fabritius, who created the National-Socialist Party of Romanian Germans (PNSGR, Partidul Național-Socialist al Germanilor din România). Hess suggested to his Romanian *Parteigenosse* to use anti-Semitism in order to develop a “peaceful penetration of the Saxon people by the forms of regeneration” (Motta 2013, p. 99).

The path towards the final triumph of anti-Semitism as a State policy ended up in 1937, with the King Carol appointing the government of Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza, whose weak National Christian Party corresponded to the King's desire: to calm down the citizens thanks to anti-Semitism (Scurtu 2003, p. 376). Goga, in fact, clearly explained that his program was based on the concept of differentiation by race (*diferențierii de rasă*) and by religion (*diferențierea de religie*), which were the cornerstone of the preservation of Romanian “organic entity” (*entitate organică*) from the assault of “foreigners” (*străini*) (Wiesel 2004, p. 7).

In one of its first official acts, approved and enforced by King Carol in January 1938, the new government undermined the position of the Jewish minority in Romania by banning Jewish newspapers, firing Jewish public servants, cutting off State aid to Jewish institutions, and invalidating the citizenship certificates of more or less 225,000 Jews. In this moment, while an American diplomat admitted that “frank anti-Semitism is the alpha and the omega of the National-Christian program”, the journalist Mihail Sebastian expressed his desolation: “I realize that we have nothing to gain, nothing to defend, nothing to expect” (Ursuțiu 2003, p. 143).

4. Conclusions

The roots of Romanian anti-Semitism are intertwined with the modern unification of the Romanian principalities, the independence and the creation of Greater Romania. Anti-Semitism between the two world wars represented a continuation and, under many aspects, an intensification of its mid-nineteenth century version. In fact, strong anti-Jewish currents were present in various forms and with varying intensity in the Romanian society long before the rise of Nazism in Germany and the accession to power of the National Christian Party in 1937.

If the most virulent form of nationalism became manifest only in the interwar period, the program Romania to Romanians (*Romania a Românilor*) was present since the foundation of modern Romania. It was at that time, when Romania was a compact Nation-State that the Jews became the symbol of Otherness (Oisteanu, 2001, 2009).

According to William O. Oldson, in this phase Romanian anti-Semitism was “providential”, for it derived from the nationalistic self-interest of the Romanians and of the Romanian State (Oldson 1991). All the most influent Romanian intellectuals advocated anti-Jewish measures as the natural result of an extreme urgency: to preserve the Romanians (Iorga 1913, pp. 202-203).

As pointed out by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (Solomon Katz), the Jews were perceived as the origin of the evil, under-developed, feudal system that oppressed the Romanians: the cause of Romanian misery was to be found in religion and not in a socio-economic structure of the country: “every connection disappears and the replacement is complete in a total diversion: the cause is the lease-holder as a Jew, the cause is the religion and the race of the lease-holder, the colour of his hair and his eyes” (Dobrogeanu-Gherea, 1910).

In a *longue durée* perspective, anti-Semitism has constituted one of the most enduring facets of Romanian nationalism and consequently assumed different aspects in different times and circumstances. Romanian anti-Semitism in itself represents a compendium of all the forms that anti-Semitism has historically assumed, an endemic amalgam of nationalism and anti-Semitism, of rationalized bias and visceral excesses.

In the rural context of the Romanian countryside (the term *țara* incidentally means both country and countryside), anti-Semitism was a consequence of religious beliefs and was traditionally connected to the old bias of Deicide (Pana 2006; Brustein-Ronnkvist 2002). Having suffered what Alexandru Dutu defined “a Counter-Reformation without a Reformation”, Romania had never enjoyed a tradition of religious or ethnic toleration (Kelley 1998; Vago 1993). The religious bias was still well alive also in the twentieth century, as proved by the articles of a relatively moderate journal of Transylvania, which could be considered the most developed and westernized region of Romania.

In addition to religious anti-Semitism, the Romanian Jews were attacked as prototypical of a foreign middlemen minority, the scapegoat that justified all the problems of Romania. If we take into consideration Blalock's and Blumer's threat theory (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958), according to which both economic conditions and demographic shifts affect out-group hostility, the popular anti-Semitism of Romanian peasants naturally spread to the higher classes that were the historical product of Romanian society. When a Romanian State finally gained independence, in the context of a general European modernization that led to the political, social and economic emancipation of Jews, Jewish competition elicited fears among many Gentiles, which reinforced anti-Semitic attitudes. As underlined by Carol Iancu, “economic competition and a spirit of narrow-minded exclusiveness” converted the unexperienced Christian bourgeoisie into the most persistent enemy of the Jews and, conforming to the modernization thesis of anti-Semitism, when the European States became less dependent on wealthy Jewish financiers, Jews experienced a new status characterized by a loss of real power while remaining holders of major wealth (Iancu 1978, p. 71).

For Hannah Arendt, this inconsistency between insignificant power and phenomenal wealth created within the general public the image of Jews as a parasitical social group. Pierre Birnbaum further suggests that the rise of modern anti-Semitism was a popular reaction against the State. Where a strong State was perceived as having imposed on society the emancipation of the Jews, anti-Semitism tended to be strong (Brustein-King, 2004).

In Romania, all these factors coexisted and if in 1938 the old Nicolae Iorga suggested that Romanian anti-Semitism was 100 years old and that the Jewish question had always been the most vital problem of Romanian prosperity, it is because since the beginning anti-Jewish rhetoric had represented a useful political instrument, a means to gain popularity within the masses.

As suggested by Brustein and King (2004), anti-Semitism was a response to perceived Jewish power and in the context of independence, the Jewish problem rapidly became a very useful argument in the hands of Romanian politicians who were confronted with unprecedented problems and could easily justify themselves blaming the strangers' oppression. For many centuries Romania had been oppressed by foreign Empires, after 1866 the oppression was represented by foreigners.

The struggle against foreign powers and influence became the fight against the enemy within, the strangers, namely the Jews and the other minority groups. This nationalist xenophobia (Ambri 1980, pp. 206-207) was further alimented by the repeated international interventions in defence of Romanian Jews and from this viewpoint the Jews were the personification of an exterior world that

was menacing Romanian existence. This sentiment of isolation was further increased by the representation of Romania as a Latin island in a Slavic ocean and, after 1919, this perception was exacerbated by the presence of Soviet Russia and Soviet Hungary right at the Romanian frontier. Once again, the Jewish minority was perceived to support a political agenda at odds with the projects of the majority group.

It was natural therefore that anti-Semitism easily spread among the higher classes, who were devoted to represent the welfare of the nation, which on the other side could not develop satisfactorily – this was the most common idea – owing to the presence of foreigners in the most strategic sectors of the State such as economy and press.

Anti-Semitism was espoused by the most important literary and historical writers and these nationalistic patriots represented the best cultural product of the country, the elite: they were appreciated historians and critics as well as politicians of the highest rank. Anti-Semitism was an essential part of being a nationalist and nationalism was the funding pillar of the State. Anti-Semitic bias was well represented by Romanian intellectuals, first of all by the traditionalist doctrines such as *Poporanism* or *Junimism*, which were influenced by Russian populism and advocated the promotion of national culture with the emancipation of peasantry through culture.

The disquieting presence of anti-Semitism in the most important Romanian authors' works continued also after the creation of a Greater Romania, when the Jews were no more the only substantial minority of the State. In a short period, the Romanians did not have the force and the ability to assimilate or to re-assimilate the various minorities of the new regions. The schools were an essential instrument to reach this target but were still too cosmopolitan and needed to be Romanized. But if the government succeeded in re-adapting the primary schools, it encountered serious hurdles in the secondary. The Romanian peasants were instructed and received adequate facilities to begin their "urbanization", but the attendance to secondary schools was not sufficient, because secondary education represented the promise of a social mobility previously denied to rural population.

As explained by Irina Livizeanu (2000) and Leon Volovici (1991), the example of Alecsandri, Xenopol, Bolliac and Iorga was followed by the new generations, by Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade and Eugen Ionesco. The young intellectuals promoted a rightist national revolution and highlighted the necessity of fighting the Jews, who according to Cioran were greedy for land and life (Laignel-Lavastine 2002; Cioran 1990, pp.11-15).

In the interwar period, anti-Semitic traditionalism was further enriched by new doctrines of regeneration or national awakening and by a new "scientific" approach, which was based on eugenics and racism. From this perspective, Marius Turda traces a parallel between Nichifor Crainic's ethnocentric State and Cuza's and Codreanu's ideas, both aiming at the "Health of the Nation". The most aggressive scientists, such as Iordache Facoaru, N. C. Paulescu and Petru Tiparescu, dreamed about a "rejuvenation" of the Romanian nation and envisioned a national community based upon the exclusion of all those deemed to be alien or anti-social (Turda-Weidling 2007). While Paulescu, who became famous for the discovery of insulin, stated that the Jews were degenerate because their brains weighed much less than the Aryan ones as a consequence of genetic hereditary malformations, Tiparescu enumerated the following causes of Jewish degeneration: intoxication, infections and the congenital lesions of the brain (Paulescu 1928; Tiparescu 1941).

In the interwar period, the development of Romanian anti-Semitism reached its most complete phase and added to the traditionalist themes of anti-Judaism and economic competition an entire set of different "suggestions" which included the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, the dreams about a regeneration of Romania and the racial bias. In the period before the Holocaust, Romanian anti-Semitism showed incomparable variety and intensity and appeared to be a complex combination of all the four strains of religious, racial, economic, and political anti-Semitism. Analysing the number of anti-Semitic acts in the period 1899-1939 per population, Romania stood as the most violent country having a number three times that of Germany.

Table: Classification of the different anti-Jewish acts made by William Brustein and Ryan King (2004, p. 700) in the period 1899-1939.

Laws-acts of discrimination	75 (17%)
Laws-acts forcing Jews to leave posts, appointments or los business	44 (10%)
Riots with vandalism, physical assault, destruction of property	91 (21%)
Formation of anti-Semitic groups, protest speeches, leafleting	36 (8%)
Laws-acts against Jewish immigration or naturalization, expulsions, citizenship reversals or deportation	36 (8%)
Riots and demonstrations without vandalism	46 (11%)
Media attacks	6 (1%)
Laws-acts against Jewish practises	20 (5%)
Violent acts on people-murder	41 (10%)
Raids, confiscations shutdowns	8 (2%)
Vandalism or destruction of property	13 (3%)
False accusations, arrest or imprisonment	5 (1%)
Boycotts or strikes	10 (2%)

Notwithstanding all these reflections, many observers pointed out that in a place that was defined by Arendt as the “most anti-Semitic country”, a relatively high percentage of Romanian Jews survived the Holocaust. A good explanation of this paradox was given by Jean Ancel who stressed that the Romanians drew a distinction between “their” Jews and other Jews. Though considered as foreigners and invaders, the Jews were “Romanian” and only the Romanians could rid the country of them. It was not by chance that the looting of Jewish property was termed Romanization rather than Aryanization. The Romanian participation in the liquidation of the Jewish people was, therefore, predicated on an ideology that preceded Nazi racism and was the result of free choice. Clearly, Germany’s domination of Europe permitted the Romanian allies to accomplish the old anti-Semitic dream, but anti-Semitism was not imported from Germany, it was a pure Romanian product (Arendt 1975, Ancel 2011; Butnaru 1992). From this perspective, the survival of many Romanian Jews was a further evidence of the nationalist xenophobia that had inspired the Romanian governments since the moment of independence, confusing patriotism with nationalism, and nationalism with anti-Semitism.

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