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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE URBAN JEWISH LIFE AND SPACE IN INTERWAR ROMANIAN LITERATURE. JEWISH BUCHAREST RECONSTRUCTED FROM THE WORKS OF ISAC PELTZ

Il est cependant un quartier dont nous devons parler, par ce qu'il se différencie des autres, c'est le quartier où sont allés s'installer de préférence les juifs : la Calea Văcărești, strada Decebal, strada Sf. Vineri, strada Mircea Vodă, strada Olteni, Calea Dudești, strada Lucaci, strada Labirintului, strada Negru-voda, strada Patria, strada Sf. Ioan Nou, strada Mămulari etc. Ces rues sont de deux sortes : les unes sont presque exclusivement commerçantes ; plus de jardins, plus de cours, les maisons appuient les unes aux autres, ayant toutes de petites magasins. La population très nombreuse étouffe, dans de petits appartements bon marché. Aussi, dès que le soir arrive, tous les locataires sortent-ils sur le trottoir pour respirer. Entre sept heures et onze heures, une vie intense règne dans ces rues, où grouille une population, qui par le type, la langue et parfois le costume, se distingue si nettement du reste des habitats. Les autres rues du quartier juif, comme la strada Sf. Ioan Nou, la strada Lucaci ressemblent aux nouvelles rues des autres quartiers : de coquettes maisons avec cour et jardin et pas, ou très peu de magasins, c'est là, qu'habitent les juifs aisés. Quant à la strada Mircea Voda, elle est habitée par des Roumains, riches propriétaires de tres beaux immeubles dans la patrie qui va de la strada Căldărari à la strada Lucaci et au dela, presque entièrement par des juifs. Il ne faudrait pas croire cependant, que tous les Israélites habitent Bucharest, se sont concentrés dans ce seul quartier. Ce serait une erreur. Beaucoup habitent le centre, les nouveaux quartiers et les boulevards. Un grand nombre se sont fait construire des beaux hotels, dont les maitres occupent une place considérable dans la société roumaine.

(Frédéric Damé, *Bucarest en 1906*¹)

Introduction

Writing on the fate of the Jewish people, Amos Funkenstein synthesized – what came out as little surprise for the versed readers – that “few cultures are as preoccupied with their own identity and distinction as the Jewish”. In this context, the major dilemma of the post-Haskalah² period was trading tradition and identity for modernization for the sake of inclusion and integration into the Gentile world. Subjected to a series of processes ranging from the influence of Jewish Enlightenment, of the religious reform, self-emancipation and acculturation, emancipation in political terms and efforts to integrate to the surrounding society, the Jewish community discovered itself facing serious identity challenges and crisis. The Jewish social life and public space, constructed from the beginning around the central idea of *community*, tradition and identity preservation (religious, cultural, educational, linguistic) underwent a series of changes under the general effect of modernization. Being part of a wider process of attempting acculturation, integration and inclusion, the Jewish lifestyle and settlements are at the same time subjected to a phenomenon of disintegration and identity change, while the tradition is also altered. The permanent tension between identity and tradition preservation and the impact of all the above-mentioned processes imposed by modernity created a complex situation within the community.

Romanian Context

A multi-ethnic state from the very beginning, Romania brought in the newly formed state at the end of the First World War together with its different ethnic groups a variety of cultural and social patterns which had to accommodate within the new general context. The specificity of the Jewish life³ and its special inhabiting patterns underwent significant changes during the modernization process which had started already in the 19th century as the result of the Haskalah and also during the attempts to integrate it into the wider social and cultural Romanian life through acculturation. Still, the efforts of preserving the Jewish identity beyond contextual changes in terms of social space and life enriched the Romanian background. In a social and cultural context arguing for integration, modernization, homogenization, Westernization, the situation of the non-Romanian ethnic groups struggling to survive socially by adaptation to the new context, but also culturally and religiously by preserving their

identity, faced a serious conflict generated by this constant negotiation, extremely significant for a wider research on the modernization patterns and social processes in Romania. Due to the fact that I am interested in the dynamics of this complex process, I chose to focus on the interwar period as the most acute one in a possible chart of the above presented complex of processes. The post World War 1 situation in Romania included new Jewish communities, very different in terms of culture, language, identity specificity and a more intense and dramatic process of interaction and mutual influences started.

In these terms, the Jewish community in Romania seems to be subjected to an even more complicated set of influences. Thus it is subjected to the general process of *modernization* brought by the inner trends from inside the Jewish milieu (Haskalah, self-emancipation, efforts towards inclusion, etc.), but also a parallel one coming from the wider Romanian surrounding society undergoing a process of belated modernization as well (urbanization, industrialization, steps towards national integration, etc.) acting as a centrifugal force upon the traditional Jewish identity. In the same time, there is also the process of *autochtonization* (acculturation, "assimilation", localization of identity into the Romanian one, integration, absorbing through acculturation and integration many of the Romanian characteristics and lifestyle in architecture, customs, mentalities, etc.). Both processes tend to oppose the centripetal effect coming from the Jewish traditional core and trying to preserve the identity, compromising and trading as little as possible in order to avoid identity loss. As a result, the Romanian Jewry is subjected to a complex concurrent set of modernizing trends. Due to this situation, the process of "Westernization" gets a more complex image and the choice over the modernity version affecting the Jewish community in Romania might be also influenced by the modernization and "Westernization" form adopted by the wider Romanian society out of a variety of modernizing models. The modernity trends and patterns reaching the Jewish community were often mediated and filtered through the Romanian set of preferences, in the end creating a sort of acculturation to a Romanian version of modernity. Thus, the modernizing process to which the Jewish community in Romania was subjected was decided out of a range of multiple modernities, just as the process influencing the Romanian society also had an impact on the Jewish community due to the parallel processes of acculturation and integration.

In a wider context, mid-1930s witnessed in terms of literary phenomena the emergence of a literature focused on Jewish life and identity in Romania. The major novels and short stories written on this topic are published now; in 1933 I. Peltz⁴ publishes *Calea Văcărești* (Văcărești Avenue), 1934 bring to the wider public *Ghetto Veac XX* (Ghetto 20th Century) of Ury Benador⁵ and *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* (Fire in the Linen Inn) of I. Peltz, 1936 launches *Copilăria unui netrebnic* (The Childhood of an Idler) of I. Calugaru.⁶ Moving from the monographic description of the traditional life in a small shtetl⁷ from Northern Moldavia as in the novel of I. Calugaru to the challenges of the urban life in the Bucharest Jewish quarter of legendary Văcărești – Dudești as described in the two novels of I. Peltz – *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, but especially *Calea Văcărești*, the literary variety of description also benefits from the presentation of the Jewish neighborhood in Braila, Eastern Walachia, multiethnic city of medium size, semi-urban in its poor periphery and still able to bridge the two contrastive cases. Although the literature on Jewish life in Romania was not in its beginnings in mid-1930s with the aforementioned volumes, the interesting element is the fact that writers seem to come from a similar literary and social perspective of reflection and approach. Previous attempts seemed rather tackling the topic from outside, mainly coming from a Romanian literary tradition which was enriched with exoticized pieces of literature able to fit into the Romanian literature ways of dealing with non-Romanian ethnic groups, basically either idealizing or stereotyping (if not stretching this device to exaggeration and to anti-Jewish portraying). As a result, these novels seem to deliberately present an inner description of the Jewish life avoiding either idealization, so frequent when describing life in a shtetl by Jewish writers in Eastern Europe, or its negative description in the works of anti-Semitic authors.⁸ Finally the emergence of this type of literature is a confirmation of the need for establishing a new ground of approaching this topic.

Obviously, the writers are aware of the lack of accurate description of the Jewish life and their endeavor might aim at correcting a wider cultural perspective by using literary imagery first of all. As a result, the newly emerged literature on Jewish topics aimed to publicly legitimize in the cultural and intellectual field a distinct social, religious and ethnic group with its own identity, to present / de-exoticize for the non-Jewish public a group until then separated and represented in a distorted manipulative way and to depict and preserve for the collective memory and posterity a social and material reality.

Jewish Bucharest

Concentrating one of the greatest Jewish communities among the capitals of the region, Bucharest gathered 10% of the Jewish community in Romania and exerted a great influence on the rest of the Romanian Jews. According to censuses, the Jewish population in 1930 raised to 76,480 individuals only in Bucharest, while the total numbers in Greater Romania were around 750,000 individuals. Although the presence of the Jews in Bucharest was documented from the 16th century⁹ already as invited and supported through legislation by the local rulers in order to develop economy, commerce and manufacture, their input in the economic life and social development started to be more visible only in the 19th century when the population increased significantly.

It is difficult to delimitate the areas inhabited by the Jewish population in Bucharest. As many historians claimed, there was no Jewish quarter in the sense of exclusively Jewish concentration of population in a certain defined zone, as in the case of ghettos or shtetls showing also the absence of official regulations and impositions. Instead, the Jewish population was predominant in some areas, mostly connected initially with their economic and manufacture occupations, but it was also present in many other parts of the Capital. This fact made researchers¹⁰ conclude on the tolerance on behalf of the local population and freedom of the Jews to settle and exert economic activities in any part of Bucharest according to the business opportunities. This fact was connected to the main reason of inviting the first Jewish merchants and manufacturers to the Principalities by the ruler in order to develop these levels of the economy. The richer families as well as the Sephardim were living disconnected from the chain of mahalas¹¹ of spread Jewish communities; moving out of the ethnic neighborhood meant success, economic and professional advancement as well as integration into the Gentile communities. In this sense, the individuals still living into the quarters were connected to the community through customs, family connections, economic and financial dependency.

Due to the same economic motivation, the neighborhoods were not exclusively ethnically Jewish, although they were predominantly inhabited by Jews in some areas; rather, there were also Romanian, Roma, Greek and Armenian populations reflecting also on the ethnic mixed pattern of the Bucharest mahalas as well as on the multiculturalism present especially in the commercial and manufacture zones.

Thus the first Jewish residential areas were associated with the Sephardic population settling in the area of Sf. Gheorghe Nou. Thus, historian Radu Stefan Vergatti identified several areas of Jewish population in Bucharest such as **1)** Sf. Gheorghe Nou; **2)** Calea Văcărești-Dudești; **3)** Calea Victoriei and Academiei area and **4)** Calea Griviței up to Podul Basarab, str. Popa Tatu and Piața Matache Măcelaru. Apart from these main areas, the literature focuses on the importance of Calea Moșilor and of Sf. Apostoli – Calea Rahovei areas. In this larger structure, Vergatti narrates the development of the Jewish Bucharest as "...starting from 1878, Jews groups in the "Old Tîrg", on the left bank of Dîmbovița, in the mahalas having the axis of transportation Calea Văcărești and Calea Dudești, close to the now demolished Tîrg al Cucului, and towards South West, beyond Str. Sfinții Apostoli. The Jews of Calea Văcărești, Calea Dudești and nearby streets were mostly oriented towards the old economic center. Others created a new center, the second one, in the area of the former Palace of Justice – Str. Sfinții Apostoli, from where step by step they conquered Calea Rahovei. Another group formed a third area on Calea Moșilor, where later the synagogue of Str. Gh. Palade would be built. In the last decade of the 19th century, the Jews expended in a new area, the fourth, on the streets from the center of Bucharest, Str. Academiei and Calea Victoriei, and also on the side ones. Somehow isolated, without a connection through houses, there was also a fifth area, of the Jews from the Calea Griviței (between Gării area, Podul Basarab, and Calea Victoriei). To them, also those coming from Str. Popa Tatu and around Piața Matache Măcelaru joined. Eventually, others spread on the whole surface of Bucharest, without creating areas of compact zones of inhabitation."¹²

At a closer look, the "Jewish quarters" were rather specialized as residential (Văcărești-Dudești) and commercial (Calea Moșilor, Calea Rahovei). Settling starts in the center and advanced towards south and south-east. Anca Ciuciu noticed there was a clear distinction between poor quarters (Dudești-Văcărești and Calea Griviței) and rich ones (Calea Moșilor, Calea Victoriei, Sfinții Apostoli, Calea Griviței inhabited by industrialists and financiers).¹³ In the same line, she stated that the Jews of Calea Văcărești and Calea Dudești were oriented towards the old economic center.

Brought to fame by the work of I. Peltz, born and living up to a certain age in the neighborhood, Dudești-Văcărești area enjoys a certain status of mythical space. Populated in its majority by a community nowadays gone while the space itself disappeared itself from the map due to political

reconstruction of the Bucharest geography during the Communist regime, Văcărești-Dudești manages to be rather recreated from documents, oral history, literary works and photographs. In this context, the reconstructions could be only subjective and personal, involving a high degree of emotional involvement, personal history and background. Thus, the Văcărești quarter was one of the poorest, known also for its sellers of old clothes and for the famous Hala Vechiturilor (The Old Things' Store).¹⁴ The Văcărești quarter was described insisting on its poor quality of life in Henri Stahl's *Bucureștii ce se duc* (The Fading Away Bucharest; a useful source in terms of descriptions and documents, but coming from a rather biased and anti-Semitic discourse). Basically, according to Anca Ciuciu's research, the Văcărești-Dudești quarter was not much different from the usual Bucharest periphery or mahala; the specificity of the area was given by many institutions and cultural markers defining Judaism as synagogues, ritual baths, teahouses playing religious Jewish songs, kosher butchers, metal collectors, street vendors, etc. In his work *Bucureștiul dispărut*, Gheorghe Leahu presented the area as

analyzing in general, Calea Văcărești had a heterogeneous architecture, good houses alternating with empty areas, well-kept shops with old poor ones. Watching closely the color and volume combinations, you would discover a modest appearance, specifically Bucharest-like, so close to our nature. The tall, white façade, the entrance with a metal fence, the shop at the ground floor with its green blinders, the lace-like metal balcony... generated a picturesque combination of elements which offered an unexpected charm to the now lost Calea Văcărești.¹⁵

An even more personally involved reconstruction of the Jewish quarter was offered in the work of Frederic Dame, *Bucarest en 1906*, plunging into the lively atmosphere of the social manifestation and group organization of the space:

Un spectacle original offer le quartier juif, très étendu et compris entre la rive gauche de la Dimbovitsa à partir de la Morgue jusqu'à la fonderie Lemaitre d'un côté, et la rue Dudesco de l'autre. Entassés dans des maisons étroites ils vivent pele-mele sans espace et sans air, travaillant autour d'une lampe fumeuse, acharnés au travail et avides de réaliser un peu de bien être. Le soir après la fermeture des bureaux et la sortie des magasins où la plupart d'entre eux sont occupés, leur quartier prend une animation extraordinaire, toute cette population se répand au dehors refermée tout

le jour, des qu'elle se sent un peu libre et que le temps le permet, elle sort dans la rue ; vivant les uns avec les autres, partageant le meme sort, ils se connaissent tous, ils se savent entre eux et chez eux et c'est ce qui donne un caractère tout spécial d'intimité à l'ensemble, ils se promènent sur leurs trottoirs, tels qu'ils sont en leurs intérieur, en cheveux, femmes, enfants, vieillards, les jeunes vont causant, les plus agés s'attablent aux ceainerie – débits de thé – où moyennant 0,10c on sert un verre de thé chaud. Celui qui sur sa route arrive à passer le soir, assez tard, par ces quartiers, est tout surpris de voir à l'heure où le reste de la ville est presqu'assoupi, la vie encore intese qui règne de ce coté.¹⁶

I. Peltz's Representation of Jewish Bucharest

1. Mapping Mentally the Jewish Quarter

The Jewish Quarter through its old neighborhood Văcărești and Dudești was the area of localization of the works of I. Peltz and basically the topic of description in an apparent monograph series of two volumes. Although the obsession of the author is the “the small lane which does not appear in any guide” as a marker of poverty and isolation, the geography of the literary space is complex and more precise. Thus *Calea Văcărești* novel takes place mostly between streets as Lazăr, Olteni, Lînăriei, Traian, Sticlari, Bradului, Tabacu, Raion, Făurari, Cîmpoduci, Carol, Leglslatorului up to Bariera Victoriei, while *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* concentrates it action mostly around Labirint, Mircea Vodă, Șelari, Lipscani, Smîrdan, Gabroveni, Dobroteasa, Tunari, Bărăție, Sf. Apostoli, Cantemir and Udricani. The circulation of individuals and the course of action does not really separate the two areas which are treated mostly collectively as Văcărești – Dudești area due to the fact that in both the Jewish population settled and when treating the community's situation at large, the author uses generally the whole area.

During an anti-Semitic confrontation, the camps of young locals defending their families versus the hooligans coming from outside determined the author to define the limits of the area through a social and politicized set of circumstances. The reader finds that solidarity of Văcărești, Dudești, Raion and Cîmpoduci defended the intersection of Calea Văcărești with Sf. Vineri as the limit of the quarter as well as the symbolic separation line between Gentile aggressor group and the Jewish community, while the attackers were expected to arrive from Obor, Bellu, Mihai Bravu, Filantropie, Gropile lui Ouatu, Stefan cel Mare, Jianu, but

passing through Sf. Vineri and Sf. Gheorge, Dobrotesei as mental area boundaries. Nevertheless, the boundaries are by no means set. The Văcărești and Dudești areas, although known to be Jewish quarters are inhabited also by Gentile population, Romanian, Roma, Greek and even Albanian characters appear in the structure of the novel working in different stores and workshops, being included in the local administration and gendarmerie, working as servants, etc. Similarly, the locals practically live most of their life in the center and in other areas of the city to work, shop, make business, study, entertain, etc. Far from the closed, mostly self-contained shtetl structure, the urban quarter became merely a space for concentration of population.

The Jewish quarter, unlike the semi-urban shtetls, enjoys the status of a region of a greater structure, the city, rather than a definite separation as in the case of rural settlements. In this organization, the Jewish quarter becomes a part of the city where mostly the Jewish community lived, but it also had permeable boundaries which are crossed from both parts. In the moment of anti-Semitic conflicts, the organization of the defense of the area on streets and regions enforces the mental structure of a region with local solidarities rather than of a closed and strictly separated settlement. In this context, the writer often defines the quarter as a mahala. The mere usage of the word mahala, specific to the local culture and Balkan area as describing the outskirts of the urban or semi-urban settlements, suggests that a process of mental integration to the Bucharest structure took place. At the same time, the assimilation of the concept of mahala to the specificity of the Jewish life in Bucharest as well as a clear perception of the regional imagery in connection with the center of the city emerged through the mixture of cultures.

The perspective offered by I. Peltz is thus of a community with blurred boundaries, permeable limits and fluid space. The community and the space marked to be its inhabiting area are vague, not precisely delimited subjected to the permanent movement inside / outside due to different occupations (business, study, work, medical assistance). The community is not isolated and self-contained, mobility towards Gentile space and the presence of Gentile individuals inside the community complicated the picture and the stability of its structure fluctuates according to economics and social life. Even more, integrated into the bigger structure of the city, the area received from the beginning a status of subordination and dependence and adopted mahala as a cultural marker defining it publicly and assumed by its inhabitants. This might be considered the first element

of Balkanization, thus autochthonization and adaptation to the local structures. The deconstruction of a solid communal identity enforced through its settlement organization seems to be the first step suggested by the writer in his demonstration of identity crisis through modernization concentrated in the disappointed remark of one of the characters of Calea Văcărești: "It is obvious how much you Bucharest people lost from our holy customs! In our Moldavia..."¹⁷

2. Simultaneous Spaces

Writing a monograph on the Jewish life / quarter, the public space and institutions became almost characters on their own. The two novels include a countless number of teahouses, synagogues, workshops, stores, community buildings, professional associations, mutual aid institutions, philanthropic institutions, theatres, cinemas, libraries, bookstores, etc. as well as corresponding events as dancing balls, political meetings, soirees, dancing events, public lectures, festivals.

The author constructed clearly a generational separation while presenting the individuals and groups involved into the life of the neighborhood. Thus, the young generation is presented in both novels as fascinated by politics and interested in culture, education, entertainment. Studying commerce (as Ficu), or medicine, pharmacy (as Liza) or law became a clear and widely spread option for the young, and women seem especially interested in cultivating also artistic talents as painting, music, literature while attending special boarding school institutions. In this context, the political ideas agitate the groups as the Socialist club became an attraction for the students and young intellectuals, but also for the poor workers. *Sala Unirea* (Unirea Hall) is the place where one of the characters lectures on cultural and political topics, while *Sala Libertății* (Libertății Hall) hosts a meeting of the workers' syndicates. Watching movies at *Cinema Victoria* or in *Dudești*, attending dancing soirees at *Dacia hall* in *Dudești* or at *Liedertafel Hall* became entertainment occupations naturally specific to the young as requiring a certain degree of modernization, socialization and education. The middle generation is the one dominating the social life at the moment and it builds the whole economic life owning developing enterprises (pharmacy, timber factory, inns, lodging space), or suffering from poverty and struggling in street vending, trading, etc. As a contrast, I. Peltz reserved the meetings of the *Baron de Hirsch Temple* committee, the *Society of the Patriot Jews*,

several societies of philanthropy *Iubirea Aproapelui* (The Love of Thy Brother), *Fericirea universală* (Universal Happiness) to be attended by the established tradesmen, businessmen portrayed as the pillars of the community, thus coming from a different generation and having different interests. Thus *Jignăa garden* was frequented also by these people who were partying afterwards in pubs / restaurants / *cîrciumi* as “*coana Cearna*”, “*Piatra*”, “*Rotaru*”, and frequenting dancing places at *Pomul Verde* (The Green Tree), the dancing evenings of the *Community*, etc. Finally, the old generation is schematically described as living their lives between the synagogue, the teahouse and the workshop, more or less suggesting the faithfulness to the traditional lifestyle and the lack of interest in the changes taking place around them.

Basically, living and working in the same space, different individuals coming from different generations thus with different interests, identities and options, articulated different personalized versions of the same place. I. Peltz thus constructed a Jewish quarter of the old and traditional, preserving their identity, but also one of the young and the modern with all the innovations and political debates brought inside the community by the effects of urbanization and modernization, just as much as there was also a Dudești – Văcărești of the middle generation with economic obsessions as well as social advancement interests. Practically, in the same area and novel, there are several personal versions of the space simultaneously present there and activated by different categories of individuals. By suggesting this delimitation in the usage of space and buildings, Peltz enforces the image of generational separation in terms of projects, aims, attitudes and the progressive change of identity through a permanent contrast among groups. The loss of continuity of identity is felt through the vertical separation and compartmentalization of the generations choosing different lifestyle.

3. Buildings as Life Containers

The descriptions of the Jewish quarter, Jewish street or neighborhood are naturalistic and refer more to the individuals' living the space than to the space itself; nevertheless, the structure of the area is sketched first of all in order to become soon a pretext for evoking human destiny and fate:

The pride of Șulăm Șolț was of course his house in Traian street. He bought a hut and built several acceptable rooms. The mahala of the housewives, frail and with deformities caused by poverty, and of the half-naked children, becoming cruel due to hardships considered him quite rich. There were only a few Jews owning their own house on this street and especially in the area ending in Calea Dudești. Most of them – street vendors, shop sellers on Lipscani Street, traders with personal stories hard to imagine, workers and office clerks with poor salaries – were barely making a living. One's eye, even unable to read some other eyes, even from the beginning of the street would have understood that there is a extremely poor quarter. On the left, it is true, there were a few rows of bricks in construction, a cart or two with sand and four gypsies running to and fro would have suggested the master's "prosperity", but the truth was that mister Nae supervising this activity was for forty years head of an office at the Mayor's and only today, while at his old age, he managed to fulfill his dream. Watching his tired and sad eyes, you could have believed he was tending not his house, but his grave which would receive him soon. What about right across the street? You would have passed an empty area, large and sad, and finally encounter some sort of inn, full of manure and garbage; on both sides, in tiny constructions, there were a couple of scores of poor Jews: shoemakers ignored by the youth of the quarter, tailors barely making a living and fathering countless children, electricity men, students coming from far-away places as Dorohoi, dishwashers in the great Bucharest restaurants (...) a mixed and defeated people. Close to the inn, there were several houses facing the street with their entry doors, each of them with several steps. There were small shops of glass items, a photo shop, a dancing room, a school, a sausage factory and some other house holdings with their extremely poor owners melancholic for their long waiting for a potential client.¹⁸

Shortly, buildings and space seem to compartment individuals' lives and collect biographies. The inn,¹⁹ the teahouse, the hotel are not described as themselves, but became pretexts for producing life stories and sketch human destinies. They became interesting for the structure of the novel merely through the quantity of life contained. It is rather difficult to find a description of the organization of the quarter or neighborhood; the author is immediately lost in an evocation of the human substance beneath the walls and the rest of the picture is blurred. For example, the famous inn became a reason to present the life stories of several tenants:

Druță's Inn hosted the well-known population of the mahala, subjected to the mighty will of Micu Braun. Extremely thin women, who come to the timber businessman every month in order to ask him decrease the rent and are chased by his servants; workers with very few cheap clients; street vendors as Mehală; actors without a contract of the Jewish theatre who sometimes manage to have a "representation" out of which they live for a week; miserable shopkeepers, tailors, shoe polishers and luggage carriers.²⁰

Although the inn and Calea Văcărești became characters in the economy of the plot, they are still living through the individual trajectories inside of them or, better, they became characters and had a life of their own just because their essence is the human destiny:

Calea Văcărești was still sleeping, in the warm morning of mild winter. The windows of the teashops were still preserving the light of the night and were welcoming the first clients: firm painters, street vendors, provincial travelers just out of their train, still sleepy and shivering, a old woman looking for her grandson away since yesterday from home, the street girls from the center, the usual people of the neighborhood.²¹

And, as from any container, the buildings described became sites of mental escaping: "He craves for such a trip, any trip, an escape from the miserable teahouses of Dudești, from the dirty hotels of the quarter, from the streets with crammed poor houses from here."²²

4. Practices of Inhabiting

In his both novels, I. Peltz populated his literature with description of buildings, presentation of common space and material objects. Human life, individual's destinies, life stories seem to be determined by these structures, especially as I. Peltz uses them to start presenting the human substance. Concentrating on individuals, the author presents several forms of inhabiting used as markers of economic and social success or failure.

The poorest individuals live in shared accommodation as inns, rented houses, and cheap hotels: "What about the bagel maker? There are ten people in a small room, all of them men and all working hard from morning till after midnight. The wife of the bagel maker died of tuberculosis, her sons would follow her soon."²³

The lack of privacy imposed by communal living, the high costs of the rent and the poor conditions (humidity, lack of electricity and heating) generates a permanent search for better place, thus periodical moving out at St. George and St. Dumitru, but also a series of diseases flourishing in these scarce living conditions. Evictions and buying properties are the major events in human's destiny marking the end or the beginning of ascension. The first step ahead is the individual housing, signifying independence, better economic status and the beginning of individual property. The increase of economic resources of the businessmen and traders was also quantified in estates, buildings, houses, the money gained are invested in accommodation rented afterwards for the poorer. For example, the case of Micu Braun described step by step:

Mister Micu befriended great boyars and started providing wagons, dozens, hundreds, thousands of wagons to the officials, he got himself a fur, a carriage, built a house, then another one and eventually he bought the inn with fifty tenants – all the poor people of the neighborhood.²⁴

The dream of the majority was described as a country house outside Bucharest offering better health conditions and privacy: "now his thought wet back to an old dream of hers and of all the people around her: to have a house in an average village. Her lungs were weak."²⁵

But the most admired cases were represented by professionals and businessmen who afforded to move out of the mahala into the city center, a fact bringing naturally severing ties with the community and lifestyle, but also signifying a high degree of acculturation, integration and social and economic success:

in the coffee shop of Lipscani where he had been recently hired, he met daily a whole world of people in business, traders of coins and grains, houses and estates, textile and medicines. These Jews were not living anymore in Calea Văcărești or on the streets of the quarter. They escaped towards the center, towards Doamnei, Smîrdan, Șelari, Rahovei and even Bărăției or Polonă. They were living in new houses, with gardens surrounded by clean walls, had private teachers for their children, trained in German and French. They were leaving for the summer to Karlsbad or Vichy. Some settled shops in the actual center of the city. They had nothing in common with the people of Dudești. Once or twice per year, for the sacred holidays of the fall, they were filling up Templul Coral, built and taken care of in a modern way, completely different from the other small

synagogues of the neighborhood, where God was sitting down next to the religious people on the wooden rotten bench. They had not been speaking Yiddish for years. They parted for good from Calea Văcărești, where they still had some poor relative living there or some unfortunate acquaintance. (...) As they were returning to the quarter, they were facing again the old fallen cheeks of the Jews here, the half-naked and hungry children, the women going from one teashop to another, carrying unbelievable baskets filled with peanuts under their frail arm, the wretched hungry people of the poor streets.²⁶

Thus, the novels of I. Peltz present individual's advancement represented by the properties owned, usually houses and shops, buildings to be rented or used for business – all seen as markers of social and economic success. The rise and fall of human destiny in personal stories appears symbolically presented through the type of accommodation used, lost and gained:

Next to the actors' family, a short and disgustingly fat woman was living. (...) During her youth, she sang in a variety theatre in the center of the city. Then she used to live in two rooms of the Palace hotel on the main boulevard and hired an old woman to take care of her. (...) Difficult times came for her though. War and misery came. (...) She had no hotel room, no servant, no bank savings. She moved to Rahovei area, to a coffee fortuneteller. A simple bourgeois flat. She was not performing in the first class cabaret. She was hired by mister Weiss, the owner of "Camelia", on Calea Griviței, a variety theatre preferred by the fat provincial clients and to the ones living over night in the hotels close to the train station. Then she grew old, her teeth fallen off, men started to avoid her. She moved on Bradului street, in one single furnished room. The next years chased her into the street in order to find, rarely, a client. (...) Now she moved to Druță's Inn, exhausted by the tons of lost hopes.²⁷

Belonging to a certain social category was also suggested through housing as a marker for success. Happiness and misery seem to be determined by the possession of a house or by the lack of this property. The individual legitimizes its value through the possession of his real estate situation: "Albert Zwabel (...) had his own house – which earned the respect of the quarter's vagabonds – and he was also the president of the temple Baron de Hirsch"²⁸ while "banker Nordman, the aristocrat of the Jewish people, managed to become from a street vendor with a

small counter in the market into the owner of a dozen of houses and of a "credit institute".²⁹

Finally, the need for such a public visible acknowledgement is given by the continuity defined by Liza Blum in the need for house and for owning properties: "Men of my father's kind have the sense of continuity. (...) The Jewish petit-bourgeois cherishes material goods for what they mean in the present, but also for what they will represent in the future. When they build a house, they take care to raise a floor also for their children."³⁰

Using the symbolic value of housing and accommodation, I. Peltz practically presented the social and economical barriers existing inside the community and the fact that this separation increases the crisis of the community through its lack of cohesion and mutual aid as traditional values.

5. Identity Changes and Crisis

Foc in Hanul cu Tei is embedded with a severe social criticism related to the rich and poor categories within the community, focusing on the means of gaining fortunes, manners of conducting illegal business and so on; the particularity of the approach is that the author envisages the criticism through a *generational / chronological* perspective judged mostly at the level of *Jewish identity preservation*. Along the novel the opposing groups are not so much the rich and the poor contradicting the group solidarity and the communal mutual helping structure, but also the chronological changes taking place within the community in time and shapshotted through a presentation of the different generational views.

The generation of the old, perceived as preserving the traditional life and communal values, is described by default by the author, mostly invisible in the structure of the plot. Rather reference points to a culture and set of values compromised by the economic advancement and financial gain in the context of modernization and adaptation to the Gentile world, the generation of the old rarely appears actively in the story, leaving more space for the generation of their children and grandchildren confronting violently. Their portrait is sketchy, based on a primitive deconstruction of their existence oscillating "between synagogue, workshop and teahouse" in a form of detachment from real world:

the same Jewish grandfathers, exhausted by the long years of work and torments, lost in a perpetual dreaming state, absent from the arguments of those around them, mummified in their defeated attitude – the same world occupies the chairs and drinks out of teapots the boiling drink... This is their only vice, their only escape from the trouble of everyday living, these hours dedicated to the coffee shop.³¹

The group of raising businessmen, financially thriving and compromising the values of the community and lifestyle are often criticized. In this context, glass trader Blum was described suggestively:

as any neighborhood merchants, he had his shop open on Saturday; he did not wear a beard and cut his hair in a fashionable way, smoked no matter if it was a Jewish holiday or not, ate pork ham and was by no means different from any other Christian shopkeeper. As Micu Braun, as Blumefeld, as Nordman, he celebrated Christmas and Easter, when he laid tables and partied nights on end with everyone in the commercial area of Lipsani. Only on Rosh-Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the holy festivals of the fall, Blum felt obliged to close his shop. He was not doing it out of religious conviction. Rather, he was subjected to a fear of the unknown and hoped to be in good terms with the Hebrew God, at least then.³²

The degree of acculturation to the Gentile values became a reason of pride and displayed publicly. Thus they go to the synagogue wearing black hat and modern suites, have subscriptions to the *People's Library*, are fascinated by the *National Theatre* and by the *Opera* house and attend their shows frequently, are familiar with the latest boulevard songs. The fracture with the past is severely criticized as well as the lack of continuity:

He measured everybody. He knew how much hypocrisy and lies existed in these philanthropic scum abundantly fed. Most of them had nothing in common with their shepherd ancestors, scholars and religious men. He could look deep down into the eyes of that sly lawyer and see him disturbed as under the effect of a condemnation.³³

After all, the ascension on the social and economic ladder is fairly recent in the view of the ones surrounding them: "All the 'aristocratic' families descend from traders, shopkeepers, street vendors, arendars and money-lenders. If they should boast with such noble ancestors, their whole

nobility of children and grandchildren of cereal traders, estates attendants or stock market agents would go to hell..."³⁴

The young became lucid, realistic and practical, articulating a severe criticism of their parents' generations, or were simply confiscated by the possibility of alternatives offered by art, literature, and politics. Thus Liza Blum is "educated, demanding, intelligent", "with strange ideas", "does not believe in God". Liza Braun, thin and sensitive, is reading novels all day long, plays the piano and cries without any reason as an authentic Emma Bovary; raised in a "bourgeois way" in the catholic school and in boarding school, she remains home to read, sing and dream about an alternative reality to the mercantile vulgar world of her parents who made all these happen. The young men of the quarter were also fascinated by the political debates, spending a lot of time in the socialist club. Women graduate Conservatory, Letters and Beaux Arts, men turn more and more towards medicine, business or law school. The generational break was enforced educationally and culturally and prompted economically by the previous generations.

The structure of the novel manages to bring together vividly the three generations involved in the community together with their discourses and reciprocal criticism meant to stress the oppositions within the community. The most targeted group is made of the presently active and central generation made of the middle aged rich and business-running pillars of the society or professionally successful assimilated to the Romanian environment and separated from the community. The criticism against them comes from both sides: tacit ones and a condemnation of the loss of Jewish identity, traditional and solidarity coming from the parents' generations, mostly presented as coming from traditional background (even Yiddish speaking one) or from Polish / Russian immigrants still preserving the observant lifestyle. Opposing them, the second generation can not maintain the same lifestyle and religious precepts as the majority's rules and their desire to integrate and to participate socially would prevent them from preserving them. The young generation's critique targets their lack of political options and their loss of Jewish identity; indeed, as compared to the third generation included in the picture, the middle generation does not have other political views but those supporting the majority's national interests, usually the Union of Romanian Jews and the "integration/assimilation" projects. Sensing the failure of their parents' project of integration, children rebel and find refuge in political (mostly ideological and propagandist activities as the Romanian environment was

not very permissive with leftists movements in the interwar period and the Zionism was not very popular among the Regat community) life, but as they do not move from the level of discourse, are condemned by the practical sense of their parents' approach. Although the antagonisms between the three generations are visible, mostly opposing the middle generation, the grandparents and the children generations manage to connect to the level of identity preservation (partially, mostly the Zionism sympathizers) or to quit for good any connections with their Jewish identity, not preserving not even the formal attachment that the middle generation managed to preserve (leftist adherents).

Political Agenda

In 1917, when I. Peltz was only 18, his essay *Menirea literaturii* (The Role of Literature) was published as an excursus through the world philosophy concerning the role and function of literature within human society. The by-then self-defined Socialist moves the demonstration of his ideas through the Kantian system, the Comte's positivism and Buehler's materialism in order to reach the conclusion that

human soul, so important to be known in all his manifestations, this very soul can be revealed only by the writer. Literature has the sublime function of showing the soul's mysteries (...). And indeed, this is one of most important functions of the literature. Knowing the intimate mechanisms which make the individual exist as a personality is the most profound thing. And this is what literature teaches us. A world we see and analyze, a vital laboratory, a gallery of souls and mentalities, this is literature.³⁵

Definitely, for him literature had a clear social message and a wider significance than the mere aesthetic product. Along his maturity works, his political discourse became clear as "the bourgeoisie enslaved by the money, not believing in anything, for which money is scope and means – namely everything",³⁶ together with the precarious position of the poorest received larger representation. Isac Peltz expressed very early his leftist political views, especially through his collaboration and contacts with Socialist publications and journalists. In his volume *Evocari* (Evocations),³⁷ he presented the figure of C. Dobrogeanu Gherea, major Socialist theoretician and literary critic and his impact on the public; Peltz was also in contact with Panait Istrati and worked in the beginning with N.

D. Cocea. Often meditations on the social inequity appear in Isac Peltz's work, for example in *Moartea tinerețelor* (The Death of the Young Age) one character wonders "Why is the order here on earth so strange? Why are there children who do not have anything to eat? Hm... God? ... He represses any judgment. No, there is no point in him judging the order here!"³⁸ To prove that even for the most traditionalist thinker, social reality is a contradiction to their beliefs and supporting the germs of a rebellious thinking. Quite often, I. Peltz included in his novels Socialist characters able to speak on behalf of their political beliefs; *Noptile domnișoarei Mili* (The Nights of Miss Mili) portrays a feminine Socialist character embodying in an extreme radicalization of human destiny her political options thus becoming less credible, especially when placed against the mahala environment with corrupted, promiscuous and unstable destinies. *Țară bună* (Good Country) is a novel dedicated to the multiculturalism of interwar Romania stressing the presence of many ethnic groups as well as the danger of nationalism and anti-Semitism lurking beneath the opportunities existing in the "good country" in an ambiguous combination of compromise and betrayal. Isac Peltz's multicultural human pattern was visible starting from *Țară bună* where Italians, Japanese, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Russians, Turks and Hungarians characters were sharing their existence in Romania. After a demonstration of the opportunities present in the "good country", the author manages to analyze the problems affecting its functioning, basically the nationalism regarding the different ethnic groups, generously presented in a sort of mosaic from the very beginning of the novel. The possible solution is presented towards the end of the novel through the insertion of different debates between characters championing one or another political option, favoring basically from the part of the author the Socialism as a "different order" as "this is indeed a good country! But there is necessary to have another regime!" as "all who believed and suffered" agree that "the world is not well designed (...) when some people are filling themselves – while others are starving."³⁹ In *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, a few Socialist characters attending the gatherings at the Socialist club discuss openly their frustrations against the rich embodied by Micu Braun: "They want to abolish the separation between the rich and the poor! All to be just the same and equals. (...) Socialists believe the world is badly structured. A few manage to get fortunes after the work of the many. There is a great need to change the order. Everybody should work and own the results of their work"⁴⁰ and "let the rich ones work we well... Not only have us to get dry here in our poor room and them to enjoy their

time in luxurious palaces they have no clue how big they are! No one to be exploited by no one. This is why I am happy about!"⁴¹ And when desperation gets to him, Mehală is the one asking "Tell me again, Ioina, is it going to be fine when everybody... I mean... Isn't it?"⁴² Finally, *Calea Văcărești* discusses at a certain point the frustration of the individuals on one hand claiming their belonging to the Romanian nation but excluded in moments of crisis, as well as the discrimination in terms of social class when it comes to be affected by anti-Semitism and exclusion:

who to tell them they are not right? That the guilty ones are not the Jews from Văcărești or Dudești; that the capitalist oligarchy of one country has similar oligarchic structures just as any other country; so thus proletariat has also perfectly identical interests in every country? (...) Why did they come here? Why did not they go to destroy the shops of the Jews in the center of the city and their palaces if they are up to? (...) There they would have risked facing the guns of the servants and countless guards⁴³

or

they are simply swine, real swine. What do they have against Calea Victoriei? What against Calea Dudești? This is where they want to show their bravery? Here are the Jewish exploiters, the rich industrialists and the commerce fed up tycoons and the jerks not believing in anything? Here are the financiers obsessed about money and only about money? Here where there are so many poor wretched people? People working 20 hours a day, feeding God knows how their children. And does not have any of the joys of life? Here have they found the traitors and the rich exploiters? ... these people who came to our neighborhood to punish us have no idea that the Jewish rich people are laughing at themselves with no worries about this. Locked in their palaces guarded by dozens of servants in friendship relations with all the powerful figures of the moment – they do not actually care of the bravery acts of those coming in a crowd, with throwing stones and guns to destroy the small houses of the outskirts and to beat up the inhabitants of the Văcărești and Dudești quarters...⁴⁴

In this larger political background of Peltz's work, I planned to frame my analysis. In the political context of the early 1930s when the two novels of I. Peltz were written, the rise of right wing ideology among Romanian society and intelligentsia due to the acute economic and social crisis was already visible. Nationalist discourses directed against

the “foreign” element undermining the national economical situation affected mostly the Jewish population, mostly visible due to religious and cultural particularities. On the other hand, the legal emancipation of the Jewish community was already showing its long term effects in the sense of creating a natural community feeling and cultural self-representation among the Romanian nation and culture; Jewish community and culture finally started to be perceived publicly as part of a multicultural and multinational state.

In this context, the presence of several works presenting Jewish life from within represented as public assertion of the natural integration of the community socially and culturally, but in the particular case of Isac Peltz's work, it also expressed a special political agenda at a more complex level of debate. The work of Isac Peltz has a clear political and social discourse addressed at several levels of criticism and directed against the Gentile, but also Jewish society. First of all, Peltz writes about Jewish life in the manner of the literature of the periphery, so fashionable among the Romanian interwar writers focusing on the naturalism of the ugly and decadent life of the marginal. Through the work of authors such as G. M. Vlădescu, Gib Mihăescu, Cezar Petrescu and Felix Aderca, the “literature of the milieus” or “of the periphery” was analyzed by critics such as Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu and George Călinescu who dedicated large chapters to the phenomenon. This type of social discourse of the poor and neglected, victims of the fate and social determinism secured Isac Peltz the affiliation to a successful literary recipe for the period. Writing on the Bucharest mahala just like everybody else, Isac Peltz focuses on the Jewish life and specificity of the community in a larger social reading. The literature of the milieus, with its picturesque, uses the material representation, the reconstruction of physical life for a better more credible with greater impact way of transmitting the message. Thus the description of building, streets, institutions, geography, lifestyle and practices of inhabiting, occupying most of the descriptive economy of the novel actually became the graphical transmitter of human destinies and drama. The house / the building functions as a physical representation of the human life and of its inner conflicts; by focusing on the several functions of housing and building descriptions, my intention actually focused on a richer representation of individual agglomerates of destinies.

Using this literary genre of the periphery literature, I. Peltz follows a double political and social discourse. On one had he debates the situation of the poor, marginalized, forgotten and subjected to fatal determinism,

just as any writer from this picturesque-evoking group. On the other hand, Isac Peltz focuses on the ethnic aspect of this periphery in an attempt of deconstructing the anti-Semitic stereotypes of the moment accusing the Jewish community for the decline of the Romanian economy and life. A depiction of the poor Jewish neighborhoods attracted the attention of the readers on the balanced stratification of the community following the general proportions as in any other type of community and showing also the underprivileged individuals. If a certain category of Romanian literature was targeting the caricature-like figure of the *arendar*, financier, banker and industrialists, tradesmen and ferocious merchant, Isac Peltz presented the Jewish quarter in Bucharest not with the definite project of putting together a monograph with its specific details, but rather to stress on these aspects of Jewish society.

In this context, the presence of the rich Jewish characters is accompanied by a severe criticism coming from the part of the community's perspective, accusing the loss of identity of the new groups striving for economic success and social recognition compromising the lifestyle and customs of traditional observant life. Directed against the rich groups, Isac Peltz's discourse added a third level to his political stance.

Eventually, discussing the situation of the poor Jewish communities, Isac Peltz addresses a subtle criticism to the Gentile increasingly hostile right wing discourse (he also presents an anti-Semitic attack in *Calea Văcărești*, but also to the Jewish community itself subjected to the danger of identity loss under the effect of modernization, assimilation and acculturation and hoping for economic and social success among the Gentile world. A thus multifaceted perspective of a social group placed at a more complex level the debate on the "novel of the periphery" or of the "Jewish literature" as Isac Peltz's work was often categorized. The striking representation of material life, lifestyle, inhabiting practices and housing functioned as a metaphor for the graphic presentation of human destinies. By making it more visible, the author created also an emotional context for the visual suggestion and increased the message behind this literary device. By describing obsessively old houses, shops, inns, synagogues and teahouses, Isac Peltz actually made a selection and a second more dramatic representation of the local poverty (after all, he deliberately chose the *Dudești– Văcărești* area within whole Jewish Bucharest instead of the more well-off *Calea Victoriei* or *Moșilor*).

Conclusions

Isac Peltz's main criticism and literary message is directed against the modernization and secularization process affecting the Jewish life in Bucharest; subjected to several concurrent processes of modernization and adaptation to the local reality, the Jewish quarters in Bucharest was not a traditional community anymore, although not totally modernized due to its periphery complex. Thus the analysis falls on the interferences between the Jewish and Romanian society on one side and on the modernization of the society on the other side while losing its traditional lifestyle.

The inn, the teahouse, the mahala became literary pretexts for enumerating human destinies thus brought in the same place by their mere cohabitation and transformed into a natural scene for the Flaubertian human drama. Describing buildings, inhabitation practices and lifestyles was transformed actually by Isac Peltz into a facile strategy of bringing together the most disparate groups of people with their destinies, situations, trajectories and dramas. Expanding the stage, the Jewish mahala collected larger groups and gave more space to the author to play with his characters' lives. This material placement of population offered the opportunity to the writer to enumerate professions or mere occupations through their diversity, misery, poverty, individual trajectories, and illicit ways of transgressing social boundaries. In the same way, the space of sanity, illnesses, depression, death and diseases, suicide, madness and insanity came naturally at hand. As space for socializing, the teahouse and the synagogue for the older, the shop for the middle generation and the party meetings, the balls and the political and cultural societies for the younger represented alternative forms of being introduced to the readers according to age, modernization and identity representation.

To conclude, I. Peltz's work employed the material structure of the familiar Jewish quarters of Bucharest in a personal representation and reorganization in an effort of suggesting the crisis of identity and his perspective on modernization and urbanization. The house, accommodation, inn, hotel became metaphors of the human life and pretexts for describing it in all its stages to depict more vividly the social perspective which I. Peltz planned to share with its readers: "a world where money is everything; where honor weighs in gold; where personal merits disappear in front of the well fed stomach, of the jewelries and fortunes; where traditions of the "people of the book" disappeared completely!"⁴⁵

NOTES

- ¹ Frédéric Damé, *Bucarest en 1906*, pp. 352-353.
- ² *Haskala* is the term used to define the Jewish Enlightenment, a movement among 18th century European Jews advocating for modernization, integration into the European society and theorized by philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786).
- ³ According to the data and survey presented in chapter IV, *Romania* in Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of Eastern Central Europe between the World Wars*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 171-211, and Carol Iancu. *Evreii din România de la emancipare la marginalizare. 1919-1938* (The Romanian Jews from emancipation to marginalization). (București: Editura Hasefer. 2000), the Jewish population was slightly over 750,000 representing in the interwar period (census of 1930) 4% of the whole population. Still, it is more proper to talk of Romanian *Jewries*; Western-type, Eastern-type, acculturated or still Yiddish speaking, Romanian Jewry was diverse. The Jews of Bessarabia and Bukowina were, if acculturated, related to the Russian and German culture and to a certain extent, Yiddish speakers. In Transylvania, the Jews declared Hungarian as their cultural identity. In Moldova, a more economically backward region, the Jewish community was larger and of Eastern-type, still traditionalists and Yiddish speakers. Only in Walachia, where the community was rather small and of Western-type, the Jewish group was Romanian-speaking in its majority. This was the only group with previous close contacts with Romanian culture. The differences between the Jewish groups were mainly cultural.
- ⁴ I. Peltz (1899-1980) was a Romanian novelist and journalist of Jewish origin. The focus of his creation was the life of social periphery, of the poor, particularly of the Jewish community in works as *Calea Văcărești*, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, *Horoscop*, *Noaptea Domnișoarei Mili*, etc. Collaborator of several literary reviews, he was also editor for *Epoca*, *Îndreptarea*, *Lupta*, *Era nouă*, *Ordinea*, *Izbânda*, *Avântul* journals, mostly of Socialist orientation.
- ⁵ Ury Benador (1895 -1971) was a Romanian prose writer and journalist of Jewish origin. Editor for cultural reviews *Viata romaneasca*, *Lumea literară*, *Rampa*, *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, *Albina* or *Gazeta literară*, Benador was best known for his literary recreation of the Jewish life in *Ghetto Veac XX* and *Appassionata*, but also for the plays collected in volume *5 Acte*. Originally a Yiddish speaker, Benador was also the director of the Bucharest Jewish Theatre.
- ⁶ Ion Călugăru (1902-1956) was a Romanian journalist, playwright and prose writer of Jewish origin. colleague and collaborator of Sașa Pană and his avant-gardist enterprises, Călugăru was also a member of the famous Generation 1927 together with Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Mircea Vulcănescu or Mihail Sebastian. In his early career years, he collaborated for *Cuvantul*,

- the journal directed by Nae Ionescu, but also for *Mantuirea* of A. L. Zissu and was remarked by his Latin teacher, E. Lovinescu who suggested also his controversial pseudonym. His naturalist melancholic evocation of the Moldavian shtetl in *Copilăria unui netrebnic* or the prose cycle later collected as *Paradisul statistic* became paradigmatic for the literary representation of the Jewish life in rural Romania.
- 7 *Shtetl* is the term used to denominate the small urban Jewish-inhabited settlements inhabited mostly by traditional religious communities, thus preserving the Jewish culture especially in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland, Romania).
- 8 For example, the description of Henri Stahl in *Bucureștii care se duc*, chapter "Prin Calea Văcărești", p. 101-124.
- 9 In the article of Irina Heinic, 'Comunitatea evreilor din București la începutul secolului al 19-lea' in *Revista Culturii Mozaic*, No. 255 / 15 June 1971, Year XVI.
- 10 The lack of systematic research on the Jewish community in Bucharest was problematic while undertaking investigations for the background of the current article. Apart from Anca Ciuciu and Radu Stefan Vergatti, there are no recent works on the topic. Important sources were Frédéric Damé's and Vintilă Mihăilescu's surveys, but being written at the beginning of the previous century, they had only a partial relevance for the interwar period analyzed.
- 11 The term of *mahala* is originally Turkish and it used to define a quarter, no matter its central or marginal position. The complex of periphery was attached to it after 1830 when Bucharest assimilates traits of Western urban life and structure, thus the central *mahalas* were integrated in the center of a cosmopolitan city which was surrounded by semi-rural new marginal quarters which started to be defined as mahalas, according to Adrian Majuru, *Bucureștii mahalalelor sau periferia ca mod de existență*, Compania, Bucuresti, 2003, p. 8.
- 12 Radu Stefan Vergatti, "*Dinamica demografică și aspecte socio-profesionale ale obștii evreiești din București (1810-1939)*", p. 184-185.
- 13 Anca Ciuciu, "*Cartierele evreiești din București în perioada 1866-1914*", p. 101-102.
- 14 Anca Ciuciu, "*Cartierele evreiești din București în perioada 1866-1914*", p.101-102.
- 15 Gheorghe Leahu, *Bucureștiul dispărut*, p. 91.
- 16 Frederic Dame, *Bucarest en 1906*, p. 357.
- 17 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 112.
- 18 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 96 – 98.
- 19 The concept of *inn* as used in Isac Peltz's work as well as in the social history of inhabitation in South Central Europe and Romania was basically "un des traits caractéristiques du Bucarest d'il y a un peu plus de cent ans,

était l'existence des hans, immenses constructions qui étaient à la fois des dépôts pour les marchandises venues de l'étranger et des auberges pour les voyageurs. Imaginez une vaste cour qu'entourent de hautes et fortes murailles en briques percées d'une seule ouverture fermée par une porte de chene blindée. Au dessus des caves profodes, des magasins voutés ouvrant sur la cour ; au premier étage des chambres dont les portes et les fenestres donnaient sur une galerie ouverte à laquelle on accédait par deux grands escaliers couverts se faisant face l'un à l'autre." (Frédéric Damé, *Bucarest en 1906*, p. 56).

- 20 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 195.
 21 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 74.
 22 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu tei*, p. 134.
 23 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 52.
 24 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu tei*, p. 16.
 25 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 28.
 26 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 247 – 248.
 27 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu tei*, p. 199 – 200.
 28 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 39.
 29 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 41.
 30 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 288.
 31 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 206.
 32 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 146.
 33 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 290.
 34 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 102.
 35 Isac Peltz, *Menirea literaturii*, p. 9-10.
 36 Isac Peltz, *Țară bună*, p. 323.
 37 Isac Peltz, *Evocări*.
 38 Isac Peltz, *Moartea tinerețelor*, p. 127.
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 40 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 245.
 41 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 248.
 42 Isac Peltz, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei*, p. 254.
 43 Isac Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 279.
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