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A JEWISH STATE THEATER
IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA?
NOTES ON A TRANSITIONAL BECOMING
(1944-1953)

Outline: This article¹ argues against viewing the *Jewish State Theater* (TES) in Bucharest as a mere mouthpiece of the political regime ascending to power after 1944. In her book *Die jüdische Kultur im Schatten der Diktaturen: Israil Bercovici—Leben und Werk* (2002) Elvira Grözinger writes:

“Das Jüdische Staatstheater in Rumänien, als Schöpfung der Diktatur und von dieser unterhalten, mußte ebenfalls ihr Sprachrohr sein. [...] Die ehemaligen antifaschistisch engagierten jüdischen Künstler konnten hier an die Barascheum-Zeit anknüpfen und dem ‘volksdemokratischen’ Regime auf künstlerische Art und gemäß dem Geist der Zeit Schützenhilfe bieten. [...] Die künstlerischen oder ästhetischen Aspekte der Theaterarbeit wurden damals allesamt der Ideologie geopfert.”²

In his monograph *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă 1944-1965* (*The Jews in Romania during Communist Times 1944-1965*) (2004), Liviu Rotman states that “[...] the [Romanian] state took it upon itself to establish two Jewish theaters [...]”³ and allows for the possibility that these institutions might have been more than mere propagandistic flag bearer only for the 1960s or 1970s.⁴ I consider both these positions insufficiently nuanced.

Considered in the larger context of the development of Yiddish theater on Romanian soil, a post-Second World War existence is not surprising, as it was a continuation of Abraham Goldfaden’s endeavor to bring such a theater to life. The milestone of the 1940s was the gradual fusion of all Yiddish theaters into the *IKUF-Theater* by March 1948 rather than the

transformation of the *IKUF-Theater* into the *TES* by August of the same year. The latter was merely a bureaucratic formality, while the former marked a defining moment, on the one hand abusive—it dissolved private enterprises and tainted to some extent the artistic discourse—and on the other redemptive—it provided financial stability and afforded the perpetuation of Yiddish theatrical culture. Nonetheless, as my sources attest, members of the ensemble knew how to subvert the theater’s official role from the beginning: actors remained true to an art of performing untouched by ideological demands and directors staged by and large classics of either Yiddish or world literature.

For my research, I consulted documents in the *Romanian National Archives* (*Arhivele Statului Român*) about the Jewish theater in Romania from 1940 until 1956, the meetings of the Cultural Commission of the *Jewish Democratic Committee* (*Comitetul Democrat Evreesc*) from 1945 until 1953, and various meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party⁵ pertaining to either the “Jewish problem” or minority issues in general. I supplemented the information on Jewish theater with materials from the *Archives of the Center for the Study of the History of Jews in Romania* (*Arhiva Centrului pentru Studiarea Istoriei Evreilor din România*). I examined press reviews in a variety of newspapers and conducted interviews with people who knew the theater at that time.

Structurally, my article consists of two parts: the first gives a brief overview of the historical context, paying attention to the life of the Jewish community; and the second details and critically analyzes the transition period between independent theater troupes in the aftermath of August 23, 1944, the nationalization of 1948, and the political changes of the early 1950s. In order to substantiate my claim, I explore four illustrative performances, one by the *IKUF-Theater* and the rest by the *TES*. Each of them mirrored the situation of the Yiddish theater and its self-understanding at the time when it was presented to the public.

Through the critical interrogation of the *TES*’ creation I want to contribute to the larger discourse about Romania’s need to undergo its own *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) with respect to both its nationalist and socialist past. Yet true and fruitful questioning of the past can only depart from a sincere *Vergangenheitsbewärtung* (evaluation of the past).⁶ In the case of the Romanian-Jewish coexistence this requires an additional step, namely that of a *Vergangenheitsannahme* (acceptance of the past), which can

only come about through knowledge of that past. I regard the following commentary as part of my own learning process in the field.

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When Abraham Goldfaden created a Yiddish theater in 1876, it was an act of illumination in the tradition of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment. Performances were in Yiddish and they depicted realities of East-European Jewish life. Goldfaden being himself a *maskil*,⁷ the subsequent confession in his autobiography should be taken as a credo: "Since I have come to have a stage, I want it to be a stage for you [i.e. Jewish audiences]. Come to me and look at the paintings I am making of you; look at them like you look into a mirror reflecting your good and bad habits. You will draw wisdom from them so as to straighten your own mistakes in your family life; you will learn how to behave towards each other and towards those next to which you have to live at all times."⁸ Yiddish theater persisted in Romanian in this vein until 1940.

At that moment, aspirations to perform in Yiddish were countered by the determination of Romanian authorities to exclude both Yiddish artistic endeavors and Jewish performers from Romanian stages and the public sphere in general.⁹ The state admitted the existence of *one* Romanian language Jewish theater, i.e. a theater where only Jews could perform and where the racial laws of 1940 decided who was Jewish.¹⁰ Similar to the German *Nuremberg Laws* (September 15, 1935), *Decree-Law No. 2650* from August 8, 1940, claimed racial justification and used religious criteria as its basis.¹¹ Jewish artists responded to this constraint by establishing a theater that complied with all the demands of the Romanian authorities: *Barașeum Hall—Jewish Theater (Sala Barașeum—Teatru Evreesc)*. The enterprise was a means to survive and, with few exceptions, performed vaudevilles. The "tragedy" was that actors of Jewish descent, like Leny Caler, Alexandru Finți, Alexandru Ronea, N. Stroe,¹² who had no sensitivity for Yiddish theater even if it was performed in Romanian, yet had no choice but to comply with the new regulations if they wanted to perform at all.¹³

After August 23, 1944, several groups of actors wanted to bring back the tradition of authentic Yiddish theater along the lines of what they had known to be its acme: the *Vilna Troupe*. This return was the basis for post-Second World War Yiddish theater in Romania, which combined

the artistic drive of talented performers with the enthusiasm of eager audiences. As they progressed towards full domination of the Romanian public sphere in its political and cultural dimension, the Communists understood how to instrumentalize this phenomenon. The strategy was to favor the *Idisher Kultur Farband (IKUF)*—which itself came from the left and embraced certain values similar to those of the ascending ideologues¹⁴—over other existing Jewish cultural organizations. A statement by the *IKUF-Theater's* director, Iacob Mansdorf, in an interview from July 1945 signaled the major problem arising from this strategy: he had to go outside Bucharest and look for potential actors.¹⁵ The stars of the pre-war Yiddish stages who were in Bucharest refused to be associated with this theater, as did all other centers of Jewish culture. This became apparent in another interview on January 5, 1946, where Mansdorf deplored the general reticence vis-à-vis the *IKUF-Theater*.¹⁶ Yet, by March 1948 whoever wanted to perform Yiddish theater had to join the *IKUF-Theater*, which by then already received state subsidizes. Its transformation into a state institution became a matter of bureaucracy and cosmetics.

At this level, the *Jewish State Theater* was the result of an act of coercion, because it forced everyone interested in Yiddish theater under one roof. The enlisting of famous actors of the Yiddish stage—Sevilla Pastor, Dina König, Seidy Gluck, Iudith Kronenfeld, Moris Siegler, Marcu Glückman, Benno Popliker, Mauricius Sekler—gave it the necessary touch of glamour and allowed for its fall back on a pre-war tradition. A mixture of good old-timers and ideologized youngsters characterized the *TES* during the first phase of its existence. The dichotomy was visible in many reviews of the time: they praised the older generation for its skills but also criticized it for its formalism, and they critiqued the young for their lack of experience but foresaw bright futures for them as they were raised in the “healthy tradition” of social realism.

The establishment of the *TES* was also a continuation in the Enlightenment project initiated by Goldfaden. Although taken under the premises of an agenda, its creation fulfilled the major desideratum of the founding triumvirate of the Yiddish theater—Abraham Goldfaden, Iacob Gordin, and Iacob Sternberg—in that it provided Yiddish-language artists with a permanent stage and a venue to keep alive artistic practices with deep roots in Eastern Europe. While the claim cannot be generalized to include the *TES'* existence throughout the socialist era and even less so until the present day, for the time under scrutiny, the ideologizing and indoctrinating tendencies of the socialist regime or its apparently

minority-friendly policies cannot solely account for the *TES'* initial life. Yiddish and an interest in it did not *reappear* after 1944; it had never *disappeared* among those thinking, speaking, and feeling Yiddish. One cannot even claim that Yiddish made its way back into the public space under the tutelage of the Communists. As I show, the initiative to reopen Yiddish theaters after August 23, 1944, belonged to artists loyal to this form of art and not to political bodies. The Communists instrumentalized and appropriated an existing enthusiasm for and commitment to Yiddish theater.

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After the Shoah, Jewish life in Romania unfolded under the fear of a possible recurrence of the type of public discourse that had marked this community's life during the years of Ion Antonescu's regime. The population felt insecure and skeptical about its own position and future in Romania.¹⁷ These fears, however, were paralleled by hopes, the years 1944-1947 being a period of transition during which the various ideological and political trends that had characterized the Jewish community before the war¹⁸ were revived. Overall, upon establishing their new order Communists had first to annihilate the re-born bodies of a once fervent civil society. In the case of the Jewish community, defenders of civil rights were Wilhelm Fielderman from the assimilated *Union of Romanian Jews* (*Uniunea Evreilor Români*), Abraham Leib Zissu representing Zionist interests, and Chief Rabbi Alexandru Șafran.¹⁹ The *Federation of the Unions of Jewish Communities* (*Federația Uniunilor de Comunități*) was reinstated in October 1944²⁰ and its membership mirrored the structure of the Romanian post-Antonescu government: Social Democrats, Communists, Liberals, National-Peasants, and members of typical Jewish organizations (*Union of Romanian Jews*, *Zionist Jewish Party*, and *Zionist Executive*).²¹

Between 1944 and 1948, a slow and partial reintegration of the Jewish population into the socio-economic and cultural discourse of the time took place.²² Still, xenophobic allusions in the political discourse of the historical parties estranged the Jewish population from them and pushed even those members without left-leaning sympathies towards the Communists, which—at that time—were very careful with their slogans.²³ Moreover, the Communists understood how to profit from the political mistakes of their adversaries and made the most out of the latter's blunders, by pleading for unity in general and, specifically, within ethnic

communities.²⁴ Thus, the Communists, advocating a new form of assimilation, and the Zionists, with their drive for Palestine, represented the main trends within the Jewish community.

In order to implement their ideas, the Communists within the *Federation*, the so-called *jewsekim*, formed the *Jewish Democratic Committee* (*Comitetul Democrat Evreeesc/ CDE*) on June 7, 1945, at the directives of the Communist Party.²⁵ Until 1948, the *CDE* tried to attract members of other political bodies and succeeded in incorporating several left-wing organizations—*The Zionist Bloc of Working Palestine* (*Blocul Sionist al Palestinei Muncitoare*), *Ichud*, *Mishmar*, and *IKUF*. Other smaller Zionist groups were willing to negotiate with them; some members of the *Union of Romanian Jews* who rejected Wilhelm Fielderman's points of view as well as the Social Democrats also joined in.²⁶ In 1948 the *Federation's* name changed to *Romania's Federation of Jewish Communities* (*Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România*) and the representatives of the Communists, Max Hermann Maxy, Paul Iscovici, and Bernard Lebli, who had occupied the key positions already by October 1945, came to control it.²⁷ Within the new *Federation*, the *CDE* maintained its attributes of a political vanguard for the Jewish masses and, at a cultural level, its tasks included promoting Yiddish culture and Yiddish as a language over Hebrew, Yiddish being seen as a "progressive language."

In December 1949, Romania declared Zionism a fascist ideology²⁸ after it had forced all Zionist organizations in the country to self-dissolve.²⁹ At the same time all Jewish founded organizations in the country—the *Joint Distribution Committee* (*Joint*), the *World Union for the Protection of the Health of Jews* (*OSE*) and *Organization for Rehabilitation through Training* (*ORT*)—were banned, as all community schools, hospitals, and social institutions were being nationalized.³⁰ These measures targeted the dissolution of the autonomy of the Jewish community. Whether different by origins, religious practices, or political credos, Jews were all coerced into one body, the "New Community", which lacked both organizational and financial autonomy. Concomitantly, official propaganda became caustically anti-Israeli and anti-*aliyah*,³¹ even during times when Romanian authorities encouraged and facilitated emigration such as between 1950 and 1951.³² The discourse was the opposite in practice from theory, a fact admitted and deplored retroactively also by H. Leibovici-Șerban in his intervention at the meeting between members of the Communist Party and the *CDE* on March 16, 1953, when the *CDE* was officially dissolved.³³ It is thus fair to say that 1949 marked the

destruction of the plurality of voices within the Jewish community in Romania.

Even in this format, the community represented an alternative space to the socio-political reality of the time. As Rotman has indicated, people came together, discussed specific problems, exchanged rumors, debated, and told jokes poking fun at the political reality. Independent of the will of the vigilant community leaders and despite the permanent control by the state, an incipient civil society took shape. People stomped or coughed during speeches, and tore the anti-Israeli and anti-*aliyah* posters stuck to the walls of community centers or synagogues.³⁴

As was the case with all other Eastern bloc countries, between 1952 and 1953, Romania looked towards Moscow for its strategies at all levels. With respect to the "Jewish problem" and anti-Semitism the tensions in Moscow during these years, notably the so-called *Jewish Doctors' Plot*, were mirrored in local "Jew hunts." During these trials, 150 people were arrested and prosecuted for their Zionist sympathies or convictions.³⁵ Rotman's claim that the trial against Ana Pauker should also be seen as a measure to thoroughly cleanse Jews from all important Party functions³⁶ is challenged by Vladimir Tismăneanu's in-depth analysis of Communists of Jewish descent who retained their positions during and after that time. I concur with Vladimir Tismaneanu: "[...] the elimination of the Pauker-Luca-Georgescu group was the result of a struggle for absolute power and not an ethnic 'purification' of the party."³⁷

In this generally tense atmosphere, during a meeting on January 14, 1953, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party redefined the government's policies towards national minorities and decided that the national democratic committees of all minorities should cease to exist. The Party had "justly" solved the "national question," hence such committees were outdated and also an impediment in the process of educating the masses "in the spirit of proletarian internationalism and patriotism." During the discussions, the *CDE* was openly charged with isolation vis-à-vis the Party and its failure to neutralize supposed espionage activities among religious parts of the Jewish community.³⁸ The *CDE* was abrogated on March 23, 1953 under the following considerations: (1) that the Jewish working class was integrated in mass organizations, which determined their duties and solved any arising problems without reference to nationality; (2) that the committee would be an impediment preventing an ethnic minority from properly integrating into the Romanian society; and (3) that it would open avenues for bourgeois elements to misuse the

committee and camouflage their reactionary activities.³⁹ The real reason seems to have been the fact that by being given the opportunity to maintain a space of their own, ethnic minorities, whether Jewish, German, or Hungarian retained a space of alterity that allowed them not to be absorbed into the mainstream. Rotman has rightfully called these spaces “islands of alterity” or “parallel spaces” to the power structure of the state, as they entailed a subversive potential.⁴⁰

A very important issue in dealing with the history of the Jewish community in Romania is *aliyah*. Because of the high number of Shoah survivors (375,000),⁴¹ Romania was an important pool for future Israeli citizens, and thus the State of Israel had a particular interest in dealing with the Romanian authorities. Furthermore, Romania’s geographic position also made it an important harbor for departing Jews. I agree with Radu Ioanid that the “selling” of the Romanian Jews is a sensitive, double-facetted issue: while Romania was interested in receiving compensations for allowing its Jewish citizens to leave the country, so the State of Israel was willing to remunerate the Romanian authorities for allowing *aliyah*.⁴² Until 1948, the authorities did not develop a strategy with respect to *aliyah*. They adopted a policy of non-intervention: while not explicitly encouraging it, they did not do anything to prevent it either. After the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948 and the requests of numerous members of the Jewish community to emigrate, the Romanian state decided to allow *aliyah*.⁴³ The State of Israel, through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Sharett, justified its interest in Romania’s Jewish population in a letter sent to Ana Pauker on March 11, 1949. The letter highlighted the fact that the State of Israel was a small nation faced with neighbors that were hostile to its existence. As long as its military potential was low, the official wrote, the country could not consider itself safe. More important than the military issue was the economic development of the country; this could not proceed without human resources of a certain quality for which Eastern Europe in general was the main reservoir.

“Israelul este astăzi o mică națiune, având a face față unor vecini dominați, pentru moment, de forțe și interese ostile existenței și dezvoltării noastre. Chiar dacă am reușit până acum să respingem invazia, noi nu considerăm situația noastră militară asigurată, atât timp cât potențialul nostru de război este redus, în special ca efective. Dar situația militară, atât de importantă, nu este decât un aspect al problemei. Un altul, de o importanță predominantă, este dezvoltarea economică. Israelul trebuie să fie credincios crezului său în creșterea economică. Regiunile sale deșertice și puțin

dezvoltate trebuie supuse la o cultură intensivă și populate de o manieră decisivă, iar posibilitățile industriale trebuie realizate pe deplin ... Îndeplinirea acestor comandamente cere un material uman de o anumită calitate, iar rezervorul principal al unor astfel de elemente îl constituie țările Europei de Est.”⁴⁴

Two questions arise naturally after the confrontation with documents such as the above-mentioned: Why did people want to leave? Why did the Romanian authorities allow *aliyah*? The answer to the first question can be found in a partially dormant and partially explicit anti-Semitism still infiltrating Romanian society; in the new socio-economic realities in Romania; in the fear of a new war in Europe due to the disagreements arising among the former allies of the Second World War; and in the excitement triggered by the events in Israel.⁴⁵ A report of the *CDE* evaluating the year 1950 included also: the petty-bourgeois origin of a considerable number of people who refused to be reeducated in the spirit of the new times, the immediacy of a discriminatory past and persisting signs of anti-Semitism, the low level of political awareness among the masses, the strong tradition of Zionism, and the drive to follow one's relatives already settled in Israel.⁴⁶ With respect to the Romanian authorities, Rotman suggests that they misread the reasons behind the phenomenon. They saw it not as a genuine desire driving certain people, but as Zionist propaganda, and believed that if people were allowed to go not so many would actually go.⁴⁷ At the same time, the State of Israel started pressuring the Romanian state both politically and economically in this direction.⁴⁸ Due to the large numbers of people wanting to leave—a situation that also signaled the failure of the Communist ideology to deliver on its promises—the authorities decided to combat *aliyah* in the public discourse as of 1950, while physically allowing it to the maximum, at least during 1950 and 1951.⁴⁹ Overall, the authorities had an ambivalent position towards *aliyah* allowing or disallowing it according to their own needs.⁵⁰

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After the events of August 23, 1944, the wartime *Barașeum Theater* dissolved. The actors either returned to the theaters where they had been active before 1940 or opened new, private theaters.⁵¹ Splinter troupes performing either in Romanian or Yiddish harbored former members of

the *Barașeum Theater*. The Barașeum Hall became a building for rent like any other without an agenda or mission statement. It remained in the administration of Otto Marcovici,⁵² who rented out the two rooms of the hall. The incomplete archival material available today makes it difficult to distinguish between the splinter troupes, since in some cases actors performed one play with one ensemble and another with a different one.

One group of actors performed under the name *Barașeum Theater* or *Barașeum Studio Theater* in Romanian under the guidance of Otto Marcovici and P. Bereșteanu. It opened the 1944 season on October 6, with an adaptation by Mihail Sebastian of Henning Berger's *The Flood* starring Beate Fredanow and Alexandru Fiñți.⁵³ Reviewers of the performance placed this troupe in the continuation of the wartime *Barașeum Theater*. One in particular recalled the role of the *Barașeum* during the Antonescu regime and stressed its unique position as an instance of moral resistance for the Jews, but also as a site of fraternization between Jews and Romanians who refused to accept the anti-Semitic impositions of the state.⁵⁴ The author, Sergiu Milorian, went on to proclaim the end of light repertoire on the Barașeum's stage and the beginning of a new phase in which the theater would live up to its ontological rationale. He refused to overlap "theater of essence" with "propaganda theater" and decried the heavily didactical tone of the performance he had seen. "We understand and militate for a repertoire of substance engaging social aspects," Milorian wrote, "but we will always be on the other side of the barricade, when the theater becomes something else than what it should be: an expression of life."⁵⁵ Praises on his part went to some directorial decisions (the suggestive compositions of human unity in the face of calamities) and some of the actors. The review pointed to two aspects confronting the theater: it showed that at that time true theater criticism was again and still possible, and it sketched the expectations entertained vis-à-vis the theater—to distance itself from its former vaudevillian character and not to become a political mouthpiece. The review of the main rehearsal in *Mântuirea (Redemption)* underlined also the fact that the performance of *The Flood* united for the first time on the Barașeum's stage Romanian and Jewish actors.⁵⁶

On December 20, 1944, the *Barașeum Theater* performed another adaptation by Mihail Sebastian, *Moonless Nights (Noapți fără lună)* based on John Steinbeck's 1942 novel *The Moon Is Down*.⁵⁷ Ștefan Baciu of the daily *Libertatea (Liberty)* saw in the *Barașeum Theater's* performance

one of the most qualitative offers of the season and bestowed laurels on the founders of the small theater.⁵⁸ Other reviews focused on the appropriateness of the topic and on the artistic achievement of the entire ensemble,⁵⁹ although some criticized Sebastian for his choices in the process of dramatizing the novel. The objections were on purely artistic grounds without ideological undertones.⁶⁰ In a review for the newspaper *Democrația* (*Democracy*) Monica Lovinescu clearly placed the *Barașeum Theater* on the cultural map of quality Romanian theater when discussing another adaptation by Mihail Sebastian after Marcel Achard *Viața e frumoasă* (*La vie e belle*).⁶¹ The critic wrote: "We appreciate the effort of the Barașeum Theater to work honestly in the realm of theater without making use of tricks and cheap achievements often employed by the majority of Romanian stages at the moment."⁶² This ensemble included: Alexandru Finți, Romald Bulfinski, Gh[eorghe] Mărutza, Vasile Lăzărescu (who was also an actor for the National Theater),⁶³ Sorin Gabor, Dorel Livianu, Al[exandru] Marcovici, Costin Popescu, N[icolae] Tomazoglu, Beate Fredanov, Athena Marcopol, Maria Sandu, E. Ricardo, Dinu Gherasim, Em. Rony, Eugen. Arădeanu, Max Hermann Maxy, Eleazer Semo, C. Vurtejeanu, Ana Negreanu, Titu Vedeia, G. Mazilu, W. Siegfried, Lucie Chevalier, Theodora Anca, George Rafael, and J. Straucher, Dinu Negreanu, Moni Ghelerter as stage directors.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, a review from September 26, 1945, described the same ensemble as a mere neighborhood theater and listed Vasile Crețoiu as its manager. It performed in Romanian the 1892 melodrama *Schuldig* (translated as *Am ucis*) by Richard Voss. The only actor from the previous troupe was N[icolae] Tomazoglu.⁶⁵ In November 1945, the *Studio Barașeum*, again under Otto Marcovici, performed the musical comedy *Comedianta* (*The Comedian*), which was an adaptation from Yiddish into Romanian by Lica Grünberg, who had belonged to the wartime theater, as had some members of the cast: Bebe Spitzer, Nușa Grup, and Beno Vereia.⁶⁶

There were also other Yiddish ensembles in Bucharest: On September 15, 1944, Iso Schapira directed the opening show of a Yiddish language troupe performing the one-act *Mentshn* (*People*) by Sholem Aleykhem and verses by Moris Rosenfeld, Itzak Leib Peretz, and Eliezer Steinbarg.⁶⁷ Around the same time A. Samuelli-Sandu and Boris Segal initiated the *Naier Idisher Teater* (*New Yiddish Theater*), which united Seidy Gluck, Samy Davidsohn, Max Reisch, Marcu Glückman, Lya and Joji Sterling, Leon Julkower, Ifim König, Sarah Etfinger, and Solomon Friedman.⁶⁸

The *IKA (Idisher Kinstler Ansamb)* under Mauricius Sekler enlisted Haim Schwartzman, Dina König, Isy Havis, Borch/Burech Rintzler, Gitta/Ghita and Karl Tef[f]ner, Benno Poplicher, Liuba Maiden, Avram Goldiner, Marcu Glückman, and used one of the two rooms of the Barașeum Hall.⁶⁹ There was also the *BIFT (Bukarester Idisher Folks-Teater)* that defined itself as a progressive theater and was created May 1, 1946.⁷⁰

This coexistence makes it apparent that the theater scene in Bucharest was very heterogeneous and that all these theaters attempted to survive in the city's cultural landscape by (re)negotiating with and for themselves a state of normalcy. This again underlines another vital aspect: the availability of a large public to see the performances, but also to accept and reject the theaters depending on their offers. A major concern for all theaters was finding a stage on which to perform. Marcovici, who had at his disposal the Barașeum Hall, rented it from October 10, 1945 until May 31, 1946 to the *IKUF-Theater*.⁷¹ Marcovici offered the hall, the firmament, the lighting, the heating, the sets, the costumes, and the requisite. He was also responsible for renovating the building, which included whitewashing the walls, fixing the furniture, the floor, the stage, and making sure that the water, light and heating systems were in good working conditions. The *IKUF-Theater* on the other hand brought into the union the capital, the artistic ensemble, and the repertoire, and took over the expenses for posting and advertising, paying salaries, and taxes.⁷² At the same time, the 1945 playbill of the *Naier Idische Teater* mentioned that this theater could also benefit from the Barașeum Hall due to the generosity of the same person: Otto Marcovici.⁷³

Post-Second World War Yiddish culture in Romania is most commonly and substantially linked to the organization *Idisher Kultur Farband*. The *IKUF* was founded in 1937 out of the genuine need for culturalization on part of Jews in Bessarabia, Moldavia, and Maramureș.⁷⁴ The preoccupation with and interest for Yiddish came from the left, as Zionists embraced Hebrew as the defining language of Jews.⁷⁵ Before August 23, 1944, the *IKUF* recommenced its activities in Moldavia most likely due to the advancement of the Soviet Army in that part of the country. It improvised a theater group that performed in Yiddish in Botoșani in the same hall where Abraham Goldfaden had acted in 1876 during his tour. The performance was called *Naht-Tog (Night-Day)*.⁷⁶ After August 1944, the *IKUF* was recognized as a legal person and became very active in organizing Jewish cultural life throughout the country with a heavy emphasis on Yiddish.⁷⁷

In July 1945, the *IKUF* created in Bucharest the *IKUF-Theater*⁷⁸ under the leadership of Iacob Mansdorf. It premièred on October 17, 1945,⁷⁹ with the play *Ikh leb (I live)* by the Soviet-Jewish author Moshe Pinchevski. Iacob Mansdorf was a man of the Yiddish theater in the old tradition. He was a graduate of the drama school in Warsaw and a former student of both David Hermann and Konstantin Stanislavski. He had been a member of the famous *Vilna Troupe* and of other ensembles (*AZAZEL*, *Pariser Idischer Arbeiter Teater*, *GOSSET*) and had performed side by side with the star of the Jewish theater in Moscow, Solomon Mikhoels.⁸⁰ When he arrived in Bucharest, he was determined to craft the theater established by the *IKUF* into a quality enterprise. In what seems to have been his first interview in the Romanian capital on July 28, 1945, he talked about the bad reputation that the Romanian theater, in general, and the Yiddish, in particular, enjoyed abroad, due to its boulevard character. The theater was dominated by mercantile considerations, in the case of the Yiddish theater probably also due to the absence of official subventions and the reliance on donations by the public that in return asked for cabaret-style-entertainment. Thus, Mansdorf argued, the theater lacked a cultural, educational, and artistic agenda, which he was determined to bring to it. His goal was to transform the *IKUF-Theater* into “an art theater.” He affirmed:

“Our agenda is the obligation to put on stage our rich heritage of historical figures—Bar-Kokhba, Yehuda Maccabi—not some nonsensical appearances built on pranks. As Sholem Aleykhem fought in past times with a positive *oeuvre* against the shoddy literature of Shomer, so will we replace cheap shows with true art.”⁸¹

The article was programmatically entitled “In Goldfaden’s Footsteps” and there is no reason to doubt Mansdorf’s statement for his previous activity mirrored dedication to his ideals. In order to put together an ensemble that corresponded to his demands and expectations, Mansdorf went outside Bucharest to recruit young people. This situation can be interpreted in two ways. On the one side, like any master, Mansdorf might have wanted to mold his own actors in the spirit of the tradition for which he himself stood. On the other hand, given the left-wing tendencies of the *IKUF*, actors of the pre-war era who were already in Bucharest might have willingly kept their distance from this troupe. In an interview with me, Anton Celaru⁸² remembered that Mansdorf was also eager to

avoid becoming involved in the usual intrigues of the theater milieu characteristic of the Yiddish theater world as well. Instead of putting up with the whimsical moods of stars and starlets, he wanted to generate his own.⁸³ Mansdorf's troupe enlisted in addition to him Borch/Burech Rintzler, Edith Horovitz, Gitta/Ghita Tef[f]ner, Silvia Tylbor, Itoc Lasclover, Iso Shapira, I[ancu] Alpern, Moise Rubingher, Zita Frucht, and Haim Schwartzman as conductor and musical director.⁸⁴

The opening performance was a success, and available reviews praised Mansdorf for his artistic and directorial skills and determination.⁸⁵ Present at the pre-opening alongside N. D. Cocea (General Director of Theaters), Nicky Atanasiu (President of the Artists' Union), Jacob Groper (President of the Yiddish Writers' Association), and Ury Benador (President of the Association of Jewish Writers Writing in Romanian), Mihail Ralea, Minister of Arts, emphasized the importance of the theater and the historic moment unfolding before the public's eyes. The performance received the support of the government but it is unclear in which form.⁸⁶

The play recounted the story of a group of Jewish prisoners in a German camp in the Ukraine. Rabbi Tzala Shafir, his daughter Miriam, and the singer Hershel Klezmer become the protagonists, as the camp's commander sends the rabbi and the singer in the woods to spy on partisans. He keeps the rabbi's daughter as warranty and picks Klezmer's eyes out. The two prisoners depart on their mission without knowing that the German soldier Paul followed them. One day the soldier catches a partisan woman and wants to take her to his superior, but the rabbi prevents him, ultimately strangling him. When the camp's commander retrieves the rabbi and the singer, he sets out to have the rabbi executed, but the partisans arrive and save him. Shortly afterwards the Soviet Army frees the camp. After the initial moment of joy, the rabbi and the singer vow to continue the fight and the curtain falls on the rabbi shouting: "There is no other way; it's either live in freedom or die fighting."⁸⁷

The applauses of a large and enthusiastic audience at the end of the show rewarded the ensemble both for its efforts and its creativity in conveying a message that resonated with most of the spectators.⁸⁸ The play was without a doubt a tribute to the Soviet Army who had delivered not only Romania's Jewish population, but also half of Europe from National Socialist Germany, and as such it was cheered in contemporary reviews.⁸⁹ However, it also thematized Jewish activism during the war without subordinating it to Communist forces. A rabbi joining the partisan resistance in the Ukraine was a potent image meant to empower the

members of the audience and raise their self-consciousness. The blind singer who did not succumb to despair personified the strength of the jovial Jewish spirit enduring in the *galut*.⁹⁰ The banner in Hebrew adorning the stage on the night of the première *The people of Israel lives!* appealed precisely to these sentiments, while also hinting at Jewish solidarity.⁹¹ The chronicle in the newspaper *Victoria* (*Victory*) newspaper transposed this plea for solidarity into the artistic reality of the time:

“If the proverbial Jewish solidarity were a fact, ‘Ih Leb’ would benefit from an amazing echo, which would manage to motivate also students from conservatories to follow the activities of the ‘IKUF’ ensemble; this could help them contribute with their own talents to the replacement of the entertainment and functionary theater with the theater as a school, *an art theater*. By so doing they would not only save themselves from compromises no matter how well remunerated, but as a collective they would restore the stage to the role it deserves structurally in [the process of] our reparation.”⁹²

Shortly after the première, in the newspaper *Viata evreească* (*Jewish Life*) Geri Spina pointed out the meaning of the *IKUF-Theater* beyond its artistic significance, which he called upon the theater critics to evaluate. He greeted the *IKUF-Theater* for its socio-political role, which he identified in the carrying of the “cultural torch” put out by the war.⁹³ Goldfaden’s tradition was an important aspect of the *IKUF-Theater’s* dramatic activity, not only because Mansdorf had taken the classics of Yiddish literature as his standard, but also because parts of the public remembered and cherished that tradition. Mansdorf hailed this disposition of the Jewish public in Bucharest in an interview with Hanna Kawa on January 5, 1946. He rejoiced at the reaction of the Jewish public vis-à-vis the theater, especially since he had been warned before arriving in Romania that Romanian Jews spoke no Yiddish.⁹⁴ He was, however, also dissatisfied with the reluctance of other Jewish cultural organizations to cooperate with the *IKUF-Theater*.⁹⁵ Their reasons were motivated by politics—as the *IKUF Association* stood for leftist ideals, distance from its theater meant distance from its views—but Mansdorf could not accept that. For him, this theater was a site of artistic dialogue and his choice to debut with *Ikh leb* was also a first statement about the theater’s potential. It would not only honor the classics, as Mansdorf had advocated in his interview, but it also enrich the repertoire by promoting new texts, which were also relevant to the audiences and their recent experiences during the war. When he realized the impossibility to engage in such a dialogue

in a country set for the Communist order, he left, before the authorities could misuse his passion and idealism.⁹⁶

From the onset, the *IKUF-Theater*—like the other troupes in Bucharest—faced meager financial possibilities and needed the assistance of sponsors.⁹⁷ It found them in the wealthy manufacturer Herman Segal for its second show, *Tevie der Milkhiker* (*Tevie the Milkman*), and in the *Jewish World Congress*, through its representative in Bucharest the lawyer Arnold Schwefelberg, for the subsequent performances: *Der eibiker nigun* (*The eternal melody*) based on Itzak Leib Peretz and *Di Khishufmakhern* (*The Witch*) by Abraham Goldfaden.⁹⁸ The *IKUF-Theater* also lacked a stage on which to perform. *Tevie der Milkhiker* was presented in the upper room of the Barașeum Hall,⁹⁹ and, according to reviews, one of its most remarkable achievements, *Di Khishufmakhern*, was staged in a beer garden, *Astoria*. “Somewhere in Dudesti,” a critic wrote, “around a corner on Mircea-Voda [Street], in a yard on Anton Pann [Street], between a country-side-like convenience store and a showcase with fruits and vegetables a [beer] garden has opened. The only green is that of the paint covering the chairs and the only flowers are made of paper or painted; they are on a narrow stage made of primitive boards like the ones used for *Mosi*. On this ‘stage,’ in this ‘Garden’ every evening one plays theater in Yiddish before a small and enthusiast audience.”¹⁰⁰ The circumstances were not different from those that had caused Goldfaden or the *Vilna Troupe* to leave Bucharest, but Mansdorf persisted in his endeavor. A year after his first interview, he was pleased that the theater had premiered three plays and was preparing the fourth. Despite the hardships, the theater carried on.¹⁰¹ His staging of *Di Khishufmakhern* reminded some critics of the *Vilna Troupe*, footprints Mansdorf was more than eager to fill.¹⁰² In the most faithful Goldfadian tradition, he ridiculed religious superstition while maintaining the rightful measure between *prodesse* and *delectare*.

Despite these successes, an article from January 11, 1947 signaled the demise of the *IKUF-Theater*.¹⁰³ Iosif Faerstein began by praising its existence, which had demonstrated that creations in Yiddish could still move the Jewish population, and its successes, which had confirmed, that the population was interested in artful events and not merely entertainment of doubtful taste. “The existence of this theater,” the journalist concluded, “responded [...] to stringent, organic, and general needs and callings [within the Jewish population].”¹⁰⁴ Then Faerstein

went on to point out the real matter at stake: the *IKUF-Theater* had ceased its performances and the reason behind it had been the lack of a stage and appropriate conditions for the *IKUF-Theater*. Faerstein did not limit himself to stating the problem; he also indicated the party he considered responsible for the situation and asked for the intervention of the Ministry of Arts to find solutions. He condemned the administrator of the Barașeum Hall—Otto Marcovici¹⁰⁵—who “commercialized the stage, transformed frivolity into a goldmine, and worked hard to prevent the evolution of the spectator away from trivial art,” yet had no understanding for true art.¹⁰⁶

The article constituted but one example of a discourse gaining contour in the press, which thematized both the shortcomings faced by the various troupes and especially by the *IKUF-Theater*, and the latter’s so-called historic duty towards Jewish culture. Thus, directly or indirectly the press prepared the ground for the intervention of the Romanian state in dealing with this issue. Willi Savill’s article “Teatrul evreesc la răspântie?” (“The Jewish Theater at a Crossroads?”) printed in September 1946 in *Neamul Evreesc (The Jewish Kin)* was symptomatic of the situation. In the author’s description, the theater lacked self-understanding and a sense of responsibility. The article defined the calling of the *IKUF-Theater*: “to incorporate all those artistic elements present or about to become visible among the Jewish population.” This goal had not been achieved and the author deplored the absence of the premises favoring the creation of a homogenous and permanent theater. Jacob Mansdorf was seen as a shooting star that had initiated the process by leading the way and forming a public, but, the author suggested, certain actors’ personal egoism and artistic infatuation had prevented them from understanding the demands of the new times—collective efforts and achievements. Their mentality was deemed an obstacle in a qualitative redefinition of the theater.¹⁰⁷ The same reviewer in an article entitled “Idischer Kinstler Ansambl” (probably also from 1946) saw the unification of all troupes as an imperative matter, as neither the *IKUF-Theater* nor the *IKA* could create valuable art under the conditions available to them. He asked solemnly: “Where is the man who with the necessary authority can fuse these groups for the security and prestige of the fragile art site that the Yiddish theater has to be?”¹⁰⁸ Interventions in the *IKUF-Bleter*, the Yiddish newspaper edited by the *IKUF* from March 1946 until March 1953, by Moshe Lax, the association’s president, suggest without a doubt that the *IFUK* understood itself as a standard setter for the entire Yiddish culture taking shape in

Romania at that time. Lax appealed to Jewish intellectuals in Bucharest and elsewhere in Romania not to tolerate “irresponsible troupes” with repertoires of low quality, but to support the *IKUF-Theater*.¹⁰⁹

As mentioned earlier, the *CDE* reunited Jewish organizations of different political backgrounds into one over-arching organization, whose goal was to annul diversity among the members of this community and to homogenize it in accordance with the directives of the new establishment. In this sense, the association *Prietenii teatrului evreiesc din România* (*The Friends of the Jewish Theater in Romania*) was founded in 1946 to support the activities of the Jewish theater morally and financially.¹¹⁰ In November 1947, at a symposium on contemporary problems of the Jewish theater, it was decided that the *IFUK-Theater* should establish contact with the *Asociația dramaturgilor din România* (*The Playwrights’ Association in Romania*) in view of possible collaborations.¹¹¹ As time went by and the new political regime crystallized, the role and social position of theater in general changed. The Yiddish theater’s tradition was more and more discarded as cheap, a-cultural, and an-aesthetic, an enemy to good artistic and moral taste.¹¹² The demand was for social realism. A text by Emil Dorian “*Ceva despre teatrul idiș*” (“*Something about Yiddish theater*”) from 1948 clearly defined the attributes of this new kind of Yiddish theater that denied its Goldfadenian roots and looked upon the Soviet Union as its matrix.¹¹³ Dorian wrote that the Yiddish theater’s birth on Romanian soil had been purely haphazard. He rejected Abraham Goldfaden’s theater as mediocre due to its vaudevillian character through the reliance on humor, music, lyricism, and dance.¹¹⁴ In his view there was no true Yiddish theater as there was no quality Yiddish dramaturgy. The true Yiddish theater had appeared in the Soviet Union where it had created a repertoire that sprang directly from the development of Jewish life during Sovietization.¹¹⁵ The Yiddish theater had to make use of the context that had brought it to life and create a new artistic ideal, i.e. art for the people, for its moral recovery, for uplifting its conscience.¹¹⁶

A letter by Marcovici dated June 16, 1948, in which he asked permission to continue the activities of the *Barașeum Theater*, bears the side note: “Otto Marcovici is a known exploiter and businessman. [...] His request will be rejected.”¹¹⁷ This suggests that at least by that time the *Barașeum Theater* ceased to exist as such, but details about its activities between December 18, 1946—date of the last review available to me—and June 1948 are unavailable. I have, moreover, not been able to trace the *IKUF-Theater’s* (in)existence between January 1947—when Faerstein

decried its absence—and March 1948. In the *CDE* files the first references to theater date from after the *TES'* creation.¹¹⁸ I found no information about Mansdorf's departure, his replacement, or Bernard Lebli's involvement with the theater. On March 24, 1948, the *IKUF-Theater*, under Lebli's leadership and with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Finance (Minister Vasile Luca), the Ministry of Arts (Minister Ion Pas), and the *Joint* reopened in the newly renovated Barașeum Hall. It performed Sholem Aleykhem's *Dos groyse gevins (The Grand Prize)*¹¹⁹ It is relevant that although it was not yet a state institution, the Romanian authorities had already given this theater their blessing. Transforming it into a state subsidized and subordinated body was just a formality, which came about in the summer of 1948, while the theater was on tour. Thus, on August 1, 1948 at the suggestion of the *CDE* and the association *IKUF*, the *Jewish State Theater* was founded in Bucharest.¹²⁰ The Barașeum Hall became its permanent stage; the country's Ministry of Culture partly subsidized it, and the *IKUF* (until it was dissolved in 1953) and the Federation with the help of the *Joint* (until it was ousted in 1949) gave the remaining necessary funds.¹²¹ It united under one roof all previous Yiddish theater troupes, forming an ensemble of 110 actors. In his written demand for the theater to become a state institution, Bernard Lebli, *de facto* director although his appointment was issued bearing the date September 1, 1948,¹²² listed the following reasons: the *IKUF-Theater* was the only Yiddish theater in the country "to correspond to the impetuous need for culturalization and politicization of the Jewish masses;" Romania had the largest Jewish population in Europe after the Soviet Union and as such this community had to be the vanguard of progressive culture in Yiddish among Jews living elsewhere, and especially in countries befriending the People's Republic of Romania; despite the support of Jewish organizations, the theater was faced with dire material hardship which only a subvention by the state could alleviate.¹²³

The *TES'* creation served a propagandistic purpose for the authorities: it was meant to attest to the new leadership's internalization of the Leninist principle of ethnic indiscrimination by affording minorities equal rights, as long as their members were loyal citizens, i.e. supported the state's new ideology. It was also meant to set the new government apart from any other previous government and make it stand out as a just and inclusive political system, which offered the Jewish minority opportunities it had never had before. The goal of the theater was, thus, in accordance with the general directives to enlighten the Jewish community in the political

sense of the newly established regime. The main points on the theater's agenda became: to promote social realism over formalist traditions; to call out for the establishment of the Socialist society and for solidarity within the working class; to denounce class enemies inside and outside the country; to denounce religion as superstition; and to praise the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, seen as the selfless savior of the past war. All of these ideas appeared clearly formulated in Lebli's insertion in the playbill of the opening show, entitled "Teatrul evreesc 'Ikuf'" ("The Jewish Theater 'Ikuf'")¹²⁴ and it could not have been otherwise. However, performing Sholem Aleykhem's *Dos groyse gevins* also gave the theater a chance to go beyond the official level and build a bridge to the past and to a different tradition of Yiddish theater. The cast embodied that potential as well: Dina König, Sevilla Pastor, Iudith Kronenfeld, Benno Popliker, Mauricius Sekler, Samuel Fischler, Mano Rippel, and others.

Sholem Aleykhem told the story of the tailor master Shimele Soroker and his family living at the beginning of the 20th century in a Ukrainian *shtetl*.¹²⁵ Soroker possesses a lottery ticket and dreams that one-day he will win the grand prize, which would deliver him and his loved ones from their mediocre life and social position. The day when his creditors assault him insisting on being paid back, Soroker's dream comes true and he wins 200,000 rubles. He becomes a wealthy man, yet he is inexperienced in dealing with the world of great capital, so that his business partners bring him to bankruptcy. Parallel to this story line unfolds the tale of Beilke, Soroker's daughter. She is courted by the two helpers in her father's tailor store, Motl and Colp, but also by the rich Solomon Fain, who is charmed by her beauty. After Soroker wins the lottery and ascends to the world of social prestige, the way is open for an arranged marriage between Beilke Soroker and Solomon Fain. The girl, however, rejects this option and runs away with Motl and Copl, agreeing to marry one of them. News of her escapade reaches the reunion between her and the Fain family at the same time as that of her father's ruin, thus preventing any association between the two. Rushing to find their daughter, Shimele and his wife Etemene, arrive at the wedding ceremony just in time to give their blessings to Beilke and Motl and celebrate the new union.

Available reviews suggest that during the staging process both the director and the cast disregarded ideological demands. The ensemble preserved a formalist tradition that had become associated with Yiddish theater *per se* and conferred to it its specificity. "Today's IKUF ensemble," Simion Alterescu deplored, "composed of elements gathered from

wandering troupes retains unanimously a mannerism—characteristic of the old Jewish theater—that has become in time a tradition—that of expressionism.”¹²⁶ He reproached Dina König for caricaturing her character and B[eno] Sadigurski for connecting too much with the audiences. He disapproved of Haim Schwartzman’s musical score and Moise Rubingher’s setting designs.¹²⁷ The reviewer’s repetitive observation that the theater would have to renounce its extant style in the future underscores the fact that it had not done so already. To quote but one example: “The show at the Ikuf [Theater], aside from numerous qualities we shall mention later, preserves the sin of formalism, which in time the Jewish theater will have to abandon.”¹²⁸ He accoladed the director’s ability to coordinate the actors and make use of the newly available technical support, Cora Benador’s choreography, and the promising potential of the ensemble to live up to the expectations of the new order.¹²⁹ Unlike Alterescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu congratulated the cast and the producers on their achievements and expressed confidence about the theater’s future without tying it ideologically.¹³⁰ “Overall,” the journalist noted, “it was an interesting show [denoting] honest effort and a good beginning, and most of all persistence and enthusiasm on the part of all collaborators in hope for a fruitful artistic life.”¹³¹ His only critique targeted the orchestration, which Sadoveanu found not inappropriate but excessively opulent.¹³²

On October 1, 1949 the *TES* presented the first autochthonous play, *Nahtshiht* (*The Night Shift*) by Ludovic Bruckstein. This marked a milestone: it was the first original dramatic work to have been written in Yiddish; it was also the first attempt to thematized Jewish existence in post-Second World War Romania; and it was a direct response to the “repertoire crisis” that haunted the *TES*. The plotline was uncomplicated. While waiting for their husbands, Aron and Eli, to return from the night shift of a factory in the People’s Republic of Romania, two former Auschwitz inmates, Lana and Mira, recalled their ordeal in the camp and how they were saved through the actions of a Soviet Communist. They remembered how the National Socialist persecution had began with the burning of the *Reichstag* and the subsequent hounding of the Communists, the Jews, and other so-called “inferior races,” which included according to the characters “the Austrians, the Czechs, the Poles, the Hungarians, and the Romanians.”¹³³ In addition, the two women evoked the memory of Ivan, a Soviet political prisoner, who coordinated acts of sabotage in the camp and led the liberation fight against the guards in

the last act. The remembering process served also as a springboard to the characters' present painted in rosy tones.

The play incorporated several obligatory elements for literary creations at the time. It condemned the past not only in the form of the war, but also as the time of a ruthless bourgeoisie, which irrespective of its nationality was responsible for the war. After 1948, the political discourse had changed: the idea of ethnic unity that had been so important in the early 1940s was reinterpreted as reactionary deviation.¹³⁴ The new demand was for unity among the members of the working class and for the denunciation of the so-called "bourgeois elements" regardless of ethnicity. Through the figure of the Jewish merchant Sacher, who betrayed his fellow inmates to the German commanders, the playwright rendered the new requirement artistically. The play extolled the merits of the Communists and especially of Soviet Communists. If in Pincewski's *Ikh Leb* liberation had had a double character—physical liberation through the Soviet Army, but also, and more importantly, self-liberation by overcoming one's passivity as embodied by the rabbi—such a subversion of the liberator role was no longer tolerable. The Soviet Communists alone could fill that position and had to be depicted as such. Feeble outbursts by Jewish inmates in Auschwitz had to be subsumed under the leadership of Ivan, the harbinger of the new *Weltanschauung*. The reference to Auschwitz itself was symbolic, yet, like elsewhere in the world, a confrontation with it impossible. Another mandatory element was the description of the People's Republic of Romania as a haven allowing for the friendly and fruitful cooperation between Jews and Romanians, as in the case of Aron and Traian, who perfected a common invention. The author thus aligned its voice with the official propaganda, slowly gathering momentum for a vigorous anti-Zionist campaign. In this sense, two notions of work during the night shift were juxtaposed: the sacrilegious incineration of dead bodies in the camp, which was the result of the previous bourgeois order, and Aron and Traian's teamwork in the factory of a Socialist republic. Not only was the latter form righteous because it was not forceful exploitation, but also because it paved the way for the integration of national minorities into the Romanian society.

Turning anew to the press, one gains a distinct notion of the commencing ossification of the critical idiom. The reviews contained no real artistic critique, but merely preprogrammed statements inserted into a template language: the demand for socialist realist art, with no expressionist tones;¹³⁵ the request for an accessible Yiddish dialect spoken

by the masses and not an aestheticized form;¹³⁶ and the commendation that the play was a good beginning for the development of indigenous Yiddish literature.¹³⁷ Valentin Silvestru's very detailed chronicle in *Flacăra* (*The Flame*) is representative of the process of renegotiating registers taking place within the realm of theater criticism.¹³⁸ The ideologized trace was unmistakable in passages eulogizing the Soviet Army and its role during the war, or the insight of the Marxist teachings that had helped the playwright—a former Auschwitz inmate—"clarify and organize the material collected through his own life experience." Silvestru underscored the culpability of the bourgeoisie as a treacherous collaborating force and the virtues of "anonymous heroes" who had followed the call and example of the Communist fighter embodied by the "Soviet man." A surprising element was the laudatory presentation of a good German, Heinrich the anti-fascist. In view of the international developments of the year 1949, this discursive twist served the integration of the German Democratic Republic and its people into the Socialist camp on the same level as all other Soviet satellites: as former victims of National Socialism and covert supporters of the Soviet Union. Germans could thus no longer be exposed as National Socialists *in toto*, but as a bad majority of obedient Hitler followers and a good minority of contesters, who, however, had to be adherents to the ideals of the Soviet Union.¹³⁹ Both Bruckstein and Silvestru followed suit in their renderings.

Silvestru welcomed the manner in which Mauricius Sekler had staged the play: realist, accentuating simplicity of expression and without traces of formalism as in previous shows at the *TES*. He uttered his harshest critique with respect to the prologue, which he considered insufficiently developed and not corresponding to the social reality of Jewish life in post-war Romania. "Probably," he wrote, "[Bruckstein] has not studied sufficiently the conditions of the Jewish worker today and the problems arising from this new life-style. The class struggle is not over; it presents special forms among the Jewish population of our Republic. The state of complete happiness in which the four characters find themselves in the prologue and epilogue is not in conformity with reality; they talk only about the enemy abroad and give the impression that here [i.e. Romania] they have liquidated the antagonized bourgeoisie."¹⁴⁰ In order to compensate for this slippage, Silvestru called on Bruckstein to write a play examining the contemporary problems of the Jewish community in a more thorough manner.

Bruckstein's work was a concession to politics. The play does not stand the test of time and has no intrinsic literary value, yet as a historical artifact it is part of the *TES*' becoming and adds nuances to its own understanding during the time. The theater wanted to persist and therefore gave in to the official pressure at times. Before this performance, the *TES* had staged *Goldfaden* (*Di tzwei kune-lem/ The Two Kune-Lemls*), Nicolai Gogol (*The Revisor*), and Friedrich Schiller (*Kabale und Liebe/ Intrigue and Love*).¹⁴¹ These productions had displayed the same duality as *Dos groyse gevins* and were reprobated for it.¹⁴² *Nahtshiht* was the compromise, followed only in the 1951 season by another more aggressive instrumentalization of the theater.

In shotn funem palmenboym (*In the shade of a palm tree*) by Ionel Țăranu was the most politically engaged performance of the *TES* incipient years. It openly condemned *aliyah* as treason not only to Romania—a country working hard to become a comfortable “home” for its Jewish population—but also to the “honorable cause of Socialism.” The play premièred on January 1, 1951 at the height of the Romanian authorities' anti-Zionist crusade. In order to publicize this performance the *TES* displayed two billboards on *Calea Dudești*, the heart of the Jewish neighborhood, and at the *Sf. Gheorghe* Square; it broadcast advertisements on the radio; and published excerpts in the Jewish press.¹⁴³ On March 11, 1951 the *CDE* Bucharest organized discussions with the public about the play and its meaning.¹⁴⁴ The intense campaign illustrates the utmost importance the decision makers attributed to this performance.

The storyline followed the young dentist Emil who obtained his visa to immigrate to Israel. He left his family and his fiancée, Frieda, behind and departed confident for his future. He counted on support from his former superior Dr. Ochsenfeld, who had encouraged him to leave and had promised to help him settle in Israel. However, in Israel no one awaited him and Emil had to polish shoes in the harbor of Haifa in order to survive. A return to Romania was not possible since he had broken all the ties to his family so that he remained in a dire situation. In the meantime, in Bucharest his family had been assigned a new apartment and celebrated the achievement with a house-warming party where Jews and Romanians alike were merry and happy to be living in the People's Republic of Romania.

The play stands out through its vicious anti-Zionism and its anti-Semitism when applied to inhabitants of the State of Israel. Grözinger has rightfully pointed out that names such as “Ochsenfeld” or “Wurmstaub”

could easily have been chosen from a manual for anti-Semitism.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Israel appeared as the playground for American capitalism, represented derogatorily by drunken sailors pursuing prostitutes in the harbor of Haifa. It is the typical picture of a corrupted bourgeois world in which the individual does not count and money talks. Meant to inspire awe, the black and white depiction of the realities in Israel and in Romania, only succeeded in reproducing syntagmata of the *CDE* jargon.¹⁴⁶ Through this performance the *TES* disregarded Goldfaden's legacy and lowered itself indeed to manipulating its audiences. The question though is: Could it have done otherwise?

Bureaucratically speaking the *TES* functioned according to *Decree Nr. 168* published in the *Official Monitor (Monitorul Oficial)* No. 175 from July 31, 1948. The ruling stipulated that the theater operate under the same conditions as the *National Theater (Teatrul Național)* in Bucharest, whose statute entailed that the directorial committee had to consist of: the theater's director as president; the mayor of Bucharest or his vice-mayor; a public lawyer; an artist with a permanent appointment and accepted by the *League of Artists' Writers' Journalists' Labor Unions (Uniunea Sindicatelor de Artisti, Scriitori, Ziaristi din Romania)*; the Rector of the *Academy for Music and Dramatic Art (Academia de Muzica si Arta Dramatica)* or another cultural figure proposed by the *Union*. The artistic director was appointed by ministerial decision at the suggestion of the *TES'* director and had to be a literary critic, editor, or prestigious *literatus*.¹⁴⁷ The theater had to perform a play first for the officials and then for the public, and the *General Directorate of Theaters (Direcția Generală a Teatrelor)* sent a delegate to every performance.¹⁴⁸ The *TES'* official role was "that of raising the population's cultural standards and that of mobilizing it to build Socialism"¹⁴⁹ The *TES'* official ideological character during the years under consideration can be inferred from its playbills. Unlike earlier times when their pages included information about the play, the author, the main actors, but also substantial amounts of advertisements, the *TES'* playbills included quotes from Joseph Stalin, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Ana Pauker, Iosif Chișinevschi or Ilya Ehrenburg. They recorded also the articles of the Romanian constitution that validated the *TES'* creation (Art. 23 and 24), as well as panegyrics to the Soviet Union and its culture. Inevitably they also contained a description of the play's plot with unmistakable ideological undertones. The playbill as a construct legitimized the *TES* as an enterprise in the larger context of ideologized Romanian culture.

Nonetheless, a look at reports from the *CDE's* Cultural Commission yields a different image of the theater. Given that loyalists of the regime conceived them for the use of the power structures, these documents might rightfully be regarded as unreliable sources. To my mind, it is precisely because they were produced for inner-power fora and, thus, did not need to embellish reality for propaganda purposes, that they are useful research tools. In a meeting on June 21, 1949 the complaint was made that only four—of the *TES'* 110—employees were party members.¹⁵⁰ The “Report Concerning the Activity of the Jewish State Theaters in Bucharest and Jassy” resulting from a meeting of the *CDE's* Cultural Commission between February 9-15, 1950, called attention to the low level of political awareness and engagement among the members of the theaters' staff; those who had been there since the founding days displayed a “petit-bourgeois mentality” devoid of “a political level” and the young elements, who had been recruited after an examination in 1949, lacked not only political understanding but also experience.¹⁵¹ Bernard Lebli, director of the *TES* in Bucharest was reprimanded for poor social skills, for failing to fasten the ties between the *TES* and the *CDE*, and for attending the meetings of the *CDE's* Cultural Commission only sporadically.¹⁵² When evaluating the echo of the *TES'* activity, song and dance shows along with cabaret numbers enjoyed a much wider popularity than other performances.¹⁵³ For the time span July 1 until September 30, 1951 under the header *Shortcomings (Lipsuri)* Paul Iscovici still listed insufficient political implication among the *TES'* personnel. The ideological *niveau* of the staff had remained low, and during tours the plays had not been properly problematized for the audiences, so that the ideological content remained insufficiently revealed. He also deplored the shortage of autochthonous plays with appropriate political content.¹⁵⁴ In the report for the year 1952, the relation between the *CDE's* “conviction work” and the response among the *TES'* employees continued to be uneven. Many “elements” were still eager to emigrate. This report deplored as well the lack of fruitful collaboration between the *CDE's* and the *TES'* leadership, as the latter failed to adopt a “determined attitude” against members of the ensemble who refused to comply with the ideological demands of the times.¹⁵⁵

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There can be no doubt that the *TES* appeared as a result of the nationalization process initiated by the Romanian state. It is just to remark that this process inhibited private initiative, stopped the activities of traveling troupes, imposed a repertoire with ideological tendencies, and promoted the mingling of political activists into theatrical life. Concurrently, it is important to note that becoming a state institution and receiving state subsidizes was the only chance of survival the Yiddish theater had. Financial hardship would not have made it possible for a Yiddish theater to endure otherwise.¹⁵⁶ On the one hand it can be argued that the theater served as cover-up for the assimilationist tendencies of the *CDE*, which intended to (ab)use Yiddish—seen as the vernacular of the Jewish working classes—as means to transmit the Communist Party's ideology and indoctrinate the Jewish masses. It did so more discretely until 1949 and overly afterwards.¹⁵⁷ The *CDE* helped create the illusion of the Romanian state as liberal and supportive of its minorities and combated Zionism and *aliyah* after 1950.¹⁵⁸ The kind of cultural identification it promoted was biased because it required its subjects to distance themselves from what the State of Israel embraced as “Jewish culture” and adhere to values that had never been unproblematic among Jews. The dilemma Yiddish versus Hebrew had had its own history, which the Communists could not simply sweep under the carpet.

On the other hand, it also cannot be denied that maintaining an enclave of Yiddish culture created ethnic unity beyond the shifting tendencies of the official discourse. The *TES* was, as Mirjam Lia Bercovici claims, “the institution that best mirrored the Jews of Romania [...]”¹⁵⁹ The theater popularized Jewish culture by keeping Yiddish folklore and Yiddish music alive and by engaging the classics of Yiddish literature at a time when there was a large population with an interest in maintaining or discovering these traditions. In this sense, I argue that the *TES* should be included—from its beginning—among Rotman's “parallel spaces” that afforded degrees of liberties under an oppressive regime. Due to its tours, the theater stayed in touch with audiences throughout the country. Thus the political strategy of the decision makers—be they the Romanian authorities or the Jewish community—boomeranged toward the ideologues and escaped the pre-programmed propagandistic framework. By making Yiddish culture available, the regime propped up a mentality that went against its dogmatism. The theater embodied this dichotomy: it was not simply a mouthpiece of and for the regime, but also a site for the cultivation of a Jewish identity with a Yiddish sensitivity.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Mirjam Lia Bercovici, Anton Celaru, Anca Ciuciu, Andrei Oişteanu, Rudy Rosenfeld, Liviu Rotman, and Smaranda Vultur for their help with this project.
- 2 Elvira Grözinger, Die jiddische Kultur im Schatten der Diktaturen. Israil Bercovici—Leben und Werk (Berlin/Wien: Philo Verlag, 2002) 242-243.
- 3 “[...] statul [român] a luat în seama sa organizarea a două teatre evreieşti [...]” Liviu Rotman, Evreii din România în perioada comunistă 1944-1965 (Bucureşti: Polirom, 2004) 117. The Jewish State Theater in Jassy opened in 1949 and was closed down in 1964. I will not touch upon its history in this article (CP).
- 4 Liviu Rotman in a discussion with me in Bucharest on December 8, 2005.
- 5 I use the term “Communist Party” not as a party title, but to describe the underlying ideology of a party that changed its name from Romanian Communist Party to Romanian Workers’ Party (February 1948) and back to Romanian Communist Party (July 1965.)
- 6 Andrei Pleşu, “Nostalgie şi speranţă” Obscenitate publică (Bucureşti: Humanitas 2004) 201-205, here 203.
- 7 A *maskil* is an adherent of the *Haskalah* movement.
- 8 My translation. At this point I have access to neither the Yiddish original nor the officially accepted English translation. The Romanian translation of this quote can be found in Israil Bercovici, O sută de ani de teatru evreiesc în România (Bucureşti: Integral, 1998) 68.
- 9 Arhivele Statului Român (A.S.R) Departamentul Ministerului Cultelor şi Artelor, Direcţia Generală a Teatrelor şi Operelor Române, Dosar Nr. 62/ 1940, 87. Also printed in Bercovici 174.
- 10 Letter from Felix Aderca to the General Director of the Romanian Theaters and Opera Houses from October 16, 1940 referencing Authorization No. 9335 from October 8, 1940, which allowed the existence of a single Jewish theater under his leadership. ASR, Ministerul Artelor, Direcţia Generală a Teatrelor şi Operelor Române, Dosar Nr. 12/ 1941, 95.
- 11 For the text of the Decree-Law No. 2650 from August 8, 1940 see Lya Benjamin (Ed.), Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944 (Bucureşti: Hasefer, 1993) 46-51, here 46.
- 12 Many artists and public figures in those days did not use their full name in public: some initialed their first-name; some both name and surname. In the cases when I could find the corresponded of the initials, I completed the names, sometimes inserting them into [] to suggest that the original text I quoted or referenced did not include the full name. When I could not trace the initials back, I left the names as they appeared in those days in the press.
- 13 Cf. Leny Caler, Artistul şi oglinda—repertoriu, roluri şi parteneri de neuitat (Bucureşti: Universal Dalsi, 2004) 173-179 and Mihail Sebastian, Jurnal 1935-1944 (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2005) 444-577.

- 14 Hary Kuller, "Difuzarea idișului între cele două razboaie mondiale și după, în România" Buletinul Centrului, Muzeului și arhivei istorice a evreilor din Romania 12/ 2006: 47-62, here 51.
- 15 (Author unknown), "Pe urmele lui Goldfaden ... O convorbire cu Iacob Mansdorf" Viața evreească July 28, 1945: 2. *N.B.* Many of the reviews cited or simply referenced in this article display incomplete bibliographical data and I apologize to the reader for this misgiving. In the course of my research so far I have been unable to locate complete collections of the newspapers I use, so that I had to rely on fragmentary holdings or clippings without annotations. Throughout the article the missing information will be listed as (___ unknown).
- 16 Hanna Kawa, "Tewie der Milchiger. În dialog cu Iacob Mansdorf" (newspaper unknown) January 5, 1946: (page unknown).
- 17 Rotman, Evreii 29-30.
- 18 "Au fost astfel mai întâi anii oarecum ai asimilismului [anii 20-30], pentru care diferența, identitatea era strict religioasă. Eram români de religie israelită, ca în mai toată Europa occidentală și centrală." Amalia Pavel, "Istoricitatea conceptului de identitate" Identitatea evreiască și antisemitismul în Europa centrală și de sud-est, Andrei Oișteanu (Ed.) (București: Meta, 2003): 119-124, here 119.
- 19 Cf. Ileana Vrancea, "A Forgotten Chapter of a Common Legacy: Jewish Personalities in the Fight for Survival of Romanian Civil Society (1944-1948)" SHVUT. Jewish Problems in Eastern Europe, Liviu Rotman (ed.) (Tel Aviv: The School of Jewish Studies, 1993) 325-338.
- 20 In December 1941 the supra-communitarian organization, Federation of the Unions of Jewish Communities, was replaced by the *Centrala Evreilor din România* (Central Office of Romania's Jews), a body subordinated to the Romanian government (Decree-Law from December 16, 1941, Monitorul Oficial, No. 299, December 17, 1941)
- 21 Rotman, "Romanian Jewry: The First Decade after the Holocaust." The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry, Randolph L. Braham (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 287-331, here 305-309; Kuller, Evreii în România anilor 1944-1949—evenimente, documente, comentarii (București: Hasefer, 2002) 13.
- 22 Rotman, Evreii 34-36.
- 23 For an ample description see Dinu C. Giurescu, Guvernarea Nicolae Rădescu (București: All, 1996) and Dinu C. Giurescu, Imposibila încercare. Greva regală, 1945 (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999).
- 24 See in this sense the demand for Jewish unity ("unitate evreească"), a true buzzword of the time (Rotman, Evreii 35-36, 61, and 115; and Hildrun Glass, Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen. Zur Geschichte der Juden in Rumänien 1944-1949 (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002) 239-258.

- 25 "Proces-verbal asupra ședinței de constituire a Comitetului Democrat Evreesc, ședință ținută în ziua de 7 iunie 1945 [...]" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar Nr. 1/ 1945, 1-5. See also Rotman, "Romanian Jewry" 287-331; and Glass 139-146.
- 26 Rotman, "Romanian Jewry" 302; Glass 157-166; and Rotman, *Evreii* 114-115.
- 27 Rotman "Romanian Jewry" 305-309; and Rotman, *Evreii* 60.
- 28 Rotman, *Evreii* 39; Radu Ioanid, *The Ransom of the Jews. The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain between Romania and Israel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005) 39-40.
- 29 Glass 227-238.
- 30 Rotman, *Evreii* 39; and Ioanid 43.
- 31 *Aliyah* means emigration to Palestine and later to the State of Israel.
- 32 According to Radu Ioanid during 1950 and 1951 *aliyah* peaked at 47,071 (1950) and 40,625 (1951). Ioanid 185.
- 33 "Stenograma ședinței cu conducerea Comitetului Democrat Evreesc din ziua de 16 martie 1953" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 23/ 1953, 7.
- 34 "Aici se întâlneau oamenii, se discutau problemele specifice, se colportau zvonuri—reale sau false, ele erau o formă originală de 'informare'—și, nu în cele din urmă ca importanță, se spuneau bancuri în care era persiflată realitatea politică. În mod obiectiv, fără voia conducătorilor vigilenți ai comunității, se crea o anume formă de 'societate civilă.' În ciuda controlului permanent al Puterii, în diversele foruri comunitare se întâmpla 'altceva.' Aici se nășteau uneori și forme originale de rezistență: bătăi din picioare sau tuse neîntrerupt când trimișii Puterii încercau să ducă 'munca de lămurire.' O altă formă de rezistență era ruperea caricaturilor antisioniste și antiisraeliene pe care oamenii C.D.E.-ului le puneau pe pereții comunității sau ai sinagogilor." Rotman, *Evreii* 78.
- 35 Glass 227-238; and Rotman, *Evreii* 41-49.
- 36 Rotman, *Evreii* 48-49.
- 37 Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, 2003) 133
- 38 "Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 14 ianuarie 1953" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 2/ 1953, 8-39, here 20-21, 23, 32.
- 39 "Expunere cu privire la autodizolvarea și încetarea activității Comitetului Democrat Evreesc din RPR și a comitetelor sale regionale și locale" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar Nr. 45/ 1953, 68-79, here 77.
- 40 Rotman, *Evreii* 121.
- 41 Ioanid 14.
- 42 Ioanid 164-173.

- 43 Rotman, *Evreii* 92-94; and *Ioanid* 53-67.
- 44 Letter from Moshe Sharett to Ana Pauker, March 11, 1949, printed in *Romania-Israel, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe. Documente diplomatice, vol. I, 1948-1969* (București, 2000), 6-10.
- 45 “Stenograma ședinței cu responsabilii organizațiilor de masă, 5 octombrie 1945” ASR, Fond CC al PCR—Cancelarie I, Dosar 86/ 1945, 14-28; “Proces-verbal al ședinței de instrucțaj cu instructorii centrali [...], 11 martie 1948” ASR, Fond CC al PCR—Cancelarie I, Dosar 6/ 1948, 32; “Procesele-verbale ale ședinței secretariatului Comitetului Central privind proiectul de statut al Uniunii Tineretului Muncitoresc [...], 21 februarie 1949” A.S.R, Fond CC al PCR—Cancelarie I, Dosar 18/ 1949, 217.
- 46 “Raport asupra problemei emigrărilor din rândurile populației evreiești în cursul anului 1950, 28 decembrie 1950” ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 24/ 1950, 147-154.
- 47 Rotman, *Evreii* 94.
- 48 For concrete examples see *Ioanid* 56-62.
- 49 Glass 114-120; and *Ioanid* 185.
- 50 Radu *Ioanid*’s book provides a trustworthy account of the dealings involving the Romanian and the Israeli states, although I find the style in which he chose to present this information at times problematic.
- 51 For example Leny Caler who opened the *Teatru Victoria* (*Theater Victoria*) with George Vraca (Caler 117).
- 52 Otto Marcovici had been—among other things—the owner of the newspapers *Dimineața* (*The Morning*) and *Adevărul* (*The Truth*) in the inter-war era. Tudor Teodorescu Branîște, “Otto Marcovici” in the playbill of the *Teatrul Barașeum Studio* (*Barașeum Studio Theater*) for the season 1944-1945. ASR, Departamentul Artelor, Dosar Nr. 18/ 1941, 28b.
- 53 Sergiu Milorian, “Teatrul Barașeum: ‘Potopul’ de Berger” (newspaper, date, page unknown); (author unknown), “Beate Fredanov despre ‘Potopul’” *Renașterea Noastră* October 6, 1944: 2; Al. Cerna-Rădulescu, “Teatrul Barașeum: ‘Potopul’ prelucrare în trei acte de Mihail Sebastian, după Berger” *Ultima oră* October 10, 1944: (page unknown); dr. i. flavius, “Teatrul Barașeum ‘Potopul’” *Timpul* October 12, 1944: (page unknown); (author unknown), “Teatrul Barașeum ‘Potopul’ de H. Berger prelucrare de Mihail Sebastian” *Renașterea Noastră* October 13, 1944: 2; and Sebastian, diary entry for October 13, 1944, 570.
- 54 Milorian.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 (author unknown), “În preajma premierii piesei americane ‘Potopul’” *Mântuirea* (date, page unknown).
- 57 Sebastian, diary entry for December 18, 1944, 576.
- 58 Stefan Baciu, “Teatrul Barașeum ‘Noapți fără lună’, piesă în 8 tablouri după J. Steinbeck de Mihail Sebastian” *Libertatea* December 31, 1944: (page unknown).

- 59 V. Timuș, "Teatrul Barașeum-Studio: 'Nopti fără lună' piesă în 8 tablouri de d. Mihail Sebastian după romanul lui John Steinbeck" Jurnalul December 24, 1944: (page unknown); Victor Iliu, "Teatrul Barașeum: 'Nopti fără lună' spectacol în 8 tablouri, după romanul lui John Steinbeck, de Mihail Sebastian. Direcția regizorală: I. Straucher. Decoratia scenică: M. H. Maxy" Scânteia December 25, 1944: (page unknown); I. Flavius, "'Nopti fără lună.' Piesă după romanul lui John Steinbeck." Timpul January 15, 1945: (page unknown).
- 60 Iliu; and Flavius.
- 61 Monica Lovinescu, "Barașeum: 'Viața e frumoasă' de Marcel Achard" Democrația March 18, 1945: (page unknown).
- 62 "Aprecieri efortul *Teatrului Barașeum* de-a lucra onest în domeniul teatrului, fără a se servi de desele trucaje și realizări efinite ale majorității scenelor românești, în momentul de față." Lovinescu.
- 63 Flavius.
- 64 Timuș; Milorian; Lovinescu; Valeriu Mardare, "Teatrul Barașeum 'Viața e frumoasă!' comedie optimistă, în trei acte, de Marcel Achard traducere de d. M. Sebastian" Universul March 29, 1945: (page unknown); Timuș, "Teatrul Barașeum: 'Viața e frumoasă' comedie optimistă, în trei acte de Marcel Achard" Jurnal March 18, 1945: (page unknown).
- 65 (Author unknown), "Teatrul Barașeum: 'Am ucis' melodramă în trei acte de Richard Voss" Poporul September 26, 1945: (page unknown).
- 66 R. A. C., "Impresii teatrale: 'Comedianta' cu Bebe Spitzer la Studio Barașeum" Era nouă November 22, 1945: (page unknown).
- 67 Bercovici 197.
- 68 M. Laistor, "'Bețivana' cu Lya Sterling" (newspaper, date, page unknown).
- 69 Announcement for *Dorfsjung*, Neamul Evreesc (page unknown). I have also found announcements for a play *Femeia sub mască* (*Woman under a Mask*) with no further references by the IKA.
- 70 Arhiva Centrului pentru Studiarea Istoriei Evreilor din România (ACSIER), Dosar 79, 1bis and 27.
- 71 Agreement signed on August 16, 1945, ACSIER, Dosar 79, 9-10.
- 72 *Ibid.*
- 73 A. Samuely-Sandu, "Să facem un teatru IDIS!" Program Stagiunea 1945, ACSIER, Dos 79, 37-45, here 39.
- 74 "Stenograma ședinței cu conducerea CDE din ziua de 16 martie 1953" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 23/ 1953, 15.
- 75 Kuller, "Difuzarea" 51.
- 76 Bercovici 195.
- 77 Bercovici 198.
- 78 Invitation to a meeting discussing the Yiddish theater, ACSIER, Dosar 79, 1.
- 79 Bercovici 198; Kuller, *Evreii în România*, 188; Kuller, "Difuzarea" 60.
- 80 (Author unknown), "Pe urmele lui Goldfaden"

- 81 "Programul nostru e obligația de a aduce pe scenă, bogata noastră moștenire de figuri istorice: Bar-Kohba, Iehuda Macabi,—nu diverse apariții fără rost—clădite pe anecdote. Așa cum altădată Salom Aleihem a combătut cu o operă pozitivă, 'literatură' șundistă a lui Șumăr, la fel vom înlocui cu arta adevărată spectacolele ieftine." Ibid.
- 82 Anton Celaru was born Iosif Faerstein in June 1919 in Huși. He worked as an editor-in-chief first for the *IKUF-Bleter*, later for the *CDE* newspaper *Unirea (Unity)*—called *Viața Nouă (New Life)* as of January 1951. In 1953 when the *CDE* ceased its existence, the newspaper was also suspended. Celaru changed to *Informația Bucureștiului (Bucharest's Information)* from where he took an early retirement in 1974 due to his disappointment with the political and social situation in Romania. As a young man Celaru had truly believed that Communism would deliver the world of injustice and ethnic discrimination. Interviews with Anton Celaru at his residence in Bucharest, July 1 and 2, 2006. See also Alina Darie, "Presă și suferință. Interviu cu Anton Celaru, cel mai în vârstă ziarist din județul Vaslui" *Adevărul de Vaslui* July 1, 2006: 3.
- 83 Interview with Anton Celaru, July 1, 2006, at his residence in Bucharest.
- 84 Oscar Lemnaru, "Teatrul Barașum: 'Ih leb, piesa în 3 acte de Pincewskî' *Facța*, October 1945, pg. 2. Oscar Lemnaru, "Teatrul UKUF: Tevie Laptarul. Dramatizare în 4 acte de I. Mansdorf, după Solem Aleihem; XXX În loc de cronică dramatică: Tevie Laptarul" *Renasterea Noastră* 5.01. 1946; Hanna Kawa, "Abraham Goldfaden: Vrajitoarea" (#1550)
- 85 Oscar Lemnaru, "Teatrul Barașum: 'Ih leb' piesă în 3 acte de Pincewskî' *Facța* October 2, 1945: 2; i. fl., "Teatrul Barașum: 'Trăiesc!'... Trei acte de Pincewsky" *Timpul* October 26, 1945: (page unknown). (author unknown), "Teatrul de artă idiș 'I.K.U.F.' a câștigat bătălia. Spectacolul 'Trăiesc' o mare biruință artistică" *Era Nouă* November 8, 1945: (page unknown); C. F., "Ansamblul de artă IDIȘ 'IKUF' 'Ih leb!' (Trăiesc), 3 acte de M. Pincewsky" *Victoria* November 28, 1945: (page unknown); St. T., "Ih leb..." *Libertatea* December 6, 1945: (page unknown).
- 86 Lemnaru.
- 87 Synopsis based on Lemnaru. A transcript of the play is unavailable.
- 88 fl.
- 89 Lemnaru; G[eri] Spina, "Sensul ne-artistic al teatrului IKUF" *Viața evreească* October (date unknown) 1945: (page unknown).
- 90 *Galut* is the Jewish exile or Diaspora.
- 91 I am thankful to Anton Celaru for informing me about the banner. Interview with Anton Celaru, July 1, 2006 at his residence in Bucharest.
- 92 "Dacă proverbiala solidaritate evreească ar fi o realitate, 'Ih Leb' ar beneficia de un răsunset uluitor care, ar parveni să-i constrângă și pe elevii conservatoarelor la urmărirea activității ansamblului 'IKUF', de unde ar deprinde să contribuie, cu mânărea însușirilor lor, la înlocuirea teatrului—

- divertisment și funcționarism dramatic, cu teatrul școală, cu *teatrul de arta*. [C]onvenind că prin aceasta, individual, s'ar salva dela compromisuri, fie ele cât de strălucit retribuite, și colectiv, i-ar distribui scenei, în redresarea noastră, rolul pe care structural, îl merită." C. F.
- 93 Sapina.
- 94 Kawa, "Tewie der Milchiger"
- 95 *Ibid.*
- 96 According to Anton Celaru, Iacob Mansdorf left Romania in 1947 and died not too long after that in South Africa. Interview with Anton Celaru July 1 and 2, 2006, at his residence in Bucharest.
- 97 Unsigned letter from the *IKUF-Teater* addressed to Max Ausschnitt asking for financial support. June 3, 1946. ACSIER, Dosar 79, unnumbered.
- 98 Bercovici 198; Arnold Schwefelberg, *Amintirile unui intelectual evreu din România* (București: Hasefer, 2000) 157.
- 99 M. Roșca, "Teatrul de arta Ikuf-Barașeum: 'Tevie Laptarul'" *Veac Nou* (date unknown): 10.
- 100 "Undeva prin Dudești, pe după un colț din Mircea-Vodă, într-o ogradă de pe Anton Pann, s-a deschis de curând, între o băcănie ca de țară și o vitrină cu fructe și zarzavaturi: o 'grădină' unde singura verdeță e vopseaua cu care au fost date scaunele și singurele flori sunt ori de hârtie, ori pictate și se află pe o scenă îngustă de scânduri dintre acelea primitive ca dela Moși. Pe această 'scenă', în acesta "Grădină" se joacă în fiecare seară în fața unui public mărunț și entuziast: teatru în limba idiș." I. M. "Grădina 'Astoria' *Vrăjitoarea* Comedie muzicală de A. Goldfaden" (newspaper unknown) July 11-12, 1946: (page unknown). Cf. also Emil Suter, "Grădina Astoria: Teatrul de artă idiș (IKUF): *Vrăjitoarea*, comedie în 3 acte (7 tablouri) de A. Goldfaden" *Scânteia* July 22, 1946: (page unknown).
- 101 Iacob Mansdorf, "La a IV-a premieră a teatrului IKUF" (newspaper, date and page unknown) probably sometime before June 1946.
- 102 W[illi] Savill, "Vrăjitoarea" *Neamul Evreesc* (date, page unknown)
- 103 I[osif] Faerstein, "1947 fără teatru evreesc!" *Unirea* January 11, 1947: (page unknown).
- 104 *Ibid.*
- 105 Iosif Faerstein, today Anton Celaru, identified Marcovici as the target of his attacks from 1947. Interview with Anton Celaru at his residence in Bucharest, June 1 and 2, 2006.
- 106 Faerstein.
- 107 Savill, "Teatrul evreesc la răspântie?" *Neamul Evreesc* September 3, 1946: 2.
- 108 "Unde este omul care cu autoritatea necesară să contopească aceste grupuri pentru securitatea și prestigiul fragedului așezământ de artă care trebuie să fie teatrul idiș?" S(avill), "Idischer Kinstler Ansamb!" (newspaper, date, page unknown).

- 109 “Ne adresăm intelectualității evreiești fie din București, fie din provincie, să nu tolereze activitatea daunătoare a acestor trupe iresponsabile. Noi, IKUF-ul, sîntem îndreptățîți să cerem aceasta, căci am dovedit într-o scurtă perioadă de timp că cu strădanie și cu voință de bine se poate realiza un teatru evreiesc, care să fie la nivel artistic corespunzător și care, în același timp, să aducă cu sine frumusețe, bucurie și înălțare sufletească maselor evreiești, care sînt gata să primească și să spijine cuvîntul cinstit și artistic în limba noastră idiș.” Moșe Lax, (title unknown) *Ikuf-Bleter* July 2, 1946 (page unknown).
- 110 Bercovici 199; Kuller, *Evreii în România 190*; Kuller, “Difuzarea” 60.
- 111 Bercovici 199.
- 112 U(ry) B(enador), “Despre teatrul IKUF și alte lucruri culturale” (newspaper, date unknown): 2.
- 113 Emil Dorian, “Ceva despre teatrul idiș. Amintiri și note” *ACSIER*, Dosar 6-G, 4.
- 114 *Ibid.* 5-6.
- 115 *Ibid.* 9.
- 116 *Ibid.* 10.
- 117 Letter from Otto Marcovici to the General Directorate for Theaters, ASR, Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor. Direcția Teatrelor, Dosar 84/ 1948, (unnumbered).
- 118 ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 7/ 1948.
- 119 (Author unknown), “Teatrul Evreesc de Artă IKUF s-a deschis” *Unirea* (date unknown, probably March 1948): 3. For a detailed account on the titles under which Sholem Aleykhem’s works were published in English see Louis Fridhandler, *Indexes to the Yiddish Works of Sholem Aleichem and their English Translations* available on-line at: <http://yiddish.haifa.ac.il/SholAley/indices.pdf>, here pg. 35.
- 120 Bercovici 202.
- 121 Bercovici 200.
- 122 Decree No. 21583/ 1948, ASR, Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor. Direcția Teatrelor, Dosar 84/ 1948, (unnumbered).
- 123 Request addressed to the Minister of Arts and Information by Bernard Lebli, June 19, 1948, ASR, Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor, Dosar 6/ 1950, (unnumbered).
- 124 “Program Stagiunea 1948” *ACSIER*, Dosar 79, Doc. 44 (individual pages unnumbered).
- 125 *Shtetl* means small Jewish township in Eastern Europe.
- 126 “Ansamblul de astăzi al teatrului Ikuf format din elemente adunate din trupe răzlețe este totuși păstrătorul unanim al unui manierism—care caracteriza teatrul evreiesc—devenit cu vremea o tradiție—a expresionismului.” Simion Alterescu, “Teatrul Evreesc I.K.U.F: ‘Lozul cel mare’ comedie de Șolem Aleichem” *Rampa* April 3, 1948: (page unknown).

- 127 *Ibid.*
- 128 "Spectacolul de la Ikuf dincolo de numeroasele calități pe care le vom pomeni mai la vale păstrează însă păcatul acestui formalism de care cu vremea teatrul evreiesc va trebui să se desbare." *Ibid.*
- 129 *Ibid.*
- 130 Ion Marin Sadoveanu, "Teatrul Evreesc 'IKUF': Șolem Aleichem: 'Lozul cel mare 200,000'" Timpul April 6, 1948: (page unknown).
- 131 "În general un spectacol interesant, de trudă, de bun început și mai ales, în stăruință și entuziasm al tuturor colaboratorilor, de nădejdi pentru o rodnică vieață de artă." *Ibid.*
- 132 *Ibid.*
- 133 Ludovic Bruckstein quoted in Mioara St. Cremene, "Începutul unei literaturi dramatice noi de limbă idiș: 'Schimbul de Noapte' de L. Bru[c]kstein la Teatrul Evreesc de Stat" Contemporanul No. 164 (date, page unknown).
- 134 Cf. Rotman 113.
- 135 Cremene; I. G. Voinescu, "Cronică dramatică: Schimbul de noapte" (newspaper, date, page unknown).
- 136 Sara Feuer, "La Teatrul Evreesc de Stat se repetă piesa 'Schimbul de noapte' de L. Bru[c]kstein" (newspaper, date unknown): 2.
- 137 Sadoveanu, "Teatrul Evreesc de Stat: 'Schimbul de noapte' de d. Ludovic Bruckstein" Universul October 13, 1949: (page unknown).
- 138 Valentin Silvestru, "O piesă și un spectacol care arată odată mai mult de ce luptăm pentru pace: 'Schimbul de noapte' de Ludovic Bruckstein pe scena Teatrului Evreesc de Stat" Flacăra October 15, 1949: 5.
- 139 Cf. Jost Hermand, "'Der häßliche Deutsche wird wieder schön!' Das westdeutsche Wandlungsbild in den Nachrichtenmagazinen der Luce-Presse (1947-1955)" Angewandte Literatur. Politische Strategien in den Massenmedien (Berlin: Sigma, 1996) 73-87.
- 140 "Probabil că nu a studiat îndeajuns condițiile în care lucrează astăzi muncitorul evreu și problemele pe care i le pune noul fel de viață. Lupta de clasă nu s'a terminat, ea cunoaște forme speciale în sânul populației evrești din Republica noastră. Starea de fericire completă în care se găsesc cele patru personaje din prolog și epilog nu este conformă cu realitatea; ele vorbesc numai despre dușmanul de peste granițe și dau impresia că aci au lichidat cu burghezia vrăjmașe." Silvestru.
- 141 Bercovici 276.
- 142 Silvestru, "'Ceii doi Kune-lem!' de A. Goldfaden la teatrul Evreesc de Stat" Flacăra October 24, 1948: 14-15; Aurel Baranga, "Teatrul Evreesc de Stat (fost teatrul IKUF): 'Ceii doi Kune Lemel' de A. Goldfaden in regia lui M. Rubinger" Libertatea November 4, 1948: 2; Sadoveanu, "Teatrul Evreesc de Stat: 'Revizorul' de N. Gogol" Universul April 3, 1949: (page unknown); Cr[emene], "Câteva probleme în legătură cu activitatea Teatrului Evreesc de Stat (Pe marginea spectacolului 'Revizorul')" Contemporanul No. 134 (date

- unknown): 10 and 12; Cremene, "La Teatrul Evreesc de Stat 'Intrigă și amor' de Schiller" Contemporanul (probably February) 1949: (page unknown); Sadoveanu, "Teatrul Evreesc de Stat: Fr. Schiller: 'Intrigă și amor'" Națiunea February 4, 1949: (page unknown).
- 143 "Raport de activitate în perioada 1 ianuarie 1951 – 1 aprilie 1951" ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 34/ 1951, 10-19, here 16.
- 144 *Ibid.*
- 145 Grözinger 255.
- 146 Cf. S. Stein, "Beim bukarester idische melukhe-teater: 'In shotn funem palmenboym'" IKUF-Blätter March 3, 1951: 2.
- 147 Writing from the TES to the General Directorate for Theaters, September 24, 1948, ASR, Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor, Direcția Teatrelor, Dosar 84/ 1948, 15.
- 148 Writings from the IKUF to the General Directorate for Theaters, May 12 and 13, 1948, ASR, Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor, Direcția Teatrelor Dos 84/ 1948, 23.
- 149 "[...] rolul teatrului în general, acela al ridicării nivelului cultural al populației și a mobilizării ei în vederea construirii socialismului." Cremene, "La Teatrul Evreesc de Stat 'Intrigă și Amor' de Schiller."
- 150 "Proces-verbal al ședinței din 21 iunie 1949," ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 13/ 1949, 56-67, here 64.
- 151 "Raport cu privire la activitatea teatrelor evreiești de stat din București și Iași" February 9-15, 1950, ASR, Fond CC al PCR (Cancelarie I), Dosar 24/ 1950, 19-24, here 21-22.
- 152 *Ibid.* 22.
- 153 *Ibid.* 20.
- 154 "Dare de seamă, 1 iulie – 30 septembrie 1951," ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 34/ 1951, 57-66, here 65.
- 155 "Dare de seamă, 1 ianuarie – 1 iunie 1952," ASR, Comitetul Democrat Evreesc, Dosar 42/ 1952, 22-40, here 32.
- 156 Cf. also Kuller, *Evreii în România* 192; Kuller, "Difuzarea" 61-62.
- 157 Kuller, *Evreii în România* 186; Kuller, "Difuzarea" 56.
- 158 Willy Moglescu, "Teatrul evreesc" Contribuția evreilor din România la cultură și civilizație, Nicolae Cajal/ Hary Kuller (Ed.) (București: [Hasefer], 1996) 374-381, here 379.
- 159 "Teatrul evreesc a fost instituția care a oglindit evreii din România cel mai bine [...]." Interview with Dr. Mirjam Bercovici at her residence in Bucharest, July 5, 2006.