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POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY IN JEWISH ROMANIAN INTELLECTUAL LIFE DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD: THE A. L. ZISSU – W. FILDERMAN DEBATE

The current article aims at demonstrating that, despite the general perception launched by the large bibliography concerning the political history of the Jewish community in Romania during the interwar period, the conflicting relationship between Wilhelm Filderman, the leader of the Jewish community, and A. L. Zissu, the Zionist ideologist, was severely undermined by a commonality of aims and goals which determined the two intellectuals to recognize it and to attempt a potential rapprochement during moments of crisis; the projected rapprochement was constantly bound to fail due to the opposing strategies of pursuing the goals, general political discourses and eventually ways of relating to the central concept of *law*. My demonstration starts and utilizes as a theoretical motive the concept of “narcissism of minor differences” which enjoys currently a long and profitable career in areas such as conflict resolution, ethnic studies and international relations as it is able to explain processes taking place between groups (see Michael Ignatieff), but which initially pointed out to individual and personal relationships as it is visible in Ernest Crawley’s and Sigmund Freud’s approaches. Drawing theoretically the limits and main direction of the current analysis, I reconstructed the intellectual profile, as well as the personal relationship between the two political figures, in order to stress their individualities in terms of background, education, professional evolution and political discourse, but also I planned to demonstrate that internally the aims were common, although the means and the paths taken in order to accomplish them were different. The revelation came while reading the mostly interesting exchange of letters between A. L. Zissu and W. Filderman during late 1941 in which both came to this open conclusion of opposing stances while acknowledging the great contributions that both had within the political life of the Jewish

community in Romania. In order to support my demonstration, I heavily relied on memoirs, letters, autobiographical writings, monographs and articles dedicated to Zissu and Filderman, but also on their literary and political writings.

1. “The narcissism of minor differences”: The Career of a Concept

Michael Ignatieff has recently revamped the old concept of the “narcissism of minor differences” transforming it into a scholarly explanatory tool for ethnic conflicts and group identification which became thus a productive theoretical approach in international relations, conflict resolution and ethnic studies flourishing during the last three decades. Although my study focuses on individuals and on ideological discourses, the essence of Ignatieff’s work may be used for a better formulation of my conclusions, as “brothers can hate each other more passionately than strangers can.”¹

Going back to the origins of the concept, we may discover that, actually, nor Ignatieff is the first one to formulate it, neither the concept referred from the beginning to groups and ethnicity matters. Sigmund Freud brought the concept to fame in 1930, when he wrote a large conceptualization of the “narcissism of minor differences” in his *Civilization and its Discontents*:

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. I once discussed the phenomenon that it is precisely communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and in ridiculing each other—Germans and South Germans, the English and the Scotch, and so on. I gave this phenomenon the name of ‘the narcissism of minor differences,’ a name which does not do much to explain it. We can now see that it is a convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression, by means of which cohesion between the members of the community is made easier.²

This analysis represents the redefinition of a former study of his published in 1918, *The Taboo of Virginity*, in which it becomes clear that originally the idea was borrowed from British anthropologist Ernest

Crawley and it basically was linked to individual and psychological processes:

Crawley, in language which differs only slightly from the current terminology of psychoanalysis, declares that each individual is separated from the others by a 'taboo of personal isolation', and that it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them. It would be tempting to pursue this idea and to derive from this 'narcissism of minor differences' the hostility which in every human relation we see fighting successfully against feelings of fellowship and overpowering the commandment that all men should love one another.³

The current short insight into the history of the concept shows us that the illuminating theoretical tool started from an originally non-ethnic non-collective observation which an anthropologist such as Ernest Crawley made initially on individuals and on their social relationships in general. Far from being exclusively the explanatory tool of ethnic and collective conflicts, the "narcissism of minor differences" served originally as a tool for understanding psychological and intellectual processes such as the one under discussion here.

2. The Filderman – Zissu Debate Reflected in the Secondary Literature

In general, all historical accounts on the interwar period perceive the political situation of the Jewish community in Romania as being mainly animated by the long lasting enmity between Wilhelm Filderman and A. L. Zissu; this fact became practically general knowledge and historians rarely question the origins and the last days of the conflict in order to bring new insights into this almost stereotypical approach. As little attention as Jewish Romanian political history received during the last decades within the historiography of the Romanian Jewry, if compared with other more favored areas of scientific investigation (intellectual and economic history, anti-Semitism, Holocaust studies), the researcher did not go over or more deeper into this general perception.

The few studies analyzing the Jewish Romanian political life consolidate or offer some more elements supporting this perception. Thus, Claudia

Ursutiu, in her remarkable book, *Senatori și deputați evrei în Parlamentul României (1919-1931)*, starts a whole new section by discussing “The Jewish Political Orientations in the Romanian Parliament” with a special subchapter “Jewish Ideologies and Ideologues: W. Filderman – A. L. Zissu”. From the beginning, the ideological opposition is clearly marked starting from the title through the antagonism established textually between the two political leaders, but this suggestion in the manner titles and subtitles are formulated is also consolidated within the text, the author stating that “actually, the two Jewish ideologists, intransigent with their doctrines – the ‘assimilism’ moderated by the need for preserving a cultural and religious Jewish identity and the Zionist nationalism – monopolized almost exclusively the battle of ideas within Romanian Jewish political life”.⁴ Thus, in Claudia Ursutiu’s perspective, the ideological debate animating the two ideologists was basically the most important one within Jewish political life, with Filderman and Zissu occupying the center of the stage as main actors.

In the only so-far official monograph on the life and activity of Wilhelm Filderman, *Dr. W. Filderman. 50 de ani din istoria iudaismului român*, S. Schafferman dedicates a whole chapter to “Disagreement on the Jewish street”, followed by “Between W. Filderman and A. L. Zissu” in order to suggest once more the opposition between the two intellectuals, concluding at some point that “It is without any doubt that the rivalry between U. E. R. (Union of Romanian Jews) and P. N. E. (Jewish National Party) was based on the rivalry between Filderman and Zissu.”⁵ Thus, once more, Schafferman reduces the political tensions within the Jewish community to the personal and ideological tension between the two men of ideas.

The first editor of Filderman’s *Memoirs and Diaries*,⁶ Jean Ancel had a similar perception regarding the relation between the two parties. He considered that Zissu’s attacks targeting Filderman were undeserved and not always justified, but they managed to cause a clear separation within the Jewish electorate; in exchange, Filderman never wrote or manifested reactions against the Zionist camp, moreover being often and profoundly involved into the activity of the international Zionist organizations in Romania and lending them his full support. According to Jean Ancel, Zissu’s “notorious aversion against Filderman” deeply influenced the general profile of the political life of the Jewish Romanian community during the interwar period.

A reputed analyst of the Romanian and Jewish intellectual life, Leon Volovici investigated the issue from the perspective of ideological confrontations and intellectual debates. In his seminal article on “Romanian Jewish Intellectuals after World War I: Social and Cultural Trends”, Leon Volovici noted that “in Jewish intellectual life, Zissu was the most powerful personality opposed to the policy of Filderman and U. E. R.”.⁷

Summing up, the centrality of the Zissu-Filderman conflict presented in the historiography of Jewish interwar politics is an obvious fact, showing also its consequences onto the electorate. Generally perceived as two personalities radically opposed to each other in terms of intellectual, political, ideological perspective, and also in terms of strategies of action, the two intellectuals were basically transformed into symbols and identified forcefully to the ideological trends which were central to the political life of the time.

The natural question following this investigation reflects a larger complexity of factors; if tracing the differences between two individuals, two groups and even two ideologies is easy, may this be all encompassing in terms of explaining a complex process such an ideological debate or a socio-intellectual conflict? Naturally, this scholarly belief of adversity proves to be the easiest to be adopted when trying to find an explanation for the conflict, but was this all and what is it left outside opposition?

3. The Theorist and the Practitioner.

A. L. Zissu – W. Filderman Correspondence

A series of letter exchanged between A. L. Zissu and Wilhelm Filderman during September – December 1941 comes to bring a new personal insight into the relationship established between the two political figures. The correspondence started while Filderman established contact with Ion Antonescu and was trying to alter the regime applied to the Jewish population. This series of letters is initiated by Zissu who projects a necessary collaboration imposed by dramatic circumstances between two persons who opposed each other for decades and Wilhelm Filderman responds favorably. Eventually, the communication breaks as Zissu considers that Filderman should resign and leave his position to Zissu, request rejected by Filderman, finding the letter insulting. In a later letter from March 1942, Zissu apologized as having been very distressed by

Filderman's politics and suggests the end of the conflict due to the tragic evolution of the events as it was necessary to ally and struggle together. Apart from the actual reason which caused the letter exchange, a constant evaluation of their relationship, as well as each other's past political activity emerged; thus, the content of the letters brings new insights into the relationship established between the two politicians.

Long-Term Relationship. As the letter exchange testifies, the relationship between the two political figures was one between two individuals who "have been debating for a quarter of a century and who took parallel paths"⁸ as Zissu declared. Belonging to the same political generation, the two intellectuals came to the public eye relatively in the same time, in the second decade of the 20th century; while Filderman joined the Union of Indigenous Jews (U. E. P.) and embarked on a political career, Zissu started his activity in the Zionist camp and his editorial activity causing Filderman in his turn to declare that he, as well, was "following for over two decades (Zissu's) activity".⁹

A. L. Zissu's Criticism: "*Breaking the Jewish Law*". This long-term political intimacy made Zissu acknowledge the role and the abilities manifested by the leader of the Union of Romanian Jews (U. E. R.): "I should not and I don't want to deny and forget that you are the most indicated and that you have the right to bear the burden which you accepted a quarter of a century ago by your free will; I also gladly recognize your remarkable skills, your unusual work, the impressive energy and the devotion which you fully displayed".¹⁰ Eventually, after criticizing Filderman, he concluded that "I considered you technically capable, the most capable for the position you occupy".¹¹

Although this sudden expression of appreciation might come as a surprise after more than two decades of open confrontation, Zissu did not spare his criticism, reproaching Filderman that his political results were reached "most of times (I am speaking of the past) breaking the commandments of a dignified authentic Judaism – to the benefit of the Jewish community in the country".¹² Also, Zissu considered Filderman as having "doctrinal and conceptual sins; apart from a lack of political faith, meaning apart from acknowledging your spiritual amateurism in political life".¹³

These reproaches being expressed, Zissu's pedagogical need to avoid "the ruin of the sinner"¹⁴ by planning his correction led to his constant public challenging Filderman's work. Zissu's hidden pedagogical aims expressed through his "frantic campaign of a quarter of a century"¹⁵ hoping

for “a revival in your conscience and conduct”¹⁶ could be identified when he declared that “I do not refuse you the honors which you deserve, but I will not spare you, as I did not in the past either, of my criticism until that revival in which I continue to believe and to hope for will take place in yourself”.¹⁷

In conclusion, from Zissu’s part, Wilhelm Filderman had “the right to bear the burden”¹⁸ of leadership as being capable, hard-working, energetic and devoted to his job. Nevertheless, Zissu is criticizing once more the fact that Filderman was “breaking the commandments of a dignified authentic Judaism”¹⁹ for the community. This aspect in Filderman’s work determined Zissu to start a frenetic campaign to revive Filderman’s conscience for a long time manifested in debates. Their conflictual relationship was due to their “parallel paths”, even “divergent”, which led to a large debate and polemic, eventually, Zissu defining their relationship as the one between *opponents*: “I am your political opponent; *the* political opponent”,²⁰ but which in times of crisis, he suggests abandoning and finding a common path to follow.

In opposition, Zissu defined his own public position in relation to the one acknowledged for Filderman as “an opinion leader, a seismograph of the Jewish sensitivity, a mentor, a spiritual guide, who, if I preferred loneliness, he did not do it in order to taste the selfish pleasures of his ivory tower, but in order to preserve the cleanliness and – as much as I was able – to enrich the spiritual and ethic heritage of eternal Judaism”.²¹ In a different letter, Zissu describes himself as “a politician. Because I have political instinct, perspicacity, sound intuition of what it is useful and what it harms us. And most importantly, I have the passion of fulfilling the task which I took over and the conscience of my duty as nobody else”,²² despite his “complete lack of political ambition”.²³ In order to simplify their relationship, Zissu defines his role as a “spokesperson of non-secular Judaism”²⁴ in relation to the one acknowledged for Filderman, “the political representative of the Jews from the country”.²⁵

W. Filderman’s Approach: “The Theorist and the Practitioner”. In turn, Filderman’s pragmatic approach places their relationship in a non-oppositional perspective; in his view, their political approaches were simply different in terms of *appearance / shape / form* rather than in terms of *substance / content*. He does not identify any opposition, but rather different facets of the same phenomenon.²⁶

The explanation for such an approach is simply generated by transferring their discourses on the same level as in the classical opposition between

the *theorist* and the *practitioner*; they differ only in terms of manifestation and means of action, rather than in content as A. L. Zissu was so keen to express. The difference emerges visibly in instances when the freedom to act according to one's status is affected; if the theorist has the freedom to follow his principles, the practitioner has to act in connection with the present situation and according to practical norms: "...what separates us is more the appearance (form) than the substance. You were a theorist, I was a practitioner. If the theorist may open new ways and new horizons, it is not allowed to the practitioner who has the responsibility of the current survival to apply from the theoretical realm but what he considers possible at the moment when he acts. It is the materialization of the saying "que le temps respecte peu ce qui se fait sans lui".²⁷

The Need for Collaboration. Despite all these oppositions and distinctions, the initiative of resuming direct contact and collaboration came from A. L. Zissu who considered that "the primordial commandments deriving from the Jewish tragedy caused both of us to stray for a moment from our divergent directions in order to find ourselves on a common road indicated by them".²⁸ Thus, "the tragic circumstances to which the Jewish community is currently subjected determined two people who have been debating for a quarter of a century and who took parallel paths to get closer".²⁹ In order to be able to collaborate, Zissu proposed that, due to their distinct personalities, it was necessary to give up "to the substance of our personalities and if we do not betray the fate that temperament, ideology, perception of the world, destiny, spiritual background and natural abilities offered to you and myself".³⁰

Using from now on the 1941 letter exchange between Wilhelm Filderman and A. L. Zissu as a second *leitmotiv* for my research (together with the concept of "narcissism of minor differences"), I will basically focus on the two different perceptions of their political, but also personal, relationship; if A. L. Zissu perceives the state of affairs as an ongoing *conflict* (using terms such as *adversaries*, *opponents*), confirming the largely acknowledged perspective launched by the secondary literature on the topic, Wilhelm Filderman's view on their common past is radically different, pointing towards a different type of reading of the situation. Stressing for *distinctiveness*, rather than opposition and adversity, Filderman objects to the idea of conflict, stating a situation in which the two politicians were going same direction, although using different means which would make the opposition *theorist vs. practitioner* and *substance vs. form* a productive one. Starting from this new way of perceiving the

situation, I started looking for the common substance mentioned by Filderman, rather than for the opposing grounds populating the different approaches on interwar Jewish political history.

4. The Portrait of a Leader: W. Filderman

Returning to Zissu's characterization of Wilhelm Filderman, writing that "you are the most indicated and that you have the right to bear the burden" of leadership, indeed, Filderman is generally perceived as the most important Jewish leader during the interwar period, as well as the most important non-Zionist politician during that period, a brilliant lawyer and a skilled representative of the Romanian Jewry both in relation with the Romanian authorities, but also internationally.

Determined by his professional training and his formative experiences, Filderman once stated that

The political man shapes the life of the people and he is not allowed to ask but what he thinks it is necessary and it may adapt to the moment he lives in. This is why we should not be accused for not including in the program everything we could, but what we think we may accomplish today. The moment when we would be able to ask for more will come; today we ask only what it is strictly necessary. The future will continue. Which country, what people reached civilization in sudden leaps? Who wants to climb a ladder should do it step by step, otherwise one may fall together with the ladder.³¹

One of his very few personal statements untangling for us and for the public his adaptive strategy when approaching the practical aspects of politics, this fragment is extremely significant for the way he understood to accomplish his task. Supporting Filderman's self-definition as a *practitioner* as opposing Zissu's position as a public *theorist*, the quotation helps the reader follow, as on a conceptual map, the significant moments in his life and career which shaped his perspective on politics and life of the community and functions.

Born in 1882 in Bucharest, Wilhelm Filderman came from the family of a small businessman, owner of "a printing and bookbinding shop",³² as he confessed in his *Memoirs*; after the untimely death of his father, his mother struggled by herself with her lingerie workshop in order to

support her five children out of whom only Willy studied for a university degree. Bucharest was, at the time of his birth, a multicultural capital with a traditional Jewish quarter; the level of acculturation and integration of the Jewish community was significantly higher than in other parts of the country and thus emerged the option of many families to send their children to Romanian language schools and to study at the university for professional degrees. Filderman's *Memoirs* account that young Willy, extremely gifted for public speaking, went to Romanian language schools and studied French very early, being also interested in acquiring knowledge of Jewish history and notions of Judaism with a local rabbi. After attending "Matei Basarab" High School (1894-1902) where he first met his colleague, future Marshall Ion Antonescu, Filderman left for Paris to enroll into the Law School (1902-1906) for a BA and, afterwards, for a PhD in comparative constitutional law (1907-1909), returning only briefly in 1905 to Romania for the due military service.

Returning highly educated to Romania, Filderman was not able to practice the legal profession for which he was trained into as, just like the rest of the Jewish population by that time, he had no Romanian citizenship and the access to bureaucratic, state-funded positions was therefore blocked to the Jewish population. Between 1910 and 1912, he taught Romanian at the Jewish High School "Cultura"; after receiving Romanian citizenship in 1912, he entered the Bar and started his own successful practice in Bucharest.

Constituting as a solid base for his future arguments related to the war effort on behalf of the Jewish population in Romania, Filderman's war experience was impressive; enrolled in both the First Balkan War (1912-1913) and the First World War (1916-1918), he had a first hand experience of the statistical data collected later for his reaction³³ against anti-Semitic allegations on behalf of the right wing political voices.

Considered the most important leader of the Jewish community in Romania between 1919 and 1947, leading almost all the non-Zionist organizations of the Romanian Jews, Filderman started his political career in 1913 when he was elected in the Central Committee of the Bucharest branch of U. E. P. (Union of Indigenous Jews); led mostly by reputed old-fashioned political figures such as Adolf Stern, U. E. P. represented a great platform for young Filderman who became in 1921 vice-president of U. E. P. and eventually president of the organization in 1923 (when he changed

its name into U. E. R. – the Union of Romanian Jews).³⁴ His profile as a leader of the Romanian Jewry was consolidated when he became member in the Romanian Parliament on the lists of P. N. L. (National Liberal Party) during its 1927-1930 mandate (Filderman left the Parliament after only a year, 1927-1928, due to internal disagreements).

His international exposure during his studies and legal training, as well as his impressive knowledge of foreign languages, especially French, turned him into an outstanding representative of the Romanian Jews abroad; thus he participated in the Paris Peace Conference as U. E. P. delegate between 1919 and 1921, joining the efforts of elaborating the Minorities' Treaty. In 1920, he became also the president of Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) – the Romanian branch, while in 1929 he became the president of the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sohnut), Bucharest branch (on behalf of the non-Zionists), after being a founding member and member of the general board of the international organization starting from 1920. Similarly, Filderman was the president of the Romanian branch of B'nai B'rith and member in the general board from New York starting from 1929.

His activity within the Jewish community included also other public positions such as vice-president (starting from 1924) and president of the Jewish Community of Bucharest (1931-1933) and president of the Union of the Jewish Communities in Romania (1929-1948). A victim of the anti-Jewish legislation (excluded from the Bar in 1943) and of the political repression (he was deported to Transnistria for three months in 1943 for opposing a special governmental tax on the Jewish population, returning to Bucharest only due to high level diplomatic interventions), he briefly returned to Jewish communitarian activity after the end of the World War II when he became the president of the Jewish Council and reorganized the Federation of the Union of the Jewish Communities (1945-1948).

In 1948, after the change of the political regime, when his projected activity was no longer possible, Filderman left Romania illegally and settled in France, just in time before him being trialed by the Bucharest Military Tribunal later that year. Although he visited Palestine (and later Israel) three times (1926, 1951 and 1956), Filderman remained in France, faithful to his political credo, until his death in 1963.

5. A. L. Zissu as a seismograph: A Self-Portrait

A. L. Zissu's life revolved around two major, basically connected and interdependent, poles: religion and politics. In one of his studies, *Nu există cult mosaic*, a theological demonstration of the impossibility of reducing Judaism to the status of a religious denomination, Zissu concludes by declaring that "My childhood and adolescence were consumed by the incandescent flame of a religious frenzy which not only once opened to me the heavenly gates of ecstasy. I am, therefore, an initiated – an initiated through grace, through intense experiencing, not through adaptation and not through dogmatic adaptation; initiated through "dvekut", as it is called in the kabalistic language, which is the realization of the metaphysical adherence to divinity, so I may say that in this area I am able to speak with the certainty of the irreversible experience".³⁵ At the other extreme, his political fervor, manifested through a devoted Zionist adherence, determined him to perceive himself as "an opinion leader, a seismograph of the Jewish sensitivity, a mentor, a spiritual guide, who, when preferring loneliness, he did not do it in order to taste the selfish pleasures of his ivory tower, but in order to preserve the cleanliness and – as much as he was able – to enrich the spiritual and ethic heritage of eternal Judaism".³⁶ Animated by his profound religious structure, Zissu's political discourse and actions, as it will be visible later, were organized accordingly by the belief in the divine law, just as the legal training in the case of Filderman dictated his sense of justice and attachment to secular law.

Writer, essayist and journalist, political ideologist and businessman, A. L. Zissu is a complex and at times paradoxical figure of the Jewish political, but also intellectual life during the interwar period. One of the important Zionist leaders, definitely the most articulate Zionist ideologist in Romania, more specifically a representative of the revisionist Zionism, Zissu left his mark on the literary, journalistic and political milieus of his time.

Born in 1888 in a large Hassidic family in Piatra Neamt, A. L. Zissu was one of the ten children of an accountant and received a solid Jewish education from his early years. Knowing both Yiddish and Hebrew, knowledgeable in Jewish thought and mysticism, as well as in biblical exegesis and Talmudic literature, Zissu was a very religious man and, in 1908, he received the rabbinical diploma (recognized by the Romanian authorities), although he never used it.

Nevertheless, in 1910, Zissu had started working for the "Moldova" Bank in Iasi until 1914 when he organized and led a strike described

in his novel, *Marcu sin Marcu*. Important to note for his future political trajectory is also his conflict with the nationalist student group led by Professor A. C. Cuza in Iasi in 1910. Getting married and starting his own business career, Zissu moved to Bucharest in 1914, working first as an administrator of a sugar factory in Ripiceni, then of a metal ware store and forestry exploitation, starting business activity in publishing and journalism as well.

Although his public position came to prominence due to his political and financial activity, his *violon d'Ingres* was journalism and literature, being very active in the journalistic, cultural and literary life. He started very early to contribute to both Romanian, but also Jewish publications, especially to leftist and culturally avant-gardist publications, some of them founded by him and his young friends. In 1904, he made his debut in the Romanian-language Jewish journal *Egalitatea*, followed in 1914 by his debut in the Yiddish magazine, *Likht*; in Iasi, in 1911, he founded together with P. Constantinescu-Iasi the literary journal *Floare albastră*, followed in 1912 by the Hebrew journal *Ha-Mekitz*, initiated by A. L. Zissu together with M. Braunstein-Mebashan in Piatra Neamt. In 1918, he started enthusiastically the project of the short-lived review *Spicul*, together with Gala Galaction and L. Algazy. Despite his early effervescence directed towards literary journals, his masterpiece was the national Jewish daily *Mântuirea* (1919-1922) which he founded, acting as its director and as a permanent collaborator and which appears as one of the most important Jewish political publications during the interwar period and also as the major Zionist journal in Romania.

Instrumented through his journal and contributions in press, Zissu's reputation as a Zionist leader and ideologist was consolidated at the same time with his becoming the initiator of the Zionist group *Renasterea* (1922). Important representative of the revisionist Zionism and leader of the Zionist movement in Romania, Zissu was also the founder of the Jewish Party in 1930.

During 1937-1944, A. L. Zissu was affected by the anti-Jewish legislation, had no occupation and was forbidden to publish, acting only as the president of the Migration Bureau for Palestine, office which attempted to save Romanian Jewry through international efforts supporting its migration. In 1944, he was imprisoned on political grounds at Târgu-Jiu for two months for sending an insulting letter to the Jewish Central Office (organism created by Ion Antonescu in order to better control the Jewish community) during the Antonescu regime. After the end of the World War

II, he attempted to recreate the Jewish Party and became again the leader of the Zionist movement in Romania for a short period.

In 1950, during the Zionist trials, Zissu received a life sentence for his political activity and remained in prison until 1956, when he was released due to his severe medical condition and allowed to leave for Israel, dying a few months later in Tel Aviv.

6. Addressing to the Public:

A. L. Zissu's and W. Filderman's Works

Investigating libraries and archives, the discursive traces left by the two political figures confirm the initial dichotomist perception; following their political argumentation, if Wilhelm Filderman follows a solid *legal discourse*, A. L. Zissu moves freely between a *theological and essayistic discourse* and a literary corpus able to illustrate in more sensitive terms his ideas already presented in his other writings.

W. Filderman was not a writer or a journalist; he was a lawyer defending a cause and therefore his activity was based in the Court and in his office. Nevertheless, whenever necessary, his argumentation was collected in pamphlets and in small volumes destined to answer and deconstruct anti-Jewish stereotypes and public attacks. Therefore, among his publications, we count *Adevărul asupra problemei evreiești din România în lumina textelor religioase și a statisticei: urmate de listele nominale ale ostașilor evrei morți, răniți, prizonieri, dispăruți și decorați în războiul pentru întregirea României* (1925), *Problema muncii naționale: criza în barouri* (1935), *Răspuns unor mistificări or Unde duce antisemitismul*. Statistical, demographical, legal and constitutional arguments were brought together into a great effort of organizing a reality in order to respond to anti-Semitic allegations, as well as to formulate and further claims. His personal writings,³⁷ autobiographies and memoirs, follow somehow a similar line, constituting an *addenda* to his political activity as they tend to explain retrospectively his actions by placing them in the context of Jewish and Romanian political and social life. Such works are *Pro domo mea: rectificări, autobiografie* (1937) and his *Memoirs and Diaries* recently published in Israel.

On the contrary, Zissu was a devoted writer and essayist, reputed journalist and polemist for whom writing represented first of all a way of expressing his ideas rather than justifying his actions. His essays and

ideological writings (*Noi... Breviar iudaic*, 1932; *Logos, Israel, Biserica*, 1937; *Nu exista cult mosaic*, 1947) were also illustrated in literary terms in *David Brandeis* (1914), *Spovedania unui candelabru* (1926), *Ereticul de la Mănăstirea Neamtu* (1930), *Marcu sin Marcu* (1934), *Calea calvarului* (1935), *Samson și noul Dagon* (1940). Thus, Zissu's theological and essayistic writings came to justify his ideological discourse and were continued and illustrated through literary works and journalistic activity. The coherence of an ideological construct emerging under different forms on various levels of intellectual expression revealed a determined ideologist and a great thinker, despite the unevenness of his works and the thesis-oriented character of his literary activity diminishing often its artistic value.

As simplistic as it would seem, this distinction and opposition between the legal and theological and ideological discourses of the two intellectuals may be easily justified through their background, formative experiences, professional and educational training and occupations; all these factors previously presented and analyzed here shaped basically two predictable intellectual types and model trajectories deepening even more the already mentioned obsessive dichotomy generated by the historiography dedicated to the Jewish Romanian political life during the interwar period. If differences are easily recognized, the common substance mentioned by Wilhelm Filderman in his letters should from now occupy the center of the current analysis; but first, a short survey of the evolution of the relationship between Wilhelm Filderman and the Zionist movement should be presented, therefore also the connection with A. L. Zissu, in order to trace the factual origins of the conflict.

7. The Anatomy of a Conflict: the UEP and the Zionist Movement

The history of the relationship between U. E. P., Wilhelm Filderman and the Zionist movement might bring some new insights into the monolithically defined approach, fixing everything into an insurmountable opposition.

Going back in time, before the end of WW1, tracing clear ideological borders would be impossible; thus, documents show that the Zionist movement included often U. E. P. leaders and political figures who adhered to the Jewish national revival, but who were also following the

non-Zionist way of struggle for equal rights in the Diaspora defined by U. E. P. Such an example was Horia Carp who, although a leader of U. E. R., he was also a director of Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal), Zionist international organization. Thus, U. E. P. included a great number of Zionists who did not find any serious ideological obstacles in activating within both political directions. Filderman himself, despite the ideological disagreements, maintained a long and fruitful collaboration with different international Zionist organizations supporting their fundraising actions, although never being a Zionist activist. Thus, as the political platforms were still unclear, *ideologically* the U. E. P. supported the Zionist ideal of creating the Jewish state, while Zionist adherents joined the U. E. P. efforts of continuing the struggle for civic and political rights in the Diaspora, while *practically*, U. E. P. and W. Filderman supported many of the actions of the Zionist movement in Romania.

The disagreements started to emerge more clearly after 1918, when a new generation of Zionists emerged from within the student body with a more articulated and clearly defined political discourse.

Filderman was not a Zionist, but he was not an anti-Zionist either; his declaration at the inauguration of the Romanian branch of the Jewish Agency in 1929 was that "I believe that, Zionist or non-Zionist, a Romanian Jew can not oppose to the creation of a Jewish national state", thus publicly stating the relation and the compatibility between the Zionist doctrine and his political views as a Jew and as a leader of the U. E. R.

Filderman contributed to fundraising activities for Zionist organizations such as Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund) and Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal) which used to collect funds for buying lands in Palestine and for developing agricultural areas. Therefore, Filderman participated in meetings and fundraising campaigns, launched public appeals to Zionist actions for collecting funds, delivered speeches of support on these occasions, organized public events on his behalf for fundraising purposes. Apart from the direct involvement into these practical matters, Filderman acted also as a facilitator for Zionist activities such as presenting the Zionist cause to the Romanian political groups, favoring visits of the major figures of the Zionist Organization (Weizman and Sokolow) to Romania and facilitating their contacts with Romanian politicians.

Due to his activity, Filderman was highly appreciated by the World Zionist Organization and his collaboration was publicly praised, enjoying recognition as, for example, on Misu Weismann's behalf, thanking Filderman for his precious collaboration. His inclusion into international

Zionist organizations demonstrated once more Filderman's wide appreciation as being elected as a member in the executive committee of the Jewish Agency (Sohnut) from the creation of the organization in 1929 in Zurich. In his capacity, Filderman elaborated the founding documents and participated in all the general meetings, drafted important documents and was elected as a president of the Romanian branch. In case of need, he supported the general actions of the organization, lending them the support of his prestige, such as in the case of the temporary halting of *aliya* by the British authorities; as a reaction, Filderman drafted a protest letter on behalf of the general assembly of the Jewish Agency and went together with a delegation at the British Embassy in Bucharest in order to demand the resuming of the *aliya* process.

8. The Anatomy of a Conflict II: W. Filderman - A. L. Zissu conflict

More complicated to document is the personal conflict between Wilhelm Filderman and A. L. Zissu. By the time Wilhelm Filderman entered U. E. P. politics in 1913 and even more after WW1, U. E. P. was already a strong organization with a fair representation in the territory, while the Zionist movement was still dispersed into groups often opposing each other, and being obviously in its formative period. By the same time, A. L. Zissu entered the political scene bringing a dynamic approach to the Zionist movement and basically starting an unprecedented process of coagulation.

According to S. Schafferman, the conflict was initiated by the defiant attitude of the young Zionists around *Hatikva* review, together with A. L. Zissu, who criticized U. E. P.'s way of doing politics even before the end of WW1 and suggested their change their ideological direction from the so-called "assimilationism" to the struggle for national revival and reconstruction of the Jewish state. But while W. Filderman supported this ideological direction, he also insisted in continuing to fight for civic and political rights in Diaspora, here conflicting with the Zionists.

Even more punctually, Schafferman believes that the beginning of the divergence between the two politicians was represented by a debate that A. L. Zissu had with W. Filderman concerning the manner in which citizenship should be granted. While A. L. Zissu proposed that citizenship should be granted based on certificates issued by the Jewish

communities, W. Filderman discarded this solution as the communities were still not organized and did not function as legal or moral entities and not all the Jewish population was listed. In exchange, W. Filderman proposed that citizenship to be granted to all Jews living in Romania based on a simple declaration, this solution becoming eventually the basis of the emancipation campaign within the Paris Conference. From then on, all governments consulted U. E. P., namely W. Filderman, for drafting the citizenship legislation until it was granted, thus acknowledging his competence on juridical and communitarian problems on the international level.

The conflict continued, despite moments of practical collaboration, through their respective journals, *Curierul Israelit* as the official journal of U. E. P. / U. E. R. and *Mântuirea* for the Zionist group (after *Mântuirea's* disappearance, the attacks against W. Filderman continued through *Renașterea noastră*) confirming the existence of a tension between U. E. P., and later U. E. R., and the Zionist group.

After identifying the points of divergence and the differences between the two intellectuals, the elements which bring them together and undermine the common perception of their enmity should be found within the common *goal* and within the *manner* employed for accomplishing it; thus, the *common substance* of their public discourse, be it articulated in legal or theological and literary terms, is the Jewish *identity preservation, affirmation and representation* as a common goal, while the manner of fulfilling the task belongs to their specific intellectual trajectories: following the *divine law* commandments, or the *secular law* ordering the life of the people on everyday basis, both forms of *law* being appealed to obsessively and surprisingly in their respective public discourses.

9. Defining Jewish Identity within Modernity

Accused often of “assimilationism”, mostly by voices from the Zionist camp, U. E. R. and, therefore, Wilhelm Filderman expressed on many occasions the manner on defining Jewish identity within the current political and socio-cultural context. Therefore, at this point, it is necessary to understand in which terms both Wilhelm Filderman and A. L. Zissu defined Jewish identity within modernity, nation states and emancipation.

Naturally, the specificity of their formative experiences and intellectual background are to be found in the way they express their approach to Jewish identity; if Wilhelm Filderman pragmatically focuses on political, social and civic terms in an objective manner expressed through wide usage of acknowledged modern concepts such as *minority*, *population*, *nation* and *ethnicity*, A. L. Zissu employs a specifically spiritual approach based on subjective elements coming from within Judaism and communitarian identification. Nevertheless, despite the two opposite ways of perceiving and defining identity, the irreducibility of Jewish identity and thus the impossibility of assimilation are valid in both cases.

Thus, Filderman answers within an interview with the following clarifying terms:

The Jewish population of the country forms, without question, a religious minority because its religion is the religion of a numerical minority, but also an ethnic minority because scientifically the difference in terms of origin between the majority and the Jewish population is beyond any doubt.³⁸

A few years earlier, A. L. Zissu in one article on political representation declared that

Judaism (and implicitly the Community which it represents) may be considered a race, a nation, an idea, a vision of existence, a tragedy, a permanent universal digression, but it is definitely not a religious denomination.³⁹

Apart from the religious idealism of Zissu's approach, his consistent stance on the problem of the impossibility of reducing Judaism to a religious denomination turned into a long-term mission for the ideologist who later wrote *Nu există cult mosaic* in a period when the attempt of reducing the community representation to a mere religious denomination became a threatening option, thus forcing an assimilating approach to the Jewish population. In more pragmatic and political terms, Filderman stresses the religious and ethnic distinctiveness of the Jewish population within Romanian state, therefore pleading, just as Zissu a few years earlier, for preservation of a distinct identity in religious, ethnic and cultural terms.

Such a reduction to elementary structures was necessary as often the "assimilationist" attribute was attached to U. E. P. / U. E. R.'s, respectively

W. Filderman's manner of doing politics. Definitely, such an ideological trend existed, emerging immediately after WW1, but it enjoyed very limited success, being mainly followed by intellectuals and academics and not having a large adherence within the masses. Far from identifying with such political direction, W. Filderman and U. E. R. pleaded for integration within Romanian society, pressing for the necessity of granting equal rights to Jewish population, but also for preserving the national specificity and identity in religious, cultural and ethnic terms. An obvious clarification of the manner in which Filderman understood to distance himself from the "assimilist" accusations appears in one of his speeches when he explained that

...assimilism, if it is perceived as a complete dissolution of a plant, an animal in another environment, it is obviously impossible to be accomplished; but if by assimilation we think of the adaptation of the plant or animal to the surrounding environment, then without any doubt not even Jewish nationalism can not avoid being assimilist as the preservation of the ethnic and national Jewish essence can not exclude the adaptation of the Jewish population to the majority as Jewish people may admire and feel love for the language of the majority without abandoning its own national and ethnic Jewish essence.⁴⁰

Filderman's main fault in the eyes of A. L. Zissu was the fact that, dealing with the state and with its policy, Wilhelm Filderman acted as a lawyer and employed juridical means, treating basically the situation of the Jewish community as a simple legal issue which was supposed to be solved through legal means. For such a religious man as Zissu, such a reduction was unacceptable, justifying this way his accusations of "betraying the Jewish law" while favoring the secular one.

Nevertheless, even for a determined Zionist ideologist such as A. L. Zissu, the absence of the "assimilationist" direction and ideological trend in Romania was obvious, despite the accusations against Filderman and U. E. R., as he declared in one of his articles that "such a thing does not exist within our people, but as a euphemism".⁴¹

10. Two Political Doctrines?

Apart from the common rejection of assimilationism and struggle for identity preservation, the public discourses of the two intellectuals represented the manifestation of two different, basically opposing, political doctrines, therefore often prone to open confrontations on theoretical grounds.

A profoundly religious man and a devoted Zionist, A. L. Zissu was the ideological promoter of *integral Judaism*; starting from the concept of Jewish nationalism, Zissu envisaged that the situation of the Jewish population should be solved according to their status of a *national minority*. In this respect, socio-political issues concerning the status of the Jewish population within the Romanian state, the problem of the citizenship included, interested him only as a means for the Jewish community to preserve its spiritual identity. His radicalism in this matter was obvious and any other solution suggested for the situation of the Jewish minority which did not follow this line was severely criticized and openly opposed by the fierce ideologist; as already mentioned, his major objection to Filderman's manner of doing politics referred obsessively to his "doctrinal sins"⁴² and "betrayal of Jewish law" when appealing to secular and legal norms able to regulate the status of the Romanian population in general, including its Jewish community.

Filderman's political agenda consisted from the beginning of obtaining citizenship rights for the Jewish population in Romania, followed by the organization of the Jewish community as a national minority and by obtaining its cultural and religious autonomy. Indeed, during his mandate as a member of the Parliament on the lists of the National Liberal Party (although the mandate lasted between 1927-1930, he left due to some disagreements after one year, in 1928), Filderman succeeded 1) to receive state funding for the "mosaic cult" (syntagm and definition highly criticized by Zionists due to the assimilationist danger hidden within this manner of approaching the status of the Jewish community reducing it to a mere religious denomination) and 2) to achieve the autonomy of Jewish schools, both important steps towards accomplishing its previously defined objectives.

In this context, it appears that, despite doctrinal tensions and polemical confrontations related to radically opposed perspectives on the needed political action, Filderman reached basically the same goals that also Zissu envisaged, albeit using a different political strategy of negotiation with

the State and its representatives. But, as Filderman and U. E. R.'s legal and political strategy was adapted to the Romanian interwar political conditions and legislation, searching for ways of collaboration and mutual support and breaking the goals into more tangible and accessible objectives to be accomplished step by step, A. L. Zissu stated bluntly from the beginning the final scopes and aimed at reaching it directly and without any potential compromise, without taking into consideration the general hostile socio-political environment of the moment in Romania. Thus, connecting Zissu's ideological claims and Filderman's declarations and public actions, it became obvious that, far from any form of assimilation, both intellectuals shared similar goals, but approached them in different and specific manners, faithful to their political doctrines.

11. Stating Political Goals

In one of his articles on Jewish autonomy and the state interests published in 1919, Wilhelm Filderman declared that

...as we can not stop being Jewish and no one has the right to force us not to be, we want to be authentic Jews. Or, for this it is necessary to freely manifest our national life, freedom which, far from being in conflict with the laws of the country, it addresses to them, asking for warranty and defense. Similar to the way the individual has to act when it is about the recognition of his rights. The poli-ethnic state has no right to refuse this right to its minorities as the sovereignty of the majority was ethically earned based on the same principle which grants to minorities the minor right within the state.⁴³

Faithful to his ideals, Zissu clearly stated, immediately after the realization of Greater Romania and in the new context of a "poli-ethnic state", the need for an equal status for the Jewish minority in relation with the majority group in order to have an *equal affirmation* of the Jewish identity and community, a fair *public representation* and also *preservation* of the identity within the larger context, conditions which were supposed to be necessary to "freely manifest our national life" as being "authentic Jews". The new socio-political context offered new grounds for supporting the "warranty and defense" of the equal rights of individuals, but also of the community, and Zissu adapted his discourse accordingly.

Unlike A. L. Zissu who articulated his discourse on the fact that the Jewish community is not only a minority, but also a *national group*, Wilhelm Filderman employed a more diplomatic language, starting from the fact that the Jewish community represented a *minority group*, but continuing with elements which, summed up, constituted the characters defining Zissu's "nation group". Thus, Filderman stated in one of his interviews in 1934 that

The Jewish population of the country forms (...) a religious minority (...) and an ethnic minority (...). But based on this fact, I do not think that the majority population may deny to the Jewish people its complete equality – or that the minority group may have the right to ask for anything but complete equality – because the state rule offers rights for duties, the origin and religion of its inhabitants should not be legal criteria neither for enjoying the rights, nor for fulfilling the duties.⁴⁴

Therefore, Zissu's concept of nation is recreated in Filderman's statement using instead of the monolithic definition of a nation its defining characteristics in terms of ethnicity and religion; basically, the demands for equal rights, identity protection and preservation remain similar.

Moreover, answering to the incessant accusations of "assimilism", Filderman declared in a debate on the Law of Secondary Education in the Parliament from 1928 that

...as we already clarified that we have a distinct ethnic origin, a religion and tradition of our own, we consider we need to respect and preserve them, because it is just and good, for us and for the general heritage of the whole humanity, for our original being to be preserved further as centuries of civilization shaped it. We have the right and the desire to preserve our traditions, our religion, our customs, our specific aspirations, essentially everything that comes from our independent ethnic being.⁴⁵

Indeed, Zissu contested every time he had the chance the attempts of looking at the Jewish population in Romania as at a "religious minority" as, according to his long and brilliant essay *Nu există cult mosaic*, this type of approach represented an attempt of assimilating the Jewish population by reducing it to a mere religious denomination, while deliberately ignoring the national, ethnic, cultural complexity specific to the group. Although Filderman accepted this political compromise by supporting the "Law for

Religious Denominations”, his actions have to be analyzed in a larger context as he also lobbied for additional laws, documents and decrees stating the rights of the Jewish community also as an ethnic and cultural group entitled to a specific system of education up to a certain level as well as to cultural affirmation, elements which would complete the status of the Jewish community by bringing it closer to Zissu’s initial ideal. Thus, mostly condemned by the Zionist camp, W. Filderman approached a more political and diplomatic discursive and negotiating strategy which brought results and public recognition.

In order to accomplish the similar goals commonly pursued by the two intellectuals, each of them suggested a series of distinct measures and applied a set of divergent actions confirming their individual backgrounds and political strategy.

A. L. Zissu, consistent with his approach to the Jewish community as a national group, suggested from the beginning a collective political representation, distinct within the Romanian state. Thus, his suggestion for the creation of a Jewish Party, its achievement and success confirmed his initial enterprise as

a political organization, central and representative, of the Jewish population from the country – the Jewish party – should: 1) Channel the greatest part of the Jewish votes towards the direction considered most suitable with our interests and prevent the waste of the votes among different political parties (...); 2) Watch so that the rights we earned on paper – and for now only on paper – to be fully applied without restrictions and legal tricks; 3) Watch so that any potential scholarly elaborated decrees or shrewd documents should not be able to diminish or annihilate the national rights granted to the ethnic minorities of Greater Romania, so also we, the Jewish population (...).⁴⁶

On the contrary, Wilhelm Filderman challenged Zissu’s perspective and found an opposite strategy of political representation through alliances with the major parties in power, able to fight also for the demands of the Jewish population in exchange for electoral support. Trying to eliminate any accusations of separatism and, thus, to deconstruct anti-Semitic stereotypes of self-segregation and lack of interest for integration, Filderman attempted the ultimate compromise between identity and representation in political terms by arguing that

...our interests do not differ from the interests of the country; they merge with the general interest of the country. If we have also specific interests which our moral being demands for thousands years, they are not in disagreement with the general interests of the Romanian state, but, on the contrary, in perfect agreement with those interests, as there is no greater danger in the development of Judaism in the Romanian state as it would be in the development of Magyarism, Germanism or Russism, so why placing an obstacle for the Jews only and not also in the other direction.⁴⁷

If Zissu accused Filderman once more of assimilation and betrayal of the Jewish law by assuming this political strategy, Filderman expressed also his fears and doubts in relation with the existence of a Jewish Party as

the creation of a Jewish party would be even more dangerous as it would cast an abyss between the Romanian people and the Jewish population. The isolation was never a good option for creating a rapprochement and mutual understanding. The only means of accomplishing this are the constant manifestation of solidarity of the Jewish population in presenting its demands towards the government and the activity of presenting the Romanian people its own interests through the voice of a Jewish organization of self-defense. In order to demonstrate my thesis I could present you many examples from the country or from abroad.⁴⁸

12. Accomplishing the Goals: Jewish Law versus Secular Law

In his struggle for obtaining equal rights and reaching public representation for the Jewish community in Romania, Wilhelm Filderman adopted always a legal type of discourse which came naturally due to his training and profession. The appeal to the *law*, the secular type, appears obsessively in his public declarations, often invoking the Constitution, the international treaties, the Western models of democracy and political orders as

...to create equal regimes for different minorities, be them minorities of race, language, religion or national minorities. A non-equal regime between minorities would lead naturally to the creation of privileges on the expense of the others and therefore to new struggles and tensions. It would also be against the Constitution which does not allow that the rights granted to some citizens be refused to some other, all being necessary equal.⁴⁹

A flawless discourse of argumentation, following the logics of the international and national legislation, leads to the natural conclusion of the necessity of granting equality, recognition and representation for the Jewish population as a group within the larger Romanian nation and within the larger context of modernity, emancipation and enlightenment. The line of argumentation comes from the objective sphere and goes towards the specific group targeted, while planning to apply evenly the commonly regulated norms:

Jewish population needs to express its demands. They can be summarized in a single word: equality. Equality de facto and de jure, equality in terms of rights, but also in terms of duties. This and nothing more. But from this demand, all the others are naturally implied as they are nothing else but the application of the principle of equality.⁵⁰

A profoundly religious man, deriving from this source also his political ideology, A. L. Zissu accused Filderman of breaking the Jewish law while accomplishing his political actions and compromises, as he served the community “most of the times (...) breaking the commandments of a dignified authentic Judaism – to the benefit of the Jewish community in the country”.⁵¹ This was such a serious and obsessive accusation against Filderman, that Zissu indirectly returned to it later, in the more specific context caused by their resumed correspondence from 1941, aiming at Filderman’s actions once more.

In a more complex way, A. L. Zissu’s manner of approaching politics and therefore Jewish identity was directly connected to and influenced by his religious thinking. A sophisticated ideologist of Zionism, Zissu based his discourse on religious arguments as

the movement of Jewish rebirth has not only to re-edit national and universal messianism, resuming under new forms the mission of the past; thus Jewish nationalism does not mean only to return to the deeper sources of Judaism and to channel the inner life power of the Jewish people; thus, the desire of returning to Zion does not mean only the creation of natural healthy economic basis for the Jewish work, but also simply the preservation of human culture.⁵²

For him, “Jewish law”, far from turning into an argument while constructing his anti-Filderman discourse, represented the center of

his ideological thinking which he followed consequently. Deciding to give preeminence to religious Zionism and to its ideology and not to the emergence of the civic modern principle of self-determination and equality in rights, A. L. Zissu confirmed once more his lifetime option for the *religious law* able to order also the modern society, while discarding its more recent secular offspring, the legal and social system:

...the Zionist organization, long before the emergence of the new concept of self-determination, being aware of the equity of this principle, imposed, as a necessary task coming immediately after the Basel programme, the organization of the Jewish people for political activity in Diaspora. (...) to accomplish the coalization and reorganization of the Jewish forces with the purpose of recognizing the Jewish nationality and of obtaining the right of legal self-administration in all the matters connected to national life. The seed was initially planted by the Russian Zionists in 1906, immediately after 1905 revolution, but it could not root as many other seeds thrown by the revolted Russian people could not root as this tragic land was waiting for a later bloody fertilization in order for the fruits to ripe now, after the fall of Tsarism. The fact that the new Gospel gave us back the country of which we were tied through thousands of threads which could not be torn during the 19 centuries of separation did not take from us the right to national autonomy in the countries where compact masses of Jewish people live.⁵³

Obviously, for both intellectuals, the *law*, the rules and regulations ordering the society and the world in general, were capital, being heavily used as a leitmotiv, but also as instruments in the public debate and struggle for the common goals. But while A. L. Zissu employed as a constant reference the *religious law*, Wilhelm Filderman adopted *secular law* and thus was severely criticized by the Zionist camp, namely by Zissu and his adepts for “betraying the Jewish law”. If Filderman employed the secular law to demand equality and public representation for the Jewish community from the state, Zissu draws from the Jewish law arguments to ground his Jewish nationalism and integral Judaism when making political objectives, rather than claims. This dichotomy between religious, symbolic law, and its secular, practical counterpart, is extremely significant for the relations between the two intellectuals and it accounts greatly for the debates and polemics generated by their diverging manner of accomplishing their similar goals.

Conclusions

The largely acknowledged adversity and opposition between Wilhelm Filderman and A. L. Zissu was actually based, as I attempted to demonstrate, on issues concerning rather the political strategies employed than the substance represented by common goals and shared final objectives. Starting from an extremely personal letter exchange from 1941, a different insight comes to relatively contradict the conclusions of the historians based on cold historical facts and public documents: that the enmity and adversity between the two intellectuals was rather a long-term tense admiration and distinctiveness caused by an unspoken division of the tasks between the *theorist* and the *practitioner*, a relationship which was anytime able to be transformed into cooperation as shared goals were always acknowledged. Theoretical instruments able to better structure my empirical line of arguments were the concept of “narcissism of minor differences” stressing on the shared values undermining the apparent conflict, while the leitmotif of *law* was employed in order to separate in more obvious categories the levels of opposition between the two intellectuals such as religion, symbolized by Zissu’s favorite syntagm of “Jewish law”, and politics, reasoned through the secular legal system and constitutionalism, highly credited by W. Filderman. Aiming to challenge the general perception on the enmity between A. L. Zissu and W. Filderman, the current article planned also to bring new insights within the complex political life of the Jewish community during the interwar period.

NOTES

- ¹ Michael Ignatieff, "The Narcissism of Minor Differences" in *The Warrior's Honor – Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 1999, p. 47.
- ² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, p. 114.
- ³ Sigmund Freud, *The Taboo of Virginity*, 1918, p. 199.
- ⁴ Claudia Ursuțiu, *Senatori și deputați evrei în Parlamentul României (1919-1931)*, Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, pp. 35-36.
- ⁵ S. Schafferman, *Dr. W. Filderman. 50 de ani din istoria judaismului român*, Tel Aviv, 1986, p. 129.
- ⁶ Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries. 1900-1940*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Ancel, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem Jerusalem, 2004.
- ⁷ Leon Volovici, "Romanian Jewish Intellectuals after World War I: Social and Cultural Trends" in *Shvut. Jewish problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, no 16/1993, Tel Aviv University, p. 319.
- ⁸ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ⁹ W. Filderman, *Letter to A. L. Zissu*, 4.10.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁰ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹¹ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹² Often, A. L. Zissu criticized the politics of U. E. R. and Filderman's as being "asimilist" in relation to the demands of the state of the majority, thus sacrificing the Jewish identity and representation.
- ¹³ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁴ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁵ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁶ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁷ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁸ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- ¹⁹ A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.

- 20 "It is correct: I am your political opponent; *the* political opponent. But this does not cloud my conscience. On the contrary: it makes me more objective and serene than the others – than the 'friends', the clowns and the opportunists surrounding you" in A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 21 A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 22 A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 23 A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 4.12.1941, Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 24 A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941., Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 25 A. L. Zissu, *Letter to W. Filderman*, 25.09.1941., Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
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- 32 Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries. 1900-1940*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Ancel, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem Jerusalem, 2004, p. 75.
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- 39 Abraham Leib Zissu, "Contra reprezentării profesionale. Interview" published on 10.07.1926, collected later in volume *Noi... Breviar Judaic*, Editura Adam, București, 1932, p. 218.
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