

Becoming Israelis, Nostalgic of Romania: The Life of Holocaust Survivors in 1950s Israel as Reflected in the Romanian Language Journal *Sliha*

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Abstract

According to a World Jewish Congress census, there were approximately 420,000 Jews in Romania in 1947. The vast majority immigrated in the following decades, most of them to Israel. This article contributes to a better understanding of the struggles, joys, and nostalgia of Holocaust survivors from Romania who immigrated to Israel, by describing and examining several issues of a journal published in the 1950s in Tel Aviv. Although the name of the journal was in Hebrew, *Sliha*, all the articles were written in Romanian and infused with Romanian literary, cultural, spiritual, social and political elements. These people, while trying to adapt to the new Israeli society, still felt Romanian, had nostalgia of Romania, and wanted to maintain as long as possible the attachment to the country they emigrated from. This was in stark contrast with the interwar perpetrators' propaganda, which presented Jews as foreigners, not true Romanians.

Keywords: nostalgia, Holocaust survivors, Israelis, Jews of Romania, propaganda

During a 2014-2015 postdoctoral fellowship at Yad Vashem, I came across some interesting articles published in 1956 in the Romanian language journal *Sliha*, based in Tel Aviv. Although my postdoctoral project was on

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a different topic, namely the attitude of the Catholic Church in Romania towards the Jewish community during the Holocaust, I became very interested in these articles. They showed a world which has escaped academic scrutiny until now, mainly because research and writing in English about the everyday life of Holocaust survivors from Romania who immigrated to Israel is scarce.

Since 1990, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, research on the Holocaust in Romania has grown steadily. We know today much more than we knew 29 years ago about the Romanian involvement in the destruction of the Jewish community and about the tragic fate of the estimated 280-380,000 Jews who died under Romanian administration, most of them in Transnistria (Friling et al., 2005, p. 179). The historiography of the Holocaust in Romania has mostly focused its attention after 1990 on the perpetrators. This was a normal reaction to the communist narrative, which had denied for more than 40 years the Romanians' participation in the Shoah. At the beginning, the focus was on Ion Antonescu, the leader of Romania during the Second World War, and on his criminal policies that led to the pogroms in the summer of 1941, deportations to, and killings in Transnistria. Because of these debates, the Elie Wiesel Commission on the Holocaust in Romania was created in 2003, at the suggestion of the state of Israel (Ha'aretz Staff and AP, July 27, 2003). In 2004, in a context in which Romania was making efforts to join NATO and the EU, the Romanian president and government publicly acknowledged the *Final Report* of the Commission, which clearly stated the Romanian destruction of the Jewish community and the murderous role of Ion Antonescu's regime. In recent years, young historians have started to focus their attention on the responsibility of other institutions/individuals in the implementation of the Shoah, such as the Army, the Church, and the interwar Romanian intellectual elite.

Due to this legitimate focus on the perpetrators, academic writing about the everyday life of Holocaust survivors from Romania has been scanty. There have been of course many memoirs of survivors, mostly from Northern Transylvania and Bukovina, published over the years. Elite Olshtain (2010), Edith Balas (2010), Edward Friedmann (2009), Elly Gross (2012), Hindi Rothbart (2009), are only few of those who published such memoirs in the last ten years. The research on immediate post-war years and the experience of survivors appear also in works by Liviu Rotman (2004,

2005), Harry Kuller (2002) and Radu Ioanid (2005). However, we lack systematic research, in English or Romanian, on the life of Holocaust survivors from Romania who immigrated to Israel.

At the end of the war, a census organized by the World Jewish Congress concluded that there were 428,312 Jews in Romania (Kuller, 2002, p. 37). The survival of approximately half of the Romanian Jewish community was due to Ion Antonescu's change of plans. Before October 1942, he made every effort to deport and destroy the Jewish community. In the first phase, he targeted mostly the Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina and Moldova (North-Eastern Romania). In the summer of 1942, in the context of German implementation of the Final Solution, Antonescu agreed with Nazi proposals to deport all the remaining 230,000 Jews who were still on the Romanian territory after the change of borders, deportations and killings in 1941-1942 (Deletant, 2006, pp. 205-206). Plans were put in place for deportation to the Belzec death camp, but at the end of September, beginning of October 1942 Ion Antonescu changed his mind. He was discontent with Hitler's refusal to agree to his military and territorial claims and probably sensed already difficulties in the German eastern campaign. In October, he decided to halt all deportations, awaiting further developments (Deletant, 2006, pp. 209-213). After the loss of the Battle of Stalingrad in February 1943, this decision became even clearer, as Antonescu understood that Germany could lose the war and Romania would be in a difficult position at the post-war peace conferences if it continued the annihilation of the Jewish community.

Some Romanian Jews immigrated to the British controlled Palestine during the Holocaust. Ion Antonescu's dream of cleansing Romania of Jews permitted emigration even before October 1942 (Ofer, 1997, pp. 31-35), although this trend became more obvious after he changed his mind about deportations to Belzec (Bauer, 1981, pp. 349-350). His policies of open destruction were gradually replaced after this date with open encouragement of emigration. However, not many Jews were able to leave during the war, on the one hand because of the British quotas and on the other because Jews had to pay Romanian authorities in order to go. The precarious conditions of transport through wartime zones, made these journeys very perilous. One of the most known tragic cases was the sinking in the Black Sea of the Struma ship in February 1942 and the death of all those on board, but one. After August 23, 1944, when Romania changed sides and joined the Allies,

the post-Antonescu governments continued to encourage Jewish emigration although the peril of annihilation was not there anymore (Siperco, 2009, pp. 131-132). This shows the embedded anti-Semitism in Romanian society and the fact that the desire to rid Romania of Jews should not be limited only to Ion Antonescu's regime.

Although we do not know the exact figures, until 1948 the number of Romanian Jews able to immigrate to Israel was low. In the first years after the creation of the state of Israel, the Romanian communist authorities encouraged immigration. This served them on several levels. Firstly, Jews, and especially Zionist Jews, were very vocal against some of the communist policies, such as the collectivisation and the monetary reform. Getting rid of them spared the communists of a dissenting voice. Secondly, as with the emigration from the Soviet Union during the same period, there was a belief that the immigrants would open communist outposts in Israel and would further the communist cause (Ioanid, 2005, p. 30). By 1951, when it became clearer that the plan was fruitless, they stopped the emigration. But this first major wave, allowed 120,000 Jews from Romania to move to Israel from 1948 to 1951 (Rotman, 2005, p. 23). In the following years of the 1950s the emigrations continued, but at a much lower rate of approx. 3,000 Jews leaving Romania per year. The second major wave of immigration took place from 1958 to 1962 when again about 110,000 Jews immigrated to Israel. This wave also signalled the beginning of commercial and financial deals between Romania and Israel in exchange for emigration.

Thus, the March-July 1956 issues of *Sliha*, discussed in this article, were the product of Romanian Jews who either emigrated before 1948, or who came as a result of the first major wave of immigration of 1948-1951 and the smaller yearly arrivals of the 1950s. These issues can be found in the Yad Vashem Archives, the O.1 - K.J. Ball-Kaduri - Collection of Testimonies and Reports of German Jewry, in a file of Memoirs and Documentation of Fred Efraim Saraga regarding the persecution of the Jews in Romania and Transnistria (File no: 191; Item ID: 3549440). Fred Saraga was one of the leaders of the Iași Jewish community and in several issues of *Sliha* he detailed his and the Jewish community's rescue efforts during the Holocaust.

The first issue of *Sliha* in the Fred Saraga file is year 1, no 4, March 22, 1956, and is entitled "Număr de Paști" ("Passover/Easter Issue"). In the

Romanian language the word for Easter and Passover/Pesach is the same: Paști. It was 16 pages long and it costed 30 piasters. The journal declared itself “a journal of attitude, satire, humour and news/reportage.” This idea of self-identification and definition appears several times in the issues researched. In one of them for example, in a section entitled “Questions and Answers,” the first question asked was: “What kind of journal is *Sliha*? For a humoristic one it contains too much serious material. For a serious journal, it contains too much humoristic material” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 21 (year 1, no. 5, April 5, 1956, p. 2)). The editors claimed that the journal was something in-between, this being actually well reflected in its content. The journal was fortnightly and it appeared on Thursdays. The two main editors were Moșe Maur and Ben Zvi Hacohen. Some of the contributors included: Lică Abramovici-Avron, Beno Baruch, Carol Barzilay, Isac Bercovici, Ioana Catz, Mircea Crin, Wilhelm Filderman, Lică Grunberg, Ed. Grossman, Siegfried Haffner, Mihail Hameltzar, Ben Hanoded, Ion Pas, Ion Pribeagu, Mircea Pribeagu, Moise Provincialu, Camil Ring, Dally Rosenzweig, Fred Saraga, Solo Singer. The vast majority of the contributors were men, with only few exceptions of articles written by women².

This article looks at few issues of the newspaper *Sliha*, from March-July 1956, and offers a comprehensive description and analysis of the main themes and the core struggles of the people who contributed and of its readers. In order to have a clear picture of the wide range of subjects tackled by the journal, the article is structured according to the major topics that seem to appear in every issue. The footnotes offer the Yad Vashem Archives reference number and page and, in the brackets, the corresponding reference dates and pages of the journal itself.

1. Humour

One of the major features of *Sliha* was its emphasis on humour, which took various forms; the most utilized were sketches and jokes. Both of them had a long tradition in Romania, being one of the defining elements of Romanian folklore, which permeated into the media. Until today Romanians love to

² Such an example is an article published in YVA, item ID 3690233, p. 34 (year 1, no. 5, April 5, 1956, p. 15) and written by H. Anna. The article entitled “O Poveste Tristă dar Adevărată (A True, but Sad Story), is a pedagogical exercise, teaching women how to choose the right husband, not to be lured away by those with riches.

[illegible]

Fig. 1. First picture, The first issue from March 1956

In the first issue from March 1956 (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 4 (year 1, no. 4, March 22, 1956, p. 1)), on the first page, using the motif of the Passover celebration, the authors drew few such comic sketches. The first one, on the left, portrays an animal eating grass and the note reads: "for the Passover Holiday..." In Romanian the verb "Paște" also means an animal eating grass. So Happy Passover could also mean in Romanian "Happy grass eating". Below there is a sketch of the Exodus, a Jewish couple leaving

the pyramids behind. The note reads: “My dear, I escaped the trouble of shikun for 40 years.” Shikun can refer to the ugly apartment buildings that were being built in Romania and/or Israel at the time. By referring to the 40 years of wondering in the wilderness, the author mocks these ugly neighbourhoods. He/she would rather be in wilderness than surrounded by these buildings. Below, another sketch, suggesting again a scene from the Exodus: “Dear wife, can’t you see that you are shouting in wilderness (deșert)?” (“deșert” in Romanian means both wilderness and vain). Another sketch on the same page shows Moses and the people of Israel leaving Egypt and arriving at a stop. The note reads: “Pass now as long as it is free at the stop!” This could suggest, behind the joke, the reality of permanent changes in the life of Jews in the last decades. On the other hand, the joke is a direct reference to the changing policies of emigration of the Romanian communist authorities. And finally, the last sketch on the page is that of someone arriving at the Egyptian customs. The custom agent is a Muslim and the note reads: “Do you have something to declare?” This sketch could be linked to the 1956 ongoing dispute about the Suez Canal. The Israel-Egypt relations appear in later issues too.

The main humoristic themes are representative of the Romanian society at the time. Many of those jokes are about marriage and, usually, misogynistic. For example: “My wife ran away with my best friend/Who is he?/ I don’t know, but whoever he is, he is my best friend.” On the same page: “My wife left home./ Call the police./ No way. Last time I called the police, they found her...” (Ilon, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 10 (year 1, no. 4, p. 7)). Sometimes the misogyny of the jokes goes a step further and expresses the Romanian tradition of male dominance and domestic violence. In a very elaborate joke, a man asks his wife to cheat on him. His wife resists his requests and towards the end of the dialog she accepts, but asks him: “Why do you insist on me cheating?” His answer: “Because you are so perfect that I did not have any occasion to beat you up until now, but if you will cheat on me, I will break your legs, you understand me?” The title of the joke is “When a man is getting bored” (RAK, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 26 (year 1, no. 5, p. 7)).

The theme of marriage is one of the most used in jokes and sketches. At a very close distance come jokes/sketches with a political character. In the first issue in the file, a sketch presents the queen of England awarding Glubb Pasha “the Order of Bath.” Glubb Pasha replies: “No bath in the world can

wash my impudence” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 12 (year 1, no. 4, p. 9)).³ In another sketch, America and Russia are stretching Nasser and the note reads: “And what if he breaks?” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 20 (year 1, no. 5, p. 1). On the same page a cart driver, which according to his hat could symbolize America, is trying to keep a tight hand on the horse, but the horse is in the wrong position, facing the back of the cart. On the horse, it is written “Koalicja” and the note reads: “Hăis, Cea...” (To pull different ways). This is a familiar saying in Romanian describing a confused, undecided course of action. The sketch suggests that in 1956 the international coalition was chaotic and without a vision when it comes to Egypt and the Middle East. Another sketch on the same page portrays America and the USSR as being puppies to a dog on which it is written “the 4th Reich,” and the note reads: “The eternal story of the wheel: it reels” (allusion to a Romanian saying suggesting that the history repeats itself: “Roata se învâртеște”).

³ Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb, KCB, CMG, DSO, OBE, MC (April 16, 1897, Preston, Lancashire – March 17, 1986), known as Glubb Pasha, was a British soldier, scholar and author, who led and trained Transjordan's Arab Legion between 1939 and 1956 as its commanding general.



Fig. 2. Second picture, Jokes/sketches with a political character

The journal also published more neutral jokes and sketches. In one, for instance, the author mocks the Israeli customs authorities. The note of the sketch reads: “The tourists must be well shaken up in order to leave their dollars to us” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 20 (year 1, no. 5, 5 April 1956, p. 1)).



Fig. 3. Third picture, Neutral jokes and sketches

These neutral jokes are used as a break from the main themes: marriage and politics. In one case, a sketch mocks the families with naughty children, and the way the parents do not seem to realize how many troubles they created to the nanny: “We leave. If the little ones will create any problems...” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 16 (year 1, no. 4, p. 13)).



Fig. 4. Forth picture, The theme of naughty children

The theme of naughty children, which was again familiar to Romanian audiences, appears several times in sketches and jokes. In one instance, the sketch mocks a wonder kid who, instead of playing the musical instrument, started to play games during a concert. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 10 (year

1, no. 4, p. 7)). In one joke God wants to go on holiday. He asks his saints where to go. One suggests to go to Cannes, another, to go to Israel. God says: “I will not go there because 1956 years ago I went there, I had a relation with a virgin and even today people are talking about it.” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 35 (year 1, no. 5, p. 16)). In another one, the author mocks the postal service in Mexico. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 24 (year 1, no. 5, p. 5)).



Fig. 5. Fifth picture, Joke about the postal service in Mexico

In several issues, the authors published what they called “The Exemplified Encyclopaedia: A humoristic learning exercise (YVA, item ID 3690233, p. 42 (year 1, no. 6, April 19, 1956, p. 7)).

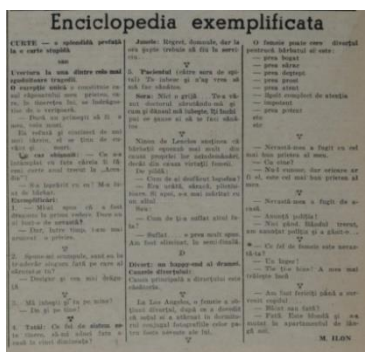


Fig. 6. Sixth picture, The Exemplified Encyclopaedia: A humoristic learning exercise

2. Holocaust memory

Coming to the serious side of the journal, one of the most prominent topics is that of Holocaust remembrance. This takes various forms, amongst them the publication of memoirs by the leaders of the Romanian Jewish community who fought to preserve the very existence of thousands of people during those tragic times, and information regarding compensation for those who suffered during the Shoah. Even from the first issue in the file, *Sliha* published in serial story columns the memoirs of Wilhelm Filderman, the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (1939-1947). The recollection of events is chronological. Under the title “The fight against anti-Semitic measures,” Wilhelm Filderman’s memoir tells about his efforts on behalf of the community. He offers details for example about the forced relocation of Jews from villages to cities, about the forbiddance of leaving the cities, about the effect on the national economy, about the yellow star, which according to him was implemented at local level, this being the reason why it was not an unitary policy. He also speaks about the creation of a ghetto in Iasi. (Filderman, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 6 (year 1, no. 4, p. 3)). Alongside Wilhelm Filderman’s memoir, *Sliha* published the memoirs of Fred Saraga. He describes the difficult living conditions for those deported to Transnistria and the desperate efforts of the Iasi community to help them. (Saraga, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 9 (year 1, no. 4, p. 6)). On page seven of the first issue the newspaper published also the memoir of Isaac Bercovici about Ruach Hadash, a Zionist association created in Brăila before the First World War. (Bercovici, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 10 (year 1, no. 4, p. 7)).



Fig. 7. Seventh picture, Wilhelm Filderman - “The fight against anti-Semitic measures”

This recollection of events during the war receives probably the largest space in the issues of *Sliha*. The memoirs of Wilhelm Filderman, Fred Saraga and other Romanian Jewish leaders are detailed and appear in all the issues looked at.⁴ They act as both remembrance of the fate of those who died, and as historical evidence documenting their tragic fate. There is also a sense of pride about the actions of the community, which resisted in various forms (legal proceedings, intercessions with political and religious authorities) the implementation of destruction policies. And, when such policies were implemented, these memoirs document the charitable work of

⁴ Filderman’s and Saraga’s memoirs continued to be published in the next issues of *Sliha*. See YVA, Item ID 3690233, pp. 22 (year 1, no. 5, p. 3); 23 (year 1, no. 5, p. 4); 38 (year 1, no. 6, p. 3); 39 (year 1, no. 6, p. 4); 54 (year 1, no. 9, p. 3); 55 (year 1, no. 9, p. 4); 63 (year 1, no. 11, p. 4); 79 (year 1, no. 12, p. 4); 95 (year 1, no. 13, p. 4).

those who were fortunate to avoid deportation in aid of those who were in Transnistria. The memoirs of Fred Saraga are especially dealing with this topic. The publication of memoirs documenting these actions expresses the shared belief of those who survived and were safe in Israel, that without them their situation could have been different.



Fig. 8. Eighth picture, The memoirs of Fred Saraga

The memory of the Holocaust was also kept alive through the publication of info about various programs for survivors. For example, in one of the journal's issues, on the first page with large letters it is written: "Have you done forced labour? Fill in the form on page 2." On page 2 the title is: "To the attention of Olims from Romania who were deported to Transnistria or did forced labour." (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 37 (year 1, no. 6, p. 2)). The news said that Nahum Goldman announced Germany's upcoming law

giving compensations to Jews from Romania who were deported to Transnistria, or did forced labour. Because there was no statistic of those who would be entitled to compensations, the journal facilitated the process by distributing the forms. The first question in the form was: “Have you been deported? Where and for how long.” Other questions included: “Have you been kept in a lager? Have you done forced labour? Have you faced political persecution because of the Nazi policies? Have the Germans confiscated your property or factory? Have the Germans (or the Romanians) taken over your business as part of the war effort? Have you been forced to relocate from your place? Where and after how long did you return home? Has someone from your family died in the Struma or Mefkure tragedies?” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 37 (year 1, no. 6, p. 2)).

F O R M U L A R No. 1

1. Ați fost deportat? Unde și cât timp?

2. Ați fost detinut în lagăr? Unde și cât timp?

3. Ați făcut parte dintr-un detașament de muncă obligatorie? Unde și cât timp?

4. Ați fost condamnat din cauza legii naziste? La cât? Unde și în lagăr?

5. Germanii v-au confiscat întreprinderea sau proprietatea? Ce valoare avea?

6. Germanii (sau românii) v-au reînălțat întreprinderea pentru efortul lor de război? Cât timp? Ce venit și-a avut din această cauză?

7. Ați fost scutit forțat din localitatea dumneavoastră? Unde și cât timp nu v-ați putut întoarce la domiciliul vostru?

8. Ați fost detinut sub vreă altă formă?

9. Ceva din familia d-voastră a murit în catastrofa Struma sau „Mefkure”? Numele și gradul de rudenie.

10. Cazurile neprevăzute în întrebările de mai sus, notați-le în acest punct

Comenzii tuturor prizonierilor dumneavoastră, că a în interesul lor să completeze formularul de mai sus. Există în acest material statistic și documentar va da posibilitatea sa să în drept să-și capete mai repede drepturile, după ce guvernul din Bonn va adopta legea pentru acordarea de despăgubiri tuturor români care au suferit de pe urma regim nazist.

Fig. 9. Nineth picture, Forced labour form

Sliha did not limit to only remembering the events of the war. Of course, the space dedicated to publication of memoirs pertaining to the Holocaust is the largest, but there are some other articles dealing with the history of Jewish life in Romania. For example, Isac Bercovic published an article entitled: “A Legendary Figure of Romanian Jewry: Jacob Psanter (sic), Historian, Chronicle and Memory Writer.” (Bercovici, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 41 (year 1, no. 6, p. 6)). Jacob Psantir (original surname Zelig) was born in Botoșani in 1820. At the age of 13, he joined a musical band and the fact that he played the dulcimer explains his pseudonym “Psantir” (a traditional name for a type of dulcimer). He was one of the first major historians of Romanian Jewry and a founding member of the Iuliu Barasch Historical Society. Today he is regarded as a pioneer in the fields of Jewish epigraphy and historiography in Romania. (Benjamin, 2002, pp. 49–55; Kara, 1997, pp. 160–166).

Some readers expressed frustration at the post-war disunity of the Romanian Jewish leadership. A reader for example writes: “Do something to unite the Regat Jews (i.e. Evreii regăteni – which refers to the Jews of the Old Kingdom of Romania). Mobilize Wilhelm Filderman and Chief Rabbi Safran.” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 21 (year 1, no. 5, p. 2)). In their reply, the editors promised to contact Safran and to offer more details in the next issues. Chief Rabbi Alexandre Safran and Wilhelm Filderman, the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities, who led the community during the Holocaust, were forced to flee Romania in 1947 and 1948 respectively due to the communist takeover of the country. They became the target of communist propaganda after 1948. The new Romanian Jewish leadership elected and, according to some reports, enforced by the communists, was in open conflict with some members of the old elite. Although we know from other sources about these conflicts, which were transferred into Israel too,⁵ in the issues looked at in this file they are not evident.

⁵ See for example the tensions between rabbi David Safran, and Moses Rosen, the Chief Rabbi elected in 1948, in YVA, 0.11 Romania Collection, item ID 3689429, Documentation regarding the Romanian war criminal [Archbishop] Valerian Viorel D. Trifa, 1940-1976, pp. 110-112.

3. Issues specific to Israel

Since *Sliha* was published in Tel Aviv by Holocaust survivors from Romania, themes related to Israeli life are also prominent. In a series of articles called “Cronica Mizantropului” (The Misanthrope Chronicle), different shortcomings of life in Israel are described. In one such example, C. Barzilay criticises the poor professional quality of the radio broadcasts. According to the author, “the Israelis like to hear themselves speaking” and “the broadcasts are boring.” (Barzilay, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 7 (year 1, no. 4, p. 4)). In another article entitled “Drive the scandal into the corner,” the author, whose pen name is Figaro, starts by telling a story about a street fight he witnessed when he arrived in Israel five years before. Two individuals attacked each other with broken glasses and one of them was taken to the hospital bleeding and in a very bad state. From this story he moves to speak, in an ironical way, about the political fight between Menachem Begin and David Ben Gurion. (Figaro, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 8 (year 1, no. 4, p. 5)).

The article “Patru Intrebări de Pesach” (Four questions at Pesach), by Bano Baruch, deals with deeper themes of Israeli life. The author writes in the form of questions and answers. The first question he addresses is: “Why is Israel not provoking enthusiasm anymore?” His answers include: because the politicians are fighting each other; because “we ask American Jews only for their money and not for their soul”; because the youth has only one plan – Marilyn Monroe, and only one ambition – American trousers. Question 2: “Why is America not willing to give Israel arms?” The author suggests that the answer had to do with the larger number of Arabs in the world and with the American interest in the Arab oil. Question 3: “Is a war imminent?” The answer is yes, and Bano Baruch speaks about the mobilization of armies in the Arab countries. Question 4: “And what is to be done?” The author offers several answers, but his main emphasis is: “We should not forget that we should rely only on ourselves, on our strength, and on our army. We should not forget that our ally is the Jewish people and us.” (Baruch, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 15 (year 1, no. 4, p. 12)).

Often the articles about Israeli life are very critical. For example, an article written by Ben Zwi Hacoheh criticizes the economic policies of the state of Israel, and the fact that a lot of money was wasted on infrastructure mistakes. In the conclusion he says: “I am glad that there is no minister of Romanian origin. ‘Ours’ have not advanced yet beyond the director

position, although if we would ask for a numerus clausus (fuia!) [this is in the original version of the article. It is not clear what the word fuia means in Romanian, but it probably emphasizes the irony of his proposal], we would have the right to give two or three ministers.” (Hacohen, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 24 (year 1, no. 5, p. 5)). This article shows that in the 1950s there was a clear Romanian Jewish identity, and that, in the author’s view, the Romanian Jewish community was marginalized in Israel. He also condemns towards the end the fact that the majority of the Israeli administration was Turkish and Polish.

4. Israel-Romania relations

The links with Romania are evident not only in the way in which the authors joked, or in their sketches, but also in articles directly discussing the Romanian-Israeli relations. In the first issue of the Fred Saraga file, in a quick fire news section, we learn that a radio station from Israel broadcasted fifteen minutes in Romanian every day during a program called Koll Israel. There was a possibility for that to be extended to a 30 minutes broadcast. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 11 (year 1, no 4, p. 8)). The problem of language is interesting in the sense that on the one hand *Sliha* published in every issue a Hebrew-Romanian dictionary, to facilitate the learning of Hebrew for the newcomers, but on the other hand it spoke proudly about this broadcast in the Romanian language.

The cultural links with Romania and Romanian language was not limited to publishing a journal or having a radio broadcast in Romanian. There were some other endeavours. For example, we learn of an intention to translate one of the last novels of Mihail Sadoveanu (the name of the novel not given) into Hebrew. Sadoveanu was a well-known Romanian novelist, whose links with communist authorities after the war became very strong. Sometimes *Sliha* entered controversial territories unintentionally. Virgil Gheorghiu, a problematic Romanian writer, who during the war supported a fascist stand, now posed as a philo-Semite and was about to visit Israel. His visit was advertised in *Sliha* in the same section of Romanian-Israeli cultural relations. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 11 (year 1, no 4, p. 8)). Sometimes the journal expressed its pride at the success of some famous Romanian Jews abroad. Such an example is a very laudatory article about Adin Poli Podeanu, a Romanian Jewish actress and comedian, who had great success

in Paris and New York. (Z.C, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 33 (year 1, no. 5, p. 14)).

The journal also kept survivors informed about eventual policies of restitution. In most issues, a short news rubric was dedicated to this topic. One such article, describing policies of the Romanian Popular Republic for Jews says that: “This is not an Israeli action, the likes of the one done in accord with Germany.” The article claims that the compensations were for the victims of Nazi terror and it was initiated by the American government. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 27 (year 1, no. 5, p. 8)). In the same section of brief news, the readers are informed about an improvement in the Israeli-Romanian relations and mentions the commercial deals that started to be put in place by the middle of 1950s between the two states (see Introduction).

The communal relations, or the grudges between the old and the new Romanian Jewish leadership does not appear too evident in the issues looked at. The journal tried to keep away from those tensions and to avoid the intrusion of politics into its articles. They tried to keep a balanced relation with communist Romania, although sometimes the veiled criticism is visible. Such an example is an article entitled “Mr. Zissu why did you not declare that you were a Zionist spy?” Avram Leib Zissu, was a prominent Romanian Zionist leader, and the article was ironic of the communist authorities who persecuted Zissu. From the journal we also learn that Romanian newspapers such *Scântea* and *România Liberă* were available for purchase in Israel, but no Jewish newspapers were available in Romania. (Maur, YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 92 (year 1, no. 13, July 26, 1956, p. 1)).

5. Other topics

5.1. Advertising

One of the most interesting features of the journal is its advertising. There are many ads to small businesses such as pastry, beauty, hair salons, and health. Other ads are for house equipment such as vacuum cleaners, and hair dryers. Sometimes the link to Romania is nostalgically mentioned in the adverts. One such example is the ad for a pastry shop: “do you want to eat a cake similar to the one in Bucharest? Visit the Merkazit pastry shop” (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 4 (year 1, no 4, p. 1)).



Fig. 10. Tenth picture, Ad for Merkazit pastry shop

Some ads are only written words, but in other cases they are more elaborated with images and sketches. Such an ad is the one for the Cospar perfume, advertised as the perfect gift for the Passover holiday.



Fig. 11. Eleventh picture, Ad for the Cospar perfume

Lawyers are advertising their business, as there are banks. But one of the most utilized themes in ads is the one dealing with losing weight. There is a variety of such ads, from the ones directing the readers to try some miraculous machine at the Venus Institute in Tel Aviv, under the direction of Mr (not Dr) Raphael Halpern (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 13 (year 1, no. 4, p. 10)), to the more elaborate article adverts (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 18 (year 1, no. 4, p. 15)).



Fig. 12. Twelfth picture, Ad for Venus Institute in Tel Aviv

There are also ads of bigger Israeli companies such as Supergass, and Israel Gas Distribution. (YVA, Item ID 3690233, p. 20 (year 1, no. 5, p. 1)). Some of the adverts are targeting directly the Romanian alya, or have a clear link to Romania (the Gogu ad to textile products below. Gogu is a quintessential interwar Romanian name of a small businessman).



Fig. 13. Thirteenth picture, Ads that are targeting directly the Romanian alya

5.2. Learning Hebrew

Apart from jokes, politics, Holocaust remembrance, advertisement, *Sliha* had a section dedicated to learning Hebrew. In every issue at pages 11-12 a Hebrew-Romanian dictionary was published.

5.3. *View on anti-Semitism*

In one of the issues of *Sliha* appears an article on a theme that would become more relevant later on. Under the tile “We have our own anti-Semites,” a note about the Anglo-Jewish association which asked the press to make a distinction between Jews and Israelis. The author of the article considered that to be anti-Semitism. (YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 15 (year 1, no. 4, p. 12)).

5.4. *Facing stereotypes*

An un-authored note entitled “Deși e Român” (Although he is a Romanian) criticises the Israeli literary critic Efraim Mostovsky, who said that the poems of Romanian-Jewish writer Iona David are impregnated with “the flame and the warmth of the Latin. Although Iona David is Romanian, his poetry is original.” The author of the note is greatly upset by what he sees as stereotyping on the part of Ephraim Mostovsky. “What he means is that the poems are his (i.e. Iona David’s) own, not stolen from other authors (i.e. an allusion at the Israeli stereotype that Romanian Jews were stealing/pick pocketing). According to this system [of stereotyping] we could say about a writer whose origins are in Russia that his volume smells of alcohol; the book of a Polish stinks; the book of an Iraqi is dark; and about the book of Mostovsky that it is imbecile.” (YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 16 (year 1, no. 4, p. 13)).

5.5. *Poetry in Romanian*

One of the most striking examples of how these people living in Israel in the 1950s still felt Romanian is their poetry. Keeping with the tradition of the journal, the poetry is often not serious, maintaining the humorous or ironic tone. However, humour and irony are expressed in structures reminding readership of the beautiful Romanian poetry tradition. Such an example is Mircea Crin’s “Scrisoarea a II-a” (The Second Letter/Epistle) a reference to Mihai Eminescu’s epistles. The poem is about the difficulty of life in Israel, about the low payment and the lack of money. Crin is also ironic towards women seen as an ideal which is often ephemeral. He even makes a comparison between the payment and the woman: “while the slick

woman can become heavier, a low payment is never becoming bigger.” Towards the end of the poem the author specifically mentions Eminescu and his epistles (Crin, YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 17 (year 1, no. 4, p. 14)).

The themes of the journal such as marriage and misogynist stereotypes are common in these versifications too. One short poem entitled “Căsnicie” (Marriage), by Mircea Pribeagu, speaks about three ladies comparing their marriages. The last one says that her marriage is ten, because she is one and her husband is zero (Pribeagu, YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 19 (year 1, no. 4, p. 16)). Other themes used in these poems are the status of the immigrant, politics, consumerism, and Israeli-Romanian relations. One of the most prolific writers of such verses, Mircea Crin, published in issue year 1, no. 5, another poem entitled “Oda Protecției” (Ode to Protectionism), where he attacks the Israeli heavy bureaucracy and nepotism of that era (Crin, YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 32 (year 1, no. 5, p. 13)).

One poem by Iona Catz, entitled “Plăgi Moderne” (Modern Plagues) expresses irony towards God. God and religion appear tangentially in the journal, often in the jokes section. Borrowing the theme of the first issue, Pesach, he retells the story of the Exodus. But in his view, ““With a heavy hand the Almighty saved us/wasting on Egypt ten plagues in vain/and Moses, the Rebel (or the Rabbi), to the old land/put us off with fine promises and took us by hand,/From that time year after year the legend says/the Jew has a duty to dream:/the Messiah will come and it will be well again...” The critique of God, who wasted plagues on Egypt in vain, turns in the poem to the new plagues the Jews had to endure either in the countries of origin before emigration, or in Israel after the arrival. Catz critiques the harsh conditions of immigration, the heavy bureaucracy, and the Israeli discrimination according to the country of origin (Catz, YVA, Item ID 369023, p. 16 (year 1, no. 4, p. 13)).

6. Conclusion

As many immigrants before, these Romanian-Jewish Holocaust survivors were caught in-between worlds, ready to learn the language of the new land, but not willing to give up on the language and culture of the old one. This desire to keep alive the speaking of the Romanian language also tells us something about the Jewish life in Romania itself and about the demographic of the Holocaust survivors.

Before the Holocaust, Romanian Jews came from various different backgrounds. The Jews from the Old Kingdom of Romania were more assimilated into the Romanian society and most of them spoke Romanian. Jews from Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia, who became part of Romania at the end of the First World War, came from different traditions. The Transylvanian Jews spoke mostly Hungarian. The Bukovinean Jews spoke German and/or Yiddish as this territory was a centre of Austrian culture in the 19th century. The Bessarabian Jews spoke mostly Yiddish and/or Russian. (Mendelsohn, 1983, pp. 198-199). Most Jews from these territories added in 1918 were murdered either in the 1941 pogroms and in Transnistria (Bukovina and Bessarabia Jews) or at Auschwitz (Northern Transylvania Jews).

The fact that *Sliha* was published in Romanian and that a desire to maintain alive the Romanian language and traditions was often manifested in the journal, suggests that from wherever part of former Greater Romania they were, these people still held their former country dear to their hearts. They still felt Romanian, had nostalgia of Romania and wanted to maintain as long as possible the attachment to the country they emigrated from. This is fascinating, especially when contrasting it with the Romanian perpetrators' propaganda, which presented Jews as foreigners, not true Romanians. And here they were, in Israel in the 1950s, after surviving the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, speaking, publishing, joking, advertising, debating, and dreaming in Romanian and often about Romania.

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