

A "GRAMMAR OF EXCULPATION" IN COMMUNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: DISTORTION OF THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST UNDER CEAUSESCU*

*Adrian CIOFLANCA***

Abstract:

This aim of this article is to show how the history of the Holocaust was distorted by communist historiography during the Ceausescu regime in Romania. To this aim, the author conducts a content analysis on a representative sample of history books published in Romania during the 1970s and the 1980s and examines the main patterns of the communist discourse regarding the Holocaust, fascism and the Antonescu regime. On the basis of this analysis the paper concludes that historiography was strictly controlled at that time and that the RCP ideological blueprint prevailed over science, while historiography was used to illustrate Romania's self-victimization and serve the political enterprises of different communist regimes in an attempt to deny Romanian participation in the Holocaust. At the same time, the author argues that post-communist Romanian negationism has roots in this communist historiography on the Holocaust.

Key words: Holocaust, communism, historiography, ideology, fascism, Jews, Antonescu, Ceausescu

* This article is part of the author's contribution to the Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, issued in November 2004. I am grateful to my colleagues on the commission for their helpful remarks, and especially to the members of the working sub-group that produced this part of the report - Michael Shafir, Leon Volovici, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu and William Totok. Special thanks are also due to Michael Shafir, who translated the sub-group's contribution from Romanian into English.

** Adrian Cioflanca is a Romanian historian, journalist with the *Ziarul de Iasi*

Despite the antifascist rhetoric of official propaganda, the history of the Holocaust was often distorted or simply ignored by East European communist regimes. There are several explanations for this. First, communist ideology was structurally incapable of analyzing the character and evolution of fascist regimes. Almost until the moment of their collapse, communist regimes continued to abide by the definition of "fascism" formulated by Georgi Dimitrov in his 1935 report to the Komintern. Fascism, according to this definition, was "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."¹ As historian István Deák observed, "an ideology that regards ethnic and religious problems as mere cover-ups for class conflict cannot deal adequately with a historical process that had as its goal the extermination of all members of a particular group, whether progressive or reactionary, whether exploiters or part of the exploited."²

Second, communist "antifascism" did not construe any precise critique of fascist ideology and its regimes, but, as amply demonstrated by François Furet, it was merely a power-strategy employed in the communization of Eastern Europe.³ The purpose of Dimitrov's definition was to place fascism at the opposite pole of communism, and the imprint left on the collective imagination by World War II (at least in the eastern part of the continent) was a simplistic ideological binary of communist-fascist confrontation. The victory of the Soviet Union consecrated this logic, with military victory being interpreted as the victory of communism over fascism. One of the effects of this logic would be that communists would refuse to acknowledge anyone else's right to call themselves either an adversary or a victim of fascism.⁴

Third, in the postwar years it became obvious once more that communism and fascism had been conniving. It is well known today that while anti-Semitism was officially outlawed in the Soviet Union, it was unofficially encouraged and disseminated by the authorities. Soviet authorities went as far as to prohibit any mention of massacres of Russian, Belorussian, or Ukrainian Jews on monuments erected in the memory of the crimes committed by the Nazis on Soviet territory. The Black Book, a collection of testimonies on the Holocaust compiled by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossman with the aid of the Jewish

1 Georgi Dimitroff, *The United Front Against War and Fascism: Report to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International 1935* (New York: Gama, 1974), p. 7.

2 István Deák, "Antisemitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary," in *Antisemitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 99-124. Quotation at p. 118.

3 François Furet, *Trecutul unei iluzii. Esen despre ideea comunista în secolul XX* (București: Humanitas, 1993), *passim*. For the case of Romania, see Ovidiu Buruiana, *Antifascism și naționalism ca pretexte în strategia de comunizare a României, Xenopoliana 7* (1999), 1-2, pp. 1-16.

4 François Furet, *op. cit.*, pp. 377, 389, 417.

Antifascist Committee, was banned in the Soviet Union shortly after it was finalized in 1946 and partially translated into Romanian and English.⁵ Indeed, although the Soviets liberated Auschwitz in January 1945, they kept silent for several months about what they found there. In response to inquiries from their British allies, they went out of their way to ignore the racial dimension of the atrocities, officially replying that four million "citizens" had died at Auschwitz.⁶

For the communists, when Jewish martyrdom was not assimilated to the general martyrdom of mankind, it vanished into that of specific nations. The Soviets encouraged amnesia around the Shoah in Eastern Europe, particularly since some of these states were implicated in the perpetration of the genocidal project.⁷ Their discourse on the Holocaust avoided striking any accusatory notes, partly to avoid arousing the hostility of populations about to undergo communization, and partly to channel whatever guilty sentiments that did exist in their own directions.

Postwar Romania shared in these attempts to obscure and/or distort of the Holocaust. As early as 1945, the new regime signaled its unwillingness to acknowledge the role played by state institutions and by the ethnic Romanian majority in perpetrating anti-Jewish atrocities. In July 1945, the local branch of the Iasi Communist Party organization unsuccessfully tried to stop the commemoration of the Iasi pogrom⁸. The authorities also opposed the dissemination of Matatias Carp's three-volume book, *Cartea Neagra (The Black Book)*, on the suffering of Romanian Jews between 1940 and 1944. Indeed, right up to the regime's fall in 1989, Carp's book remained the only serious scholarly work on the Jewish genocide to have been printed in communist Romania.⁹ The book, published in a small edition, was soon withdrawn from bookshops and no subsequent editions were authorized after 1948. Moreover, communist authorities subsequently kept it in the secret sections of the public libraries.¹⁰

The trials of Romanian war criminals began in 1945 and continued until the early 1950s, yet they received public attention for only a brief period of time. The more the communist regime consolidated itself, the less the media covered the trials. As historian Jean Ancel has observed, as early as the end of the "local" trials that followed the "Trial of the Great National Treason" - the trial in which Antonescu and his collaborators

⁵ Bernard Wasserstein, *Disparitia diasporei. Evreii din Europa începând cu 1945* (Iasi: Polirom, 2000), p. 92.

⁶ Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), pp. 175-176.

⁷ François Furet, *op. cit.*, pp. 405, 417.

⁸ Liviu Rotman, "Memory of the Holocaust in Communist Romania: From Minimization to Oblivion," in *The Holocaust and Romania: History and Contemporary Significance*, ed. Mihail E. Ionescu and Liviu Rotman, (Bucharest, 2003), p. 206.

⁹ Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagra. Fapte si documente. Suferinta evreilor din România în timpul dictaturii fasciste 1940-1944*, vols.1-3 (Bucharest: Socec, 1946-1948).

¹⁰ Information provided by the U.S. editor of Carp's book, Andrew L Simon (Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania: Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-1944*, [Safety Harbor, Florida, 2000]), pp. 1-2.

were indicted - a tendency to distort the nature of the crimes being prosecuted was already discernable, and Jews began to fade from the role of principal victim.¹¹

At the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) was internally divided over how to address recent Romanian history. Two main opposing trends can be noted. The first approach was advocated by Lucretiu Patrascanu, who implicitly supported a Romanian acknowledgement of guilt. Patrascanu's study, entitled *Fundamental Problems of Romania* (which was begun in 1942, published in 1944, and reprinted several times until 1946), had a special chapter on "state antisemitism" and "the mass, systematic, and methodical extermination of the Jewish population" in Antonescu's Romania. Proceeding from a Marxist perspective on the "Jewish problem," Patrascanu nonetheless did not hesitate to mention the Romanian state's responsibility for a "long and horribly cruel series of antisemitic crimes."

Individual and collective assassinations committed by the Legionnaires were followed by the systematic and methodical mass-murder of the Jewish population. Pogroms were officially organized, with soldiers and state organs being charged with carrying them out. Thousands and tens of thousands of people-men, women, children, the elderly-were sent to death by hunger and frost, being deported beyond River Dniester to wastelands under harsh winter conditions. When all the deeds committed in Moldova and beyond River Prut after June 1941 are made public, when the thousands of mass executions without trial-of those guilty of nothing other than being born Jewish-are revealed, when all these crimes are brought to justice, then not only those in the dictatorship who ordered them, [and] not only those who implemented them, would have to answer, but so would the regime in whose name they acted."¹²

According to Patrascanu, while Germany did indeed exert an influence on Romania, "*Antisemitism nonetheless remains a Romanian phenomenon that must be investigated not only in what it emulates, but also in what is intrinsic to it.*"¹³

His approach was never heeded. The study sold well (it was printed in three editions), yet it was reviewed unfavorably by Stalinist ideologues.¹⁴ After a power struggle at the top of the RCP, Patrascanu was arrested in

11 See Jean Ancel, "Introduction," in *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol.11 (Jerusalem: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), pp. 13-19; see also the chapter on the war criminals' trials in the *Report of the International Commission on Holocaust in Romania* (Bucharest, 2004).

12 Lucretiu Patrascanu, *Probleme de baza ale României* (Bucharest: Socec, 1944), p. 211.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 171, author's emphasis.

14 Lavinia Betaea, Lucretiu Patrascanu. *Moartea unui lider comunist. Studiu de caz* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2001), pp. 37, 62-63.

1948 and executed in 1954. Although he would be officially rehabilitated in 1968, *Fundamental Problems of Romania* would never be reprinted.¹⁵

It was the alternative approach to coping with the country's recent past that would become canonized. Its normative model was provided by the famous *History of Romania* (soon to be called *History of the Romanian People's Republic*), an obligatory textbook whose editor-in-chief was Mihail Roller.¹⁶ Roller's textbook embraces Dimitrov's definition of fascism, presenting autochthonous Romanian fascism as little else than embodying "monopoly capital" - a movement allegedly lacking popular support, strictly controlled by Nazi Germany, and intended to plunder the Romanian economy and terrorizing political adversaries. The textbook only rarely mentions the regime's anti-Semitic policies, and these few references are ambiguous and lack any explanation. The most blatant distortion emerges whenever reference is made to the victims of fascism, among whom Jews are never mentioned. Instead, for Roller, the "advent of the Legionary-Antonescu dictatorship signified the intensification of terror measures directed against the popular masses and their leaders. Concentration camps were set up, in which thousands of democratic citizens were imprisoned." The textbook does mention the camps in Transnistria, but nowhere does it name the ethnicity of its Jewish or Romany inmates. Students can only conclude that the "organized" relocation to and extermination in the camps targeted the regime's political adversaries, especially communists. Roller concludes, "[by] these cruel acts, the Legionary-Antonescu dictatorship proved its affinity with the crimes committed by the German Hitlerites in the death camps of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Mauthausen, etc."¹⁷ Elsewhere, the textbook mentions "racial injustices," "racial repressions," and "measures intended to bring about the enslavement of cohabiting nationalities."¹⁸

In contrast to Patrascanu, then, Roller's *History of Romania* replaced Jews and Roma with communists and Romanians as the principal victims of fascism and ignored anti-Semitism as a defining trait of Antonescu's dictatorship. This approach came to prevail in all subsequent history textbooks,¹⁹ even after Roller fell into disgrace in the late 1950s, as well as in official communist histories on the interwar period and on the Second

15 *Probleme de bază ale României* was often quoted in works about fascism published in the 1970s and 1980s, but the chapter on the Jewish question was systematically eschewed. See, for example, Gh. I. Ionita, "Un strălucit analist al procesului de naștere și evoluție a mișcării fasciste în România - intelectualul moldovean Lucretiu Patrascanu," in *Intelectuali ieșeni în lupta antifascistă*, Gh.I. Ionita, A. Karetchi (Iasi: Institutul de studii istorice și social-politice de pe lângă CC al PCR-Sectorul din Iasi, 1971), pp. 58-86.

16 Mihail Roller et al., *Istoria României. Manual unic pentru clasa a VIII-a secundară*, (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1947).

17 *Ibidem*, pp. 767-768.

18 *Ibidem*, pp. 805-808.

19 Alexandru Florian, "Treatment of the Holocaust in Romanian Textbooks," in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 237-285.

World War.²⁰ The distortion was in no way hindered by the Jewish ethnic origin of many prominent historians in the first two decades of the postwar years. These Jewish historians were first and foremost disciplined party soldiers devoted to communism, and viewed their Jewishness as secondary at most.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, a revitalization of socio-political anti-Semitism occurred.²¹ Soviet "anti-Zionism" and "anticosmopolitanism" - two catchphrases that concealed an antisemitic campaign serving the purpose of political and institutional purges - spread throughout the Eastern Bloc during the late 1940s and 1950s and were used in power struggles at the top of communist parties. Massive Jewish migration also triggered political problems.²² In this context, (to which one should add the Cold War tensions and the problems posed by postwar reconstruction) the issue of the Holocaust was systematically avoided in both academia and politics. Historiography underwent a process of enforced Marxification. Subjects such as nationalism and ethnic minorities were not priorities under Stalinist research guidelines. Furthermore, the marginalization of the Holocaust was also the result of strict censorship, limited access to WWII documents, purges in the community of historians, and the simultaneous promotion of "militant historians" educated at the RCP's Institute of History, which was established in 1951.²³

Beginning in the 1960s, official discourse and historiography signaled a renewed focus on nationalist themes. This was made possible by the efforts of RCP leaders to distance Romania from the USSR and to mobilize elite and popular support for the party. In general, as in the case of all East-Central European countries, there was a return to the prewar focus on national history in Romania, with a bias towards the ethnic majority. This ethnocentrism dismissed scholarly interest in the history of ethnic minorities as irrelevant, even in extreme cases, such as mass deportations and massacres. It also resulted in the continued avoidance of the topic of the Holocaust.

While Rollerism was denounced in the late 1950s and while the historical discourse was re-nationalized in the 1960s, the approach to the Holocaust remained the same, even if fascism was re-interpreted. Roller's

20 Victor Eskenasy, "The Holocaust in Romanian Historiography: Communist and Neo-Communist Revisionism," in *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, ed. Randolph L. Braham, op. cit., pp. 173-236.

21 Gheorghe Onisoru, *România în anii 1944-1948. Transformări economice și realități sociale* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 1998), pp. 156-162.

22 Robert Levy, *Gloria și decăderea Anei Pauker* (Iasi: Polirom, 2002), p. 168 ff and passim.

23 On the Communist distortion of Romanian history in general, see Michael J. Rura, *Reinterpretation of History as a Method of Furthering Communism in Rumania*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1961); Dionisie Ghermani, *Die kommunistische Umdeutung der rumänischen Geschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Mittelalters* (Munich: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1967); Vlad Georgescu, *Politica și istorie: cazul comunistilor români 1944-1977* (Munich: Jon Dumitru-Verlag, 1981); Al. Zub, *Orizont închis. Istoriografia română sub dictatura* (Iasi: Institutul European, 2000).

textbook was criticized for, among other complaints, proclaiming too radical a break with pre-communist historiography. Ideological guidelines issued in the late 1960s required the integration of communism into national history in order to illustrate that communism was the outcome of an organic evolution.²⁴ As a consequence, **the problematic past was no longer entirely dismissed, but was now selectively retrieved through discursive strategies that constituted a genuine "grammar of exculpation."**²⁵ These transformations are seen best during the reign of Ceausescu (1965-1989), when the communist regime fell back on a local version of national-communism, which combined extreme nationalism and neo-Stalinism.

In order to examine the main traits of the communist discourse on the recent past, a content analysis on a representative sample of authoritative information from the 1970s and 1980s has been carried out. These representative samples include two synthetic volumes on Romanian history—the only books published during the communist regime on the Legion, the Antonescu dictatorship and the Iasi pogrom—and several military histories on Romania's participation in the Second World War.²⁶

This analysis shows:

- a) Fascism is presented as a primarily imported product ("alien to the Romanian people" and "organically rejected" by it) and as devoid of popular support (fascism was not "the expression of a mass trend"). It is argued that fascism was "imposed from abroad," in the face of an "ever growing opposition of popular masses," and amidst an "unfavorable" international context, that it was "transplanted" by foreign imperialists into Romania, which was subsequently transformed into an "out-post" for these foreign interests, supported by a local "retrograde minority."²⁷

²⁴ Andi Mihalache, *Istorie si practici discursive în România "democrat-populară"* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2003), pp. 110-111.

²⁵ The term refers to the means employed in attempts to avoid coping with the difficulty of the past in postwar Germany. See Jeffrey K. Olick, Daniel Levy, "Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, no. 6 (December 1997), pp. 921-936.

²⁶ Miron Constantinescu, et al., *Istoria României. Compendiu* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1969) (The History of Romania. Compendium, henceforth Compendiu); Constantin C. Giurescu, Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până astăzi* (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1971) (The History of the Romanians from Ancient Times to the Present, henceforth Giurescu); Mihai Fatu, Ion Spalatel, *Garda de Fier, organizație de tip fascist, 2nd ed.* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1980) (The Iron Guard: A Fascist Organization, henceforth Garda de Fier); Mihai Fatu, *Contribuții la studierea regimului politic din România* (septembrie 1940-august 1944) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1984) (Contributions to the Study of the Political Regime in Romania: September 1940 - August 1944, henceforth Contribuții); A. Karetki, M. Covaci, *Zile însângerate la Iasi (28-30 iunie 1941)*, with the Preface of Nicolae Minei (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1978) (Bloody Days in Iasi, June 28-30, 1941, henceforth Iasi); *Marea conflagrație a secolului XX* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1974) (The Great Conflagration of the 20th Century, henceforth Marea conflagrație); Gheorghe Zaharia, Ion Cupșa, *Participarea României la înfrângerea Germaniei naziste* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1985) (The Participation of Romania in the Victory over Nazi Germany, henceforth Participarea); *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial, vol. I* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1989) (Romania during the Second World War, henceforth România în război); *Istoria militară a poporului român, vol. VI* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1989) (The Military History of the Romanian People, henceforth Istoria militară).

²⁷ Compendiu, p. 526 ff; Garda de Fier, pp. 31, 37, passim; Contribuții, pp. 9, 11, 14, 19, 27, 38, 86, 91; Iasi, pp. 20, 33, 76, passim; Marea conflagrație, p. 139 ff; Participarea, p. 39 ff; România în război, p. 308 ff; Istoria militară, p. 367-376.

- b) Romania is presented as a victim, innocent of any wrongdoing or crime. While highlighting the role of "Western treason," which "left Romania alone" and "pushed Romania into the arms of Germany," the authors blame Nazi Germany either exclusively or predominantly for Romanian political developments (e.g., Germany brought the Iron Guard and Antonescu to power and strictly controlled political, social, and economic life in Romania), for Romanian decisions (e.g., Germany made Romania enter "the adventure of the War" and forced it into implementing "terrorist policies"), and for atrocities committed by Romanians.²⁸
- c) The Romanian population is absolved of any responsibility. The authors argue that the establishment of the dictatorship, its actions, and Romanian atrocities were not the product of "mass will," since they stood in "blatant and irreconcilable opposition to the overwhelming majority of the Romanian people." In the beginning, the Romanian people could not formulate its opposition. However, it gradually expressed its "unmitigated hatred" and "active opposition" to the dictatorship, and its indignation with regard to the regime's "excesses," by building an "insurmountable wall of humanitarianism."²⁹ Even when these positions are difficult to uphold, as in the case of the Iasi pogrom, where the Romanian army, police and local population participated in the atrocity,³⁰ the authors find a means of evasion: blame is either deflected on the German troops and thus externalized and extra-territorialized; or, alternatively, blame is diverted to the "periphery"-Romanian participation is said to have been limited to "a few isolated soldiers," deserters, "degenerate elements in the police force," Legionnaires, and "inebriated civilians."³¹
- d) In contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, during the 1970s and particularly the early 1980s a qualitative separation is established between the Legionary and Antonescu regimes, with a severe bias against the former. The Legionnaires are represented through the use of terms that evoke marginality and unrepresentativeness: "bandits," "hooligans," "robbers," "murderers," "terrorists," "traitors," "fifth column of Hitlerism." The authors insist that,

28 Compendiu, pp. 522, 524, 528; Giurescu, p. 652 ff; Garda de Fier, pp. 31, 258, 288, *passim*; Contributii, p. 86, *passim*; Iasi, *passim*; Marea conflagratie, p. 120, 150; Participarea, p. 39 ff.; România în război, p. 308 and *passim*; Istoria militara, p. 363 ff.

29 Compendiu, p. 529 ff; Giurescu, p. 658; Garda de Fier, pp. 37, 86, 130 ff; Contributii, p. 19, 91, 112; Iasi, pp. 18, 20, 71, 106 ff; Participarea, *passim*; România în război, pp. 312, 316; Istoria militara, pp. 361, 372.

30 Jean Ancel, *Contributii la istoria României. Problema evreiasca*, vol. 2, part 2, 1933-1944 (Bucharest: Hasefer, Yad Vashem, 2003), p. 83-124.

31 Iasi, p. 25, 73, 75, 89, *passim*.

for the Legionnaires, ideology was nothing but an "excuse" for their reprehensible deeds.³² By contrast, Antonescu appears less bloodthirsty and irresponsible, although mention is made of some of the crimes committed under his rule.³³ While the deeds of Legionnaires are depicted as having been committed out of a gratuitous propensity to kill, the crimes committed during Antonescu's dictatorship are placed in the context of the state of emergency, which suggests that the Conducator had limited freedom of action and that his decisions were motivated by the war, as well as domestic and international circumstances.³⁴

- e) Antisemitism is only seldom presented as an ingredient of fascism. For example, in the book on the Legion, antisemitism is mentioned last among a long list of other defining features of fascism, after anticommunism, hostility to democracy, irrationality, mysticism, anti-national character, hostility to the working class, the cult of death, anti-intellectualism, and the apology of war. Even when mention is made of antisemitism, the trait is depicted as being aimed at "concealing the real causes of the economic, social and political crises of those years" and at "diverting the attention of the working class from its struggle against exploiters."³⁵ In the book on the Iasi pogrom, the two authors claim that it is "simplistic" and "mystifying" to speak of "Romanian antisemitism" at all, while going on to conclude, in a sententious note, that "unlike in many parts of East-Central Europe, the Romanian land did not prove fertile to the poisoned seeds of hate."³⁶ On most occasions, even when explicitly mentioned, antisemitism is not explained, but only inserted into an enumeration of other traits of fascism. Among the books surveyed, only one analyzes antisemitism as a form of racism and lists the antisemitic measures of that time. This volume also admits that antisemitism "became state policy as early as the times of Carol II."³⁷
- f) Just as they strive to diminish the importance of antisemitism in

32 Compendiu, p. 527; Giurescu, pp. 650-653; Garda de Fier, passim; Contributii, pp. 53-57; Participarea, pp. 39-50; România în război, pp. 309-314; Istoria militară, pp. 372-373.

33 See, for example, Giurescu who makes no mention whatever of the crimes of Antonescu's regims; Garda de Fier, p. 275, p. 280, Contributii, p. 19, p. 313 etc; Iasi, pp. 61, 73, passim; Participarea, p. 51 ff; România în război, p. 315; Istoria militară, p. 374 ff.

34 The following two examples are telling: "The institutional framework within which Antonescu exercised his dictatorship between January 1941-August 1944 had been established by the emergency legislation passed under wartime conditions...;" (Participarea, p. 51); "General Ion Antonescu took over the helm of power in circumstances of an extremely difficult internal and external situation; as most of his rule was exercised in a state of war, the legislation made use of was repressive, extremely harsh." (România în război, p. 370).

35 Garda de Fier, p. 85; on p. 37, the authors emphasize that antisemitism is not an important trait of fascist movements.

36 Iasi, pp. 17-18.

37 Contributii, pp. 41, 157 ff.

the fascist credo, the authors minimize Jewish suffering and narrow the scope of Jewish tragedy. For example, the *History of Romanians* mentions only the Legion's "pressures and brutalities against Jews."³⁸ After first referring to the fate of imprisoned or executed communists and antifascists, *The Compendium* notes: "To the series of murders committed during the Antonescu dictatorship one can add the pogrom organized in Iasi, in which 2,000 people, most of them Jews, were murdered. Many other citizens of various nationalities, most of them Jews, were interned in labor camps [and threatened with] extermination through various means."³⁹ In *Garda de Fier*, mention is made of a well-known and well-documented incident of January 1941, during which 200 Jews were locked in a Legionary headquarters in Bucharest during the Iron Guard's uprising, and ninety of them were later shot in the nearby Jilava forest. The two authors, historians Mihai Fatu and Ion Spalatelu, cite Carp's *Cartea neagra*, but in their version the 200 Jews are turned into "200 citizens." A few pages on, however, Fatu and Spalatelu cite Carp correctly, mentioning the number of the pogrom's victims as 120.⁴⁰ The *Contributions* offers the most information about the regime's antisemitic policies and mentions the Transnistria deportations, which is rare. Still, the terminology employed for this purpose remains ambiguous and inaccurate: "One of the forms of repression used against the Jewish population was the internment of the people regarded as 'dangerous to the security of the state,' which usually meant communists or antifascists, in concentration camps in Transnistria (Râbnita, Vapniarca, and others)."⁴¹ In *Bloody Days*, the authors cite one of Ceausescu's well-known references to the Iasi pogrom: "Immediately after the beginning of the anti-Soviet war, a true pogrom was organized against antifascist forces, during which 2,000 people were killed in Iasi."⁴² The authors conclude that 3,233 Jews died during the pogrom, although the documents cited (to which the authors had privileged access at a time when such access was strictly supervised) indicate much higher figures.⁴³ In the preface

38 Giurescu, p. 653.

39 Compendiu, p. 527.

40 Garda de Fier, pp. 337, 341.

41 Contributii, pp. 145, 157 ff, 161.

42 Nicolae Ceausescu, *România pe drumul construirii societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate, vol.11*, (Bucharest: Editura politica, 1975), p. 570; cited in Iasi, p. 16.

43 Iasi, pp. 16, 105, passim. Some Communist party historians go as far as to admit a figure as high as 8,000 victims, albeit they do so only in publications targeting foreign readers. See: Ion Popescu-Puturi, et al., *La Roumanie pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Etude* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Academie de RPR, 1964), pp. 419-450; Gheorghe Zaharia, *Pages de la résistance antifasciste en Roumanie* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974), p. 45.

to the book, Nicolae Minei inserts a footnote on the Transnistria deportations, yet the purpose of the footnote is to distort reality and deflect guilt.⁴⁴ Finally, *The Participation of Romania in the Victory over Nazi Germany* offers information unavailable in the other volumes examined. First, the involvement of Romanian troops in atrocities committed on "territories where combat occurred" is acknowledged. It is furthermore stated that "Romanian gendarmerie units that participated in combat and some troops from the Second and Fourth Armies joined the acts of cruelty begun by the German Fourth Army, led by Colonel General Ritter von Schobert, as well as by SS troops." The volume also lists several "labor camps in Chisinau, Falesti, Limbienii Noi and Balti, in which about 5,000 Jews were interned in early July 1941."⁴⁵ Mention is also made of 115,520 Jews "deported eastward," of which just 50,741 survived; the rest, it is stated, were murdered by the Nazis, by epidemic, by malnutrition, and by harsh work conditions. Finally, the authors acknowledge that nomadic Roma were subjected to the same measures.⁴⁶ In brief, although Gheorghe Zaharia and Ion Cupsa underestimate the number of victims, and the depiction of events is inaccurate and distorted, this book is an anomaly in communist-era historiography. What's more, Zaharia and Cupsa's example was not heeded by others. The three-volume study on Romania during the Second World War has only two paragraphs on the victims of the Antonescu regime and even those provide meager information. The first paragraph argues that the RCP was the main target of repression by Antonescu's regime, that "numerous" communists were executed, and that other communists were "interned in camps, in order to isolate them from society." The other paragraph states only that Jews were subjected to "discriminating policies." When the third volume addresses Nazi concentration and extermination camps, Jews are not identified as their victims.⁴⁷ Neither does *The*

44 "The deportations beyond the Dniester carried out by the Antonescu authorities were never motivated, explicitly or secretly, by the intent to exterminate those affected. That some would nevertheless perish was due to three main reasons: abuses committed by some representatives of the authorities, who embezzled funds allocated for food purchasing; criminal excesses by degenerate elements belonging to the surveillance and supervision organs; the intervention of the Nazi *Einsatzkommando* assassins who, while withdrawing from the East, forced their way into the camps and exterminated the inmates." See Iasi, p. 25. It is worth noting that a Jewish historian, Nicolae Minei, was tasked with writing the preface, and thereby legitimize the official version on those events.

45 In actual fact, in Chisinau there was a ghetto, while in Falesti, Limbienii Noi and in Balti transit camps were set up ahead of the deportation to Transnistria. See Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României. Problema evreiască*, vol.1, part 1, 1933-1944 (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2001), pp. 143-229; Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1998), pp. 157-191.

46 Participarea, p. 53 and passim. The authors do not source the information provided.

47 România în război, pp. 315; see also vol.III, p. 528; vol. III includes two pages dealing with the "danger of revisionism," but the formulations used are ambiguous and it does not clearly transpire from them that it is the Holocaust as subject of "revisionism" that the authors have in mind; see p. 532 and passim.

Military History of the Romanian People do a better job. Readers would never learn from this volume that during the war Jews perished at the hands of the Antonescu regime. Its sixth volume mentions only "the policy of systematic reprisals against the Romanian Communist Party."⁴⁸ *The Great Conflagration* elaborates this type of historical distortion. After enumerating the Nazi labor camps, its authors claim that: "In these camps there were communists and other antifascists, partisans and [French] Resistance fighters, Polish, French, Yugoslav, Dutch, Belgian and Soviet war prisoners, in all several millions of people. Their fate was sealed: exhausting labor, starvation, misery, filth, followed by the gas chamber and mass graves." Surprisingly, the volume mentions the Odessa massacre, which all other texts reviewed here avoid. However, not even in this case are Jews depicted as its victims: "The Field Gendarmerie executed civilians. Romanian public opinion was outraged and rejected with disgust and anger such criminal acts. This was also the mood of a majority among the Romanian military."⁴⁹

- g) The books analyzed insist on the differences between Nazi Germany and Antonescu's Romania as well as on the alleged Romanian exceptionalism in the implementation of the Final Solution. A section in *Contribution to the Study of the Romanian Political Regime* reads: "Historical reality has sanctioned the truth that insofar as Romania is concerned, the regime established in September 1940 did not elevate political violence to the same level of intensity as that encountered in Nazi Germany, Horthy's Hungary, or in other countries...After the January 1941 [Iron Guard] rebellion, physical violence and terror did not become the main practice and means of exercising state power; the regime's primary instruments of rule were dictatorial and military methods, as well as political, judicial, and economic repression stemming from, and determined by, fascist ideology." Furthermore, Mihai Fatu claims that "Antonescu was not prepared to follow the Nazi model of repression of the Jewish population" and deems the Marshal's policy towards that population to have been "a lot more moderate" than that of the Nazis.⁵⁰

Herein, apparently, lies the key to understanding the terminological shift that would occur in the 1970s, which turned

⁴⁸ *Istoria militara*, p. 375.

⁴⁹ *Marea conflagratie*, p. 140 (In the captions under the photographs of camps reproduced on page 141, the Jews were replaced with "people"); for Odessa, see p. 167.

⁵⁰ *Contributii*, p. 18 ff, 42, 73, 157.

Antonescu's "fascist dictatorship" (as his rule was designated in the first communist documents) into a "military-fascist" one. The authors studied here attempt to argue that the acts of repression perpetrated by Antonescu regime's were not based on either an antisemitic ethos or on ethnocentric policies, which would have associated Romania with Nazi Germany. Instead, these acts were cast as politically motivated repressive measures or as measures imposed by military circumstances.⁵¹ In the late 1980s, the linguistic construct "military-fascist dictatorship" was in turn sidelined, as it suggested an involvement of the army in politics and its support of the dictatorship. Antonescu's regime would henceforth be labeled either a "personal dictatorship" or as a "totalitarian regime" and military historians would insist on the fact that the Marshal took all decisions himself and responsibility for their outcomes rests solely on his shoulders.⁵² Yet efforts to absolve the army of any responsibility are not confined only to military historians.⁵³ As is well known, nationalist ideologies (Ceausescu's brand of national communism among them) see the army as the very epitome of statehood.

Both deflective and selective negationism⁵⁴ are reflected in claims of Romanian exceptionalism. According to the authors of *Romania during WWII* (a collective volume), "Romania was the only country in Nazi Germany's sphere of influence where the so-called Final Solution adopted by Hitler for exterminating the European population of the Mosaic rite was not implemented."⁵⁵ Similarly trenchant statements about Romanian exceptionalism can be found in *Bloody Days*, especially in the preface signed by Nicolae Minei, who argues that "the Holocaust did not occur in Romania precisely because - with few and rather insignificant exceptions - the swastika-wearing executioners not only did not enjoy self-volunteered local cooperation, but also encountered outright refusal when they attempted - officially or otherwise - to recruit accomplices in the organization of deportations or other genocidal actions." Minei goes on to argue that "of all countries under Nazi occupation Romania distinguished itself as the only one that had no ghettos or extermination camps and [as the only country that] did not deport [Jews] to the ovens of Auschwitz or

51 Compendiu, p. 526 ff; Giurescu, p. 652 ff; Garda de Fier, pp. 275, 350, 353 ff; Contributii, passim; Iasi, p. 35; Marea conflagratie, p. 122.

52 România în război, p. 313 ff; Istoria militară, pp. 361, 367, 374.

53 Garda de Fier, passim; Contributii, p. 23 ff., 69 ff.; Iasi, p. 73, 75, 89; Marea conflagratie, passim.

54 I am using the terminology of Michael Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare prin comparație: negarea Holocaustului în țările postcomuniste din Europa Centrală și de Est* (Iasi: Polirom, 2002).

55 România în război, p. 315.

Majdanek, the only country that offered asylum to foreign Jews."⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Minei was the first in communist Romania to argue that Romania did not exterminate Jews during the war, but saved them on a mass scale.⁵⁷ Interestingly, this is precisely the argument made by representatives of the Antonescu regime in the postwar trials of war criminals.

- h.) The quotations above demonstrate that terms such as "Holocaust," "Final Solution," and "genocide" are systematically avoided when reference is made to the fate of Jews under Romanian administration, but are perfectly in order when used to designate the actions of others. For example, according to Contributions: "The intensification of violence by some fascist regimes, such as those in Germany and Hungary, up to the point of [the perpetration of the] Holocaust was an expression of their aggressive, expansionist and annexationist policies directed at other countries and peoples."⁵⁸ Similarly, contributors to Romania during the Second World War write: "From the very outset of the Horthyist occupation [of Northern Transylvania], measures taken by authorities bore the incontestable mark of a genuine ethnic genocide that had been prepared in detail in order to change the ethnic realities of the area." In the chapter where this quotation appears, the term "genocide" is used to describe the Horthyist policy toward the Romanian population.⁵⁹

These works pay particular attention to Hungary, which is represented as closely associated with Nazi Germany's systematic policy of physical destruction of Jews. Furthermore, Hungary is presented as pursuing the same type of policies toward the ethnic Romanian population in occupied Transylvania. This is a particular characteristic of Romanian historiography under Ceausescu: while atrocities perpetrated on Romanian territory or Romanian-administered lands are either ignored or minimized, the antisemitic policies of Horthy's Hungary are thoroughly scrutinized. An emblematic example is *The Horthyist-Fascist Terror in North-Western Romania*, edited by Mihai Fatu and Mircea Musat. The volume places side-by-side Hungary's participation in the Holocaust and the anti-Romanian policies of the Horthy regime.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Iasi, pp. 20, 24 ff; see also p. 39, passim.

⁵⁷ Iasi, p. 20. "In order to fully comprehend what the salvation of a massive (some 350,000) population from an apparently ineluctable destruction really meant, one must take into consideration the context of the times and the Hitlerite's exterminatory obsessions."

⁵⁸ Contributii, p. 16.

⁵⁹ România în război, 295-306; citation on p. 297.

⁶⁰ Mihai Fatu, Mircea Musat (coord), *Teroarea horthyisto-fascista în nord-vestul României (septembrie 1940-octombrie 1944)* (Bucharest: Editura politica, 1985) și *Horthyist-Fascist Terror in Northwestern Romania. September 1940-October 1944* (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1986).

Blatant as it might seem, this discrepancy in treatment may be explained by the anti-Hungarian nationalist policies practiced by the Ceausescu regime, particularly during the 1980s. A considerable number of history journals from those years,⁶¹ as well as the official media, were mobilized to take part in the "image war" against the neighboring country. The Chief Rabbi of Romania, Moses Rosen, became involved in the campaign, the more so as his anti-Hungarian sentiments were perfectly in line with the regime's policies on this particular issue.⁶² The regime's anti-Hungarian policies also help explain the special status enjoyed at that time by Oliver Lustig, a Holocaust survivor from Hungarian-occupied Transylvania, who was allowed to publish several books on Nazi extermination policies because they also contain anti-Hungarian undertones.⁶³ Taking advantage of their special status within the regime, Moses Rosen and Oliver Lustig on several occasions managed to mention publicly or in print atrocities committed against Jews under the Romanian administration, yet the impact of these gestures were limited.⁶⁴

Several conclusions can be drawn from this historiographical analysis. First, given that the various contributions reviewed here were made by different authors living in different periods, it is striking how uniformly distorted were the discussions of the Holocaust, of fascism, and of wartime events in general. This provides ample evidence that the historiography was strictly controlled, according to RCP-issued ideological blueprints.⁶⁵ Besides, all the historians authorized to write on such sensitive topics were well positioned in the RCP, as researchers affiliated to the RCP Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Studies or the Center for Research on Military History and Theory headed by the president's brother, Ilie Ceausescu.

61 Remarkable among them is the popularized history journal "Magazin istoric," launched in 1967 with support from the Institute for Historical and Social and Historical Studies affiliated to the PCR's Central Committee. This institute replaced the former Institute of [Communist] Party History.

62 See, for example, "Remember. 40 de ani de la masacrarea evreilor din Ardealul de Nord sub ocupatia borthysta" (Bucharest: Federatia Comunitatilor evreiesti din Romania, 1985).

63 For example, Oliver Lustig, *Jurnal insangerat* (Bucharest: Editura Militara, 1987), translated into English as *Blood-Bespotted Diary* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1988).

64 As of June 1986, Moses Rosen received permission to commemorate the Iasi pogrom within the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities (FCER). However, information on the commemorations would be allowed to appear in print only in the FCER publication *Revista cultului mozaic*, whose distribution in Romania itself was very small, but which benefited from a large distribution abroad. The publication had English and Hebrew summaries, thus managing to create outside Romania a cosmeticized image of how the Holocaust was being treated under Ceausescu's regime. Oliver Lustig managed to slip into an article published in 1986 one of the rare references to Antonescu's responsibility for "the death of between 70,000-80,000 Jews in Transnistria, "but the article in which he did that could easily be considered as belonging to the category of selective negationism. See "Exceptie?... Da, a fost o exceptie," *România literară*, 7.11.1986.

65 Compare Nicolae Ceausescu, *Istoria poporului român. Texte selectate* (Bucharest: Editura militara, 1988), pp. 337-608; *Împotriva fascismului. Sesiunea stiintifica privind analiza critica si demasarea fascismului in Romania*, Bucharest, March 4-5, 1971 (Bucharest: Editura politica, 1971); *Comitetul antifascist român*, (Bucharest: Editura politica, 1985) etc.

Second, it is obvious from these texts that the ideology prevails over science and that the historiography on the Second World War was fully mobilized in the service of Romania's self-victimization, self-lionization, and self-exculpation. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the tone of historical discourse changed with shifts in the regime's profile: as the 1980s progressed and official nationalism and the cult of personality intensified, the historiography became even more nationalist and selective.⁶⁶

Third, the approach to fascism continued to be heavily influenced by Dimitrov's definition. Romanian historians distanced themselves from Dimitrov only when necessary, in order to embellish Romanian history even further.⁶⁷ They did not perceive antisemitism as central to the characterization of fascism or as relevant to Romanian political culture. Accordingly, Jews are not represented as the principal victims of Nazi-like murderous policies. The volumes examined here reveal a clear intention to distort the specificity of the Holocaust by positing that communists and ethnic Romanians, in general, were its main victims. This pattern is contemporaneous with the revival of anti-Semitism - a development tolerated by Ceausescu - in the works of various "court writers" who, after 1989, would become leading figures of postcommunist Romanian negationism.⁶⁸ In general, the policy of communist Romania vis-à-vis its Jewish citizens was extremely ambiguous, as communist Romania offered, in the words of B. Wasserstein, "one of the most paradoxical blends of tolerance and repression in Eastern Europe."⁶⁹ Unlike all other communist bloc countries, Romania maintained good relations with Israel. This policy was generally motivated by considerations of foreign policy as well as by the economic benefits of Jewish migration to Israel. Ceausescu's concern for his image abroad meant that antisemitism was formally repudiated and the Jewish community was granted a certain degree of autonomy.⁷⁰ The same considerations prompted the signing of an agreement on cooperation (involving the exchange of documents and holding joint symposia) between RCP historians and Yad Vashem historians in 1980s. Yet powerful ideological constraints prevented Romanian historians from taking advantage of the agreement, and its

66 Vlad Georgescu, "Politics, History and Nationalism: The Origins of Romania's Socialist Personality Cult," in Joseph Held (ed.), *The Cult of Power. Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983), pp. 129-142; Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society. Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985).

67 For example, see *Contributii*, p. 15 ff.

68 Michael Shafir, "The Men of the Archangel Revisited: Antisemitic Formations among Communist Romania's Intellectuals," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. XVI, no.3, Fall 1983, pp. 223-243.

69 B. Wasserstein, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

70 Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu si Securitatea. Constrangere si disidenta in Romania anilor 1965-1989* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), pp. 200-205.

impact on Holocaust research in Romania was minimal.⁷¹ Again, foreign policy considerations explain why several studies which admit, in hushed tones, that Antonescu's regime was responsible for atrocities against Jews were presented by Romanian historians at international colloquia abroad in foreign languages. But it is just as relevant that these studies were never published at home, in Romanian translation.⁷²

Fourth, a distinction was gradually introduced between the National Legionary state and the Antonescu dictatorship as part of a quasi-official strategy to discreetly rehabilitate Marshal Antonescu. The marks of this strategy initially emerged in the 1970s and become more obvious in the 1980s.⁷³ There were several identifiable reasons for the emergence of this strategy: the commitment of RCP-affiliated historians to the exoneration of the Romanian state and society of any involvement in antisemitic atrocities; the concern of military historians to absolve the Romanian army and its command of responsibility for wartime involvement in crimes; and the romanticization of Antonescu by some writers who were gravitating around the party leadership.⁷⁴ Also important was the role of Iosif Constantin Dragan, a former Iron Guard sympathizer, who became a millionaire in the West and later a persona grata with Romania's dictator. Having metamorphosed into Antonescu's fiercest advocate, Dragan contributed to the campaign waged abroad by the regime to rehabilitate the Marshal and recruited domestic and foreign historians to the cause. Among them were Mihai Pelin, Gheorghe Buzatu, Larry Watts. Four volumes of documents portraying Antonescu positively were published in the West under Dragan's supervision, at a publishing house he owned in Italy.⁷⁵ Before 1989 and after, these documents were inaccessible to the great majority of Romanian researchers, but Dragan obtained them due to his excellent relations with the regime and, particularly, with Mircea Musat and Ion Ardeleanu, censors of the history department of the RCP's Central Committee.⁷⁶

Finally, there is ample evidence that all the authors discussed in this section strived to minimize the scope of atrocities committed on Romanian territory or in territories administered by the Romanian government and to deny Romanian participation in the Holocaust.

⁷¹ Victor Eskenasy, *loc.cit.*, p. 187, 191.

⁷² *Ibidem*, *passim*.

⁷³ Randolph L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 49 ff; Victor Eskenasy, *loc.cit.*, p. 184 ff.; Dennis Deletant, *op. cit.*, p. 185 ff.; Liviu Rotman, *loc.cit.*, p. 209 ff.

⁷⁴ For example, Marin Preda, *Delirul* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea românească, 1975).

⁷⁵ Iosif Constantin Dragan (ed.), *Antonescu. Maresalul României și rasboaiele de reîntregire, vol. I-IV* (Venetia: Editura Nagard, 1986-1990).

⁷⁶ Victor Eskenasy, "Istoriografia și istoricii pro și contra mitului Antonescu," in *Exterminarea evreilor români și ucraineni în perioada antonesciană*, Randolph L. Braham (ed.) (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2002), pp. 313-346; Michael Shafir, "Reabilitarea postcomunista a maresalului Ion Antonescu: Cui bono?," in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 400-465.

What's more, post-communist Romanian negationism has roots in the communist-era historiography on the Holocaust. The victimization and lionization of Romanians, who replace Jews as the principal victims of Nazism, the displacement of responsibility for crimes, the minimization of the true scope of these atrocities, self-flattering exceptionalism, the rehabilitation of Antonescu, as well as many other manifestations, are reproduced, in various forms, in post-communist negationist historiography.