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Alternative identities at the periphery of a national state. Hashomer Hatzair and the Zionist youth from Romania

Introduction

Since the settlement of their first communities on Romanian lands during the middle ages and pre-modern era, Jews have been subject to unstable policies and attitudes varying between hostile tolerance, assimilation and rejection. This situation was also reflected by the late collective emancipation of the Jewish population in Romania that took place only after World War I. In the new post-war geopolitical context, Romania became a national unitary state joined by new provinces (Bukovina, Bessarabia and Transylvania) that added diverse multicultural populations to the Romanian majority. With most of its population spread across rural areas (75%), facing a low literacy rate (57% literate population in the whole country)[1] and lacking an autochthonous middle class, the Romanian state engaged in a compensation process against those national minorities more educated and urbanized, like the Jews.[2] Moreover, struggling to consolidate the unification process, the state transformed public education and instruction of the future generation into one of its main national policies.[3] But despite the nationalist tendencies of the state, social mobility through education was embraced by many youngsters, especially from acculturated families, once Romanian citizenship was finally granted to all Jewish inhabitants by the 1923 Constitution. Even a part of the young generation from more segregated communities broke with the tradition and attended non-denominational secondary schools.

In the Romanian multicultural state, the Jewish population was not homogenous. Sephardic communities lived in the Old Kingdom (Regat)[4], but the region

1 Data from Recensământul general al populației României din 1930, vol. II, București, Imprimeria Națională, 1938.

2 Though reaching only 4% of the total population, Jews represented a large ethnic group in urban areas (14%), with many working in liberal professions, finance and education.

3 See Livezeanu, Irina: Cultural politics in greater Romania: Regionalism, nation building, and ethnic struggle, 1918–1930. Ithaca 1995.

4 Regat (the Kingdom), also called the Old Kingdom, designated the Romanian territory (Moldavia and Wallachia regions) before the 1918 union with the other provinces.

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was home to highly acculturated Ashkenazi Jews who had been established there for generations, with a well-defined role in many areas of professional and social life, while actively practising their religiousness. Emancipated long before the Romanian Jews, as inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the communities from Bukovina and Transylvania identified with the former dominant nations (German and Hungarian) and were the keepers of the imperial legacies. Hasidic communities in Bessarabia or northern Transylvania tended to a more segregated life, practising their rituals and religious traditions as part of daily life.[5] A general review of the youth organizations in 20th-century Romania has to take into account this complex cultural and ethnic diversity of Romanian society and the historical legacies of the provinces that strengthened this multicultural feature after 1918. In a national state aiming for unification, diversity was a challenge faced by the nationalist policies aiming to promote the Romanian dominant nation.[6]

In the interwar period, the Jews were still perceived by the majority not only as a minority population but as a "problem" often referred to as "the Jewish question". Anti-Semitism became one of the main features of society, emerging as a consequence of economic competition, as a result of social unrest, or as a political and ideological reaction of rejection towards otherness. Anti-Jewish reactions also manifested in youth environments, in schools or youth organizations.

From the 1920s, higher education was the scene of the student movements contesting the poor conditions of study and a scarce job market, while blaming the Jews as scapegoats. The anti-Semitic propaganda argued for the restriction/elimination of the competition represented by non-Romanians, especially the non-Christian Jewish student population. High schools were also a proper medium for political radicalization, with pupils attracted by the autochthonous fascist Legionary Movement.[7] Nonetheless, communist propaganda (emerging mostly in Bessarabia and Bukovina) found supporters among the youngsters, especially workers and ethnics persecuted by the nationalist fervour.[8]

In an agrarian country with slow economic growth and a population eager for better living conditions, social tensions were amplified by the failed reforms and

5 Iancu, Carol: Evreii în România interbelică. In: Trecutul prezent. Evreii din România: istorie, memorie, reprezentare. Edited by Anca Filipovici and Attila Gidó. Cluj-Napoca 2018. pp. 51–70.
6 Following Ernest Gellner's theory, nationalism is defined by this perspective as ethnic ideologies which hold that their group should dominate a state. See: Gellner, Ernest: Nations and Nationalism. Oxford 1983.
7 See Clark, Roland: Holy legionary youth: Fascist activism in interwar Romania. Ithaca 2015.
8 Janos, Andrew C.: East Central Europe in the modern world. The politics of the Borderlands from pre- to post-communism. Stanford 2000. p. 160.

distrust in the traditional democratic parties.[9] Post-war social and political turbulence escalated during the 1930s, a decade marked by the ascendancy of the European far-right regimes. In this context, among other measures, in 1934 King Carol II created Straja Țării [the Sentinel of the Motherland], a state-sponsored youth organization, in an attempt to redirect the interest of youngsters enchanted by radical movements. Straja used the logistics and formal principles of scouting and was conceived according to the fascist Opera Nazionale Balilla and Nazi Hitlerjugend.[10] Until Romania adopted the dictatorial model of the Third Reich and implemented extensive anti-Semitic legislation (August 1940),[11] Straja engaged all minority youth, including the Jewish youngsters.[12] Thus, many Jews were enrolled in both the public secondary school system (~12–16 %)[13] and Straja Țării. But this social mobility manifested in tandem with the need for ethnic stability, so these youngsters also became members of Jewish movements and organizations. Among these, the Zionist ones were the most widespread.

In the last decade of the 19th century, Jewish youth organizations were created in Diaspora as a consequence of the modernization process, aiming to counteract the negative effects of industrialization on young people. Two phenomena inspired youth worldwide, including the Jewish youth: Scouting in England[14], a youth organ-

9 Roberts, Henry L.: Rumania: Political problems of an agrarian state. New Haven 1951. p. 189.

10 Straja Țării was designed for both male (age 7–18) and female students (age 7–21) and it was compulsory for all youngsters, no matter their ethnicity. The official purpose referred to the "national and physical education of the youth of both genders" and "coordination and control of similar activities deployed by state and private institutions". However, its aim was to prepare and, after 1938, to consolidate the personal dictatorship of the king. And in this way, to redirect the youth from his main competitor, the fascist leader Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu.

11 See Benjamin, Lya: Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944. Vol. 1: Legislația antievreiască. București 1993.

12 Since its creation, Straja stated that the organization was geared towards all young Romanian citizens. This was one of the main differences between Straja Țării and Hitlerjugend. Out of foreign policy strategies, King Carol II aimed for political support from England and France. He was under pressure from the League of Nations, which was overwhelmed with petitions from international bodies, in favour of minorities in Romania and especially Jews. However, the regulations and the implementation rules indicated that, in fact, Straja was suited mainly to Christian pupils and thus acted as an agency of assimilation. See Filipovici, Anca: "Faith and work for King and Country!" Nationalization and covert Romanianization through the youth organization Straja Țării (1934–1940). In: National Identities no. 21 vol. 23 (2021). pp. 349–367, doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2020.1813698.

13 Filipovici, Anca: The Youth of the Unified Nation: Social Control and Discipline in Romanian Interwar High Schools. In: N.E.C. Ștefan Odobleja Program Yearbook 2018–2019. Edited by Irina Vainovski-Mihai. Bucharest 2020. pp. 135–164, here p. 142.

14 See, for instance: Boehmer, Elleke: Introduction. In: Scouting for Boys. A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship. Edited by Robert Baden-Powell. New York 2004. pp. XI–XXXIX.

ization coordinated by adults (the conformist model), and Wandervogel in Germany[15], a youth movement created by young people, usually as a form of action against the older generations (the rebellious model).

At the beginning of the 20th century, while the process of Jewish emancipation was accomplished in many countries, East-Central Europe, and especially Galicia, became the cradle of the Zionist movement. Organizations proclaiming and acting for aliyah to Eretz Israel flourished in the context of restrictive legislation and anti-Semitic attitudes that led to self-isolation. Within the Zionist movement, youth organizations had a distinct position. Hashomer Hatzair, a leftist secular Zionist organization created in 1913 Galicia,[16] was one of the most renowned, raising its voice against the assimilation tendencies of the Orthodox Jews and the traditional religious Jewish society. Hashomer Hatzair offered not only the possibility of identification with Jewish nationality, but a promising future under the auspices of Zionism.

Framed by this complex context, this article sketches the broad picture of Jewish youth organizations in the provinces of Romania (the Old Kingdom, Bukovina, Bessarabia, Transylvania), revealing their main regional features. The analysis will then focus on the Zionist-socialist Hashomer Hatzair organization, discussing its ideology, structure and instruments (1) in connection with the evolution of the state youth organization Straja Țării and (2) as an individual option of the youngsters exploring the Zionist cause.

In the last decades, Romanian research on Zionism was marked by the writings of historians like Lya Benjamin[17] or Hary Kuller[18]. Dalia Ofer discussed Zionism as a gateway to escaping the Holocaust in the 1940s, with references to Romania.[19] The studies of Adina Babeș[20] are in the same vein. But a comprehensive history of this topic has not yet been written. As such, the information about youth movements is thus disparate and at times contradictory. The sources reflect

15 See, for instance: Adriaansen, Robbert-Jan: The rhythm of eternity: the German youth movement and the experience of the past, 1900–1933. New York 2015.

16 On the origins of the movement, including the Vienna-Galicia period of 1915–1918, see Margalit, Elkana: Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement, 1913–20. In: Journal of Contemporary History no. 2 vol. 4 (1969). pp. 25–46.

17 Benjamin, Lya and Gabriela Vasiliu (eds.): Idealul sionist în presa evreiască din România. Antologie: 1881–1920. București 2010.

18 Kuller, Hary: La a 60-a aniversare a Statului Israel. In: Buletinul Centrului, Muzeului și Arhivei istorice a evreilor din România. Edited by Hary Kuller. București 2008. pp. 11–34.

19 Ofer, Dalia: Escaping the Holocaust. Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939–1944. New York 1990.

20 See: Babeș, Adina and Alexandru Florian: The Emigration of the Jews in the Antonescu Era. In: Holocaust. Studies and Research vol. IV (2012). pp. 16–34.

either the truncated perspective of Romanian authorities or the subjective approach of former pioneers or older Zionists. Research was also limited by a lack of access to the Hebrew language, as some volumes[21] could shed light on the evolution and actions of former members of Hashomer Hatzair. Any conclusion at this juncture has to be expressed with caution.

The paper builds on similar research in other geographical spaces, dealing with the evolution and actions of Jewish youth movements constructed as spaces of alternative identity.[22] The text is the result of exploring primary sources (the press of the organizations, brochures and archives) in conjunction with memoirs and testimonies of the former members of the organizations, while certain factual information is depicted from the Yizkor Books[23]. The paper argues that during its legal and underground existence, Hashomer Hatzair and similar structures functioned as an island of solidarity and Jewish identity in a nationalist country.

Jewish youth organizations and movements in Romania (the first half of the 20th century)

The Old Kingdom

As already mentioned, the Kingdom of Romania was home to Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities; Hasidic, Orthodox and secular Jews; Yiddish speakers and acculturated to the Romanian language. The variety of local or regional charity, cultural and educational associations corresponded to this diversity. However, these organizational structures were not necessary the appanage of the young generation, nor channels of political ideals.

A great number of Jewish youth associations were Zionist. Moreover, Moldavia hosted an important centre of the pioneering Zionist movement. In December 1881,

21 Ofir, Efraim: In the Lions' Den: The Zionist Movement in Romania Before and During World War II (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv 1992.

22 See for instance: Gledhill, Jim: Forces of Tomorrow. Youth Culture and Identity in the British Hashomer Hatzair Movement. In: Journal of Modern Jewish Studies no. 2 vol. 14 (2015). pp. 280–298; Stamberger, Janiv: Zionist Pioneers at the Shores of the Scheldt. The Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement in Antwerp, 1924–1946. In: Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine vol. 11 (2014). pp. 67–104, doi.org/10.4000/cmc.367; Pilarczyk, Ulrike, Ofer Ashkenazi and Arne Homann (eds.): Hachschara und Jugend-Alija. Wege jüdischer Jugend nach Palästina 1918–1941. Gifhorn 2020.

23 Memorial books printed in Yiddish and Hebrew by associations of Holocaust survivors, that document the history of East-European Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust.

in the town of Focșani, a Jewish reunion took place joined by delegates that mobilized the First Aliyah to Palestine and the creation of the first moshavim: Zikhron Yaacov and Rosh Pina. Youth associations started to appear though only after the Zionist Congress in Basel (1897). In 1909, in Moldavia, these organizations functioned under the General Association of the Zionist Pupils, while, in 1914, Jewish university students organized The Union of the Zionist Students Hasmonaea.[24] Five years later, once the Great War ended, Zionist activity had been institutionalized through the creation of the Zionist Organization in Romania. Zionist ideology drew inspiration from rabbis and intellectuals like Avner Kasswan, Dr K. Lippe, Matatias Friedmann, Dr I. Niemirower or A.L. Zissu.

Starting with the second half of the 19th century, a rich Zionist press was regularly published in Romanian, Yiddish and Hebrew, disseminating the Zionist ideology through translations. Regular congresses emphasized the importance of the Hebrew language in Jewish schools and the cultivation of the history and culture of the Jewish people through youth cultural meetings and associations. Many local Zionist youth organizations became active after World War I in connection with the Federal Union of the Zionist Youth. In 1921, the Association of the Zionist Youth in Romania was created, aiming to build the New Jew – courageous, disciplined, and healthy, with a sense of duty towards his/her people. The association numbered 20 sections in the Old Kingdom with diverse cultural and educational activities, but without a clear political mission on emigration to Palestine.[25] Members of the association recalled that, in the beginning, there was no coherent programme; youngsters wasted a lot of time with parties, teas, or fighting over committee positions; also, Hebrew classes were not attended by too many.[26] The change came once kvutza (small study groups that also practised outdoor activities) were created.[27]

The great Zionist ideal of aliyah and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine were promoted by the chalutz youth movements shaped in Eastern Europe even before the Great War. They had diverse political orientations, covering the whole range of ideological options. Some openly supported certain political parties. The most notorious included the leftist Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, Dror;[28] the

24 Iancu, Carol: Mișcările de tineret sioniste în România înainte de al doilea război mondial. In: File din istoria evreimii Clujene IV. Edited by Ladislau Gyémánt. Cluj-Napoca 2016. pp. 76–90, here pp. 78 f.

25 Iancu, Mișcările de tineret sioniste, pp. 81 f.

26 Kwutzah. Învățăminte din trecut, corective pentru viitor. In: Hanoar. Publicație bilunară a Asociației Tineretului Sionist no. 1 vol. 1 (15 June 1925). p. 7.

27 Kwutzah, p. 9.

28 Dror organization supported the party Poale Zion.

centrist Hanoar Hatzioni;[29] the rightist Betar;[30] or the religious Bnei Akiva or Hamizrachi Hatzair.[31]

These organizations disseminated the Zionist principles through press and meetings. More or less ephemeral magazines and brochures, with local or national coverage, tried to gain adherents for the Zionist cause. Some were printed in both Romanian and Hebrew. They contained news from the Zionist organizations in the country and from abroad and lots of translations from Zionist thinkers. However, Hanoar, the official review of the Association of the Zionist Youth (the centrists), tried to change the pattern and stated from its first issue that "we do not aspire for a publication as the other ones, an infinite reservoir for translations, a means of satisfying vanities and all pseudo-talents externalized in prose or verse". The declared aim of the publication was to manage the crisis of the Jewish youth, alienated by fake assimilation. The Association positioned itself in favour of increased morality, while criticizing the older Zionist generations.[32] Two years after launching Hanoar, in 1927, the Association of the Zionist Youth developed its organizational structure and incorporated Hashomer Hatzair. On this occasion, Hashomer Hatzair restated that the youth was slipping on the brink of national renegade, sacrificing human and educational ideals on the altar of conservatism and reactionary aggression.[33]

With common goals for the regeneration of a youth in crisis, the organizations cooperated on many levels. But their different orientations placed them in a sort of competition, shadowed at times by more or less subtle attacks in the press, especially between the rightist side and the leftists. For instance, Betar expressed on several occasions its disapproval of Hashomer Hatzair. In 1939, promoting an anti-leftist attitude that suited the Romanian nationalist regime, Betar's official paper Haiarden pointed the finger at Hashomer Hatzair, alleging that "by its attitude and activity has sufficiently demonstrated that its purpose, character, and

29 The centrists formed the majority within the Zionist Organization in Romania, represented until 1930 by the party of the Zionist Federation (President Adolphe Bernhardt). The main press organ was called *Știri din lumea evreiască* [News from the Jewish World]. A distinct group among the centrists was the intellectual group from *Renașterea* [The Rebirth]. *Renașterea noastră* [Our Rebirth] was the most important Zionist paper.

30 Betar organization was established in 1927, by the revisionist nationalist right-wing influenced by Zeev Jabotinsky. Since 1935, it represented the New Zionist Organization supporting The Revisionist Zionist Party.

31 The organization supported the Mizrachi Party.

32 Cuvinte de prezentare, Comitetul de Conducere. In: Hanoar. Publicație bilunară a Asociației Tineretului Sionist no. 1 vol. 1 (15 June 1925). p. 1.

33 Introducere. In: Haşomer Haţair. Revistă lunară a organizației tineretului sionist Haşomer Haţair din România no. 1 (April 1931). p. 1.

methods are dangerous to the Jewish people. The principles behind its formation: the great hopes of human freedom, the brotherhood of peoples, the inner liberation and others of the same essence are rich in big phrases and have led the movement [...] in zones devoid of any support and foreign to any reality". The "romantic preaching" of Hashomer was accused of grinding "the youthful soul", being a "rebellion against the regular pattern, the norms and the normal life of individuals". Moreover, *Haiarden* criticized the option of Hashomer for village life, considering it a need felt by those with intellectual hyperactivity.[34]

Once the royal dictatorship was implemented, in 1938, only the organizations that pledged their allegiance to the king could legally continue their activity. Encomiastic articles addressed to Carol II were published on the front page on diverse occasions. Moreover, journals like *Haiarden* even managed to publish articles in 1939 against the anti-Semitism in fascist Italy.

Bukovina

In the decades before World War I, the Jewish youth in Bukovina was organized in fraternities following the German model of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Postwar times marked the flourishing of the youth movements. After 1918, the city of Cernăuți, now part of Romania, became the first nucleus of the Zionist Hashomer Hatzair. The organization emanated from the actions of the young Jews who fled to Vienna during the war, got in touch and cooperated with the local organization and returned to their homelands after the war, transferring the knowledge and the organizing principles. In Cernăuți, young pioneers gathered in the city gardens or at the Jewish House. Without any systematic programme at first, Hashomer Hatzair promoted its principles of action by distributing a handwritten newsletter in secondary schools. Over the years, the contacts with young Jews in the other provinces of the country started to become amplified and the new leaders took a step forward in accomplishing the Zionist ideals, organizing the first hachshara.[35]

34 Hashomer Hatzair, încotro? In: Haiarden no. 33 (15 May 1939). p. 4.

35 Polesiuk-Padan, Jaakow: History of the Haschomer Hazair in Bukovina. www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/bukowinabook/buk1_145.html (16.03.2023).

Bessarabia

Jews in Bessarabia were generally followers of the Russian Judaism marked by the Russian language, while using Yiddish as their mother tongue. Though facing an oppressive regime and violent pogroms in the Russian Empire, the communities developed a rich cultural life. But it was the February 1917 revolution that revived the involvement of Jews in public affairs and the national Zionist movement that mobilized a large part of the youth.

According to the Yizkor Books, the most active youth organization was Tzeirei Zion with three political orientations: the Zionist-socialist movement worked for the implementation of the Zionist and socialist principles; the Proletariat movement expressed similar ideological aims but distanced itself from the socialists for tactical reasons; the Populist Democratic movement promoted refraining from any action until the implementation of Zionist ideas. The Union of the Zionist Students He-Haver was close to Tzeirei Zion. The Union had a major role, as it was considered that the students represented the future Zionist intellectuals capable of leading the masses.

In the 1920s, in Bessarabia within Romanian borders, the Zionist movement resumed its activity, organizing its first congress in Chișinău (4–8 May 1920) and the Hechalutz association. The youth organizations also started to develop, with Gordonia, Hashomer Hatzair, Dror, Maccabi and Veseliya being the most famous.[36]

Transylvania

Bearing their imperial legacies in the newly created Romanian state, Transylvanian Jews still identified with the Hungarian language and culture. Many followed the path of assimilation, especially the communities from larger cities. The Jews from the cultural and economic periphery of Transylvania manifested greater support in building a regional nationalist Zionist core. The National Union of Jews from Transylvania (NUJT) was created in 1918 in response to the Romanian efforts to distance the Transylvanian Jews from the Hungarian minority, and also to the growing anti-Semitism manifested by both Romanians and Hungarians. One of the main activities within the general organization – collecting money for the Zionist fund and promoting Zionist propaganda among families – was performed by the

36 Vinitzky, David (ed.): The Jews in Bessarabia; Between the World Wars 1914–1940. www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Bessarabia01/bes038.html (16.03.2023).

youth organizations Barisia (with 41 local groups in the 1920s) and Aviva (with 62 local groups).[37]

Though a few dozen families from Transylvania colonized certain settlements in Palestine, the Zionist movement slowed down at the end of the 1920s due to the economic crisis. A new revival took place in the mid-1930s, when almost every Zionist youth organization set up its own agricultural training colony, but still faced low funding and resources. In 1940, six main Zionist youth organizations were still active in Transylvania: Habonim, Hanoar Hatzioni, Mizrachi, Hashomer Hatzair, Bnei Avoda and Dror.[38]

Young Jews in Hashomer Hatzair in 1930s Romania

An antithetic metaphoric description of the young Jew in Galut versus the Jew settled in Palestine was published in a provincial Zionist paper in 1926 in Romania:

> Pale, shy, he is the natural consequence of the environment he lives in. His life, a torment. He lives in eternal indecision, between ideal and reality. An ideal that he sees, vaguely and distantly, while the reality is sudden, torturous, and full of disappointments. He can't do anything, he doesn't want anything. He's the young man from Galuth. He is still a long way from Zionism.
>
> Dreamy and abstract, he has nothing in common with the Jew 'from here' [...]. Though usually calm, when talking about the Motherland he becomes whirling. He becomes the lightning that scares you. The thunder that shakes you. You feel that this man 'had a desire'. That in the face of his iron will, nothing will resist. He is irresistible. He is 'Halutz'.[39]

This image of the young pioneer was promoted as a prototype by Hashomer Hatzair. In Romania, Hashomer Hatzair was founded first in Bukovina (Cernăuți, 1918), followed by Bessarabia (1922) and later Transylvania (1930). In the Old Kingdom, the first training centres were created in Moldavia (in the cities of Iași, Roman, Bacău) and Bucharest. After merging with the Association of the Zionist Youth, Hashomer Hatzair counted over 56 sections with more than 4.500 members (in 1931), half of them being from the Old Kingdom. About 350 pioneers were active

37 Gidó, Attila: "Patrie liberă, cămin paşnic". Mişcarea naţională evreiască din Transilvania şi activitatea pentru construirea noii patrii în Palestina, 1918–1940. In: Gyémánt, File din istoria, pp. 37–57.

38 Between 1920 and 1940, more than 17.000 Jews from Romania emigrated to Palestine, of which around 4.000–5.000 were from Transylvania. See also: Kuller, 60-a aniversare, p. 22.

39 ben Isac, Iacob: Impresii. In: Hazair no. 4 (January 1926). p. 3.

in Hechalutz, some of them able to make aliyah in the communal settlements (kibbutzim) of Palestine.[40]

Hashomer Hatzair ideology emerged as a product of modernity and was framed by several political phenomena that marked the turn of the 20th century. It was stimulated by the national romantic movements and the creation of the national states after World War I. The Russian revolution of 1917 also represented a source of the socialist dimension of the Zionist movement. But the organization also appeared as a reaction to growing anti-Semitism and the persecution of Eastern Jews. Finally, since the youngsters were the main actors of the movement, it nonetheless represented a manifestation of the dynamics of the youth inspired by German and British movements.[41] Despite this, scholars also indicated the Bible as a source of inspiration, though in a distorted reading and with a nationalist interpretation.[42] All these influences were filtered by the Zionist thinking and translated into the Hashomer Hatzair principle of personal fulfilment, meaning settling in Eretz Israel and joining a kibbutz. To this purpose, training in agricultural farms and community life represented the main pillars for the pioneers.[43]

According to the Regulation of the Hashomer Hatzair in Romania (1927), the attributes of the pioneer were related to elements such as truth; loyalty to the people, homeland and culture; work and nature; solidarity; loyalty to the scouting leader; discipline, joy, physical and mental health; voluntary work; honesty; and abstinence from vices.[44]

Like many modern organizations, Hashomer Hatzair developed a set of educational instruments fit for teenagers and young adults that combined intensive study and training with the energy and joy of age. Formal visual identity was expressed by using certain symbols, uniforms and looks, recalling the discipline of the paramilitary organizations. Hashomer Hatzair thus conferred a certain identity that included youngsters not only in a national community, but also in a distinct peer group.

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40 Haşomer Haţair no. 1 (April 1931). p. 2.

41 Among the many connections and transfers between the German movement and Hashomer Hatzair, researchers discuss the significance of Eros as part of the pedagogical and educational system of the Zionist movement. See: Szamet, Miriam: Eros and pedagogy in the Hashomer Hatzair movement in the Jewish community in Palestine. In: Eros, Family and Community. Edited by Ruth Fine, Yosef Kaplan, Shimrit Peled and Yoav Rinon. Hildesheim 2018. pp. 221–251.

42 Bitty, Yehuda: Nature, religion et identité: l'enjeu de l'éducation sioniste. In: Paedagogica Historica. International Journal of the History of Education no. 5 vol. 57 (2021). pp. 578–587, doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1738506.

43 Iancu, Mișcările de tineret sioniste, p. 84.

44 Regulamentul Organizației Haşomer din România. București 1927.

The organization included youngsters of both genders, aged 8–18 years old, and had a hierarchic structure: the young level or the cubs (age 11–14); the intermediate level or the scouts (15–16); the adult level or the adults (from 17 upward). The topography of the organization comprised the following layers: a local branch that constituted the nest; the district branch; and the national federation.[45]

The regular activities replicated some of the scouting and sentinel actions, including marches at certain events, festivities, sports competitions, trekking and hiking, summer camping for agricultural training, all combined with the extensive study of the Hebrew language, the history and traditions of the Jewish people or the writings of socialist and Zionist thinkers.

The development of Hashomer Hatzair was determined by the so-called phenomenon of cultural decadence of youth. In the context of the impoverishment and transformations of the social structure of the Jewish population in the 1930s, it was considered that the young Jews faced two main dangers: the careerism that alienated them from social and cultural aspirations, and the tension and despair that predisposed all youngsters to radicalization.[46]

Accounts of individual experiences

There is a large body of Jewish oral and written memories recording experiences of youth organizations at adolescent age. Rather than intending a formal classification at this point, I would like to offer some examples showing different perspectives on how membership of these organizations marked the formative years and political evolution of the future adults.

Membership of Straja Țării is documented by the Jews' photographs and memoirs, expressing a surprising hypostasis: young Jews enthusiastically playing their sentinel role, anchored in an organization that formally included them, but without adapting to their ethnic and religious profile:

> The King had founded a nationwide youth organization, Straja Țării [...] and every high school student was automatically a member. We wore uniforms, and were organized in paramilitary fashion. [...] In our class of about forty plus, there were only six Romanians, three Poles, one Ukrainian, one German, the rest Jews. The century chief had to be an ethnic Romanian, the nest's chiefs Christian, only the little nest's chiefs could be Jewish. Once, while we were all standing at attention in the school yard for some flag raising ceremony, during the singing

45 Jewish Virtual Library: Ha-Shomer Ha-Za'ir. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ha-shomer-ha-x1e92-a-x0027-ir (16.03.2023).

46 Bloch, Zweew: Rolul actual al tineretului și al Hehaluț-ului. In: Hașomer Hațair. Revistă lunară a organizației tineretului sionist Hașomer Hațair din România no. 2 (May 1931). p. 13.

> of the national anthem, with our right hands raised in a Roman salute (almost like the Nazi variety), I normally sang along with *much gusto.* A Romanian classmate told me not to exert myself too much, since it wasn't my anthem, – you're Jewish –. I very much wanted to be Romanian, and here I got a cold shower that dampened my patriotic zeal.[47]

As in the case of the Romanian young sentinels, a fascination with the militarized atmosphere was reflected especially in young people's natural passion for uniforms. Bernard Politzer, a Romanian Jew born in Timișoara in 1927 and educated in Bucharest, remembered: "[…] the king himself established his own pseudo-fascist regime. I myself was childishly happy to be drafted into the Royalist Youth Organisation and to wear the uniform and white beret of the Străjeri. We would parade army style and salute with the fascist outstretched arm, proclaiming our oath to king and homeland."[48]

For other youngsters, adolescence was marked by membership of the leftist Hashomer Hatzair. Aharon Govrin, a student at the Jewish High School in Galați (1935–1939) and member of Hashomer Hatzair, recalls that, during the Goga-Cuza far-right government, one of his teachers warned the pioneers about the police raids looking for Hashomer Hatzair members. He stated that the organization was a "far-left movement, where alongside Zionism we were taught Stalinism."[49]

And indeed, according to other testimonies, communist propagandists often interfered with the Jewish youth organizations to recruit members for the communist movement. Meri Horodetzky, a member of Hashomer Hatzair in Bender, Bessarabia, recalled that in the late 1920s, "The Romanian authorities followed all activities of Hashomer Hatzair. There were arrests and searches for forbidden literature or anything else they found objectionable. We were forced to pretend to join forces with Maccabi. Soon the authorities began to bother Maccabi as well." Furthermore,

> It must be noted that in this time of depression inside and outside, when our youth was in bad shape, there were some Communist instigators that influenced them and they managed to entice some of our best members. They believed that the Communists would solve the problems of our people. This interruption passed after help was received from Hashomer Hatzair in Kishinev. Again there was a reawakening among our youth and activities were resumed.[50]

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47 Schreiber, Gerhard Bobby: A tale of survival. p. 5. http://czernowitz.ehpes.com/stories/schreiber/schreiber_memoirs2.pdf (16.03.2023).

48 Politzer, Bernard: Walachian Years. Politico-Cultural Chronicle of a Youth, 1940–1960. Rehovot 2001. p. 11.

49 Aharon/Aaron Govrin in Herşcovici, Lucian-Zeev and Violeta Ionescu: O istorie a evreilor din Galaţi: file de cronică de la începuturi până la emigrare vol. 2. București 2018. p. 221.

50 Horodetzky, Meri: Hashomer Hatzair. www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Bender/ben104.html (16.03.2023).

In some cases, in the long run, the communist propaganda among the young Zionists was successful. Rudi Zimand, a student at the High School for Boys in Iași, enrolled in Straja Țării in around 1937: "I proudly wore the white shirt and red tie of the sentinel's uniform, I was happy to serve the Great Guard, King Carol II." But once the anti-Semitic legislation entered into force, in the summer of 1940, Rudi was expelled and had to enrol at a Jewish high school. He then became a member of Hashomer Hatzair: "I accepted with enthusiasm, because I saw in emigration and the founding of the Jewish settlements in Palestine the only possibility of salvation." The times of oppression had a lasting impact on the teenager, who once proudly wore the Romanian sentinel uniform. After the war, he notes: "I considered the communist solution, which proclaims freedom and equality for all members of society, superior to the Zionist solution which benefits only the Jewish people."[51]

The diversity of perspectives is rounded of by the testimony of Pinchas Ben Shaul, a pioneer in Bender, Bessarabia. His faith in Zionist ideals conferred not only a distinct ethnic identity, but constituted a universe to escape from an oppressive reality:

> Our branch of Hashomer Hatzair – as was the case in other towns – was an island of Hebrew in the ocean of alienation, 'Red assimilation' and the decrepit life of the 'Golden youth'. [...] The Zionist pioneering youth movement which had a radical Socialist ideology was suspected by the Romanian secret police (Siguranța). We were followed for a long time and they watched us constantly. Many times, in the mornings, we found a lock with the wax stamp of the secret police on our door. It was accompanied by a 'polite' invitation to present ourselves at their headquarters.[52]

The Hashomer Hatzair pioneers' ambiguous relationship with state authorities

In the 1920s, Hashomer Hatzair was credited by Romanian Scouting as a Jewish scout youth association, since it shared some of the scouting principles and activities. As members of the organization from Bukovina recalled, "We succeeded for a short time in cooperating with the general Romanian Boy Scout Organization (Cercetași), while Captain Sidorovici, who later became adjutant to King Carol, was

51 Zimand, Rudi: Cum am străbătut patru regimuri social-politice. In: Revista Baabel no. 287 (17 January 2019). https://baabel.ro/2019/01/cum-am-strabatut-patru-regimuri-social-politice/ (16.03.2023).

52 Shaul, Pinchas Ben (Pinko): Hashomer Hatzair Among the First Movements. www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Bender/ben104.html (16.03.2023).

their leader."[53] The situation changed in the following decade, worsening in the second half of the 1930s, a period marked by political radicalization and growing anti-Semitism. The activity of all youth organizations, including Hashomer Hatzair, was influenced by the evolution of the anti-establishment fascist Legionary Movement and the strategies of King Carol II to counter the influence of this far-right movement on youths (both university students and high school youngsters). The illegal communist movement also attracted a part of the youth affected by the nationalist atmosphere or the precarious work conditions in factories. Moreover, the increasing control exerted by authorities on youths was influenced by the many cases of misdemeanours committed by high school students.[54]

Since high school youths were affected by these political influences, a new regulation for secondary schools was issued in 1929 with a specific update on youth organizations: school-age youths were forbidden to join any meetings (organized by students, parties, professional categories etc.), especially those of a potentially anarchic nature (art. 247); they were forbidden to initiate any organizations, except for the literary or sports associations supervised by teachers (art. 250).[55] These rules were interpreted rather flexibly by school authorities when it came to minority organizations.

But once Straja Tarii was created (in 1934) as an extra-curricular mechanism to gain a monopoly on the youth, the 1929 regulation became a severe norm that sometimes resulted in discrimination. An example of the application of this regulation on Jewish students enrolled in public high schools can be found in the archives of the Ministry of Education. A resounding case took place in 1936, at the high school B.P. Hașdeu for boys in Buzău, where 11 Jewish boys (aged 12–15) were expelled for their membership in Hashomer Hatzair, labelled by the local school authorities as an illegal association. The main charges against the students involved their attendance of the organization meetings; the Zionist propaganda they performed, including the distribution of leaflets; the gatherings and parties joined by both Jewish boys and girls, infringing the principle of gender segregation in secondary schools; socialist propaganda expressed as a critique of the capitalist world order, infringing the interdiction of political engagement of the school youth.[56]

This political engagement also attracted Christian students. The growing public support afforded to the nationalist Legionary movement reached even higher

53 Polesiuk-Padan, History.

54 Filipovici, Youth.

55 Regulamentul de funcționare a școalelor secundare, Imprimeriile statului. București 1929.

56 Arhivele Naţionale Istorice Centrale, Bucharest (ANIC), Fund The Ministry of Education, file 485/1936, pp. 333–365.

peaks in 1937 and involved many youngsters. This challenged the king's ambitions to monopolize the youth, and so he decided to eliminate his Legionary adversaries. In the autumn of 1937, Carol II declared the autonomy of Straja Țării by royal decree[57], while the other youth organizations were disbanded and placed under Straja's coordination. At the end of the year, since no party obtained the majority at the parliamentary elections, the king nominated a far-right government (led by O. Goga and A.C. Cuza, December 1937–February 1938), opposed to the legionaries but anti-Semitic enough to satisfy the growing nationalist demands of the public. However, in February 1938, the king imposed his dictatorship, marking a new milestone in the evolution of the youth organizations. On December 15, 1938, the Law of Straja Țării was adopted, formally abolishing all other youth organizations.

At that time, Hashomer Hatzair deployed intense propaganda to recruit students in secondary schools. It must be noted that the Zionist Organization in Romania worked legally until 1942, though closely supervised by the Secret Police (Siguranța). However, the authorization of the "adult" Zionist activity was not extended to youngsters. Hashomer Hatzair was considered not only a forbidden political association, but a major threat – due especially to its left-wing orientation, which the Romanian authorities associated with a form of communism, a perception motivated by the fact that some youngsters transited the Zionist movement and ended up joining the illegal communist movement.

In these circumstances, during the 1940s, the alternative for Hashomer Hatzair pioneers was to operate underground. The former members of the organization in Bukovina recall:

> The Movement demonstrated as always its tenacious grip on life, the number of members didn't decrease, but in contrast, it grew and a leadership was built up from the younger members who remained true to the Cause and handled the job with skill. One avoided using written or printed documents, so as not to aid the hostile forces of the state. Therefore, one had to memorize the necessary material, and go back to using 'oral tradition', so well known in Jewish history.[58]

Some final remarks

Zionism is a distinct chapter of the history of Jews in Romania, only partially revealed in historiography so far. The main consequence of this phenomenon for the Zionist Jews was a national revival, though not always a cemented connection to

57 Royal decree for the creation of Straja Țării. In: Monitorul Oficial, Part I, no. 233, 8 October 1937.
58 Polesiuk-Padan, History.

Palestine. For the young generation, it represented a barrier to total assimilation, a form of rebellion against the exiled Jew that had to be replaced with the New Jew. Youth organizations thus had a distinct place in the movement, since youngsters were the pioneers seeking to build the Jewish homeland. Zionist education was founded on the notion of the Jew returning to nature, on the prominence of physical activity over intellectual work.

When analysing the connections between adolescents and Jewish youth movements, from an internal perspective, Hashomer Hatzair illustrated the progressive model of education adapted to the psychology of youth, as one Zionist educator in 1930s Romania emphasised:

> The propensity of the small child for games, the romanticism of those of 15–16 years old – these are all details of the youngsters' soul, which we acknowledged and took into account; but sometimes we lose sight of this axiom and begin to talk like an educator or a politician. [...] We must help the child to enjoy the age of playing, not to subjugate him, but to give him developing forces during play or during his animated stories and his imaginative activity. To the same extent, the romanticism of the young teenager must be developed.[59]

The external perspective on the youth movement showed an unstable relationship with state authorities, whose attitude oscillated between acceptance, tolerance and prohibition. This was highlighted not only at the central level, but also locally, when overzealous teachers declared membership of Hashomer Hatzair to be an act against the Romanian state or, at least, an act that was not conducive to state loyalty.

However, Jewish students joined Zionist associations not only to maintain their ethnic identity, but also to feel integrated into a social youth medium, since public high schools were a source of interethnic tensions. As some depictions of testimonies showed, membership of Hashomer Hatzair was lived in a distinctly subjective manner, varying from experiencing Jewishness to representing a transitory stage to the affiliation to other ideologies.

59 Gotthelf, Jehuda: Ideia educativă a lui Haşomer Haţair. In: Haşomer Haţair. Revistă lunară a organizaţiei tineretului sionist Haşomer Haţair din România no. 1 (April 1931). p. 8.

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