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Selling Jewish Victims' Experiences During the Holocaust for Hard Currency: The Case of the Romanian Communists Compensation Claims Collection from 1970

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Abstract: In the 1970s, the Romanian authorities put together a large collection of compensation claim files of Romanian citizens victims of Nazi persecution between 1939 and 1945. The Romanian Communists' scope was for a hard-currency settlement with the Federal Republic of Germany. In doing so, the Romanians claimed that the Federal Republic of Germany would pay for persecutions for which the Romanian state had been responsible. The selective denial of the Holocaust was the Communist authorities' approach to the topic after the end of the Second World War. Especially after 1948, they carefully avoided tackling the issue of country's own involvement in the persecution of its citizens, externalizing the blame on Nazi Germany. Additionally, in the official narrative the focus was on anti-Fascist resistance and Communists' martyrdom during the Holocaust and not on Jewish sufferings. By analyzing different claim files part of the larger Romanian collection to be found in the Arolsen Archives I argue that Romanians' plan of getting Germany's money–and indirectly recognition of Germany's responsibility for the Romanian authorities' wrongdoings during the Holocaust – would have solidified the externalization of blame at international level on the long run.

Keywords: Romania; West Germany; compensation; holocaust; jews; denial

Abbreviations

SRR	The Socialist Republic of Romania
Securitate	The Romanian Secret Service

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After re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1967, the Romanian Communist authorities filed a large collection of compensation claims for Romanian citizens who were victims of National Socialist persecution between 1939 and 1945. The Romanian Secret Police (Securitate), under the guidance of the Socialist Republic of Romania (SRR) leadership, managed to compile, in less than a year, 155,126 individual cases of people persecuted because of their race, religion, or ideology.

They added orders, reports, and decrees – mainly legal and administrative measures – to the compensation claim files that defined the framework under which Jews and other groups were oppressed during the Antonescu regime. These documents had to reflect the pressure that the Romanian authorities felt coming from Germany during the Second World War, which, as the Communists implied, played a role in the development of Romanian policy toward the persecuted individuals.

Ceaușescu's regime hoped to sign a compensation agreement with West Germany to get a lump sum of hard currency into the country. In doing so, the Romanians claimed that the Federal Republic of Germany should pay for persecutions for which the Romanian state had been responsible.

Anti-Semitism had spread into Romanian society during the interwar period. After 1938, other economic and social anti-Jewish measures, such as the expropriation of property, the forced labor law, numerus clausus, and the prohibition of intermarriage – inspired by the Nuremberg laws – were implemented in Romania. During the Second World War, Romania was an ally of Nazi Germany, with its own anti-Jewish and anti-Roma policies. Between 1941 and 1944, the Romanian authorities killed 280,000 to 380,000 Jews and about 11.000 Roma in Transnistria (Friling 2005, 178).

With the rise to power of the Communists in 1948, distortions and "deflective denial" (Shafir 2002, 49) of the Holocaust became their approach to the topic. The history of the Holocaust went through a process of minimization followed by oblivion, employed mainly by the political spectrum (Rotman 2003, 205). Jewish suffering became "secondary in the general interest" (Rotman 2003, 205).

Thus, starting in 1948, the Communist leadership carefully avoided tackling the issue of the country's own involvement in the persecution of its citizens based on ethnic or religious motivations, shifting the focus to political persecution. In the official narrative, the emphasis was on anti-Fascist resistance and Communists' martyrdom during the Holocaust, without explicitly mentioning the mostly ethnic and Jewish identification of the victims of the event (Fox 2004, 420). Moreover, Ion Antonescu and his collaborators were depicted as Nazi Germany's puppets.

For example, books that mentioned Transnistria were no longer available for the general public after 1948, per the Communists' decision. Between 1948 and 1965,

emphasis was placed on class struggle during the war, and there was no longer any mention of Transnistria.

During the Ceaușescu era, between 1965 and 1989, the regime enabled an even more selective historical memory of the Holocaust, erasing any information about Jewish and Romani suffering in Transnistria, and shifting the focus on the narrative of Jewish survivors from Northern Transylvania, deported by the Germans and their Hungarian collaborators. In this nationalistic attempt to sanctify the country's past, Romanian authorities' involvement in the Holocaust was whitewashed, and Ion Antonescu's role was reevaluated. The argument that he "saved" Jews from the Old Kingdom became the main historiographic narrative.[1]

How, then, does the collection of files of compensation claims fit into the discursive pattern of the period? What can the individual claims files tell us about the communist representations of the perpetrators and the victims? What did the communists hope to gain by enforcing the discourse at an international level? The externalization of the blame on Nazi Germany was already embedded in the historical and collective memory at a local or national level.

I will address the abovementioned questions by analyzing different claim files as part of the larger Romanian collection found in the Arolsen Archives. The collection consists of 272 vol, documents bound as books by the German authorities. The documents, arranged in 31 containers, were given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Germany, in 1971 by the Romanian Ambassador to Germany, Constantin Oancea. They were then transferred to the Arolsen Archives in 2008.[2]

For this paper, I chose to analyze claims from Suceava County. I opted for this specific county because the Southern Bukovinian Jews of Suceava were persecuted and deported to Transnistria. Files from other counties address different aspects of anti-Jewish or anti-Roma persecutions, such as the deportation of Northern Transylvania Jewry to Auschwitz or the Old Kingdom Jewish community forced labor. Nevertheless, we must be aware that the collection was organized by the claimants' place of residence at the time of the claim and not by that during the persecutions. Some Jews had moved to Suceava County from a different area of Romania post-war. Secondly, by the time the Communists organized the

1 The Antonescu regime deported the Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and several from other regions to Transnistria. The remaining Jewish population of Romania, respectively the Jews from Wallachia, Moldova, Southern Transylvania, and Banat, was to be deported to extermination camps in German-occupied Poland. Nevertheless, Ion Antonescu changed his mind in 1943 and refused to participate in the Nazi's Final Solution.

2 The compensation collection can be found in the Romanian Secret Police archive (CNSAS) and as a copy in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archives. Still, the files were reorganized during the Communist regime, thus, the collection might be different than the one in the Arolsen Archives.

compensation collection, many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Romania, including from Suceava, had emigrated to Israel or other countries. Additionally, it should be noted that the collection consists of very diverse cases: from what the Communists labeled as "anti-Fascist fighters," "victims of racial legislation," or "victims of Nazi persecution", to fishermen who could no longer fish in the Danube Delta during the Second World War and people who hosted German soldiers in their homes (Shapiro 2013, 121).

Thus, although problematic as historical documents for the study of the Holocaust era, especially in terms of the credibility of the institutions that created them, the compensation claims files are relevant documents for the research of the politics of memory about the Holocaust during the Communist regime.

I argue that by the time the Romanian Communist authorities tried to "sell" the country's own responsibility and culpability in the Holocaust and the victims' last chance to receive compensation for what had happened to them during the Second World War for approximately 180,000,000 Deutsche Marks (Hodor 2015), the history of the Holocaust in Transnistria and its Jewish victims had been whitewashed. The Communists tried to obtain money for a historical past that was already hidden and sealed on the Securitate's, and other state institutions', shelves. The compensation collection did not represent a change of attitude towards the Holocaust and its Jewish victims in the Communist imagination, nor can this be understood as a revision of the narrative. It can only be seen as the Secret Police and Romanian authorities' willingness to step on the corpses and memory of the victims in a failed attempt to bring hard currency into the country.

On the other hand, their plan of getting West Germany's money would have solidified the externalization of the blame on Germany for the Romanian authorities' wrongdoings during the Holocaust in the long run, especially on an international level. West Germany's postwar policy of compensation and reparations, or Wiedergutmachung ("making good again"), greatly influenced the postwar politics of memory in other European countries, such as Austria or France.

Nevertheless, the Federal Republic of Germany rejected the Communists' compensation claims before receiving the documents.

1 Planning and Creating the Romanian Compensation Collection

The Romanian Secret Police created the claims files to receive compensation from West Germany (Hodor 2015). In 1968, a new structure, the State Security Council, was

developed, with Ion Stănescu as president. This structure was, in fact, controlled by the head of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Shortly after being appointed, Ion Stănescu presented a memorandum to the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party that referred, among other things, to war reparations (Hodor 2015). New plans were made to bring hard currency to Romania through various actions in which Romanian citizens were involved, such as repatriations, inheritances, deposits, etc. (actions presented in the note as the "Harvest," "Monuments," and "Gratitude").

The Securitate's mode of action was not new since two other agreements, ultimately with the same purpose of obtaining money for the state, were in progress at that time: the selling of Jews to Israel (Ioanid 2015) and the selling of ethnic Germans to West Germany (Dobre et al. 2011).

The war reparations idea was, however, new. The Secret Police allocated a separate chapter for it in the memorandum, entitled: "Undertaking actions in the FRG to obtain reparations for material and moral damages caused by German Nazism to persons of Jewish nationality domiciled in Romania and who, following a recent law, are entitled to receive lump sum allowances from the FRG" (Hodor 2015).

Securitate referred to the Federal Compensation Law (*Bundesentschädigungsgesetz*-BEG) passed in 1956 to amend the 1953 Federal Supplementary Act for the compensation of Victims of National Socialist Persecution (BErgG).

According to BEG, a victim of National Socialist persecution was considered a person who, because of political opposition to National Socialism or because of race, religion, or ideology, was persecuted by the Nazis' oppressive measures and suffered: harm to life, body, health, and freedom; harm to possessions and assets; harm to career and economic advancement. Claimants could have simultaneously pursued damages in each of the various categories for the persecution that took place from January 30, 1933 until May 8, 1945.

This, however, did not mean that any individual who would have fit into the definition might have received compensation. More precisely, compensation was limited to German citizens, refugees to Germany before 1952, and stateless persons. Thus, victims of National Socialism from other countries would not have been eligible for compensation if they still resided in their home countries (Schrafstetter 2003, 462).

Why, then, did the Romanian Communist authorities think that war compensation would be possible for Romanian citizens living in Romania at that time?

First, in 1967, the Socialist Republic of Romania re-established diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany – a condition for any country that would have intended to apply for compensation (Henry 2002, 24). Additionally, between 1959 and 1964, 11 agreements (Globalabkommen) between West Germany

and other European countries that demanded compensation for their victims of Nazi persecution were signed (with a total pay of 977 million Deutsche Marks). France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Great Britain, Denmark, and Norway were the first to apply for compensation. Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria followed in the negotiations.

One of the countries that, during the 1947 Paris Peace Conference, signed the compensation agreement was Italy, a former Nazi Germany ally that, like Romania, accepted to give up any postwar compensations or reparations, including all claims in respect to loss or damage sustained during the war. (Article 28.4 of the Paris Peace Treaty) According to the Peace treaties signed after the end of the Second World War, Bulgaria, Italy, Japan, Austria, Romania, and Hungary gave up compensation claims from Germany.

There was a big difference between the Socialist Republic of Romania and Italy, namely that Romania was part of the Eastern bloc, being behind the Iron Curtain, while Italy was in the Western part of Europe.

The first agreements signed led to pressure from other countries. Still, because of political and ideological differences, the Communist Eastern European states could not form a group similar to that formed by the Western European states to apply for compensation. The Federal Republic of Germany avoided establishing relations with the Communist countries that recognized the German Democratic Republic's sovereignty (Klacsmann 2022, 241). Each country had to find its own way to the money (Colonomos and Armstrong 2006, 390).

Romania was encouraged to take this route also by the fact that between 1961 and 1972, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia received compensation for their victims of National Socialist persecutions, even if only for medical experiments on individuals.

When preparing their case, the Romanian Communists were aware of Italy's situation, but most importantly of Yugoslavia's case. In an article from the Romanian Communist official national newspaper, *Scânteia*, with the title "Approaching Yugoslav-West German Commercial Treaties," the author, citing the Yugoslav newspaper *Rad*, writes, "The normalization of diplomatic relations (between Yugoslavia and the Federal Republic of Germany) will facilitate the faster and more successful settlement of other unresolved issues in the relations between the two countries." Among the issues mentioned in the article was the payment of reparations for the Yugoslavian victims of Nazism (Scânteia, Year 37, No. 7577, from January 9, 1968).

As was the norm during the Communist regime, information was propagated to other smaller newspapers such as *Viața Nouă*, *Făclia*, and *Drumul Nou*, for example. The subject was then followed closely in subsequent editions of the official press.

By that time (1968), before gathering 155,126 individual claims files, the Romanian Secret Police had already tested the field. In the first phase (Matei 2016, 218), they tried to obtain money through individual cases in which the Secret Police assisted, for example, in forging the necessary additional documentation. Kohn Noe Zenob was one such particular case and a failed attempt to get compensation from West Germany (Hodor 2015). Therefore, the Communists turned to the head of the Jewish community, Moses Rosen – chief rabbi of Romania and president of the Federation of Jewish Communities – to compile lists of Romanian citizens of Jewish ethnicity who suffered from Nazi persecutions (Berindei, Dobrincu, and Goșu 2012, 281). They gathered approximately 10,000 individual claims files.

Nevertheless, the Communists changed their minds and, in the spring of 1970, decided to apply for compensation for Romanian citizens who were victims of National Socialist persecution at an official state level. Willy Brandt, the West Germany chancellor, was informed, in April 1970, by Martin Hirsch, the deputy chairman of the Social Democratic parliamentary group in the Bundestag, of the Romanian authorities' intention to initiate official negotiations (Matei 2016, 168).

The Romanian commission that started the application for compensation was formed from representatives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian Ministry of Finance, and the Romanian Bank of Commerce (Matei 2016, 223).

In less than one year, the authorities gathered 155,126 individual claims files. The collection was then given to the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the spring of 1971 by the Romanian Ambassador to Germany – Constantin Oancea. According to the West German Ambassador to Bucharest, Erwin Wickert, because the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs had given up examining the Romanian documents, "the Romanian embassy in Bonn took them with a truck and deposited one morning in the ministry's yard" (Wickert 2004, 37).

2 An Uncanny Collection of Compensation Claims

When the documents were transferred to the Arolsen Archives (ITS Archives at that time) in July 2008, they were bound as books and stored in 31 containers. The containers contained compensation claims files and general records concerning the relationship between the Romanian and German authorities between 1939 and 1944. The claims files and law books were in Romanian, with a German translation.

The first container contained five bound books of approximately 5,000 pages, respectively:

Legislation concerning racial and political prosecution 1939–1944 (two volumes) with the following chapters: A. Constitutional provisions regarding equal rights

without political or racial discrimination; B. Political persecutions; C. Racial persecution – Jews.

The last chapter, C, concerning the Jews, had several sub-chapters, including: Regulation of the Mosaic cult; The legal status of the Jews; The dissolution of the communities and the establishment of the Jewish Administration (Centrala Evreilor, equivalent of Judenrat); The military status of Jewish forced labor; Property damage: the National Commission for Romanianization (equivalent of Aryanization) C.N.R. Organization and Romanianization commissioners; Administration and liquidation of Romanianized assets; Right of pre-emption of the C.N.R.; Organization of the State Undersecretariat for Romanianization; Regulation of buildings taken over by C.N.R.; Conservation measures for Romanianized enterprises; Granting of credits for Romanization; Confiscation of rural and urban real estate as well as mortgage claims, confiscation of industrial installations, wooden materials and rights over the basement, Romanianization of movie houses, cinemas, tourist offices; Transfer of vessels and fleet to the state heritage; Romanianization of hospitals and health centers; Regulation and administration of assets left by Jews; (…) Damages through military taxes, special taxes, handover of clothing effects, and handover of radio equipment.

All of the abovementioned laws, decrees, and other administrative documents were part of Romanian authorities' anti-Jewish policies before and during the Holocaust. To explain the externalization of blame to Nazi Germany, the Communist leadership decided to add, to the compensation claims files collection, a volume with records concerning political and economic pressure on Romanian authorities by the Germans. The Romanians produced a volume in which they included exchanges of diplomatic letters in which the Securitate underlined various formulas to show Nazi Germany's pressure on Romania to join the Axis.[3] Thus, the correspondence between Carol and the German plenipotentiary Wilhelm Fabricius, Carol and Hitler, and Ion Gigurtu and Ribbentrop were included.[4]

Additional books in the first container were translations of excerpts from the most relevant legal documents concerning racial and political persecution between 1939 and 1944 into German (one volume), records concerning the persecution in Northern Transylvania, and records concerning the persecution of Roma (including maps of Transnistria, camps, and deportation routes of Roma and Sinti).

Containers 2 to 27 have an average of 8–11 large folders with claims files concerning racial and political persecutions between 1939 and 1944. The claims are organized alphabetically by county. Within a county, the individual claims are not separated by the type of persecution suffered between 1939 and 1945, but are listed

3 CNSAS, File 52875, Annex 1, 1.

4 CNSAS, File 52875, Annex 1, 6–107.

alphabetically by name. There are individual files of victims of National Socialist persecution and also claims of descendants of the victims.

Containers 28 to 31 contain approximately 8–11 folders of: Cases of restitution claims concerning the Vapniarka camp (450 cases); Records concerning 17 victims of medical experiments; 792 cases of persons whose property was confiscated by the German authorities and who were deported to Germany; 5,363 files of persons whose property was seized by the German authorities; and 16,723 files of persons who were deported and whose property was lost.

Each claim application has a series of printed questions in Romanian and German on two pages. The following are listed: Name, First Name, Name during deportation, Place and Date of Birth, Last residence, Marital Status, Romanian ID card number, and a standard text: "I hereby request compensation for the persecutions I have suffered." This paragraph is followed by a short summary of the individual's persecution history, followed by an enumeration of the things lost during that time. All personal or household goods are valued by individuals at a certain amount. Some claimants ask for monthly pensions due to the decrease in work capacity after the Holocaust.

The Romanian version of the file, typed, is either translated word by word into German or summarized.

At the end of the file is the applicant's signature and, on the second page, a notary certification by the Romanian Ministry of Justice, dated in most cases in the summer and autumn of 1970.

The overall number of individual claims application files is 131,791. Initially, there were 155,126 files, but 23,352 were removed before the entire collection was sent to West Germany.

3 "I Have Suffered for Racial Motives"

The claim files I chose to analyze for this paper are from Suceava County, with a total of 3,780 registered individual cases bound in 4 separate books. Suceava, as part of Southern Bukovina, was an area from where the Jews were deported by the Romanian authorities to Transnistria starting from October 9, 1941. Consequently, the majority of claims are by Jews or their descendants from the towns or villages of Fălticeni, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Vatra Dornei, Rădăuți, Siret, Dolhasca, Gura Humorului. The Suceava books also include compensation claim files of political prisoners (Jews and non-Jews) or other persons considered by the Communists to be entitled to compensation.

In the Jewish individual files, the description of the persecution starts, invariably, with: "I hereby request compensation for the persecution I have suffered *for*

racial motives, for being a Jew/a Jewess," as in the case of Aberbauh Riven,[5] who applies for compensation for his father Aberbauh Iosub, who died in Moghilev, Transnistria, or Abraham Moritz,[6] who was deported to Șargorod, Transnistria.

The same expression is used by Rubinger Gusta,[7] who applies for compensation for her father, Aberbuch Osias, who was deported to Târgu-Jiu prison and then to Moghilev. Rubinger Gusta writes "for racial motives" and adds "and for political motives."

After this self-identification, either as racially or politically oppressed individuals, the persons applying for claims list the type of persecution they suffered during the war. The first one, in most cases, as per the chronology of the events, was made to wear the Yellow Star. In the files it is labeled as harm to freedom. The texts used by the claimants read as follows: "I had my freedom restricted by wearing the Yellow Star" or simply "I had to wear the Yellow Star," followed by the period when this happened. The expression "I was forced to wear the Yellow Star" is also used, stressing the idea of persecution, as in Aberdam Ghizela[8] or the Schlaffer Anna[9] case, among others. Aciubotaritei Ida,[10] who claims compensation for her brother Balan Iancu writes about "restrictions on freedom, movement and supply." About restriction of movement, presented as harm to freedom, Bodnariu Vera[11] writes in more detail: "I was allowed to walk in the streets only from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m."

The subsequent persecution listed by the claimants refers to harm to freedom by deportation to Transnistria or, for the Jews that remained in the country, by forced labor. Thus, the expression "restriction of freedom" is replaced by "deprivation of freedom." "I was deprived of my freedom" is followed by "being interned/deported" to various camps and ghettos in Transnistria (Moghilev, Djurin, Murafa, Sargorod, etc.) and by the exact period of the deportation. Aberbauh Riven writes about his father, "He was deprived of his freedom being interned in the Moghilev camp,"[12] while Rubinger Gusta says about her father Aberbuch Osias, "He was detained in the political prisoners camp in Târgu-Jiu" and then "deported to Transnistria, Moghilev camp."[13]

5 Claim by Aberbauh Riven, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
6 Claim by Abraham Moritz, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
7 Claim by Rubinger Gusta, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
8 Claim by Aberdam Ghizela, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
9 Claim by Schlaffer Anna, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
10 Claim by Aciubotăriței Ida, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
11 Claim by Bodnariu Vera, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
12 Claim by Aberbauh Riven, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
13 Claim by Rubinger Gusta, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

The Jews who were not deported to Transnistria frame deprivation of liberty differently. Aberdam Ghizela,[14] for example, writes that she was taken from her village, Târgu Lespezi (Iași county), to Fălticeni, where she had forced domicile till the end of the war. Referring to the same place, Aberdam Moriți[15] writes that he was "interned in the Fălticeni hostage camp."

In most files, the persecutions are listed with a few details, like the place of deportation and the time spent there. However, some, such as Bercovici Bercu, explain their experiences during the persecution period in detail. "My freedom was violated from November 1, 1941, to March 1, 1944, being subjected to forced labor under guard in the local labor detachments and in the labor detachment belonging to the 6th Focșani Roads Battalion, at the Mânzar-Căușani road construction site, Tighina county, Bessarabia."[16] In addition to that, Bercovici Bercu adds that he has military documents to prove it.

Forced labor, during deportations to other cities within Romania or to Transnistria, is mentioned in other cases as well. Rubinger Gusta[17] writes that her father "did force labor under guard." Aberdam Moriți[18] mentioned forced labor in Fălticeni and forced labor under guards at road constructions.

While the term used mainly by the claimants is "forced labor under guard," there are nuances to it. For example, Cațˌ Rifca[19] stressed that she "did forced labor in the camp without remuneration." Furthermore, forced labor did not mean only heavy work. Avram Roza[20] writes in her file, "My freedom was periodically violated from 1941 to 1944, being forced to perform forced labor under guard at the hospital, washing clothes and cleaning the salons."

Even if deported to Transnistria or a nearby town, the persecuted individuals list the assets they had lost when leaving their homes. At the end of the list, the claimants estimate the amount of everything they were deprived of at "today's value."

"I then abandoned without supervision household goods with a current value of (…) lei" is the standard phrase used, as in Aberdam Ghizela's file.[21] However, there are nuances in how claimants write about this aspect. Lea Mencser,[22] who applies for compensation for her brother Ambramovicz Chaim, says that his

14 Claim by Aberdam Ghizela, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
15 Claim by Aberdam Moriți, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
16 Claim by Bercovici Bercu, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
17 Claim by Rubinger Gusta, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
18 Claim by Aberdam Moriți, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
19 Claim by Cațˌ Rifca, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
20 Claim by Avram Roza, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
21 Claim by Aberdam Ghizela, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
22 Claim by Lea Mencser, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

household goods "had been stolen." Others enumerate the household goods left behind: "clothes, living room, bedroom and kitchen furniture",[23] "a piano, furniture, carpets, linen, silverware"[24] or "goods from her mixed shop in Sadagura and furniture from 12 rooms."[25] Individuals who abandoned their houses use the formula "during the deportation, I was prejudiced in the use of the property right over my house."[26]

The claimants also depict the careers they left behind: "Due to the deportation, I stopped working as a pharmacist assistant at the Schwind pharmacy in Rădăuți, losing a monthly income of (…) lei"[27] or were not entitled to because of anti-Jewish legislation in Romania: "Although I was a graduate of the Faculty of letters and philosophy in Cernăuți, due to the racial laws, I could not be employed until July 1944, losing a monthly income of (…) lei because of this."[28]

Children's experiences are framed into the same pattern of harm to career and economic advancement: "At the time of the deportation, I lived in the city of Rădăuți, and because of the racial laws, in October 1940, I was no longer admitted to the high school in Rădăuți, where I was a 6th-grade student."[29]

The paragraph or phrase about damages to their health because of the persecution, mainly because of deportation, included the following. "During the deportation, I fell ill with exanthematic typhus, and since then I have had heart problems and neurosis",[30] "during the deportation my bodily integrity was damaged, being hit by a soldier, on which occasion I lost my front teeth"[31] or written in a very detailed manner, using medical terms: "because of the inhumane conditions in the camp, especially in the Vapniarka death camp, I fell ill in 1943 with spastic paraparesis of the lower limbs, anxious neurasthenic syndrome with obsessive impulses, diffuse spondylosis, which caused me to retire in 1946."[32]

Many compensation claims are written by descendants on behalf of their parents, brothers, sisters, and even daughters or sons. Thus, they are implicitly

23 Claim by Rusu Clara, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
24 Claim by Auslander Netti, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
25 Claim by Ligournik Alexander, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
26 Claim by Carstean Nora-Beata, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
27 Claim by Antonier Ambrosine, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
28 Claim by Adler Sabina, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
29 Claim by Lehrer Mihail, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
30 Claim by Landay Sara, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
31 Claim by Fritz Gisia, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
32 Claim by Katz Berl, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

writing about the death of their relatives. Regina Adler,[33] for example, applies for compensation for her brother Gartenlaub Samuel, who froze to death in Moghilev, Transnistria, in February 1942. Geigher Elka was deported to Berșad, Transnistria, where she died of typhus, as mentioned by her daughter Daskal Lea.[34]

Gelber Hermann, who asks for compensation for his brother Gelber Iacob, recounts that Iacob had been beaten to death in December 1941 in Obodovca, Transnistria.[35] Glatter Leon's brother, Glatter Max, died of hunger in Moghilev, Transnistria, in March 1943.[36] Heinish Bina died on October 20, 1941, while being deported from Rădăuți to Berșad.[37] Meer Beila from Seletin, Bessarabia, shared the same fate. After being marched for 300 km from her home to the Edineț ghetto, she was shot on August 15, 1941, at the Dniester crossing.[38]

4 Conclusions

The Suceava files analyzed for this paper as a case study demonstrate the diversity of experiences of the Jewish claimants specific to the Holocaust perpetrated by the Romanian authorities from 1941 to 1944. Individuals' shared experiences cover an extended spectrum both in terms of anti-Jewish racial legislation (forced labor for Jews; property damage; deprivation of rights, such as the right to education; confiscation of goods, property, and rural and urban real estates; confiscation of industrial installations, etc.) as well as the multitude of situations experienced by those who were deported to Transnistria: from the numerous camps and ghettos in Transnistria mentioned in the files to the diversity of death sentences to which the Jews were subjected. According to the Final Report of the "Elie Wiesel" International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, Jews died in Transnistria mainly of diseases, hunger, improper living conditions, being shot by the Romanian authorities, or simply frozen to death.

The experiences during the persecutions that the individuals wrote about in their claims were not censored by the Romanian Communist authorities that initiated and participated in the compensation claims collection, even though by that time, 1970, the Romanian authorities' participation in the deportations and killings of Jews in Transnistria was not part of the state's official Holocaust narrative.

33 Claim by Adler Regina, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
34 Claim by Daskal Lea, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
35 Claim by Gelber Hermann, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
36 Claim by Glatter Leon, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
37 Claim by Heinish Meier, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.
38 Claim by Meer Rafuel, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

More precisely, in the first years after the Second World War, Romanian authorities permitted the publication of different volumes, including Matatias Carp's *Black Book* or Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's *Fundamental Problems of Romania*, among others, in which the Romanian crimes against the Jewish population, as well as Romanian traditional anti-Semitism, was addressed.[39] At the same time, they urged and forced a whitewashing of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the obliteration of Jewish suffering in *Romanian History for eighth-grade* textbook, for example (Cioflâncă 2005, 633). The textbook, published in 1947, became canonical for all history textbooks afterward. During that time, the sensitive subject of the Holocaust was ignored, both politically and intellectually, because post-war reconstruction piqued the attention of society as a whole (Cioflâncă 2005, 634).

Following the Communist regime's consolidation of power, "Romanian historiography entered a glacial period of accentuated ideological de-professionalization," (Eskenasy 1994, 179) with the historiography of the Holocaust deliberately "forgotten" (Eskenasy 1994, 176), "buried in the Orwellian black hole of history" (Braham 1998, 39).

No explicit mention of the Romanian authorities or soldiers' implication in the anti-Jewish policies or murder of the Jews in Transnistria appears in the claims. When writing about the perpetrators, the claimants depict them in a confusing manner as Nazis or Hitlerites, without a clear national identity. For example, Mandrigiu Hane, who asks for compensation for her father, Bercovici Idel, says that "Nazi elements shot him."[40] "The Hitlerite Army" is responsible for killing Iosiper Mina's husband, Maiberg David, in 1941, near the Prut River.[41] In the same manner, when writing about her mother, Goldberg Sara, Goldberg Herman says that "she was assassinated by the Fascist troops that temporarily occupied the USSR."[42]

The identification of the perpetrators as Nazis or Hitlerites was part of Romanian official discourse from the beginning of the Communist regime. Ion Antonescu and his collaborators were represented as such, depicted as lacking their own ideology or decisions, entirely subordinating themselves and the country to Hitler's will and direction during the war criminals' trials (Procesul Marii Trădări Naționale 1946, 3, 17, 21).

Even if emphasizing that there was a German influence on Romanian anti-Jewish legislation, for example, Romania belonged to the category of satellite states that kept their independence and autonomy throughout the war years.

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39 Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940–1944*, Socec, Bucureș;ti, 1946. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi. Problemele de bază ale României*, Editura de Stat, Bucureș;ti, 1946.

40 Claim by Mandragiu Hane, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

41 Claim by Iosiper Mina, Container 21, Volume L-R, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

42 Claim by Goldberg Herman, Container 21, Volume G-K, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

The way the Communists organized the compensation claims collection from 1970 proves that they followed the same line of argument implemented immediately post-war by shifting the focus from the country's own involvement in the crimes against the Jewish population to Nazi Germany's influence on the Antonescu regime.

The discourse was to be found at the official state level, but individuals adhered to it. For example, in a handful of files analyzed from the same city, Rădăuți, the standard paragraph "I hereby request compensation for the persecutions I have suffered for racial motives, for being a Jew/a Jewess" is rewritten as "for being a Jew/a Jewess I suffered *Nazi* persecutions."[43] We can, thus, emphasize how a functionary, either a Securitate agent, the notary, or another state actor, acting as an agent of memory, added the word Nazi, as a way of underlining their and not Romanians responsibility.

There is, however, one aspect from the official narrative that the SRR leadership did not use in the compensation claims files. In the Romanian master narrative about the Holocaust, Jews were not separately identified but embedded in the Romanian population/people victims' group. Additionally, their racial or ethnic origin was obscured, with Jews being classified mainly as Communist/anti-Fascist individuals. In the files, as we can see above, the claimants identify as Jews. More than that, Communist Jews use a double identification – racial and political.

The explanation is that the Romanian Secret Police personnel and the authorities implicated in the files-gathering followed closely the BEG criteria for obtaining compensation from West Germany. Being persecuted for religion and being persecuted for ideology were two different aspects.

The files' construction, including the terminology used, the order of the persecutions, and the claimants' answers, are organized according to German law. They address every compensation category: life, health, damages to freedom, property, assets, discriminatory taxes, career and economic advancement, and loss of life or pension insurance.

Thus, even if the collection of compensation claims files fits into the discursive pattern of the period, the Communists' main interest was not in setting a new narrative, but only in getting hard currency into the country.

SRR leadership persistence was noticed by Erwin Wickert, West Germany's Ambassador to Romania at that time. He writes in his memoirs that immediately after taking his office, in 1971, at the first meeting with Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian head of state, told him: "Romanians would also have humanitarian requests, that is, the reparation of the injustices that made them suffer under the Nazis." (Wickert 2004, 29) The compensation case was presented again by

43 Claim by Adler Sabina, Container 21, Volume A-F, 10.9.2.1.236/Arolsen Archives, Bad Arolsen.

Ceaușescu during Gerhard Schroeder's visit to Romania (Wickert 2004, 35) and in June 1973 during Ceaușescu's official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. "Despite the warnings, during the meeting with Willy Brandt, Ceaușescu questioned the reparations." (Wickert 2004, 159) The West German chancellor politely refused Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The Federal Republic of Germany rejected the Socialist Republic of Romania's case. The Germans were reluctant to grant reparations to Romanian citizens for several reasons. First of all, no Eastern European country received compensation from West Germany for ideological motives, as a matter of principle, because they were part of the communist bloc (Schrafstetter 2003, 464). A single agreement concluded with a state beyond the Iron Curtain would have had a domino effect that would have led to similar requests from all communist countries (Matei 2016, 172). Federal Germany decided to reject the claims at the risk of not paying compensation to the Jewish victims who were still living in Eastern Europe (Küpper 1996, 760).

The only payments were made to the victims of medical experiments. For instance, in the 1960s, Germany provided a one-time payment to Hungarian survivors who had sustained irreversible harm to health (Klacsmann 2022, 241). Even Romania received such compensation, but paid not through a direct agreement with SRR, rather through a Red Cross International Committee fund (Küpper 1996, 761).

Furthermore, the Germans were skeptical that the money would reach the applicants: "Of course, no Romanian who suffered in the war would see even a single leu" (Wickert 2004, 37).

Additionally, the German authorities were aware that the Antonescu regime acted independently against the Jews, as an ally of Hitler and not as his subordinate. "From the reports of the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Moscow, there is countless evidence about the genocidal acts committed by the Romanian army during the war." (Wickert 2004, 31).

The history of an event is constructed and can, therefore, be reconstructed. During the Ceaușescu regime, the historical memory of the Holocaust in Romania follows the same patterns of several reconstructions. Moreover, the authors (Secret Police, Communist leadership, public servants) interfered while creating the claims files because of their own agencies, adding *Nazi* persecution, for example, and also in a dialogue with a known audience – West Germany (Carrier 2014, 199).

The German compensation policy raised numerous questions regarding the legitimization of the historical memory of the Holocaust. The recognition of their persecution by West Germany through the signature of reparation agreements impacted the politics of memory in France and Austria, for example. The fact that the Federal Republic of Germany had paid compensation to French citizens who were

part of the resistance, or to Austrian citizens, legitimized these countries' own master narratives of "the resistant nation" in France's case, or "the first victim of Hitler's aggression" in Austria's case (Schrafstetter 2003, 472).

By accepting the Socialist Republic of Romania's compensation claims, West Germany could have legitimized Romania's self-victimization myth and its master narrative of externalizing the blame on Hitler and Nazi Germany in the long run.

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