

Dumitru, Diana (2016). *The State, Antisemitism and Collaboration in the Holocaust. The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union.* Cambridge University Press. 268 pp., ISBN 9781107131965.

The last of the three monographs written by Diana Dumitru, in five years from its initial publication remains a capital input to the politically uncomfortable topic of antisemitism in Romania, Bessarabia, and Transnistria before and during the Second World War. The book brings forth the antisemitic nature of the nation-building process in the Eastern European states in the interwar period. Diana Dumitru obtained her Ph.D. from the State University of Moldova “Ion Creanga”, where she is now an associate professor, and benefited from prestigious grants at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and at the International Institute for Holocaust Research. Much of the documentation for the current book originates from her research in these institutions.

In six chapters the book follows the metamorphoses in the anti-Jewish feelings in the Romanian Kingdom and in the Soviet Union (specifically in Ukraine and Transnistria, republics inhabited by 90% the Russian Jewry) since the beginning of the long twentieth century. The study is remarkable through the comparative dimension allowed by its topic. Both regions, once part of the Russian Empire with its discriminatory ethnic and religious policies and state-supported anti-Semitism, reflected by frequent pogroms, interdictions for Jews to engage in multiple professions, to own land, or even displace from the “pale of settlement” have shown a quantifiably different code of civil behavior during the holocaust. Secondly, it represents a considerable contribution to the research of the potential of a political administration to influence inter-ethnic relations within a society. Its sources are outstanding in their liveliness. The main sources of information are the interviews with the survivors, autobiographical material, NKVD arrest protocols, and Romanian police reports as well as on reports of the advancing German army. The sources allow the author to introduce hundreds of concrete examples of social relationships shaping the character of that time, giving a human dimension to the research on these tragic events. In conducting quantitative research, Dr. Dumitru made use of statistic methods and of qualitative research to integrate the experiences of the survivors on a steep grading scale. The biggest methodological achievement of this book, however, is the scrupulous and doubting analysis of all sources, taking into account the fallacies of the interviewees’ memories, and the political engagement of police investigations and protocols.

As mentioned above, the focal point of the book is the fact that the inter-

action between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population (neighbors, co-villagers) has been different in regions previously subject to Soviet rule and those under other administration. Based on a vast amount of research, the author argues that “the Soviet civilians generally did not participate in anti-Jewish violence, unlike the populations of neighboring Eastern European territories” (DUMITRU 2016: 2). The goal is the research of the de facto egalitarian Soviet system as a successful mechanism for the integration of Russian Jewry. The focus on civilians’ behavior guarantees the fact that the study is not an ordinary political history, and rather a horizontal than a vertical history. The comparison between the ethnic policies of the Soviet Union and of Romania proves the constructible nature of antisemitism.

A critique that can be brought upon the monograph is the scarceness of the attempt to integrate and contextualize this phenomenon within the Eastern European picture. Integration is however not entirely absent, a comparison with the Lithuanian situation is being made, and the study itself echoing the transregional research of J. Kopstein and J. Wittenberg proving the increased degree of tolerance on behalf of Eastern European communist communities (KOPSTEIN & WITTENBERG 2011).

In her chronological narrative, the author shows great awareness of the Romanian interwar realities, at the same time making incursions into the Russian culture, displaying the stereotypes regarding the Jewish people in the writings of Gogol and Dostoevsky. The antisemitism of Romanian intellectuals was rooted in eugenics popular in a generation “lost” to the ethnic cleansing and nationalism of the 1930s. The author convincingly shows the importance of the intellectuals’ fascist tendencies as the instigator of social opinion, as opposed to the role of politicians’ antisemitism (DUMITRU 2016: 60). Other listed sources for Romanian antisemitism are the perception of social inequality and based on the interviews, the peasantry’s discontent with the discrepancy between the urbanized Jewish bourgeoisie and the hardships of traditional lifestyle.

In Romania, the universities and high schools were places where antisemitism was propagated by the supporters of the “Cuzist” party—the National Christian Party lead by A. C. Cuza and Octavian Goga party. The pre-War process of national consolidation in Romania was fearful of national minorities, and the national press was highly xenophobic (DUMITRU 2016: 55). Organized banditry was then excused by the “Cuzists”. The book offers remarkable details concerning the gradual consolidation of Jewish self-defense and “exclusion of Jews from the mental map of the community”, and the legitimization of mass antisemitism, which leads to the consequent aggression on behalf of the civil

population during the Holocaust. Bessarabia, the territory in the discussion, represents a separate case in the history of the Romanian Holocaust since it was inhabited by almost double as many Jews as in the rest of Romania (7,2%/4%), despite its smaller territory.

The means and subject of propaganda in both regions are considered of the highest importance in the search for the explanation of different mentalities. Soviet methods of propaganda among the rural population included the construction of lecture houses, the institution of workers' clubs, of Marxist circles with the purpose to eradicate illiteracy, and where lectures aimed specifically against antisemitism were held. As of 1927, repressive methods of struggle against the instigators of pogroms were applied, with archival evidence of the population's awareness of the punishment available. Another instrument of directed political propaganda was the introduction in the political sphere of Yiddish, spoken by many members of the Central Committee. Although not the topic of the current book, the high participation rate of Russian Jews in the Revolutionary movement and its consequent high rate of inclusion in the administrative apparatus is mentioned as further stimuli for the eradication of antisemitism. Already in the 1920s, as a result of the inclusion of Jews in the social, economic and political life of the country, their complete integration into the educational system, and the impending secularization of the Jewish community, the percentage of intermarriage of ethnic Jews with representatives of other communities reached 40%. Due to this fact, antisemitism transitioned from an ethnic to a political category (DUMITRU 2016: 104-106). The ethnic or national issue was reduced to almost a non-existent one.

The soviet propaganda mechanism included targeted publication activity which lowered anti-Jewish feelings and the anti-Judaic rhetoric through contesting and ridiculing, cinematographic representations of the proletarian Jews. The Soviet national policy of the first decade promoted "compensatory nation-building" for previously discriminated national minorities.¹ The chapters of the book polemicize with various explanations of the different civil behavior, one of which is the relative economic homogeneity of the Soviet population. The explanation is immediately deemed blatantly insufficient, just as the explanation of pogroms as "socially sanctioned violence" becoming the norm under German or Romanian administration does not explain the different reaction of civilians to the German call for actions. At the same time, the nationalistic policy of the occupational administration in Transnistria was significantly less effective in the multiethnic Soviet society, as opposed to the already Romanized Bessarabia with a lesser percentage of ethnic minorities (DUMITRU 2016: 185). Besides,

¹ As per Yuri Slezkine (1994).

proof of pre-War organized sabotage actions, which envisaged the possibility of spreading through recruited locals the “idea of collective defense against the Judaic danger” by the secret service of Romania in Bessarabia is shown based on archival materials (DUMITRU 2016: 157). In Transnistria, however, the public display of the atrocities of the occupational German and Romanian armies made the population turn against them and show solidarity with the persecuted, despite the severity of the punishment. The argument of the book itself is shaky in explaining the stance of the Soviet-German population, which quickly went under German command. This topic is briefly discussed by the author herself and obviously requires further research.

The definitive conclusion and the most important analytic outcome of the book are asserting in a highly convincing manner the significance and effectiveness of “policies of integration, affirmative action and negative sanctions” in eradicating antisemitism, and as mentioned above, the constructible nature of anti-Semitic prejudices (DUMITRU 2016: 235).

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