

# Official Order and Ritual Disobedience in Transnistria's Ghettos

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## Abstract

*The study I propose approaches the world of Transnistria's ghettos from a social perspective, my focus being on the reconstruction of the survival networks developed under the virtually exterminatory conditions of the ghettos as well as the parallel realities of official rules and inmates' alternative social structures. The theoretical approach follows the line developed by Erwin Goffman and his conceptualization of the coercive systems as total institutions.*

## Keywords

total institution; social networks;  
human capital; Transnistria

From autumn 1941 until the end of the war, Transnistria was the territory used by the Romanian authorities to implement their policy regarding the ethnical cleaning of the Romanian soil. As a result, around two hundred ghettos became operational on the territory between the Dnister and the Bug.

Starting from here, this paper will try to reconstruct the world of the ghettos with their internal organization and controlled contact with the outside world. The analysis will be developed on two distinctive dimensions: 1) the legislative system imposed by the Romanian authorities. From this perspective I will be interested not only on the reconstruction of the official norms governing the life of those deported but also in the reconstruction of the rationalizations used by the Romanian authorities in order to legitimate their policy of ethnical cleaning; and 2) the strategies developed by those deported in order to sidestep the limitations imposed by the legislative system. The analysis will be mainly circumscribed to the period of autumn 1941 to the winter of 1942, a period identified by most of the historians as the most problematic one for the deported Jews.

The research was conducted on two categories of sources: legal documents enacted by the Romanian authorities and personal documents of those

deported (letters, memories, diaries). For both categories of documents the methodological approach was a qualitative one.

### Official order in Romanian Occupied Transnistria

In the fall and winter of 1941 around 180.000 to 190.000 Jewish deportees from Basarabia and Bucovina passed through the five crossing points along the Dniester river (Moghilev, Yampol, Râbnița, Tiraspol and Ovidopol)<sup>1</sup>. There they were joined by some 300.000 local Jews<sup>2</sup>.

The gendarmerie was the institution charged with rounding up Jews throughout Transnistria. According to Circular no. 8<sup>3</sup> issued on September 8, 1941, following Order no. 209.221<sup>4</sup> from August 12, 1941 issued by The Fourth Army, General Staff, they were to check the number of Jews in each town and village, verify the creation of ghettos, and drive the Jews into them.

However, the regulations under which all Jews in Transnistria (both local and deported) were to live under Romanian control were first outlined by General Hugo Schwab in August 1941 in Ordinance no. 1. His orders stipulated that:

„The Jews will live in ghettos, colonies and labor camps. All the Jews at present in Transnistria who do not report to the authorities within ten days from the posting of this order for the purpose of fixing their place of residence, will be executed. The Jews are forbidden to leave the ghettos, labor camps and convoys without the approval of the authorities. Those who did not respect this order will be punished by death if they had a subversive motivation, if not they will be punished with 3 to 5 years in jail. (...) every Jew brought to Transnistria who try to cross, or has crossed, into Romania without the approval of the authorities will be executed. Anyone who gives any shelter to the Jews (...) will be sent to prison for a period between three to twelve years and fined between 100 and 200 marks. It is forbidden to any civilian or military personnel to transport money, letters, or any other values destined to the Jews or sent by the later. The offender will be sent to prison for a period between 3 to 5 years and fined between 100 and 500 marks”<sup>5</sup>.

Following this document, the life of the Jews in Transnistria was to be confined within the borders of ghettos, colonies or labor camps. The space outside these legitimate dwelling places was forbidden under the penalty of death. More so, the order transforms in an explicit manner, any intention of the local population to help the Jews in a legal offence punishable by prison and heavy fines. As stipulated in the argumentation of the mentioned legal text, all these measures are needed for the security of the state and the benefit of public order throughout the territory of Transnistria. And this because, according to the definition of reality held by the Romanian authorities, the Jews were dangerous elements that need to be strictly controlled in order not to endanger the Romanian war effort.

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1 Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, vol. I, (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, 2003), 65-66.

2 Dennis Deletant, „Aspects of the Ghetto Experience in Eastern Transnistria: The Ghettos and Labor Camps in the Town of Golta” in *Ghettos, 1939-1945. New Research and Perspectives on Definition, Daily Life, and Survival*, (Washington: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies – USHMM, 2005), 16.

3 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 34, 67-69.

4 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc 17, 27.

5 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 28, 49.

Following in the steps of this order, Colonel Nica Vasile for example, the prefect of Balta County issued Ordinance no. 4 regarding the establishment of a ghetto in the city of Balta<sup>6</sup>. According to this document from the beginning of September 1941, all Jews in town (locals or not) were ordered to live in a delimited sector of the city restricted to four streets; the former leader of the Jewish community becomes the mayor of the ghetto; a bakery and a Jewish hospital will be opened within the ghetto; the flour will be provided by the city hall and paid by the inhabitants of the ghetto; the head of the ghetto was also authorized to organize a Jewish police force to protect the lives and belongings of the inhabitants; all Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto, between 14 and 60 of age will be used for forced labor; entry and exit from the ghetto between 11.00 am and 4.00 pm was allowed only with a permit issued by the ghetto commandant (a gendarmerie officer).

Any Jews arriving in Balta from now on will be also living in the ghetto. Any infringement of the law will be punished by death, the penalty will be applied to the offender and twenty other Jews. That punishment is even more drastic in the Ordinance no. 3 issued on September 22 by Colonel Lazăr, the prefect of Tulcin County<sup>7</sup>, where the death penalty is applied to the offender and a hundred other Jews living in the ghetto. The rest of the rulings remain similar with those ordered through Ordinance no. 4.

On September 30, Antonescu ordered the imprisonment of Transnistria's Jews in camps alongside the Bug and confiscation of all Jewish property<sup>8</sup>. According to that order, all Jewish goods become the propriety of the local authorities. However, this was not always the case as a report from mid-November explains that the goods and furniture remained from the Jews that fled or were killed by the Romanian troops were meted out among the members of the local German population<sup>9</sup>.

In the middle of October 1941, Colonel Emil Broșteanu, head of the Gendarmerie in Transnistria reported to Gheorghe Alexianu, the governor of Transnistria that the concentration of the local Jews has been completed<sup>10</sup>.

A month later, governor Alexianu issued Ordinance no. 23<sup>11</sup>, that fundamental document stating the status of the Jews in Transnistria, either we are talking about the deported or the local ones. Ordinance no. 23 remained in force until the spring of 1944.

According to this decree, the Inspectorate of Gendarmes in Transnistria determines the localities where the Jews can be housed (art.2); a Jew can leave the commune in which his domicile has been fixed only if he has the authorization of the country prefect (art. 4); the Jews will be subjected to force labor obligations according to their profession; they will be used for agricultural labor, for road or bridge repairs, for wood-cutting in the forests, quarrying stone or any materials; in return for labor duly performed the laborer will receive meal coupons to the value of one day's labor, one day's labor being valued at one mark a day for manual laborers, and two marks a day for qualified professionals (art.6); any Jew found, without the approval of the authorities, in a place other than the one in which his residence was fixed, will be considered a spy and punished according to the military law in time of war (art. 8), meaning he will face execution.

Early in December 1942, the age limit of those included in the forced labor system was further diminished as according to Decision no. 2927 „any Jew between 12 and 60 years old must undertake compulsory labor”<sup>12</sup> in one of the domains needed

6 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 29, 52.

7 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 43, 85.

8 INSHR-EW Archive, R.G. 25003, reel 202, file 779, 165. See also Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 63, 123.

9 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 183, 353-355.

10 Deletant, *Aspects*, 23.

11 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 157, 303-305.

12 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. III, doc. 1059, 1964-1965.

by the Romanian authorities. This order from December generalizes an approach already found in a Note sent in April 1942 to Berezovca County prefect<sup>13</sup> from where we learn that 479 Jewish orphans evacuated from Odessa are to be held in an orphanage opened by the Romanian authorities and used for work.

Consequently, after December 1941, Transnistria functions as a huge prison as following the ordinances issued by the Romanian authorities, only the ethnic Romanians are allowed to cross its western border<sup>14</sup>. According to the official orders issued by the Romanian authorities, due to their dangerous and parasitical nature the Jews were gathered in special designated places where they could be segregated from the local population, they were deprived of any rights and were subjected to a forced labor regime. They risked heavy penalties (usually death) when deciding to break the official regulations.

A march order from the autumn of 1941, helps us understand how things were organized by the Romanian authorities:

„In accordance with Order No. 6769/941 of Army Headquarters and the accompanying order of the Governor of Transnistria, we are transferring to you \_\_\_ Jews; men, women and children in order that they be detained in the detention area of this village. The village authorities will see to the accommodations for these Jews, monitor them to ensure that they not leave the settlement and put them to work at various jobs in exchange for food, if they have no means of their own”<sup>15</sup>.

Consequently, the model was quite simple, they were brought to a rural area and confined to it under heavy penalties. Sometimes they have no means to provide for their food, while others they were to work in order to receive some food.

However, there were instances when the ghettoization process was even more grueling as according to the rules imposed by the Romanian authorities, families faced the risk of being separated at any time. A report of Golta Gendarmerie from March 1942 reads as following:

„From among the convoys bypassing Golta County the men fit for work are sized while passing other regions, here arriving only women and children that are unable for work and consequently becoming a burden for the prefecture in regard to their food”<sup>16</sup>.

As seen, the Romanian authorities are concerned not with the fate of those deported and the hard conditions they had to suffer but with their unfitness for work and consequently their susceptibility to become a burden for the authorities. The approach is very similar with the one discussed by Browning when commenting the Nazi definition of the Jews from the Soviet territories as ‘useless eaters’<sup>17</sup>.

Nonetheless, there were also times when families were separated on their own accord. A dramatic choice set forth in dangerous times. A set of documents issued by the Romanian authorities in the winter of 1941-1942 talk about Jewish parents that in order to maximize their children chances of survival were leaving the later in the care of Russian local peasants from the villages they were passing during their transportation through Transnistria:

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13 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. III, doc. 645, 1230.

14 See Note of Transnistria Government from 23 December 1943 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 295, 542.

15 Note of Berezovka Third Company of the Gendarmerie from 27 October 1941 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 113, 203.

16 Golta Gendarmerie Report from March 1942 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 568, 1063-1068.

17 Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of the Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 238.

„During transfers many Jews leave their children to be adopted by the local population of Russian origins. Consequently, on January 19 Ganciaru Nicolae and Garcovenco Timoftei from Cazamirovka, took a 3-4 years old child from the Jews that were passing toward Vasilionova village“<sup>18</sup>.

The children were baptized and the locals were paid for their services. However, the Romanian authorities did not allow the generalization of this social practice and were requesting the gathering of all these children in order to be returned to their parents<sup>19</sup>. Later on, on April 1942, the baptism of Jewish children, „adopted by locals or left behind from the passing convoys was strictly forbidden“<sup>20</sup>. After the spring of 1942, I have found no further documents related to this survival strategy developed by those deported.

In December 1941, Antonescu allows the Federation of the Jewish Communities to send medicines and money to their fellow co-religionist deported in Transnistria<sup>21</sup>. All financial assistance sent to the deported Jews must be deposited in the administration's account at the Romanian National Bank, at an exchange rate of 60 lei to 1 R.K.K.S.<sup>22</sup> In Transnistria the money will be distributed by the local Jewish communities. However, the large number of those deported and the meager economic condition of the Jews from the Old Kingdom, made the aid, while welcomed, insufficient to solve the problems of those deported.

Moreover, article eleven of Order no. 2927 issued by Antonescu one year later stipulates the any aid sent by the Jewish Communities to those found in Transnistria would be received only if the later exhibit good behavior and distinguished results in their work:

‘Jewish sections that will distinguish through work, discipline and perfect order will be noted in the table of those Jews that are allowed to receive aid from the country – drugs, clothing and money’.

In December 1942 when the large deportations from Basarabia, Bucovina and Dorohoi ended<sup>23</sup>, most deportees were concentrated in three districts: Moghilev, Tulcin and Balta. With the exception of several camps and Râbnița prison, the Jews were gathered in ghettos or in the localities they were ordered to live being subjected to a more or less organized forced labor system.

Ancel speaks of 165 identified camps and ghettos and dozens of collective and state farms that served as temporary camps<sup>24</sup>.

As we have seen, according to Ordinance no. 23 from November 1941, they were remunerated, one mark/day for unqualified work and two marks/day for qualified work. How helpful were this money for the survival of those deported could be recovered from official documents or from letters send at the time by those deported to their relatives. The initial exchange rate was 60 lei or 20 rubles for 1 R.K.K.S.<sup>25</sup> and in December 1941, for one kilo of bread one had to pay 800 or even 1000 lei<sup>26</sup>. The same huge amounts of money needed for buying goods of strict necessity are

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18 See Transnistria Informative Report from February 1942 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 463, 850-853.

19 See Note no. 1 of Balta City Police from 20 November 1941 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 191, 364-365.

20 See Note no. 2144 of Goltia County Prefecture from 9 April 1942 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. III, doc. 595, 1140.

21 Note no. 259 from 10 December 1941 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 248, 454.

22 See Administration Note from 5 February 1941 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 424, 787.

23 Ancel, *Transnistria*, doc 245, 450.

24 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. I, 353.

25 See International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*, (Iași: Polirom, Iași, 2005), 139.

26 Gendermerie Report no. 1661 from 18 December 1941, INSHR-EW Archive, R.G. 25.003, reel 151, file 32, 246-248.

witnessed by the letters sent at the time from Transnistria: 1200 lei for one kilo of bread in December 1941 in Shargorod ghetto<sup>27</sup> or 500 lei for 25-30 kg of firewood<sup>28</sup>. This means that, if we take, for example, December 1941 as landmark, a Jewish unqualified worker deported in Transnistria should have worked twenty days to buy one kilo of bread.

Moreover, the ghettos had no social infrastructure to assist the internees and, as Dennis Deletant makes clear, they had several things in common: they were cold and crowded, the food supply was meager, they were ravaged by typhus, and the death rate, particularly in the period between October 1941 and spring 1942 was horrendous. The example offered by Deletant is quite convincing, in Warsaw ghetto the death toll was 12-15 percent while in Transnistria it reached 30-50 percent during winter 1941<sup>29</sup>.

Take for example, Shargorod ghetto, here a hill occupied by 332 old, cramped houses made of mud brick parched together on narrow streets was declared a ghetto by the head of Moghilev's Shargorod sub-district. In December 1941, some 9000 Jews were packed in the ghetto, most of them from Bucovina; there were no bathrooms, public or private<sup>30</sup>; no trash collection and no garbage pits; the water was dirty as the few natural springs surrounding the town were forbidden to the Jews<sup>31</sup>. A report of Gendarmerie from January 1942 regarding the situation of the Jews from Moghilev allows us to reconstruct their living conditions there: they were living in insalubrious houses, often without any heating system; more so, acknowledge the report, „they are terrorized by the prospect of starvation“<sup>32</sup>. The same picture is gathered from the letters sent at the time by those deported where they were asking relatives to send them some food because they are literally dying of starvation<sup>33</sup>. Take, for example, a letter sent from Moghilev probably at the middle of December 1941<sup>34</sup>:

„We've been in Mogilow for over two months. Things are direr than ever. [...] I beg you, try in any way you can to send us butter, soap, potash, send us, to keep us alive. The children are fading away and we don't have any strength left. [...] There's nothing more we can do for ourselves. Meise Mohr has sent the children 6 potatoes, they cried with joy. What can I tell you? May God keep us from dying of starvation“<sup>35</sup>.

The example helps us take a glimpse to the complexity of a social world where six potatoes could make one to cry with joy simply because they represent the difference between life and death.

Arriving at this point, to understand how the world of the ghettos unfolded I will turn toward the memoirs of those surviving deportation as well the letters sent at the time from Transnistria, proposing a social approach instead of the historical one.

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27 Benjamin M. Grilj (ed.), *Schwarze Milch – Zurückgehaltene Briefe aus den Todeslagern Transnistriens*, (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2013), doc. 5, 58-63.

28 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 98, 466-469.

29 Deletant, *Aspects*, 28.

30 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 118, 201, 580-584, 972-991.

31 Ancel, *Transnistria*, 354.

32 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 397, 733-736.

33 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 5, 9, 12, 17, 24, 35, 37, 39, 49, 52, 53, 54, 62, 63, 77, 81, 84, 88, 91, 102, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 116, 133, 138, 151, 155, 156, 159, 162, 186, 187, 196, 201, 206.

34 The courier carrying the letters included in the volume edited by Benjamin M. Grilj, Albert Twers, was arrested in Lipnic train station on 20 December 1941. See Note no. 64504 from 3 January 1942 of the Ministry of National Defence *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 315, 584-585.

35 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 108, 520-523.

## Ritual disobedience in Transnistria's Ghettos

My interest at this point is to identify the strategies used by those deported in order to sidestep the limitations imposed by the legislative system. To understand these strategies we need to turn toward what I will call disjunctive identity models. Allow me to explain what I have in mind.

When individual lives in a unitary social world, in other words when the identity model he assumes for himself is also accepted as legitimate by the others – the question Who am I? is a non-problematic one. It can receive multiple answers, all equally correct: we are X, Y or Z, the blonde from the second floor, the child of my mother, professor of philology or space engineer. Each of these elements makes me what I am and creates through social interaction my world and my identity.

The problem arises when same individuals live in different social worlds, worlds that configure in different manners their roles and consequently, worlds within which questions like – Who am I, X? and Who is X? receive distinctive answers. To be clearer, I am interested in the scenario when under the influence of external factors individuals end up losing a fragment or the entire complex of identity markers that generated their social world. And in my opinion, this was the case for those deported in Transnistria.

Consequently, I propose to look at Transnistria deportations from a social perspective, more specifically the one developed by Goffman through his concept of total institution<sup>36</sup>. Goffman defines as total institution any isolated and enclosed social system where for longer or shorter periods of time individuals are required to a formalized way of life imposed upon them by an authority legitimated as such. The standard examples offered by Goffman are prisons, mental hospitals and concentration camps. The main characteristic of any total institutions is the requirement of major conformity with the norms imposed by the authorities.

When we talk about Transnistria we already know that the deportation process was not a unitary one: there were several camps and almost two hundred ghettos. All of them were, at least theoretically, enclosed areas that fall, following Goffman, under the definition of total institutions.

Moreover, the definition of reality held by the Romanian authorities, the definition that sees the Jew as a dangerous element of society and determines all the sanctions and discriminatory measures imposed upon him is also interiorized as legitimate by the broader society, the one beyond the border of the ghetto. This means that when analyzing the Transnistria phenomenon, we need to go further than Goffman does, and to identify a second level where the total institution operates – the communitarian one – and thus we must include not just the area within the ghettos walls, but also the rural and/or urban localities where the ghetto was built.

In Transnistria the Jew remains the holder of the same definition of reality that led to his deportation. According to this definition, all Jews are identical with a fictive one defined as a parasite and a dangerous element of the society that, as a consequence, should be expelled outside of it. His social status is perilous as he is defended by no rights and under heavy penalties when breaking the regulations imposed by the Romanian authorities. They could be beaten, stolen and even killed with no penalty imposed upon the offender. Sometimes, as proves a letter sent in early December 1941 from Shargorod ghetto<sup>37</sup>, a simple accidental meeting with a Romanian soldier could put the life of a deported Jew in danger even if the said Jew met the Romanian soldier within the ghetto borders, in other words within the space

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<sup>36</sup> Erving Goffman, *Aziluri*, (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 202, 1000-1008.

where the official definition of reality allows him to live. Moreover, the differences that these regulations impose between the Jews and all the others, determines the manifestation of this legitimate aggression beyond the borders of the ghettos walls. According to the memories of the survivors, they could just as easily become the victims of the local population that were free to handle the Jews as they saw fit.

According to the official regulations (see Ordinances no. 3, 4 and 23), a Jew interned in a ghetto or camp is not allowed to trespass the borders of the facility but if he stays inside (and plays by the official rules) he will die of starvation, thirst, cold etc. However if he chose not to accept for himself the definition of reality imposed by the authorities he will be killed as punishment for the infringement of these regulations.

So, what was the solution? What surviving strategies could be developed?

In the early autumn of 1941, money represented a solution for those that were lucky enough to have them. To have them meant to have the possibility to buy food and firewood but also to pay the transport for your goods<sup>38</sup> or to pay for the authorization for remaining in a larger ghetto (as, for example, Moghilev<sup>39</sup>). However, the vast majority of those deported lost everything, on the hands of the Romanian Army, when they crossed the Dniester. Furthermore, even those that were among the lucky ones and arrived in Transnistria having some resources, they have shortly remained without them. Letters sent from Transnistria in the winter of 1941 and also official documents issued by the Romanian authorities<sup>40</sup> prove quite clearly, that in Transnistria money were easy to lose and, due to the high prices requested on the market, even easier to spend.

So apart from money where we need to look if we want to identify solutions that lead to survival?

According to the memories of those surviving deportations the solution consisted in the construction of a parallel system of norms and a special type of social capital. Both will allow survival within the system, as the Jew will accept the status imposed by the authorities but will play this role following his own set of rules.

In general terms, the game was quite simple: to stay inside and die of starvation or to go outside and risk to be executed as a spy? The danger was even more present as, usually, the local communities acted as *de facto* total institutions.

Official documents, letters written at the time and the memories of those surviving deportation proves that the official regulations were infringed as living within the ghetto walls usually equaled dying by starvation or illnesses. The choice, however, was a perilous one as according to Ordinance no. 23, the punishment for those breaking the official order was, as already said, death.

Examples of this rule infringement are quite numerous. A Report of Balta Pretoral Service from December 1941<sup>41</sup> states that, acting against the stipulations of Ordinances 4 and 23 from 1941, twenty Jewish women and children were found wandering through the villages. According to the text, they declared that they left the ghetto to search for food. In spite of the gender and age of those involved and legitimating their decision as strengthening the authority, the commanding officer orders the application of article 7 of Ordinance no. 4 and article 8 from Ordinance no. 23, both envisaging the death penalty for those leaving the ghettos without legal authorization.

An informative Note from February 1942, for example, reads as following:

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38 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 194, 924-935 and also Report of Moghilev Gendarmerie from March 1942 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 546, 1010-1016.

39 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 113, 550-556.

40 According to a Report of Moghilev Gendarmerie from January 1942, the Jews from Moghilev remained without any money. See Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II., doc. 397, 733-736.

41 INSHR-EW Archive, R.G. 25.003, reel 306, file 1056, 175-176.



„There have been given harsh orders that all Jews found outside their settled localities to be executed on spot according to Ordinance no. 23, being considered spies placed under the regulations applied on war times“<sup>42</sup>.

And the examples could continue either we are talking about the official documents issued by the Romanian authorities<sup>43</sup> or by documents written at the time or later by those deported<sup>44</sup>. However my interest is rather explicative so I will turn to a question already formulated: which were the solutions found by the ghettoized Jews? How they sidestepped the official definition of reality without putting themselves to the risk of being shot?

According to personal documents written at the time (letters, diaries) or later (memoires), the theoretical solution was invisibility while the practical one was the creation of social networks. What does that mean? The premises of my explanatory model see the deported Jew as being thrown in a lose-lose situation. If he assumes the definition of reality imposed by the Romanian authorities and the identity model that was ascribed to him by the later, he will die either he respects or infringes the official regulations. Consequently, I am interested in recovering ways of creating parallel social structures. These social structures, largely translated in social networks will provide the Jew the social capital that will make possible his survival. Most of the time, the solution consisted in identifying the inhabitants of the villages around the ghetto or those nearby it that are capable to see him as a human and not an Yid, creating a network of trust that will allow him to sidestep the limitation imposed the Romanian authorities. The man living in the middle of the forest<sup>45</sup> or Marousia<sup>46</sup> the Ukrainian from Joil Alpern's memoirs, the shoemaker or the blacksmith from the nearby village<sup>47</sup>, the villager from Graghdanovka<sup>48</sup> remembered by Ruben Udler or the old woman from the road to Bogdanovka<sup>49</sup> from Sonia Palty's narrative are all such examples. This network of trust is to be used time and again providing the inmates with the so much needed food, firewood and sometimes even medicines.

However, apart this social network of trust, there are also special areas outside the ghettos and special periods of the year where individuals that usually accept the official definition of reality (and by doing so are labeled as dangerous by the ghetto's inmates) become capable to see the human behind the Yid: such special area is the local cemetery<sup>50</sup> while such special periods of time are the Christian holidays (Christmas<sup>51</sup> or the Feast of the Blajini<sup>52</sup>) or the funeral ceremonies<sup>53</sup>. These special places and periods of the year action like sacred breaks and the deported Jew could become visible again because, during these sacred breaks, the locals are willing to suspend the official definition of reality and are able to see the Jew as a fellow in need.

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42 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 529, 976-977.

43 See Note of the Gendarmerie Inspectorate of Transnistria from 18 October 1941 *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 79, 149 or Note no. 28 from 3 February 1942 of Balta County Prefecture *apud* Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 435, 803.

44 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 67, 92, 203, 318-21, 440-444, 1010-1018;

45 See Joil Alpern, *No One Awaiting Me – Two Brothers Defy Death During the Holocaust in Romania*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001), 67, 103, 107.

46 Alpern, *No one*, 66.

47 Alpern, *No one*, 90-91.

48 See Rubin Udler, *The Cursed Years*, (Pitshburg&Chişinău, 2005), 146.

49 Sonia Palty, *Evrei, treceți Nistrul – însemnări din deportare*, (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1989), 108.

50 Alpern, *No One*, 44 and also *Holocaustul evreilor din România – din mărturiile supraviețuitorilor*, (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 73.

51 Palty, *Evrei*, 94-95.

52 *Holocaustul*, 73.

53 Alpern, *No One*, 44.

Not less important, the network of trust is doubled by a network of legitimate aggressiveness which consists of individuals, places and periods of time that have to be avoided at all costs: the main roads<sup>54</sup>, some local houses<sup>55</sup>, the soldiers<sup>56</sup> or the mornings<sup>57</sup>, because this is the period of the day when the roads are mostly used by the later, are just some examples of strategies developed in order to avoid dangerous situations.

Consequently, if we look at Transnistria from the perspective of the deported Jew, we find a complex social structure. On one hand, we have an objective map of reality with its roads, wells and houses, a map that represents a physical and social world with its borders and rules. This social world is ruled by the Romanian authorities and for the Jew it is a forbidden place. Within it, he is allowed to live confined to the ghetto walls or, if he dares to step outside, under the protection of invisibility. However, there is another map that deported Jew overlaps upon this objective map of reality and which allows him to overcome the definition imposed upon him by the authorities. On the objective map, our fictive village could have 70 houses and 2 wells while on the map used by our Jew it has two houses and no well. But there are special places and special times of the year when the inhabitants of the houses unmarked on the map of our Jew are safe to meet, because in these places and in these periods of the year (the sacred breaks mentioned above) they are ready to elude the official definition of reality and opened to see the human behind the Jew.

Some other times, the network of trust consists not of contacts with the local population but in finding successful means of communication with un-deported relatives. The contact one establishes through trustful couriers could bring the much needed food and/or money or could provide those deported with goods that were lacking, at the time, in Transnistria and in this way allowing them to make successful exchanges on the 'free market'. Those exchanges will bring them the much needed food, medicines and firewood. To attend these goals, one had to firstly establish safe contacts, meaning to find those couriers that would have the highest chances of sidestep the official regulations that prohibited any contact between deported and un-deported Jews. Unexpectedly, the safest couriers belonged to the military<sup>58</sup>, either we are talking about the Romanian or the German Army. A sum of money was usually paid in the country by the relatives sending the parcel or if the later were sending money, the courier would receive in Transnistria a percentage of the sum. Sometimes, the scenario was even more complex. A letter sent from Transnistria in mid-December 1941<sup>59</sup>, describes a situation where a deportee had received money from a Romanian officer and, in exchange, when returned in the country, the later became the owner of a radio that was the property of the former prior to his deportation. However, even for the couriers, the practice was a dangerous one, as according to Ordinance no. 1 from August 1941<sup>60</sup> the practice of distributing letters, money or parcels in and from Transnistria was strictly forbidden and was punished with three to five years in jail. The punishment was doubled if those involved were military or administrative workers.

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54 *Holocaustul*, 209.

55 Alpern, *No One*, 96.

56 *Holocaustul*, 209.

57 *Holocaustul*, 36.

58 See Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 19, 50, 84, 91, 144, 183, 116-119, 256-260, 408-411, 436-439, 694-697, 846-847 and also Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 243, 467, 447, 857-861 and vol. III, doc. 609, 1160-1161.

59 See Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 136, 652-655.

60 Ancel, *Transnistria*, vol. II, doc. 28, 49. See also Decree-Law no. 944 from 28 March 1942, INSHR-EW Archive, R.G. 25.021, reel 20, file III-441, p. illegible.

The goods they asked their relatives to send through this clandestine system included, as expected, food, medicines and clothes but also: a calendar<sup>61</sup>, ink<sup>62</sup> and writing tools<sup>63</sup> or 'a textbook for the child'<sup>64</sup>. More so, it seems from the letters sent at the time that in the autumn and winter of 1941, on the black market in Transnistria there were two products very easy to sell and often demanded by the Ukrainians peasants: soap and potash.

'The food crisis is intensifying at an alarming rate. Even if you have money, that is to say a lot of money, you can't buy anything. The locals are only interested in parting with something if it's via an exchange, the smallest exchangeable item being a piece of soap'<sup>65</sup>.

As a consequence, the two products are often asked by those deported from their relatives still in the country<sup>66</sup>. To have them meant to have access to the new currency accepted in Transnistria's markets and in doing so to have access to goods of primary necessity.

For the deportee, within his former life there were legitimate and illegitimate means to attain to his primary needs. Before, within this legitimate framework a kilo of potatoes, for example, could have been bought, received or gathered from his garden. Now the same potatoes could be bought, begged, stolen or received. Each of these methods became perfectly legitimate in the world of the ghetto and represents another way through which the individual plays by his own rules the role imposed upon him by the official definition of reality. These new rules suppose the development of a new kind of knowledge, a practical one that allows him to minimize the risks generated by behaviors that although became legitimate within the ghetto continues to be penalized in the outer world. It is a new form of human capital that allows individual to develop skills better suited to the conditions he is forced to live. This practical knowledge takes various forms: from methods that minimize the risks involved by stealing (if practiced when the Ukrainian peasants were sowing their land<sup>67</sup>, or when the wagons were driven by old men<sup>68</sup>) to means of maximizing the chances of begging (like learning a funeral Ukrainian prayer and using it during a funeral ceremony held by local Ukrainians<sup>69</sup>). Within this social world, there is a complete reconstruction of the meanings ascribed to the reality. Here, for example, an object is deemed to be useful only if „it could be inserted, at any moment, in a pocket"<sup>70</sup>. To know these rules means to have access to skills that permit individual's successful adaptation to the reality imposed by the coercive system represented by the ghetto.

The practical knowledge and the social networks developed outside the ghetto represent what Goffman calls the clandestine life of the total institution, through which, the Jew assumes the role attributed to him by the authorities but plays this role through his own rules. According to this order, all deported Jews are equated with a fictive one, defined as harmful to the Romanian society and thus deported and also dangerous for the Romanian effort of war and thus ghettoized. However, as we have seen, the official order enforced by the authorities was paralleled by a set of social practices developed by the ghettos' inmates that allowed them to

61 See Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 195, 936-939.

62 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 77, 194, 348-377, 924-935.

63 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 112, 544-549.

64 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 77, 348-377.

65 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 139, 664-669.

66 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 18, 22, 57, 102, 108, 109, 125, 160, 163, 194, 108-114, 128-130, 282-284, 486-491, 520-527, 610-613, 752-755, 766-767, 924-935.

67 Alpern, *No One*, 100.

68 Alpern, *No One*, 61.

69 Alpern, *No One*, 44, 97.

70 See Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Timpul lacrimilor secate*, (București: Hasefer, 2003), 159.

break from the collective definition imposed by the Romanian authorities and in doing so to develop strategies that maximized their chances of survival. All these strategies represent what Goffman calls ritual disobedience, an unauthorized break from the role imposed upon the individual by the institutional order. He acts like he is accepting the official regulations but in fact constructs strategies to sidestep it and in doing so he is able to survive.

Moreover, within this world, the access of the deported Jew to the identity model that prior deportation formed his social world is theoretically denied. But this was not always the case, and sometime we may find, inside the ghetto, activities that allow individuals to have quick access to their former life: a dancing evening in Moghilev<sup>71</sup>, a chorus in Bershad<sup>72</sup>, a school for ghetto's children<sup>73</sup>, the celebration of the Jewish holydays<sup>74</sup> are all such examples.

Sometimes, the lost identity is recovered through a third party as it happens in the case of Betty, probably a former teacher from Rădăuți when writing in December 1941 to one of her presumably former students:

„My dear, sweet Ralph, I think of you and Piperl so often and I so wish to see you! [...] Are you studying and with whom? Keep everything I've been at such pains to teach you in your little head and keep studying as often as you can. It's important to keep going, my dear! Do you think of me sometimes?”<sup>75</sup>

All these examples represent individual strategies that allow the deported Jews to recreate, even for short periods of time, lost worlds and by doing so to have access to stolen identities.

## Conclusion

The world of the ghettos was a grueling and complex one. If we look only at the official documents we find that for the Jews it was a lose-lose situation. The deportation equaled death either they were following the official regulations (through starvation, cold, etc) or if they decided to infringe them (through execution). However, if we turn toward the personal documents of those deported (letters, diaries, memoires) we find that although the official definition of reality remains in place, strategies were developed that allowed individuals to play the role imposed by the authorities by constructing a set of parallel social practices that made possible their survival.

Starting from this observation, I have focused on the survival networks developed under the virtually exterminatory conditions of the ghettos aiming to reconstruct these parallel realities of official rules and inmates' reformulation of the social structure.

Following Goffman I regarded the ghettos as total institutions and, going further than the American sociologist, I have argued that we should regard Transnistria *in toto* as a total institution as the definition of reality that led to the deportation and ghettoization of the Jews is also shared by the local population and the later are free to enforce the rules imposed by the Romanian authorities in regard to the Jews.

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71 See Miriam Korber Bercovici, *Jurnal de ghetou-Djurin, Transnistria, 1941-1943*, (București: Kriterion, 1995), 17.

72 See Glasberg Gold, *Timpul*, 158.

73 See Korber Bercovici, *Jurnal*, 53, 60, 103, 106; Palty, *Evrei*, 93; Arnold Daghani, *Groapa este în livada cu vișini*, (București: Hasefer, 2004), 46.

74 See Glasberg Gold, *Timpul*, 177, *Holocaustul*, 196, 214.

75 Grilj, *Schwarze*, doc. 188, 870-875.

Consequently, trying to recreate these survival strategies I have identified a three-folded solution that consisted in: 1) creating networks of trust (locals that are ready to sidestep the official definition of reality and consequently able to see the deported Jew as a fellow in need and not less important, corruptible militaries that are ready to infringe, for personal gains, the official regulations and by doing so they are able to help the deported Jews); 2) identifying and avoiding networks of distrust (locals, places and times defined as dangerous for the deported Jew); and 3) the development of new forms of human capital, a practical knowledge that permitted their successful adaptation to the coercive system imposed by the total institution (skills that minimize the risks stealing involves and maximize the chances of begging or the correct identification of what I have called 'sacred breaks', instances when the official definition is suspended and the deported Jew could become visible in locations where, otherwise, his legitimate access is denied). All these are forms of what Goffman calls ritual disobedience, an unauthorized break from the role imposed by the coercive system within which the deported Jew was bound to live.

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