

## “THE JEWISH QUESTION” IN THE PAGES OF *CONTIMPORANUL*<sup>1</sup>

EMILIA FAUR\*

**ABSTRACT.** “The Jewish Question” in the Pages of *Contimporanul*. It is my interest to investigate how one of the Romanian leading interwar avant-garde magazines, *Contimporanul* (1922-1932), tackled the “Jewish question”. In this respect, I will consider the various standpoints the contributors took on the matter, presenting it in all its facets and complexity, as both a political and a cultural phenomenon. The analysis of the numerous articles covering the “Jewish question”, its causes and consequences, is meant to illustrate the sensibility *Contimporanul* demonstrates in regard to the “Jewish question”. Finally, I will conclude that, as in all matters covered, the magazines’ ideological position is democratic – For its contributors’ main claim is that the young Romanian state should prove itself to be united, modern, democratic based on the principles of integration and plurality, and not a nation-state based on ethnic and religious discrimination.

**Keywords:** *Contimporanul*, cultural and political anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic movements, democracy, modernity

*“Solidarity is at the root of a great deal of turmoil”<sup>2</sup>*

### Introduction

The literature covering the “Jewish question” in the interwar Romania is extensive. Still, the main focus of today’s researchers remains the 1930s-40s, for this decade marks the pitch of the anti-Semitic movements and the growing power

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0689 / „Lib2Life – Revitalizarea bibliotecilor și a patrimoniului cultural prin tehnologii avansate” / “Revitalizing Libraries and Cultural Heritage through Advanced Technologies”, within PNCDI III.

\* PhD candidate, Doctoral School in Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: emilia\_faur02@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919-1930). Mărturii documentare [Antisemitism in the Romanian Universities (1919-1930). Documentated confessions]*, Lucian Năstasă (ed.), Preface by Carol Iancu, Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, Kriterion, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 40. [All translations from Romanian to English belong to the author of the article.]

of the fascist political parties on the nation's political scene<sup>3</sup>. The scholarship notably invests all attention in the articles from the journals of the time as a source of information. Understandably, most of the scholars went for the right-wing, fascist oriented magazines – e.g. *Cuvîntul studențesc* (1923-1940) [*The Students' Word*], *Gîndirea* (1921-1944) [*The Thinking*] and others. Less attention received, however, the left-leaning or democratic newspapers and magazines – such as *Adeverul* (1871-1872, 1888-1916, 1919-1937) [*The Truth*], *Dimineața* (1904-1937) [*The Morning*] and others.

Regarding the avant-garde magazines, the scholars were mostly preoccupied with the innovative, transnational and international attitude the avant-garde members display. Some suggested even that the Jewish origin had some influence in shaping such attitudes.<sup>4</sup> I am not keen in assuming that the avant-gardes international and transnational spirit stems from a Jewish attitude; nor that the fight against anti-Semitism is a reflection of the avant-garde members' political attitude (e.g. because they were socialists); or to suggest the avant-garde members fought against Jewish discrimination because most of them were themselves of Jewish descent. I find such presuppositions presumptuous and, in some respects, biased. Instead, I aim to capture *Contimporanul* (1922-1932) take on the "Jewish question", in the effort to give a comprehensive account of the problems and questions raised by the leading organ of the Romanian avant-garde with respect to the subject – stretching from the way the contributors reflected upon the acts of vandalism and violence against the Romanian Jewish population; to their response to the social turmoil bursting in 1922-1923. As a result of the analysis of their articles, I attempt to formulate a broader conclusion in regard to *Contimporanul*'s ideological option. Whether the ideological option can be considered the equivalent of 'the reason why' they stood against the rampage towards Jews, it is neither my concern in this paper, nor its purpose.

### **A Glimpse into the Background. the Turmoil**

In 1922-1923, the institutions and the streets are flooded with manifestations against the Jews. Its main instigators are the Romanian students – the "academic

---

<sup>3</sup> Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească* [*The Thirties. The Romanian Far-Right Wing*], IVth Edition, Preface by Marta Petreu, Cartea Românească, 2015; Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească* [*From Junimea to Noica. Romanian Culture Studies*], Polirom, 2011; and others.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Cernat, *Vase comunicante. (Inter)fețe ale avangardei românești interbelice* [*Communicating Vessels. (Inter)facets of the Romanian interwar avant-garde*], Ed. Polirom, 2018, p. 55.

«youth»” [“«tinerimea» universitară”], as *Contimporanul* called them. This is not a new phenomenon, “even at the end of the XIX century, our Romanian and Christian students got themselves a reputation good enough to terrify any Jew”<sup>5</sup>. Still,

“the anti-Semitic movements came one after another and were taking proportions. By 1919-1921, many of the Romanian students formed organized groups which entered, for instance, into the Jewish neighborhoods from Bucharest, attacking shops, homes and synagogues, mistreating all the Jews they encountered”<sup>6</sup>.

The “spark” [“scânteia”] – as the start of the protests latter came to be called – is set in the University of Medicine, from Cluj. There, în November 1922, a group of Romanian Christian students, „have beaten up and drove away their Jewish colleagues from classes and their aggressions extended throughout the city [...] The pretext of the incidents was the reclamation by the Jewish students of the dead body of one of their coreligionist, brought to the Institute of Anatomy (the Orthodox Jews opposed the dissection of the bodies)”<sup>7</sup>.

Petre Ciorăneanu, a frequent guest in the pages of *Contimporanul*, comments the incident stressing the anachronism of the unseemly situation for a democratic state: “the spark came from the fire set in the dissection class of the Medicine School in Cluj, caused by an improper and anachronistic bigotry and the flame had spread”<sup>8</sup>.

The contributors take a close-up of the fire-branded mobs. It is a grim glimpse into the intolerant, xenophobic and nationalistic attitude hoisted up to the rank of patriotic enthusiasm by the deluded crowds. The titles of the columns underlie the hypocrisy and poor understanding of the national values: “Românii care se deșteaptă”<sup>9</sup> [“Romanians awakening”], “Alți români care se deșteaptă”<sup>10</sup> [“Other Romanians awakening”] – alluding to the well-known patriotic song that became the national anthem after 1989. For instance, I. G. Costin bitterly recounts:

In the past days, our newspapers bring delightful news. The old cities of Moldavia [...], broom and the dustpan in hands, chant the national anthem of our Romanian people, meaning the extermination of the Jews. [...] On the corridors

---

<sup>5</sup> Carol Iancu, “Cuvânt înainte” [„Foreword”], in *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919-1930). Mărturiile documentare [Antisemitism in the Romanian Universities (1919-1930). Documented confessions]*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*., pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Petre Ciorăneanu, “În jurul unei cauze” [“About a Cause”], in *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 29, Saturday 3 February 1923, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> I. G. Costin, “Românii care se deșteaptă” [“The Romanians that are awakening”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 16, 4 November 1922, pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Unsigned, “Povestea vorbeii” [“The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 21, 9 December 1922, p. 16.

opened by the Peace Treaty from Versailles, our Romanians from the above-mentioned cities reckon that after the attainment of all our national ideals, paid through the nose, the time has come they themselves to be awakened for the purpose of putting in the greatest safety the hard earned goods [...] With their nose full of ink [...] these Romanians that are awakening proceeded to shutting down the theatres in which only the awakened Romanians play, pull the beards of the elderly Jews [...] and put together concert programs only from the masterpieces of the Romanian polyphony<sup>11</sup>.

All of this, the blind violence against the Jews, committed by furious mobs of Romanian ‘patriots’, the entire turmoil that beset the universities and the sluggishness of the Romanian authorities in restoring law, order and safety are summed up as follows, in the pages of *Contimporanul*:

– These past days, there was a display of acts of bravery. In Cluj, in Iași and even in Bucharest. ‘The Jews is to blame’<sup>12</sup> was rerun with fury by the nation’s heroes, in the rhythm of broken glasses and smashed heads. [...] Finally, once the deeds were done [...] the order, incarnated in the government and the policemen of Mr. Brătianu,<sup>13</sup> taken, for a moment, by surprise [...] has resolved to drastic measures. (Iași, for instance, the residence of an entire military body has urgently asked for a few sergeants from Bucharest.).<sup>14</sup>

This is the image *Contimporanul* offers to its reader: a young Romanian state – recently united – of discord, hostility, enmity, and xenophobia, in a full-blown anti-Semitic rage. What are the causes, what led to this outburst of hatred and violence, some ask. What is to be done?

### One Question, Different Agendas

The leading avant-garde magazine, *Contimporanul*, has in its first two years of appearance – before it takes, in 1924, the turn to an exclusively artistic program –, the display of one’s usual cultural outlet. Meaning it gathers in its pages a wide range of subjects, covering both cultural and socio-political topics. It comes as no

---

<sup>11</sup> I. G. Costin, “Românii care se deșteaptă” [“The Romanians that are awakening”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 16, 4 November 1922, pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> “‘Jidaniile este cauza’”. The grammatical error is purposely made. Also, is a vulgar use of the wording (a way people talk in the southern part of Romania).

<sup>13</sup> Liberal Prime-minister and head of the Government.

<sup>14</sup> Unsigned, “Povestea vorbei” [“The Tale of a Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 21, 9 December 1922, p. 16.

surprise, therefore, that the magazine has a special interest in the recent public disturbances, such as the assault on the Jews. Besides, the outburst of brutality against the Romanian Jewish population actually coincides with the first years of *Contimporanul*.

Owing to the topics' complicated outlook and consistent with their own agendas, the contributors take different approaches in their critique. Some are interested in the factors that generated the anti-Semitic movements; others, simply state the relation between the anti-Semitic movements and the to-day political events; and some others still aim at dismantling the constructed prejudices surrounding the Jews, by reinforcing a positive image of them. Throughout their analysis the authors engage both against the old-time prejudices and against the long-lasting social and political discrimination. At all times, as we shall see, their criticism is based on the democratic principles.

#### **a. A Historical and a Sociological Explanation**

Looking for a socio-political explanation, Ion Vinea and Petre Ciorăneanu set out to investigate the historical causes that led to the latest turbulences. The authors spot two factors that contributed to the present turmoil. One, the “social unbalance” [“dezechilibrul social”] ensued after the World War I – and, alongside, the dissatisfaction it raised among the social classes. The other, a geo-social factor, understood as the absence of migration from the rural area to the urban area – caused by the poor educational policies.

Though Vinea and Ciorăneanu agree that the anti-Semitic attitude is a symptom of a “social unbalance” that led to the individuals' malcontent, their reasoning is slightly different.

For Vinea, the “social unbalance” is caused by the “overthrow” of the old, privileged classes. That is, the anti-Semitic movements are only a means of deflation, an action taken by those unhappy with their material conditions or with the changes in their social status after the World War: “The Intellectuals that find themselves with no job or means to improve their knowledge, military left with a skimpy compensation, and, especially, the expropriated landlords, this are the anti-Semites”.<sup>15</sup>

Ciorăneanu claims that the present social disturbances are the result of a “social unbalance” created as the Romanian petit bourgeois class changed its inner structure. After the War, he claims, once it acquires its constitutional right, the Jewish minority takes part in the structure of the Romanian petit bourgeoisie. By taking a more preminent role on the Romanian social and political scene, the petit bourgeoisie is perceived as a rival of the Romanian middle-class bourgeoisie:

---

<sup>15</sup> I. Vinea, “Silberman la noi” [“Silberman to us”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 31, Saturday 17 February 1923, p. 2.

It may well be that the War had produced a social unbalance. The young Romanian academics, as well as the Jewish young academics, were being recruited from the urban middle-class bourgeoisie. As long as the Jews had no political rights, the Romanian middle class was that which provided the individuals [...] for our leading classes. Today, as the petit bourgeoisie came into its political rights, being economically stronger – because the economic activity was left by the Romanians exclusively in its hands – she appears to be a rival of the Romanian middle class, now weakened by the War.<sup>16</sup>

The two opinions differ mostly as Ciorăneanu advances the idea that the “social unbalance” is not only the result of the changes in the bourgeoisies’ structure or the aftermath of the Great War. He further argues that a geo-social factor should also be taken in account. From his part, the “de-vitalization” of the Romanian middle class – that which makes this class so suspicious and resentful – is also the consequence of the lack of migration from the rural area to the urban area. And this unfortunate situation is a result of a misguided educational policy. One of the side effects of this flawed circuit is that the Romanian middle class comes to be poorly represented in University – making it even more vulnerable and spiteful:

Yes, we are in a full social ebullience. New social classes ask for their right to life; old classes crumble [...] The causes for the University crises? The true ones are to be found far back and [they] are deeper than the enrichment brought by war and the expropriation. The wave of new life, which is the big reservoir of the rural area was supposed to power the urban class [...] [n. but it] was systematically deviated from the cities through our educational policy.<sup>17</sup>

Under the influence of the nationalist propaganda, which claimed there are too many Jewish students enrolled at the university, the Romanian students called for the authorities to institute “*numerus clausus*” for the Jews. What Ciorăneanu tries to explain is the reason why such a claim was possible. He implicitly argues that the dysfunctional educational policies – lack of schools, teachers, teaching material in the rural area – made it so that hardly any young Romanian from the rural area was enrolling in those few universities in the city. Since Romania was still in most part an agrarian state, it becomes clear why the presence of the rural young Romanian in the academic life of the cities really counted. It also makes it even clearer that the young academics gave voice to the frustration of the Romanian

---

<sup>16</sup> Petre Ciorăneanu, “În jurul unei cauze” [“About a cause”], *Contemporanul*, Year II, No. 29, Saturday, 3 February 1923, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Petre Ciorăneanu, “Tot criza universitară” [“The University in Crises, Again”], *Contemporanul*, Year II, No. 32, Saturday 24 February 1923, p. 2.

middle class – especially as their main claim is the implementation of „*numerus clausus*” – “one of the main slogans of the nationalistic anti-Semites between the two World Wars, approved and implemented even before 1900”.<sup>18</sup> Horia Verzeanu makes this correlation explicitly as he paints the picture of the scandal breaking out into the dissection class; at its core, he says, lays the demand for “*numerus clausus*”:

So many idealists started reckoning with the mosaic religion bodies in the name of a humble principle – *numerus clausus* – and those who paid for the broken pots were the Jews themselves and a few more or less Jewish editorial offices.<sup>19</sup>

Compared to Vinea’s general remark, Ciorăneanu gives a more precise cause for the anti-Semitism’s outbreak: He follows the root of the scandal that breaks on the corridors of the University – the Hotpoint of the instigation. It does not mean, though, that, as Vinea noted, the changes brought by the War were of less importance. Surely the changes in the social and the economic structures made the Jews easy scapegoats and targets of the discontented classes.

### **b. A Double-edged Political Game**

For the contributors, the cause is not to be found merely in a social or geo-social context, but in an outright political one. Some of the contributors claim that the violence against the Jewish population is a smoke screen. That is, the scandals are a political maneuver set to silently shift the attention away from the political games taking place behind the curtains. Especially, from the debates reignited by the expected changes in the new Constitution.

In his memoirs, one witness of the time, Zaharia Boilă, recalls that the anti-Semitic students’ movement was set up by the liberals – which came to power in 1922. He recounts how, in the fall of 1922, a student from Medicine School, D. Munteanu, pays him a visit and how, on the occasion, he finds out that “Brătianus’ Government agents, by using a considerable amount of money, are trying to recruit students from Cluj for a diversionist movement”<sup>20</sup>. Shortly after, Boilă remembers

the same D. Munteanu came to tell me that the undersecretary for the Internal Affairs, Ghiță Tătărescu, came to Cluj, and, with the knowledge and with

---

<sup>18</sup> *Antisemitism universitar*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Horia Verzeanu, “Jos Jidani!” [“Down with the Jews”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 24, 30 December 1922, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Zaharia Boilă, *Amintiri și considerații asupra mișcării legionare [Memories and considerations upon the Legionary Movement]*, Preface by Liviu Titieni Boilă, edited by Marta Petreu and Ana Cornea, notes on the edition by Marta Petreu, Ed. Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 22.

the approval of the minister of the Internal Affairs, and even that of Ionel Brătianu, staged an anti-Semitic movement, in order to shift the public attention away from the campaign set by Maniu to overthrow [the government]”.<sup>21</sup> The campaign consisted mainly in weakening the power of the liberals by “sabotaging the brătienist legiferation, firstly, the Constitution that was about to be passed through Parliament”.<sup>22</sup>

Sharing the same view as Boilă, H. St. Streitman notes:

It is the phase of all falls and downfalls [...] The phase of the supreme hopelessness, in which the wicked wizards can unleash, at will, all evil spirits [...] And then, without much quest [...] the cure must be found. [...] This calls for a diversion. A scapegoat is needed. And the diversion must be at hand [...] Of course, luckily for our rulers, when there is a large number of Jews in the country... This wretched Jewish population is the best defense, the brave shield of those who – to our happiness, honor and safety – rule us and watch over us, from banks and ministries, including the old and new Jewish magnates and peddlers. [...] With a <down with the Jews!> [‹jos jidanii!›] [...] the heavy and threatening clouds scatter.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, *Contimporanul* warns its reader that the government has prepared all sorts of “diversions”, in order to protect and preserve its political status and power, the anti-Semitic movement being just one of them:

when the ruling parties awake from their reminiscent dreams [...] it will be just the time to come up a new diversion [...] what will that be? The Jewish one has become dangerous, the Hungarian one is too recent, playing peasants’ riot is not advisable ... All that is left is, of course, the question of Bessarabia and the Bolshevik assault.<sup>24</sup>

These “diversions” are meant, in the contributors’ view, to distract the Romanian citizens’ attention from the games taking place on the political stage and, mainly, from the preparation of the articles of the new Constitution: “We expect an enemy at the gates on its way to the Carpathians and we find ourselves in the face of an unexpectedly liberal Constitution”.<sup>25</sup>

Ștefan Antim, another contributor, recognizes as well that the anti-Semitic movements are just a smokescreen masking the rivalries and the ambitions of the

<sup>21</sup> Iuliu Maniu was the leader of the National Party of Transylvania.

<sup>22</sup> Zaharia Boilă, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> H. St. Streitman, “Diversiunea” [“The Diversion”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 23, 23 December 1922, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> V., “Alarma” [“The Siren”], in *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 27, Saturday 20 January 1923, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Unsigned, “Povestea vorbeii” [“The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 26, Saturday, 13 January 1923, p. 4.



political parties. He reminds its readers that the talk over the articles of every Constitution so far has been accompanied, always, by conflicts and anti-Semitic movements. The only difference this time around is its tools, the students:

In 1866, when the Jewish question was brought into discussion, heads and windows were smashed, and even a synagogue was tore down; in 1879, when the problem resurfaced in the debates over the new Constitution of the time, the same anti-Semitic excesses repeated; now, when a new Constitution is in debate and when the problem is yet again put through, the street speaks again. The only difference [...] is that [...] in the past we didn't had a satisfying number of students, the slums had the decisive word.<sup>26</sup>

The discord apple becomes article 7 of the Constitution, which dealt with giving political rights to the Jews. Antim sums it up: “It sinisterly started with the dead bodies, it cheerfully moved on to *numerus clausus* and it logically ended up at the narrow gates of article 7 [n. of the Constitution]”.<sup>27</sup>

Why are the students “opposing full citizenship for the masses of Jews [...] and demand the preservation of the old article 7”?<sup>28</sup> One might argue that this opposition comes down to different factors, interests, strategies, and, of course, irrational fears. Full citizenship for the Jews meant creating the space for equal opportunities: for social mobility, education, jobs etc. The Jews were having for the first time the chance to hold elected office and higher ranked positions in the administration. Surely, to receive a better position in the administration meant taking up high public school education. The general public, and the academics, received this news badly. Instead of considering the idea as means of integration of the minorities, it considered it the start of a fierce competition. That is, a competition between ‘the Romanians’ and ‘the others’, ‘the foreigners’; meaning, between the locals and those who, in the populations’ *imago*, were going to take over the Romanian institutions and wealth. This contorted image of ‘the other’ was fed and fueled by the nationalistic propaganda. Which claimed, for instance, that there is a very large number of Jews enrolled in universities and too many of them are taking a prominent role on the market; that the Jews are a “danger”, for they want “«to take over» the countries’ economy”; and that they exert a high amount of control in the public sphere as “opinion makers”<sup>29</sup> (as journalists, editors, publicists etc.).

---

<sup>26</sup> St. Antim, “Minorii și minoritățile” [“The minors and the minorities”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 32, Saturday 24 February 1923, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Lucian Boia, *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* [*The History's Traps. The Romanian Elite in-between 1950s-1950s*], The II<sup>nd</sup> Edition, revised and added, Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 54.

In short, the political parties danced the tango of power, while fueling the citizens' irrational fears. The opposition saw to weaken the strength of the main political party, by sabotaging the vote of the new Constitution. Meanwhile, the political party at the helm, the National Liberal Party, presided by Ionel I. C. Brătianu, Romania's prime-minister, entertained, as it seems, the illusion of permanent siege – whether it was one taking over from the inside (the Jews) or from the outside (the Bolsheviks, the Hungarians) – in order to reinforce its position on the political stage. All that *Contimporanul* does is hopelessly remark and emphasize the hypocrisy of the political parties, their selfish interests in the political affairs and their clear disregard for the wellbeing of the electorate.

### **Against Anti-Semitic Attitudes**

Since in the public discourse, the Jewish question is set on both socio-political and cultural terms, *Contimporanul* brings forth a series of arguments meant to defuse the anti-Semitic movements and to disarm and dismantle the socio-political and cultural anti-Semitism. When it comes to socio-political anti-Semitism, *Contimporanul* argues for granting political rights to the Jews. As against the cultural anti-Semitism, the contributors show the important contribution the Jewish men of culture, editors and publicists have in the Romanian culture. Throughout their argumentation, the contributors reinforce a positive image of the Jews in contrast to the negative biases and prejudices.

Since the unity of the young country is still a hot topic in 1922-23, *Contimporanul* argues that it is of great importance to bring together the nation's population by giving political rights to the minorities. On this point, though different, their arguments converge: for a peaceful cohabitation, the civic and political rights should be enjoyed by all. Antim, for instance, asserts that the Jews in the Principalities automatically gained the political rights from the moment of the annexation: "The Jews from Bucovina, from Bessarabia, from Ardeal and Banat, do not need article 7, nor do they need the infamy of the Treaty from Versailles. They are rightful citizens by virtue of the annexation principle".<sup>30</sup> In Antim's opinion, there is no legitimate reason for which the Jews should not be granted full citizenship – not doing so meant keeping a divided country:

---

<sup>30</sup> St. Antim, "Minorii și minoritățile" ["The minors and the minorities"], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 32, Saturday 24 February 1923, p. 1.

The triumph of the academic youth would lead us to the truly monstrous situation of having 750.000 Jews, foreign to the language, the customs and our aspirations, being still undisputed Romanian citizens; [...] while 250.000 Romanian-born Jews [evrei pământenii n.] [...] would continue to be foreigners.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, for G. Spina, another contributor, the Jews are entitled to citizenship since they, just as the local population, gave their “tribute of soldiers every year”<sup>32</sup> during the War, proving their loyalty to the Romanian motherland.

For this reason, *Contimporanul* voices out that the integration of the minorities, and implicitly of the Jews, should not be considered a whim, or a political toy, but a true necessity.

The attainment of the political rights, however, could not automatically annul the biases and long-time prejudices. Therefore, *Contimporanul* sought to emphasize the major contribution the Jews have to the Romanian culture. Hence, the contributors prove that the negatively perceived attributes of the Jews are actually working as positive attributes when it comes to the commitment proven by the Jewish men of letters and editors on the Romanian cultural scene. For instance, V. Danoiu points out the business focus attitude and entrepreneurship of the Jews – which was negatively advertised by the nationalists and unfavorably perceived by the locals – in a favorable manner. The author recounts with gratitude the commerciality of the books published by the Jewish publishing houses, which were offered to the average Romanian at an affordable price, making available a wide range of great Romanian writers (like Creangă, Eminescu and others):

what strikes us when we look at the question of cultural contribution [...] of the Jews in the Romanian culture, is their remarkable input, is their activity mainly on the editorial ground. Their commercial skill, so incriminated by the anti-Semites, counted a lot in this crucial problem of creating an intellectual atmosphere. Without a public invited to read [...] through a methodical and perseverant spread of the cheap editions, what would they have done: Eliade’s guys that wrote, the grandchildren and grand-grandchildren that write still? [...] Who has forgotten Creangă, Eminescu, Conta, read in the prints of Șaraga? Attentively looking at one’s childhood, we all remember the editions of Samitca, Pinoth, Cuperman, Braș, and Steinberg, through Alcalay’s «Biblioteca pentru toți» [«A Library for All» n.] [...] Publishing houses [like] Segal, ed Brănișteanu, ed Calafeteanu, are printing to this day [...] cheap and good books.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> St. Antim, “Minorii și minoritățile” [“The minors and the minorities”], *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> G. Spina, “Antisemitism cazon” [“Anti-Semitism among militaries”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 3, 17 June 1922, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> V. Danoiu, „Evreii în Cultura Română” [„The Jews in the Romanian Culture”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 39-40, 21 April 1923, p. 4.

As to the accusation that the Jews are manipulating the public opinion, the same author argues that the Jewish publishing houses were and are still being neutral and do not censor their publishing content. In this respect, he asks in a rhetoric matter: “Where are the subversive intentions of these enterprises, which printed often even anti-Semite books?”<sup>34</sup>

The political and cultural recognition of the Jews becomes one of the main topics on the magazine’s agenda. It also becomes a manifest for tolerance, unity and togetherness. All in the effort to awaken not the rage of the national ideology, but the peaceful rejoice of the countries’ citizens. To counteract the violence and xenophobia, the magazine strives to bring to the fore those aspects of the political and cultural life that are an example of collaboration and common national goals – And for that matter the undeniable participation of the Jews to the nations’ political and cultural ideals.

## Conclusion

The “Jewish question” is one of the many subjects *Contimporanul* covered in its first two years of appearance. Placed among other topics such as dysfunctional economy, press freedom, social injustice and many others alike, “the Jewish question” is discussed for it represents another symptom of the general and endemic dysfunctional state of affairs in the Romanian interwar period. This might be the reason why the problem is covered from so many different angles.

Some of the contributors define the anti-Semitic attitude as “anachronistic bigotry” pointing out its contradiction with the principles the young democratic state was about to put at the foundation of its new, modern Constitution. Others seek to explain the intolerant, xenophobic attitude pointing to the main generator of social changes and disturbances: the First World War. Some others suggest that the general dissatisfaction found among the citizens is not merely the result of the changes and upturns brought about by the War. They are also the product of the persistent flaws and impairments already present in the Romanian society – the poor educational policies, for instance. Others still are preoccupied with the lack of political consciousness displayed by the state’s citizens. In this sense, the bitter irony with which the contributors criticize the Romanian ‘patriotism’ and the xenophobic component of the nationalistic discourse is telling. On the same note, the contributors amend the lack of political responsibility evidenced by the main political parties. Acting in self-interest,

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

the political parties seem oblivious to the populations’ cries, or worse, they harness the peoples’ fears – fears generated and replenished by the general sense of disarray, uncertainty and insecurity that characterized the Romanian society in-between the Wars. Hence *Contimporanul* speaks of the hypocritical political affairs with a great sense of disappointment and revolt.

Finally, *Contimporanul* strives on numerous occasions to plead for social and political solidarity. Consequently, it argues why the new state must grant equal rights to all its citizens, no matter their ethnicity, religion or language. If only because the new citizens – the young states’ minorities –, have already put in their part to the social and cultural wellbeing of the nation.

Democratic in its essence, *Contimporanul* speaks not only against anti-Semitism, but also for solidarity. The young democratic Romanian state should prove, in this respect, that it stands united not only on paper, but also in reality. This is the imperative *Contimporanul* voices out.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919-1930). Mărturii documentare* [Antisemitism in the Romanian Universities (1919-1930). Documented confessions], Lucian Năstasă (ed.), Preface by Carol Iancu, Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, Kriterion, Cluj-Napoca, 2011.
- Boia, Lucian, *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* [The History's Traps. The Romanian Elite in-between 1930s-1950s], The IInd Edition, revised and added, Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 54.
- Boilă, Zaharia, *Amintiri și considerații asupra mișcării legionare* [Memories and considerations upon the Legionary Movement], Preface by Liviu Titieni Boilă, edited by Marta Petreu and Ana Cornea, notes on the edition by Marta Petreu, Ed. Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 22.
- Cernat, Paul, *Vase comunicante. (Inter)fețe ale avangardei românești interbelice* [Communicating Vessels. (Inter)facets of the Romanian interwar avant-garde], Ed. Polirom, 2018.
- Ornea, Z., *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească* [The Thirties. The Romanian Far-Right Wing], IVth Edition, Preface by Marta Petreu, Cartea Românească, 2015.
- Petreu, Marta, *De la Junimea la Noica. Studii de cultură românească* [From Junimea to Noica. Romanian Culture Studies], Polirom, 2011.

### Articles from *Contimporanul*

- Antim, St., “Minorii și minoritățile” [“The minors and the minorities”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 32, Saturday 24 February 1923, p. 1.

- Ciorăneanu, Petre, „În jurul unei cauze” [„About a Cause”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 29, Saturday 3 February 1923, p.1.
- Ciorăneanu, Petre, “Tot criza universitară” [“The University in Crises, Again”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 32, Saturday 24 February 1923, p. 2.
- Ciorăneanu, Petre, „În jurul unei cauze” [„About a cause”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 29, Saturday 3 February 1923, p. 1.
- Costin, I. G., „Românii care se deșteaptă” [“The Romanians that are awakening”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 16, 4 November 1922, pp. 3-4.
- Danoiu, V., „Evreii în Cultura Română” [„The Jews in the Romanian Culture”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 39-40, 21 April 1923, p. 4.
- Spina, G., „Antisemitism cazon” [„Anti-Semitism among militaries”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 3, 17 June 1922, p. 14.
- Streitman, H. St., “Diversiunea” [“The Diversion”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 23, 23 December 1922, p. 2.
- Unsigned, “Povestea vorbei” [“The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 21, 9 December 1922, p. 16.
- Unsigned, “Povestea vorbei” [“The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 26, Saturday, 13 January 1923, p. 4.
- V. [Vinea, Ion], “Alarma” [“The Siren”], *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 27, Saturday 20 January 1923, p. 4.
- Verzeanu, Horia, “Jos Jidani!” [“Down with the Jews”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 24, 30 December 1922, p. 7.
- Vinea, I., “Silberman la noi”, *Contimporanul*, Year II, No. 31, Saturday 17 February 1923, p. 2.