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ON “DRAMAS, FIELDS AND...” INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

Reconsidering Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*, my study aims to analyze its history, applicability and limits, focusing on the specific case of the Cluj Jewish group. Based on the interpretation of empirical material, collected through intensive fieldwork, my approach contributes to an anthropological understanding of “interpretive communities”. The experiences of anxieties, traumatic memories, nostalgia and the ways they determine specific group coagulation strategies are topics of main interest, permanently analyzed in my study. Viewed both at the individual and communitarian levels, constituted as thresholds or liminal stages, they have an important role in the process of identity construction and representation of the Cluj Jewish group. Empirical data gathered through applying qualitative research methods (mostly life- histories, semi-structured and in-depth interviews), put in a neo-interpretive framework, structure my approach. Meanwhile, the inconveniences and limits of the mentioned theoretical frame as well as the traps of fieldwork will be identified and analyzed in the spirit of the anthropological self-reflexivity.

Historical Data about the Cluj Jewish Community

The history of the Cluj/ Kolozsvár Jewish group might be analyzed easily as a chain of crises, of liminal situations, exposing it to various challenges and thresholds, meant to be surpassed. Objective historical data facilitate the understanding of this community as one assuming and performing, at the symbolical level, rites of passages, following systematically their three phases: the separation, liminality and aggregation¹. As other Jewish communities of Transylvania, the Cluj/ Kolozsvár one was continuously challenged and in permanent process of adaptation to unfavorable historical contexts, searching for paths to preserve its own identity, compelled to reinvent itself in various ways in different periods of time. As mentioned previously, I applied concepts from rituals studies² to analyze identity preservation strategies as they had been configured and promoted by the Cluj/ Kolozsvár Jewish group in the recent past and nowadays: I use the term separation, underlining that especially since the modern period this community had to face several identity threats, and as response it decided to

¹ See in this respect Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passages*, London – New York, Routledge Library Edition, 1960 and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1977.

² Separation, liminality, aggregation, concepts launched and approached by Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passages*.

change previous statuses, making new alliances, continuously negotiating its position with other groups, especially with the empowered ones. It faces also liminal moments, crossing over thresholds with different contents, and finds strategies to aggregate itself, adopting new forms in order to keep its cultural identity and specificities alive.

The separation, liminality and aggregation, concepts that I focus on later in this article, are used as analytical tools in the attempt to understand in depth processes of identity construction and representation configured in the focused on community. Turner's concept of *communitas* is introduced as well in order to facilitate the interpretation of deep solidarity of this group members when facing challenges and cultural identity threats³. The article considers only moments that are present in the interlocutors' narratives, therefore it makes references to the recent past and to nowadays contexts.

To frame it better, I am going to analyze a few historical data, meanwhile reconstructing – in brief – excerpts of the Transylvanian history. The region was an autonomous province, part of the Habsburg Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (from 1867 to 1918), part of Romania (from 1918 to 1940). Then, between 1940 and 1944, the North-Western part of Transylvania, including Cluj, had been annexed to Hungary. In spring 1944, the area was invaded by Nazi Germans and, in autumn, by Soviet army, becoming again part of Romania only after the Paris Peace Treaty (1947). The Cluj/ Kolozsvár Jewish group shared the fate of other Transylvanian Jewish communities, systematically mentioned since the 17th century⁴. Being often treated as undesired groups, put apart, marginalized, expelled or as minority they are exposed to assimilation and other identity threats, constantly looking for preservation strategies. They differed in time, due to specific historical contexts. For instance, after 1867 when Hungary played a key role in the new form of the Empire (Austro-Hungarian), as a survival strategy derived from threats and fear, the Jews of Cluj/ Kolozsvár, adopted and internalized the Hungarian language. It was not spoken only in public but also in private, having more or less the same degree of internalization and adoption as Yiddish. Names and surnames having a Hungarian resonance or flavor became familiar among the Jews⁵.

Then, after 1918, when Transylvania became part of Romania, the Jews of Cluj were determined to be more open to the Romanian language and denomination processes. As I suggested above, all these were configured as identity survival strategies and had been results of anxieties and fear, derived from identity

³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 94-130.

⁴ Ioan Bolovan, "Evreii din Transilvania între 1870-1930. Contribuții demografice" ["The Jews from Transylvania. Demographic Contributions"], *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie George Bariț*, XLIV, 2005, pp. 539-540.

⁵ See in this respect Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), *The Memorial Volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár*, New York, Memorial Foundation of Jewish Culture, 1970.

annihilation threats. Especially historical literature introduces the idea of a triple affiliation or openness (Jewish, Hungarian, Romanian), characterizing the community, culturally very mobile. A spatial peripheral position⁶ described the group a long period of time, and constructed specific communitarian behaviors and also certain images and stereotypes associated to it. Matters of exclusion had been related to this community, the threat of non acceptance triggered anguishes and fear, meanwhile generating continuous self reinvention, having specific forms in different periods of time.

Related to the recent past, one can say that the historical contexts of Nazism and totalitarian communism exposed the Cluj Jewish community to anxieties of identity loss. The "Romanian Chapter of Holocaust"⁷ and the Transylvanian one⁸, following a period of anti-Semitic Laws⁹ exposed the Cluj Jews to limit experiences. Then, the social changes in Romania (the communist regime installed and the belonging to the Soviet Block) had generated new types of individual and community threats, profiled in the new political context.

Following Liviu Rotman's opinion, community was for Jews a specific historical structure, having a protective role for its members, replacing the nonexistent state. Or, the Romanian totalitarian state, "confiscated" the social and educational functions of this structure through different Decrees, Ordinances, Laws in 1948, 1949. They aimed at nationalizing hospitals, medical centers, orphanages, Jewish schools. This process affected enormously Jewish communities all over Romania, deprived from parts of institutions, contributive to processes of identity construction and representation. Even if, apparently, the religious function was not so much challenged, the fact that after 1948 (the year of Israel state proclamation) many Romanian Jews started the emigration process and finally left the country had as a consequence a diminishing of the synagogues used for religious services¹⁰.

The imposed unification of the neolog, orthodox and Sephardic communities in Romania¹¹ continued the aggressive campaign of the Romanian totalitarian state against Jewry, aiming at homogenizing these communities. The Cluj Jewish

⁶ Between 1784 and 1842 the Jewish community could settle, with substantial difficulties, only in marginal places of the town.

⁷ Liviu Rotman, "Evreii din Romania. Final de istorie" ["The Jews from Romania. End of History"], in Lucian Nastasa, Andreea Andreescu, Andrea Varga (eds.), *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Evreii din România (1945-1965)* [Ethno-cultural Minorities. Documentary Testimonies. The Jews from Romania, 1945-1965], Cluj-Napoca, Ethno-Cultural Diversity Center, 2003.

⁸ Transylvania was under Hungarian occupation; the Jews from Cluj were deported in 1944. The Jews of Cluj/ Kolozsvár are exposed to the same tragic fate; gathered in a ghetto, they are deported in May-June 1944. According to sources, 8% survived. See in this respect Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), *The Memorial Volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár*.

⁹ Both in Romania and Hungary, several anti Semite laws and decrees are voted and applied. 14 documents in Romania, between September 1940 and January 1941). Since March 1944, in Hungary, under German occupation, ghettos are constituted and deportations prepared.

¹⁰ 363 synagogues.

¹¹ 11.08.1949.

community shared the same fate with other Romanian Jewish communities. The tension between them and the totalitarian state was permanently present, State was seen as a nontrustful mechanism, subject of complain and the main generator of anxiety and identity threat. Another important topic related to the Romanian Jewish communities (including the one in Cluj) was emigration to Israel¹² or to other destinations (stress and anguish related to the problem of obtaining visas had been on the agenda and then, feelings of rupture, of being derooted through emigration caused anxieties as well).

The post totalitarian period configured other specific problems: the emigration to Israel and other countries continued, the property restitution disadvantaged the Jews and, in general terms, non citizens and non residents of Romania¹³ etc. The process of transition to a market economy caused financial problems to certain disadvantaged groups. Anxieties are now connected to the difficulty to adapt and adjust to new decades and perspectives, the Cluj Jewish community, according to the most recent census, totalizes 158 persons – the age average being quite high – while in the interwar period, according to 1930 census, it totalized 18.353 persons.

The above mentioned historical data, offering a perspective on the community's recent past are correlated with the interpretation of the empirical material, as result of the anthropological fieldwork.

Methodological Clarifications

This research was a long term one, being conducted in Cluj-Napoca. It developed gradually, having different search phases and interrogation levels. Besides classic anthropological methods (participant observation, non-structured, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and also life-histories that had been of great help), I was determined to analyze archives materials, laws, decrees, ordinances published in Monitorul Oficial¹⁴, statistics (National Institute of Statistics or the World Jewish Restitution Organization reports) and to consult also historical texts.

One of the research problems derived from a lack of anthropological approaches specifically on this topic (both an advantage and a disadvantage). Another one is linked to the simultaneous advantages and limits of practicing anthropology at home¹⁵.

¹² See in this respect Liviu Rotman, "Evreii din Romania. Final de istorie".

¹³ Emigrating, they lost Romanian citizenship and residence; members of other ethnic communities faced the same problem.

¹⁴ Publishing official acts.

¹⁵ The advantages of being familiar – to certain extents – with your own field (the analyzed issue is not totally new and unfamiliar; the disadvantages of a virtual omitting of something relevant for interlocutors).

On Liminality and Communitas

In the following excerpt of my study, I aim at analyzing the concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*¹⁶, framing my interpretation of the empirical data. Following Van Gennep's perspective¹⁷, Victor Turner defines the rites of passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age"¹⁸. Each rite of passage implies the overpassing of three stages – the separation, the threshold/limen and the aggregation/coagulation. According to Victor Turner, the limen/liminality refers to the second stage, of the confrontation with a threshold: in this stage a social entity (a person or a group) assumes an experience of passage, abandoning a certain social status in order to obtain another one. On the other hand, *communitas*, in Turner's understanding, defines a specific inner state, shared by the members of a certain group, determining the change of their social status. The distinction *communitas*/ community is introduced by Victor Turner in order to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living"¹⁹. The distinction between structure and *communitas* is not "simply the familiar one between secular and sacred, or that, for example, between politics and religion"²⁰. In *communitas*, the social structure with all its component elements and ramifications is dismantled, the power relations, the social hierarchies are dissolved, the individuals are equal, assuming and sharing the same experience of passage. The state is not permanent, it is the one defining the above mentioned limen or threshold, assumed by individuals in order to get into a new stage of their social life, due to the fact that "social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality"²¹.

But how in particular the topics of liminality, *communitas* and interpretive communities are introduced in a social/cultural anthropological approach focusing on the Jewish community in Cluj? To frame an answer to this question, it is necessary to give a few details on my research. As mentioned previously, it developed gradually, in a few layers or stages. First, its main goals were to find appropriate paths to conduct research in this Jewish community of present-day, to understand and interpret the current process of identity construction and representation, as it is traced by community members. During the course of this research other issues arose: according to what specificities do they define their feeling of belonging? To what extent the anxiety of overpassing certain thresholds influences or even configures nowadays group perspectives? How, after

¹⁶ Victor Turner's perspective on *limen* and *communitas*.

¹⁷ See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passages*.

¹⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 94.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

experiencing repeated traumas did the community members manage to cope with the present and imagine the future? The first research question concerned the current forms of identity construction and representation: in Turner's terms, I attempt to focus on the vectors of liminality and how specifically *communitas* is configured or built (what are the terms of this experience of surpassing a threshold, how the experience is consumed), which are the follow-ups of the state of *communitas*?

In the process of doing fieldwork, especially when interviewing people (either through collecting life histories, or semi-structured interviews), I noticed that most of the interlocutors invoked the Past as the main criterion to define their current status. Empirical data reveal that they make reference recurrently to this temporal category and the comparative frame: past/ present is very important in the current forms of identity construction and representation.

I have identified some specificities of this sequence: time is not a standard, linear one; the perceived and conceptualized past includes certain breaks and discontinuities and all these specific representations of time are present in the interlocutors narratives. The reference is always made to the period *before* limit experiences, to that of the limen and to what comes next. It is a conscious perception of overpassing these stages. The liminal experience is represented by the common suffering, a shared experience dismantling social structure, the social hierarchies, differences and, making sense of suffering, *communitas* is configured.

In objective historical perspectives, disasters (representing the limen at the symbolic level) are associated with the recent past, particularly to Nazism and the totalitarian form of communism, installed in Romania after the Second World War. Personal and community experiences related to these periods are accumulations of anguishes and the elliptical, blurred attitudes regarding these time frames²² have to be seen as normal responses given as such to overpass traumas and to try to reestablish a sense of identity continuity. Identity threats had been attested in the recent history of this Jewish community: the 1944 deportation of the Jewish community members to extermination camps during the Nazi occupation of Northern Transylvania – more specifically, between spring and autumn, 1944. According to the interviews, the limen is associated also to other traumatic experiences consumed in the totalitarian period; recurrent references are made to the nationalization of industry, to the confiscation of private properties. It is particularly interesting that the deep, tragic experience of facing the limen is not articulated in narratives; it is not verbalized by my interlocutors, the members of this community. As I have mentioned above, they make references to the periods before and after, deeply conscious of the passage of three stages: the separation from a certain status, the passage itself and the aggregation, exactly as in a rite of

²² Interlocutors do not name them as such; the reference is somehow hidden and put under cover through the term *disasters*.

passage. Unwilling to verbalize these passage/ limit stages, the interlocutors refer mostly to an atmosphere created in the Jewish community of Cluj – references are made to certain parts/ areas of the town, inhabited by Jews, to buildings, to experiences associated to these places, to a calm, quiet period before liminal experiences. A mental map is possible to be reconstituted on the basis of the interviews data. I have identified, through fieldwork techniques, a few layers on which the community atmosphere is reconfigured.

The first layer concerns the Jewish communitarian space. It has much to do with perspectives and verbally reconstructed images of material goods: individual, family properties- houses, house objects that remind interior decorations, small factories and also, community properties- synagogues, Ritual Bath, official buildings “There were several synagogues in former times here: on Paris and Horea street, also one near the river (river Someș, crossing Cluj). All of them served as synagogues” (Judith, interviewed on 22nd of May, 2010).

A second layer, connected to the first mentioned one, refers to a distinct atmosphere of Cluj in former times, to daily practices, community life, intercultural connection. Recurrently, interlocutors relate emotionally histories on cultural exchange, on the role of Jews as mediators in different situations, being fluent in Hungarian and Romanian, on habits, customs, on ways of assuming religion. I identified recurrently in in-depth interviews relevant excerpts in what concerns the role of linguistic mediators certain community members had (this issue is a recurrent one in the interviews): “My husband had a small shop at the corner of the street, he had many customers, Romanians, Hungarians. Everyone felt there at home. My husband talked in Romanian to Romanian customers, and in Hungarian to Hungarian ones” (Gyongyi, 16th of September, 2010, Cluj); “I got sick once and I went to see a doctor. Seeing my Hungarian name, he started to speak to me in Hungarian. I answered him in Romanian, fluently, he was a Romanian doctor. He continued, you must be then a Jew if you speak both Hungarian and Romanian so well” (Erno, 5th of August 2010, Cluj). The first layer challenges mostly visual memory, being still connected to real, nowadays identifiable designates – in the sense that one can still recognize those buildings, objects etc. The second layer triggers more other senses, having, in a symbolic way, much to do with the taste, touch and smell and, because of that, the narrated atmosphere is not to be found any more, in the absence of clear designates. It is all produced somehow only at the level of these narratives. A third layer, where these categories are present, is, apparently, related to a specific cultural diversity, recounted with reference to Cluj. Also a quite recurrent issue in my interlocutors’ statements, the idea of cultural diversity appears on many levels; the internal cultural diversity: “in former times, there were a Sephardim, a Neolog, an Ashkenazi communities, here, downtown, living peacefully” (Marcus, 6th of July, 2012, Cluj); the role of Jews as mediators, due to their linguistic skills and cultural openness: “I used to translate texts in Romanian for my Hungarian Colleagues, and in Hungarian for my Romanian

colleagues” (Jeno, 15th of June, 2012), the general ethnic and cultural diversity in Cluj.

These three layers describe all a stage placed before the threshold/ limen. The narrated time in the interviews is certainly placed in the past but it is difficult to be found in very precise, historical years.

In the interlocutors narratives, time is blurred, reconstructed under the form of memories, basically *acts of testimony, of confession*²³ and nostalgia is a form of bringing them to the present, at the level of discourse, soliciting senses, and reconstituting an atmosphere in a vivid way. References to these periods before catastrophes are determined by the anxieties of not losing these sites of memories, as a follow-up of the desire to incorporate them in the individual and community cultural identity, as relics of past that have strong roles in current processes of identity construction and representation.

The narrated time is one associated mostly to the interlocutors childhood and early youth.

In Victor Turner’s terms, the separation is from such a social reality or state and the liminality and *communitas* are generated and produced paradoxically in the same moments with the process of assuming and living the disasters (in precise, historical terms – 1944, the year of deportation, and then, in certain periods of the totalitarian time). It was a recurrent attitude of the interlocutors to avoid the narration of these limit experiences, although they make vague references to them, triggering emotional reactions. The follow-up of the liminality is a coagulation of identity, its deeper articulation and self-representation. A profound meaning of community, as a traditional social organization is configured, the feeling of belonging to the cultural group is present and affirmed. As a consequence, one can identify easily, on the basis of the interviews and broadly, of the empirical data, the three stages – the separation, the liminal one and the coagulation/ aggregation. The separation is from a state of harmony, reconstructed mentally and restituted as such in narratives, perceived as a painful stage, a diffuse recent past – according to the interviews, placed before 1944, before deportation. Liminality and *communitas* – a threshold and a moment – a tragic one, dismantling the initial order of community creates a total solidarity of its members, assuming deep suffering (nazism and communism). The final state, aggregation, (in terms of the rites of passages) is characterized by a more profound feeling of belonging to the community, by the affirmation and public representation of identity, surpassing the extreme suffering. One can see this community as an interpretive one, underlining that its members share the same perspective on history and memory. A deep consensus could be

²³ See Uli Linke, “Anthropology of Collective Memory”, in Neil Smelser, Paul Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam – Paris – New York – Oxford – Shannon – Singapore, Elsevier, 2001.

identified at the level of collected narratives, the same perspectives being shared by interlocutors of different educational background, gender and age.

On Interpretive Communities

Following the same idea of common responses to different historical triggers, challenging the community aggregation and solidarity of its members, I have identified a topic that has been much debated by my interlocutors in the course of my research. Indeed, the problem of property restitution/ recuperation plays the role of a coagulation factor for the community; it proves that it is very much alive and able to reinvent itself, despite unfavorable circumstances generated by different state institutions and their arbitrary decisions. I aim at introducing the concept of interpretive community with respect to the Cluj Jewish group, focusing on, in particular, the problem of property restitution/ recuperation, analyzing how specifically it has created a particular type of solidarity, a common way of perceiving a threat and a challenge, a shared perspective on the institutional lack of functionality, a mistrust in the blurred entity of the post-socialist state. In general terms, one can speak about an interpretive community, using the case of the Cluj Jewish group, as its members make and share the same sense of history, of contemporaneity, projecting in a similar way the future. Meanwhile, it is equally relevant to underline subjective, specific responses when confronting with these temporal categories and stimuli.

Theoretical Frame

Theoretically, I approached the topic of restitution-recuperation, considering especially the understanding of property as a "cultural construct by which persons are linked to one another and to values through culturally specific idioms"²⁴. Meanwhile, the idea that property restitution aggregated substantial parts of society is underlined, depicting a more general situation, being relevant for all social, cultural articulations of the system.

The approaches belonging to other disciplines paradigms (especially law and economics) are of great help, when focusing on such a complex issue. The first one analyzes property relations on the basis of juridical aspects, deriving from legal praxis, the other perspective underlines the role of property ownership, the socio-economic advantages deriving from it.

Post-1989 property restitution laws have had the effect of generating new anguishes, being thought and articulated to create new forms of private properties. They do not allow the reconfiguration of the interwar ones but encourage their redistribution. It is absolutely obvious that in general terms, the post-1989

²⁴ Katerine Verdery, "The Property Regime of Socialism", *Conservation & Society*, II, 2004, 1, p. 191.

legislation was not one with the goal to compensate or to correct historical guilt on one level and traumas on the other.

*Historical and Juridical Contextualization.
Totalitarian and Post-Totalitarian Periods*

In my whole approach, I made reference to the communist/ totalitarian legislation that had negative effects on the Jewish communities in Romania. All these official papers; Laws, Decrees, Ordinances (emitted or adopted between 1948 and 1989) had a huge, negative impact on the community life and generated identity loss fears, and deep traumas. Through nationalizing Jewish hospital and other places for social support such as asylums and medical centers, built through the efforts of the community, certain important identity levels are much affected and brought in the hands of a blurred entity, the State (in 1949). Meanwhile, the Jewish confessional and community schools are nationalized (1948) and a very important factor in the process of identity configuration and representation, education, is threatened.

The Jewish communities, diverse initially by origin and religion²⁵ had been homogenized, communities oriented institutions with their structures, functions-forbidden by the totalitarian state, their establishments – confiscated²⁶. The identity loss threats continuously created anxieties, motivated especially in the post-1949 context, when even the internal cultural diversity is challenged. The “new community” lost autonomy after this brutal state intervention²⁷.

Synagogues, the only places that remained in the community possession, and the only ones in which Jewish people gathered became rooms of anti-emigration discourses dissemination. The effects of these attempts to distort the group identity and feeling of belonging through brutal intrusion of totalitarian power, using Decrees, Laws, Ordinances as punishment mechanisms had destructive consequences, generating anxiety. The totalitarian state constituted an entity that generated anxieties- demolishing through sometimes direct, sometimes more subtle strategies- the identity of the group.

The Jewish communities shared the same fate with many other communities in Romania: with social, educational spaces, confiscated in 1948 and 1949, the religious ones controlled and manipulated, with a private sphere also “confiscated” through different totalitarian strategies (the private properties being exposed to

²⁵ Ashkenazi, Sephardim, *Neolog and orthodox*.

²⁶ In 1948, law 119/11.06 for nationalizing factories, banks, insurance, mines, transportation companies. All these became state property. In general terms it is perceived as the law that marked the transition from capitalist economy to a centralized type of economy. Private properties were nationalized if the owner emigrated.

²⁷ See in this respect Liviu Rotman, *Evreii din Romania in perioada comunistă [The Jewish of Romania in Communist Period]*, Iași, Polirom, 2004.

nationalization). Compared to other ethnic/ cultural communities, the Jewish ones had previous been (between 1940 and 1944) targets of anti-Semitic laws as well. Therefore, in a relative short period of time they had been double victims, of Nazism – in a radical, extreme way – and of totalitarian communism, without at least a period of recovery. In terms of generating fears, post-1989 period is not more comfortable for Jews, the new policies have not served to alleviate anxiety.

The property restitution legislation that was re-articulated more clearly after 1997 favored the current Romanian citizens and did not consider the non-residents; or, emigrating, people lost the Romanian citizenship. There were primarily only two historic minorities that were excluded from compensation and restitution: Jewish and the Saxon (German speaking) communities. Their members, who emigrated in totalitarian times, lost the Romanian citizenship. Theoretically, they could reapply for it but the application deadline for getting properties back was established soon afterwards, therefore, in a subtle way, being discouraged to apply.

Also, non-residents, those who lived in other places than Romania, although they kept the Romanian citizenship, had been disadvantaged, as post-1995 Laws and Ordinances considered the interest of current citizens (Law 112/1995) and residents in Romania. This legislation contributed to and reinforced the national-state ideology²⁸, excluding minorities from restitution/ recuperation of properties, from reintegration, keeping them apart. The same type of approach dominated property restitution legislation in other Central and East European countries (Lithuania, Czech Republic, Croatia).

The Cluj Jewish community was exposed to these triggers and faced this legislation in particular ways. The interrogations I have formulated tackle the role of the property restitution/recuperation in the process of constituting of an interpretive community. Are the members of the nowadays Jewish group "reading", understanding and analyzing in the same way the elements, the actors, the facts of restitution/ recuperation process? How does the group aggregate itself after such a situation of liminality? Other research questions have followed, derived from the previous ones. Is property restitution an issue that proves, shows, configures certain specificities of the Cluj Jewish community? Is there any specific response to this phenomenon that aggregate other communities as well?

My intention is to relate this issue of properties restitution/ recuperation to the one of identity, considering that the process of Property restitution and recuperation is related to the one of restitution/ recuperation of the Past, a way in which both sides (one involved in Restitution, the other – in Recovery) can prove that memory is, to certain extents, alive (assuming the guilt from one side, simply affirming it, from the other). It relates past to the present, projecting the future. In this case, these two sides are the State (with all its mechanisms, with all its institutions

²⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations. Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, New York – London, W.W. Norton and Co., 2000.

involved in restitution) and the Cluj Jewish community (with its institutions designed for properties recuperation and mostly, with its members who have certain attitudes, thoughts and imaginary regarding it).

I. First of all, I have tried to ascertain how these two sides or parts of the process approach one another, which is their dynamic and how this issue is manifested through this dynamic.

II. Secondly, I have tried to focus on the internal dynamic of the community, approaching it and somehow, entering it via this topic, considering as much as we could, the multitude of voices, views, perspectives, meanwhile searching for invariant, recurrent responses, coagulation factors.

III. On the other hand, I have intended to assess the ways in which these groups see the same process of restitution/recuperation as affecting others (other ethnic, religious communities) and, not really systematically, to see how the process of restitution/recuperation for this Jewish community is perceived by the others. I have chosen this path as I want to have a dynamic perspective of the phenomenon, seeing it as a sort of negotiation of voices, responses, triggers etc.

IV. I have conducted and recorded interviews of members who conceptualize several problems associated with these communities (producing a sort of internal reflection on them; see in this respect the statement of a community member, known in group as “our memory”): “Those returned from deportation, very few, were not interested any more in properties and afterwards, communism distorted the sense of property. Everyone preferred not to have anything” (Moritz, 18th of November, 2012, Cluj).

Discussion

I. First of all, there are definitely certain levels of ambiguities, indecisions, contradictions in what concerns the attitude of the State regarding Restitution post-'89; the laws are formulated as such, justice is not to be trusted. The community perceives all these and the response is usually disappointment, renouncement, or incrimination of the State, which is not necessarily public. One can speak about levels of indecisions and, associated with them, about heterogeneous responses with respect to the topic. Clearly, the consequent answer is that the State is perceived as a non-trustful mechanism, with arbitrary actions. At this level, a few interlocutors made references to the process of nationalization²⁹ (through it, a part of private properties became state properties): “nationalization happened over night and look, after so many years we are still so confused”; “This principle of nationalization should have been abandoned immediately after the Revolution as we intend to change the direction of society. But it is far from being that way” (Salamon, 10th of December, 2012, Cluj).

²⁹ In 1948, Law 119/11.06, see the footnote above.

Another interlocutor, Marcus, lawyer, made reference to the Law 90/18th of March 2003, that privileged post-1989 political parties; in the sense that they could buy buildings from the State at low prices): "As far as I know, in any democratic country, if a party needs a location, it will follow the regular path: it is not the Government responsible for offering it from the property of someone else". Another interlocutor was also extremely disturbed when speaking about the Jews private properties fate: "There are no family members to claim these properties, so, no problem, they remain state property. The state is the beneficiary of our tragedy. There are buildings in this situation, as well. In Cluj, the property on Măloasă street, nr. 7. belonged to one of our families. Nobody returned. It became state property. The state sold it to the tenants" (Marcus, 13th of December 2012, Cluj).

II. With respect to our second research focus, one can say that, as there is a plurality of attitudes and voices concerning the topic of recuperation properties. I also identified some invariant responses and views, it can be seen as a dynamic one, which to a certain extent revitalizes the community. The whole topic of property restitution–recuperation is deeply linked to one of identity. The dynamics surrounding this process are relevant as part of the identity configuration and representation strategies. The Jews are involved in it as they want, in other words, to recreate their identity though rediscovering the Jewish roots by recreating a narrative besides their traumatic/ liminal experiences. Constantly, the process is accompanied by anxieties. The triggers of them are well represented, as post-1989 Laws are excluding Jews from restitution and other forms of compensation. State is perceived therefore as an enemy entity, one that makes the process of the identity restitution-recuperation sometimes slow, sometimes impossible. One interlocutor, a lawyer, making reference to the Law 112/1995 which has stated the fact that the former owners could get the property back only in case they prove Romanian citizenship asserts: "I have friends in New York and Israel. They had directly contacted Romanian Embassies, trying to regain the Romanian citizenship. But this procedure lasted too much, more than 2 or 3 months. They did not have any chance, as they could not regain the citizenship on time" (11th of May, 2012, Cluj).

III. Related to the third research point, one can say that the members of the Jewish Community that I have interviewed, assert they feel they share the same fate with members of other religious and ethnic communities, mentioning that their case is pretty much similar with that one of Greek-Catholics³⁰. "Greek Catholics have so many difficulties, like us. The others [religious communities] have as well, but not so many. Unitarians, Catholics. They have the center of Cluj. It is a real problem, it is a problem for the State, meanwhile. It is necessary to build up places for all state institutions and from where – this amount of money?". Anxieties of a virtual identity loss (another limen) through the abandonment of or lack of interest

³⁰ In 1948, the Greek Catholic churches had been confiscated by the State, Orthodoxy became the only tolerated religion/ cult of Romanians.

in this issue of property restitution/ recuperation are present in certain interlocutors narratives: “My children, one in Israel, one in Canada have their own lives where they are. They have told me they are not very interested in recuperating anything, which is sad” (Ezra, 17th of May, 2012, Cluj). Even if some persons managed to get their properties back, after repetitive trials, state appealed, and “the situation is still ambiguous”. Again, behind all these, the State entity causes turbulences and all the related anxieties.

Conclusions

All these unfavorable circumstances – the anxiety triggers, the threat of identity loss, the common enemy – play an important role in the community aggregation/ coagulation, reinforcing it, underlining its meanings. The challenges are, at a symbolic level, thresholds or limens, and the result of surpassing them is a new inner state, community being strengthened through living for a little while in *communitas*³¹. The Cluj Jewish group could be viewed and analyzed as an interpretive community, in the sense that its members construct and share a common interpretation on history, social actors, facts and contexts, also assuming the same meaning of memory.

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³¹ To involve again Victor Turner’s terms.

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ON “DRAMAS, FIELDS AND...” INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

(Abstract)

Reconsidering Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*, my study aims to analyze its history, applicability and limits, focusing on the specific case of the Cluj Jewish group. Based on the interpretation of empirical material, collected through intensive fieldwork, my approach contributes to an anthropological understanding of “interpretive communities”. The experiences of anxieties, traumatic memories, nostalgia and the ways they determine specific group coagulation strategies are topics of main interest, permanently analyzed in my study. Viewed both at the individual and communitarian levels, constituted as thresholds or liminal stages, they have an important role in the process of identity construction and representation of the Cluj Jewish group. Empirical data gathered through applying qualitative research methods (mostly life-histories, semi-structured and in-depth interviews), put in a neo-interpretive framework, structure my approach.

Keywords: Jewish community, limen, *communitas*, interpretive community, memory.

COMUNITĂȚI INTERPRETATIVE. UN STUDIU DE CAZ

(Rezumat)

Reconsiderând conceptul de *communitas*, așa cum este acesta utilizat de Victor Turner, îmi propun să analizez aplicabilitatea și limitele sale printr-un studiu de caz asupra comunității evreiești din Cluj. Bazându-se pe interpretarea materialului empiric, adunat printr-o cercetare antropologică de teren, abordarea mea dorește să contribuie la înțelegerea cât mai adecvată a conceptului de comunitate

interpretativă. Experiențele anxietății, memoriei traumatizate, nostalgiei și modalitatea în care acestea determină strategii de coagulare a grupului sunt subiecte permanent analizate în prezentarea mea. Văzute deopotrivă la nivel individual și comunitar, constituite ca praguri, stadii liminale, ele au un rol important în procesul de construire și reprezentare a identității grupului analizat. Datele empirice au fost adunate în procesul de derulare a terenului, prin aplicarea unor metode calitative – observație participativă, interviuri nonstructurate, semistructurate, interviuri în adâncime, istorii de viață – și prelucrate într-o grilă antropologică neinterpretativă (cum principalele concepte care m-au ajutat la configurarea grilei teoretice derivă din perspectiva lui Victor Turner – antropolog interpretativist).

Cuvinte-cheie: comunitatea evreiască din Cluj, *limen*, *communitas*, comunitate interpretativă, memorie.