

Timișoara between “Fictive Ethnicity” and “Ideal Nation” The Identity Profile during the Interwar Period

Abstract: Seeking to delineate the identity profile of the citizens of interwar Timișoara, a city at the crossroad of Central- and South-East-European cultures and civilizations, the paper analyzes the national, linguistic and religious population structure using the data provided by three censuses (1910, 1930 and 1941). Under Hungarian rule, until the First World War, there prevailed the policy of linguistic nationalism. After 1918, in Romania, there occurred a policy shift towards ethno-culturally based differentiation, i.e. towards belonging to a nation. Yet, amidst the interaction of cultures and customs, the notion of nationality or ethno-nationality was quite relative, and Timișoara functioned as a multilingual and multireligious environment. Contradictions were observable between nationalist political orientation and aspirations of local society. The Jewish community was an embodiment of multiculturalism. The Jews enjoyed equal rights and functioned as a bridge between other communities. In the 1930s multicultural Timișoara seems to have been a contrast to the cities where different linguistic and religious communities lived parallel lives in isolation from one another. Thus, Timișoara resisted radical, racist and anti-Semitic movements that emerged on the European political scene in the interwar period.

Keywords: Timișoara, population structure, nationality, official identity policies, multilingualism, multiconfessionality, multiculturalism, Jewish community

My study aims to call attention to the identity profile of Timișoara during the interwar period, a city at the crossroads of cultures and civilizations between Central and South-Eastern Europe. It will have in view the post-World War I urban identity phenomenon, when the region of Banat – of which Timișoara is the capital city – was partitioned among Romania, Serbia and Hungary and when one of longstanding debates was focussed on how to preserve the various legacies of the Austrian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Numerous voices were arguing in favour of keeping an undivided Banat region. They relied on the geographic, administrative and economic arguments to maintain its unity. One of the documents to testify about the Paris Peace Conference refers to this issue as follows:

To partition the Banat would mean the economic, industrial and trade bankruptcy of this province and of its inhabitants. We have vaguely learnt about the strategic and ethnic reasons which could lead to the idea of partitioning the Banat and we believe that nobody could ever affirm that partitioning could be done without exposing the province to a total economic disaster. Its geographic and economic unity has been unquestioned during time, (so) that never during its history this province belonged to more than

one single country at once [...] This province has a regular rectangle shape, bordered by three big rivers – the Mureş, the Tisa and the Danube – and by the Carpathian Mountains. Within this rectangle there is a system of channels, railways and roads which connect the province with the Tisa and Danube rivers.¹

Under the pressure of nationalist ideologies and the consequences of the war, these types of documents failed, however, to refer to the plurality of socio-cultural and religious legacies of the region: from the obvious legacies referring to the cohabitation between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and the German-Austrian-Romanian-Serbian cultural interactions to the association of the Yiddish-speaking German Jews, Ashkenazim, with the Ladino-speaking Spanish Jews, Sephardim, or to the assimilation of the emancipated Jews by other cultures such as German or Hungarian. All this symbolized at the time a history which was regarded by the population of Timișoara as being their own and which they wished to continue to live.

Interaction – as we can speak about it – is the natural consequence of a mix history in a border city, a fact which is reflected in its very names in many languages – Timișoara (Romanian), Temeswar and Temeschburg (German), Temesvár (Hungarian), Temišvar (Serbian); by the multilingual press in German, Hungarian and Romanian; by non-discriminatory social customs; by individual and civic initiatives; by the cooperative attitude of administrative authorities.

Not only did the partition of the region, as it was decided by the Paris Peace Treaty, create tensions among the three neighbouring countries – Romania, Serbia and Hungary – but it also ignited anxiety among the inhabitants regarding the centralist policies and ethno-nationalist ideologies. An important issue generated by the post-WWI ethno-nationalism in these states was the recognition and integration of their regions having various legacies. The new authorities were facing challenges such as: the multicultural and intercultural patrimony, the existence of many religions and the recognition of plural histories. These aspects had no correspondence in the *fictive ethnicity*-based definition of identity as the elites of the time were imagining.

The interwar Romanian political parties and governments, even the most tolerant ones, were not comfortable with admitting that the society in Timișoara was the result of interactions of many languages and cultures, that it did not belong exclusively to a single religious expression, and that it did not bear the signs of so-called ethno-national specificity. Its plural cul-

¹ According to the Memorandum presented at the Paris Peace Conference by the Banat Swabians' delegation, published in *Revista Institutului Social Banat-Crișana* [The Banat-Crisana Social Institute Review] XII (Timișoara, November-December 1943), 421.

tures and histories did not find their correspondence in the mono-lingual and mono-cultural orientations of the newly created nation-state.

Imperialist and nationalist censuses conducted during that time had served the political hierarchies and the centralized administrations to shape Europe’s map in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Statistics concerning Timișoara’s inhabitants in 1910 realized by the Budapest administration and having a focus on mother tongue showed the following composition:²

Table 1: Inhabitants of Timișoara in 1910 by mother tongue

| Declared mother tongue | Number of speakers |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| German | 32,963 |
| Hungarian | 28,645 |
| Romanian | 7,593 |
| Serbian | 3,490 |
| Slovakian | 341 |
| Croatian | 149 |
| Ruthenian | 4 |
| Other | 818,000 |
| Total | 74,003 |

As for the population by religion, the statistics was the following:³

Table 2: Population of Timișoara in 1910 by religion

| Declared religion or denomination | Number of adherents |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Roman-Catholic | 49,981 |
| Orthodox | 11,257 |
| Israelite | 6,729 |
| Reformed | 3,554 |
| Evangelic | 1,609 |
| Greek-Catholic | 754 |
| Unitarian | 80 |
| Other | 39 |
| Total | 74,003 |

What conclusions could one draw from these figures as classified by the census office of the time?

Firstly, that the German native speakers were the most numerous, accounting for 44.5% of the total population. An additional explanation would be useful here though. Starting with the reign of Joseph II, the Habsburg authorities agreed to use the German language, without imposing it,

² Traian Rotariu, Maria Semeniuc & Elemér Mezei, *Recensământul din 1910 – Transilvania* [The Census of 1910 – Transylvania] (Bucharest: Staff, 1999), 548–550.

³ *Ibid.* 548–550.

as a means of communication with the population. The reason behind it was that Timișoara had been inhabited by colonists of German origin (Swabian) during the eighteenth century and that most of them did not speak any other language than German.

Secondly, the Italian, Spanish and French colonists were assimilated by the German ones, so they also used German as a language of communication.

Thirdly, during the emancipation and modernization processes, German was the language of instruction of the elites all over the empire and, also, it was through it that printing was spread in all its regions. Benedict Anderson's remark that the German language had acquired a double status – a universal-imperial one, on the one hand, and a particular-national one, on the other,⁴ is perfectly valid in this case. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, German was a reference point not only for the civic and cultural code of the entire population, but also for the ethno-national ideology and movements. It was the time when people and groups were often identified based on their language and cultural peculiarities.

As for the Hungarian speakers in Timișoara, their number – 28,645 – shows an increase that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the political changes that had occurred in the aftermath of the 1848 Revolution, when the Hungarian language replaced Latin and/or German in public administration and when the Hungarian aristocracy preferred to use it in order to gain recognition in the eyes of the large mass of peasants. Classification based on language and religion, as it results from the tables presented above, was only seldom in line with the social and intellectual aspirations of the majority of Timișoara's population. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the city continued to function along its own coordinates, and cooperation among its citizens to the benefit of the community was a generally accepted way of life. At the time, the Budapest administration was learning with surprise that Timișoara defied the main ideological orientation of the time: linguistic nationalism. In this regard, the Hungarian regime could witness that German language perceptibly continued to dominate interpersonal communication as well as the fields of education, culture and media. For instance, the most important local newspaper was the German-language *Temeswarer Zeitung*.⁵ Despite the Hungarian politics of assimilation, 32,963 inhabitants

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Roman. ed.: *Comunități imaginate. Reflecții asupra originii și răspîndirii naționalismului*, transl. by Roxana Oltean and Ioana Potrache (Bucharest: Integral, 2000).

⁵ See Victor Neumann, "Temeswarer Zeitung și civismul Kakaniei", in Victor Neumann, ed., *Identitate și Cultură. Studii privind istoria Banatului* [Identity and Culture: Studies concerning the History of the Banat] (Bucharest: Romanian Academy, 2009).

of Timișoara kept German as their mother tongue;⁶ 7,593 kept Romanian; and 3,490 kept Serbian, which indicated the actual distribution as far as the social composition was concerned.

As for religious affiliation, even though Roman Catholics were a majority, that is 67.5% of the total population of the city (49,981 of the total of 74,003),⁷ religious consciousness was not restricted. The observance of the Orthodox, Mosaic, Reformed-Calvinist, Evangelic-Lutheran and Greek-Catholic religions was left to the free choice of the population, the churches and synagogues of the abovementioned faiths being distributed all over the city's neighbourhoods.

All this cultural and religious variety was conducive to the organization of the population in professional, technical and scientific associations. The bourgeoisie embarked on numerous liberal initiatives, being supported by the local administration, while the social-democratic orientation was in the mainstream of the political culture of the majority of population.

* * *

Statistic data regarding Timișoara's population during the interwar period, which were elaborated by the Romanian administration, provide evidence about both the social-cultural transformations and the continuity of the majority-minorities relationships.⁸ The category of identity is changed as

⁶ Rotariu, Semeniuc & Mezei, *Recensământul*, 548.

⁷ *Ibid.* 550.

⁸ See the ideologized criteria and notions used by Sabin Manuilă in the ten-volume *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930* [General Census of Romania's Population of 29 December 1930] (Bucharest: Central Institute of Statistics, 1938–1940). Vol. I: *Sex, stare civilă, grupe de vârstă, gospodăria, infirmități, populația flotantă* [Gender, civil status, age groups, households, disabilities, temporary residents]; vol. II: *Neam, limbă maternă, religie* [Kinship, mother tongue, religion]; vol. III: *Știința de carte* [Instruction]; vol. IV: *Locul nașterii, situația în gospodărie, menaje colective, mărimea gospodăriilor, cunoașterea limbii române, cetățenia, vârsta* [Place of birth, situation in the households, housekeeping, size of households, knowledge of Romanian, citizenship, age]; vol. V: *Profesiuni: Populația după situația în profesie, sex, grupe de vârstă, instrucție și neam pe clase de profesii* [Professions: population based on professional situation, gender, age groups, instruction and kinship by professional categories]; vol. VI: *Profesiuni: Populația pe clase și grupe de profesii și situația în profesie pe sexe* [Professions: populations based on categories and groups of professions and the situation in professions based on gender]; vol. VII: *Profesiuni: Populația pe clase și grupe de profesii după sexe, vârstă, instrucție și neam; situația în profesie a activilor* [Professions: Population based on categories and groups of professions based on gender, age, instruction and kinship; the professional situation of the active population]; vol. IX: *Structura populației României, tabele selecționate din rezultatele recensământului general al populației din 1930* [The structure of Romania's population, tables selected from the results of the general

compared to the previous period, “nationality” or ethno-culture becoming the main reference points for the census office. The table below shows the situation recorded in 1930:⁹

Table 3: Population of Timișoara in 1930 by nationality

| Declared nationality | Number of persons |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| German | 27,807 |
| Hungarian | 27,652 |
| Romanian | 24,217 |
| Jewish | 7,171 |
| Serbian, Croatian or Slovene | 2,156 |
| Russian | 700 |
| Czech or Slovak | 597 |
| Gypsy/Roma | 337 |
| Bulgarian | 257 |
| Polish | 101 |
| Turkish | 67 |
| Ruthenian or Ukrainian | 53 |
| Albanian | 10 |
| Armenian | 10 |
| Hutsan | 7 |
| Greek | 8 |
| Tatar | 2 |
| Other | 179 |
| Non-declared | 249 |
| Total | 91,580 |

While previously the aim of the Hungarian politics was to assimilate the population living in the Hungarian part of the monarchy linguistically and in terms of citizenship, from 1918 the Romanian politics of assimilation introduced new criteria of differentiation based on ethno-cultural background and on the number of persons living in a given community. For the census office, the notion of “nationality” was equivalent with kinship (Roman. *neam*), meaning “tribe” or “race”.¹⁰ Thus the census office of the time considered that it offered accurate and utterly unambiguous data.¹¹ The former criteria – language and religion – were not abandoned, but they acquired new meanings.

population census of 1930]; vol. X: *Întreprinderi industriale și comerciale* [Industrial and commercial enterprises].

⁹ Manuilă, *Recensământul*, vol. II, *Neam, limbă maternă, religie* (1938), 468–469.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

The statistics regarding Timișoara’s inhabitants in 1930 suggest that the Romanian state was concerned with the idea of nation, i.e. with the sense of belonging to a nationality. It was a general trend in the newly-formed states after the First World War, which was contained in the essentialism of socio-political languages. Defining identity on the basis of “ethno-national” affiliation generated uncertainty because until then the regions where the majority and minorities coexisted had assumed integration of the existing diverse cultures, religions and histories and had allowed for nuances when it came to defining personal or collective identity. At that time, about thirty percent of Romania’s population belonged to other cultural groups, i.e. their so-called “nationality” was different from Romanian. According to the historical and sociological literature, and also to the Romanian interwar press, the notion of “foreigner” was used to define both a person coming from another country and a person belonging to a minority group within the borders of the same state. Such an approach was used by some intellectuals in Timișoara at the time, illustrative in this sense being *Revista Institutului Social Banat-Crișana. Buletin Istoric* (1933–1946) [Journal of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute. Historical Bulletin (1933–1946)], published under the auspices of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute. The Institute and the journal were led by Cornel Grofșorean, one of Timișoara’s mayors in the 1930s, and the model was taken over from the Romanian Social Institute of Bucharest and the Institute for Social Research of Romania. The institute in Timișoara was subordinated to the centralist system and deeply influenced by the ethno-nationalist ideology, an orientation often visible in the articles of its journal’s contributors (Emil Botiș, Cornel Grofșorean, Aurel Bugariu, Coriolan Buracu, Aurel Ciupe, Aurel Cosma Jr., Gh. Cotoșman, Anton Golopența, Ilie Groșșianu, Romulus Ladea, Octavian Lupaș, Ioachim Miloia, Iosif Nemoianu, Petru Nemoianu, Melentie Sora, Ion Țenchea and Traian Topliceanu).¹² Consequently, the journal failed to reflect the local context and thus to serve the interests of all citizens.

¹² For the ethno-nationalist ideological option, see Ioan Lotreanu, *Monografia Banatului*, vol. I, *Situația geografică. Locuitorii. Comunele* [Monograph of the Banat. Vol. I: The Geographical Situation. Inhabitants. Villages] (Timișoara: Country Graphic Arts Institute, 1935); Cornel Grofșorean, *Banatul de altădată și de totdeauna. Sinteză problemelor istorice și social-politice* [The Banat of the past and of forever: The synthesis of historical and socio-political questions] (Timișoara: Helicon, Institute of Graphic Arts, 1946). For the application of the identity policies based on “nationality” and for the process of Romanian assimilation of higher education in Timișoara, see the tables with the number and nationality of the Politechnic of Timișoara graduates during 1924–1930, in Victor Vălcovici, *Școala Politehnică din Timișoara. Zece ani de existență* (octombrie 1920 – octombrie 1930) [The Politechnic school in Timișoara: Ten years of existence (October 1920 – October 1930)] (Timișoara: Romanian Print, 1930), 97–99.

On the occasion of the initiatives to set up the first institution of higher education in Timișoara, the mayor Stan Vidrighin had understood the configuration of the establishment as follows:

A higher school such as the Polytechnic [...] will prove the strength and superiority of the Romanian genius, will be able to contribute – to a great extent – to the consolidation of the Romanian element in Timișoara and the Banat, and will bring with it the nationalisation of all institutions which today are still foreign. The overwhelming majority of the Romanian element within the Banat region will gain through this establishment those intellectual forces to which the majority of Hungarians and Swabians, who are today better armed [prepared], will be forced to surrender. And our particular inferiority in Timișoara, which is the regrettable result of our minority status in this city, will certainly be transformed here, too, into superiority.¹³

Onisifor Ghibu, head of the Religions and Public Instruction Ministry in the Governing Council (*Consiliul Dirigent*),¹⁴ followed the same line. According to him, the founding of the abovementioned institution of higher education had as its main objective “strengthening and nationalisation of this border city”.¹⁵

By examining the notion of “nationality” used as the main criterion in the census of 1930, it can be asserted that Timișoara posed a challenge to the census office for the following reasons:

(1) the city was inhabited by many types of groups, each of them speaking two or three languages;

(2) one’s nationality did not always coincide with one’s mother tongue;

(3) the identity of some of the inhabitants of the city – the example of the Jews is relevant in the above statistics – was in certain cases determined by religion rather than by mother tongue (in this case the census office introduced the notion of “Jewish nationality”);

(4) Timișoara’s melting-pot character often made the identification of its citizens with one particular nationality impossible, mixed marriages

¹³ According to “Adresa Primăriei orașului Timișoara către Ministerul Instrucțiunii și al Cultelor în chestiunea înființării unei Politecnice în Timișoara” [Memorandum of the Timisoara Mayor’s Office to the Ministry of Education and Denominations regarding the establishing of a polytechnic school in Timisoara], in Vâlcovici, *Școala Politehnică*, 7–12; quote on p. 10.

¹⁴ In 1918–20, the Governing Council temporarily managed the question of the newly-integrated regions into Romania under the Peace Treaty of Paris.

¹⁵ According to “Motivarea bugetului Politecnicei din Timișoara” [Motivation of the Timisoara Polytechnic’s budget] signed by Onisifor Ghibu, in Vâlcovici, *Școala Politehnică*, 14–15, quote on p. 15.

being numerous and indicating relationships between Roman-Catholics and Protestants, Orthodox and Greek-Catholics, Christians and Jews;

(5) “nationality” or ethno-nation were quite relative notions in a region with interacting cultures and customs.

According to the 1930 census, Timișoara’s population by mother tongue was the following:¹⁶

Table 4: Population of Timișoara in 1930 by mother tongue

| Declared mother tongue | Number of speakers |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| German | 30,670 |
| Hungarian | 32,513 |
| Romanian | 24,088 |
| Serbian, Croatian or Slovenian | 1,820 |
| Russian | 688 |
| Yiddish | 442 |
| Czech or Slovak | 375 |
| Gipsy | 167 |
| Bulgarian | 234 |
| Polish | 44 |
| Turk or Tatar | 53 |
| Ruthenian or Ukrainian | 30 |
| Albanian | 26 |
| Armenian | 3 |
| Greek | 7 |
| Other | 151 |
| Undeclared | 269 |
| Total | 91,580 |

As for the religions practised in 1930, the official statistics recorded the following situation:¹⁷

Table 5: Population of Timișoara in 1930 by religion

| Declared religion or denomination | Number of adherents |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Roman-Catholic | 48,136 |
| Orthodox | 24,307 |
| Mosaic | 9,368 |
| Reformed (Calvinist) | 4,690 |
| Evangelic (Lutheran) | 2,279 |
| Greek-Catholic | 2,056 |
| Baptist | 193 |

¹⁶ According to Manuilă, *Recensământul*, vol. II, *Neam, limbă maternă, religie*, 468–469.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 755.

| | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Muslim | 84 |
| Uniate | 66 |
| Adventist | 42 |
| Armenian-Gregorian | 26 |
| Lipovan | 8 |
| Other | 14 |
| Free thinkers | 41 |
| Undeclared | 270 |
| Total | 91,580 |

As it can be seen in the tables above the identity particularity of Timișoara was referring to the preservation of a large number of multilingual citizens, among whom the native speakers of Hungarian and German were disputing their pre-eminence, being closely followed by the Romanian ones. From this viewpoint, the census records 32,513 Hungarians, 30,670 Germans and 24,088 Romanians accounting for 35.5%, 33.5% and 26.6% of the total population respectively.

As for the freedom of consciousness, statistics suggest the authorities' tendency to impose affiliation to one faith or another, a fact illustrated by the very low number of those who declared themselves "free thinkers", namely 41 persons out of a total of 91,580 inhabitants (0.04%). This is not surprising, however, because official statistics did not record any information about those who were bilingual or trilingual. Also, they did not use the concept of a citizen, nor did they register those who were assimilated to one of the prevailing cultures and religions.

Later, in 1941, the abovementioned statistics were once more referring to the situation of the population in Timișoara based on "nationalities", precisely requesting from each citizen to declare his or her affiliation in this respect:¹⁸

Table 6: Population of Timișoara in 1941 by nationality

| Declared nationality | Number of persons |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Romanian | 46,466 |
| German | 37,611 |
| Hungarian | 24,891 |
| Other | 16,084 |
| Total | 125,052 |

The table above suggests the slow but certain inoculation of the idea of opting clearly for a certain "nationality", ethnic group or for an ethnolinguistic group. It should be mentioned that counting and classifying the population

¹⁸ Rotariu, Semeniuc & Mezei, *Recensământul*, 107.

according to “nationality”,¹⁹ language or religion was also adopted by a part of those who numerically were in a minority community.

This type of quantification was adopted not only by the Romanian institutes subordinated to the central administration,²⁰ but also by the administrations of all linguistic or religious groups. Special attention was directed towards the protection of minority groups in the region, the main voice being *A Magyar Kisebbség. Nemzetpolitikai Szemle* [The Hungarian Minority. National Political Leaflet],²¹ a bimonthly published from June 1923 to June 1942 and counting a total of 480 issues. The editors were István Sulyok and Elemér Jakabffy. From 1926 a trilingual supplement was published under the title *Glasul Minorităților. La voix des minorités. Die Stimme der Minderheiten* [Minorities’ Voice]. The main contributors to this publication were: Artúr Balogh, Árpád Bitay, Kelemen Gál, Elemér Gyárfás, György Kristóf, Imre Mikó, Árpád and József Willer. Both publications were directed by one of the political leaders of the Hungarians in the Banat, and in Romania, Elemér Jakabffy. In parallel with this preoccupation, central authorities in Bucharest continued to emphasize the numerical increase in Romanian majority population in cities such as Timișoara. Compared to Timișoara’s 15 nationalities (minorities) recorded and classified by the 1930 census, in 1941 these were reduced to three: Romanian, German and Hungarian. In this respect, the category “other nationalities” replaced all numerically weaker groups. In fact, the statistics of 1941 indicated for the first time a change in proportions among the local population, Romanians becoming a majority with a total of 46,466 persons. This kind of “bookkeeping” and placing a person in society was based on the identity theory which had been conceived and formulated in the nineteenth century and had as its main reference point the concept of *Völkischekultur*.²²

Despite these inadequacies and tendencies towards creating more categories of citizens, multilingual and multiconfessional Timișoara had con-

¹⁹ See the notions in the ten volumes of the *Recensământul general*.

²⁰ This is the case of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute.

²¹ From the terminology used in the title of the publication it follows that the Hungarians considered themselves not only as a minority, but also as belonging to a different nation from the Romanian one.

²² For the explanation of the concepts of *neam*, *nem*, *Volk*, *Völkischekultur*, *Kulturnation*, see Victor Neumann, *Neam, Popor sau Națiune. Despre identitățile politice europene* [Neam (kinship), People or Nation. On European Political Identities] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005). For a new explanation, a comparison of the concept of nation in East-Central Europe, see Victor Neumann, “Peculiarities of the Translation and Adaptation of the Concept of Nation in East-Central Europe. The Hungarian and Romanian Cases in the Nineteenth Century”, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7/1 (Summer 2012), 72–101.

tinued its existence retaining its features given by its socio-cultural model, its industrial and commercial contribution to Romania, its own resources, the openness of its society, and by the impressive number of cultural, sports and civic associations.

I shall mention a few examples in order to better illustrate the contradiction between the nationalist political orientation and the aspirations of the local society:

(1) The very first professional club and the most popular football team in Romania in 1930–1940 was Ripensia Timișoara. It was the result of an admirable cooperation that reflected intercultural harmony. The team included players with diverse cultural backgrounds – German, Romanian, Hungarian, Jewish, Serbian etc. – reflecting the very nature of the city. Some of the prominent players were: Adalbert Hrehuss, Alexandru Schwartz, Balazs Hoksary, Cornel Lazăr, Dumitru Pavlovici, Eugen Lakatos, Francisc Agner, Gheorghe Ciolac, Gheorghe Oprean, Grațian Sepi II, Gustav Nemeth, Iosif Silvatz, Ladislau Raffinski, Mihai Tanzer, Nicolae Simatoc, Pavel Gall, Rudolf Burger, Rudolf Kotormany, Silviu Bindea, Ștefan Dobay, Vasile Chiroiu II, Vasile Deheleanu, William Zombory and Zoltan Beke. In 1930–1940, Ripensia repeatedly won the national football championship and competed with the main football clubs in Europe during the interwar period, thus becoming the undisputed legend of Romanian football of all times. The club conveyed one of the most credible messages about the spirit of interwar Timișoara to the whole of Romania, the names of the Ripensia players symbolizing both the recognition of their talent in sports and the continuity of the inherited pacifist values characterizing most of the multi-cultural and intercultural cities in East-Central Europe.²³

(2) Another proof of this spirit is the impressive list of journals and newspapers,²⁴ as well as monolingual and multilingual books and postcards.²⁵ During the interwar period, some of the newspapers and journals were published trilingually, in Romanian, Hungarian and German, and their number varied from three to seven.²⁶

23 See Alexiu Cristofor's micro-monograph, *Ripensia* (Timișoara: Helicon, 1992).

24 The first classification of the newspapers and periodicals published in interwar Timișoara can be found in Nicolae Ilieșius, *Timișoara. Monografie istorică* [Timișoara: Historical monograph] (Timișoara: G. Matheiu, 1943). This was resumed and complemented by Thomas Mochnács, "Cultura în Timișoara interbelică" [Culture in interwar Timișoara] (Ph.D. thesis in history, West University of Timișoara, 2012), chap. "Interwar periodicals", 101–164.

25 Mochnács, "Cultura în Timișoara interbelică", chap. "Timișoara's image in printed picture postcards", 50–100.

26 Ibid. 159–160.

Table 7: Trilingual journals

| Year of issue | Number of trilingual journals |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 1922 | 4 |
| 1925 | 7 |
| 1926 | 4 |
| 1930 | 3 |
| 1932 | 4 |
| 1933 | 6 |
| 1934 | 7 |

(3) An inventory of the postcards made by the collector Thomas Mochnács from Timișoara reveals that the postcards depicting Timișoara did not bear explanatory texts in only one of the three languages – Romanian, German or Hungarian – but also in two or three languages simultaneously. Out of the total of 480 postcards, 106 bore explanatory texts in Romanian and Hungarian; 50 in Romanian, Hungarian and German; 15 in Romanian and German; 15 in Hungarian and German; one in German and Hebrew, and one in Esperanto.²⁷ Not only are many of them cartographic rarities, but they also testify to an atmosphere where the citizens’ interest, recognition and preoccupation with the particular features of their city, as compared with those of other towns in Romania or Europe in the interwar period, were prevailing.

(4) Many members of the elites shared and capitalized on this mindset of the population. This is the case with some of the cosmopolitan writers who translated poetry and prose²⁸ from one language into another by experimenting in new literary genres, to mention but Zoltán Franyó, Ilie

²⁷ Ibid. 75–76.

²⁸ See Ion Luca Caragiale, *Az elveszett levél* [A lost letter], transl. by Kádár Imre, foreword by Bánffy Miklós (Romanian Playwright Library series, no. 1) (Timișoara: Erdélyi Helikon, 1926). (Révai Institute of Literature, Budapest, [1926]); Áron Cotruș, *Holnap* [Tomorrow], transl. by Pál Bodó, Genius [Timișoara], 1929; Viktor Orendi-Hommenau, *Literatur und Volkskunst der Rumänen* [Popular literature and the arts of the Romanians]. Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Temeswar, 1928; Mihai Eminescu, *Ausgewählte Gedichte* [Selected poems]. Deutsche Übersetzung von Viktor Orendi-Hommenau. [Translated into the German by Viktor Orendi-Hommenau]. Verlag „Von der Heide“, Temeswar - Timișoara, Rumänien, 1932; Zoltán Franyó, *A kárpáti harcokról* [About the fights in the Carpathians]. Budapest, 1915, according also to the version translated into the German by Zoltán Franyó, *Bruder Feind* [Enemy brother]. Wien, 1916. ***, *Eine Herbstsymphonie rumänischer Lyrik* [A symphony of the autumn of the Romanian lyrics]. [Translated by Zoltán Franyó]. Arad, 1926. ***, *Rumänische Dichter. Eine Anthologie zeitgenössischer Lyrik* [Romanian poets: an anthology of contemporary lyrics]. Übers. und hrsg. von Zoltán Franyó, Genius, Timișoara, 1932. Ernst Toller, *Fecskekönyv* [The books of the marthlets]. [Translated by Zoltán Franyó]. Vreera, Timișoara, 1935;

Ienea, Ion Stoia-Udrea, Petru Sfetcă, Robert Reiter/Franz Liebhardt, Virgil Birou, Viktor Orendi Hommenau, Anavi Ádám, József Méliusz, Nicolae Ivan, Mircea Șerbănescu and Károly Endre.²⁹

(5) The same orientation can be found in the artistic circle of Timișoara represented by the painters Catul Bogdan, Aurel Ciupe, Franz Ferch, Ioan Isac, Albert Krausz, Emil Lenhardt, Corneliu Liuba, Ioan Eminet, Julius Podlipny, Oskar Szuhaneck, Ștefan Szőnyi, Albert Varga, Nándor Kora Korber and Alexandru Popp, or the sculptors Andrei Gál, Ferdinand Gallas, Romul Ladea, Sebastian Rotschingk and Géza Rubletzky.³⁰

(6) An even more distinctive emphasis was generated by the musical milieu, especially by the Conservatory of Timișoara, which managed to capitalize on the richness of the popular traditions of the Banat region more than any other institution. Among those who gave substance to its creative and formative programmes were violoncellist Nicolae Papazoglu, violin instructor Maximilian Costin, violinists Josif Pianezze, Béla Tomm, Eugen Căteanu, Ludwig Farago and Josef Brandeis,³¹ composers Guido von Pogatschnigg, Sabin Drăgoi, Tiberiu Brediceanu, Filaret Barbu, Alma Cornea-Ionescu, Filaret Barbu, Zeno Vancea, Hermann Klee and Richard Carol Oschanitzky.³²

These facts support the idea that Timișoara in the 1930s was the outcome of living-together and of interacting histories rather than a city with communities living separate lives. Intercultural harmony among different communities rather than conflict was prevailing during that time. During the interwar period, both nationalist and national-communist (protochro-

Mihai Eminescu, *Der Abendstern* [The Evening Star]. [Translated by Zoltán Franyó]. Timișoara, 1943.

29 For references concerning multilingual writers in Timișoara, see Adriana Babeți & Cécile Kovacs haz y, eds., *Le Banat. Un Eldorado aux confins* (Paris: CIRCE, Université de Sorbonne, 2007), 214–217, 199–204, 205–209.

30 Adriana Pantazi, “Etapă în istoria istoriografiei artei românești interbelice. Studiu de caz: Arad și Timișoara” [Stages in the interwar historiography of Romanian art. Case study: Arad and Timișoara], the abstract of the PhD thesis; scientific adviser: Professor Iacob Mărza, Alba-Iulia, 2012, p. 5.

31 Maria Bodó, *Creația bânățeană pentru pian în perioada interbelică* [Piano composition in the Banat region during the interwar period] (Timișoara: Marineasa, 2005), esp. chap. “Viața muzicală în perioada interbelică” [Musical life during the interwar period], 101–118. See also Damian Vulpe, “Învățămîntul muzical timișorean cu școlile lui” [Music instruction and schools in Timișoara], lecture delivered at the symposium organised on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Music Faculty/Department in Oradea, 13 December 2005 (<http://www.deceniu-muzical-universitar.blogspot.ro/>).

32 Bodó, *Creația bânățeană pentru pian*, 119–159.

nist) historiographies refused to take note of this fact, or perhaps they failed to understand it.³³

It should be said that a clearly documented and narrated history of the majority-minorities relationship not only presumes to appeal to or to exemplify multicultural societies, i.e. their life under the interculturality aegis, but it also needs to emphasize that the new identity theory, that of ethno-nation and “nationality”, was in the full process of aggressive assertion, refusing any idea of convergences. That is, the meaning of local mentalities derives from two contexts, the general political and the local one, which have to be analyzed simultaneously. The ethno-national and ethno-cultural differentiation can be seen in the semantics attributed to the key concepts that define collectivity in the Romanian language, that is: *neam* [kinship], *popor* [people], nation, multiculturality, multiconfessionality. This aspect seems important to me, even more so as I had in view a city with particular characteristics resulting from its geography, its demographic trends and its cultural references and interactions.

The Jews of interwar Timișoara: politics of recognition of diversities or intercultural civics?

Beyond the political discourse and decisions in interwar Romania, socio-cultural realities are worthy of being highlighted more clearly. To this end, I have chosen to present one of the groups living in Timișoara, namely the Jews, by emphasizing their status in interwar Timișoara and Romania. Jews represent a symptomatic case of the redefinition of collective identities in the context of administrative changes occurring at state level, namely the transition from the Dual Monarchy to the Romanian state. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Jews played a particular role for Timișoara’s profile; they were the citizens enjoying equal legal and political rights; they represented a bridge among communities by using three or even four languages; they had set up some of the most prestigious industrial and trade companies in the city; they developed economic, cultural and artistic relations with other cities in Central and Western Europe.³⁴ Along with

³³ Disregard for these cultural interactions or failure to understand their identity sense has continuity from one century to another. See Rodica Munteanu & Ioan Munteanu, *Timișoara. Monografie* [Timișoara: Monograph] (Timișoara: Mirton, 2002).

³⁴ Their circulation is signalled in documents within the Timiș, Caraș and Arad counties of the Banat region. They had well established status approved by either the Ministry of Religion in Budapest or the local authorities. Many of them had a rabbi, a synagogue, a school, a cemetery, two or more cantors, administrative clerks as well as financial resources necessary to pursue traditional religious activities. See also Victor Neumann,

the Swabians,³⁵ they had created the social layer of the bourgeoisie, being involved in the process of modernization of the city and the region. Consequently, the status of citizenship was essential for the continuity of Jewish presence in Timișoara after the First World War, for the expansion of their activity and, to a certain extent, for the self-definition of their identity.³⁶

The reorganization of Central and Eastern Europe after the war, the creation of nation states following the peace treaties signed at Saint Germain and Trianon, generated a crisis of conscience within the population of Timișoara and the Banat. Post-war changes provoked dissensions between the more cosmopolitan liberal-bourgeois Jews, on the one hand, and the Zionist ones, on the other. Hildrun Glass – researcher of the German-Jewish relationship in interwar Romania – has noticed that criticism levelled at the liberal groups was formulated mainly by new Jewish political organizations. The same happened in the case of the Swabians and the Hungarians setting up their respective political organizations under the emblem of ethno-cultural or ethno-national identity.³⁷ Hildrun Glass's remark is credible, but internal tensions require further explanation which would take into consideration the formation of the nation, the political context, the economic life and social movements. For the Jews, the instauration of Romanian administration in 1919 meant the need to adapt to the conditions different from the previous ones. It was about the administrative reorganization of their community by taking into account

Istoria evreilor din Banat. O mărturie a multi- și interculturalității Europei Central-Orientale [History of the Jews of the Banat: A Testimony to Multi- and Inter-culturality in East-Central Europe] (Bucharest: Atlas, 1999), Eng. ed.: *The End of a History. The Jews of Banat from the Beginning to Nowadays* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2006).

³⁵ Elemér Jakabffy & György Páll, *A Bánsági Magyarok Husz Éve Romániában* [The 20 years in Romania of the Hungarians of Banat] (Budapest: Studium, 1939), 34–35.

³⁶ At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were Jewish communities in Timișoara, Vârșeț, Gătaia, Buziaș, Lipova, Ciacova, Recaș, Biserica Albă, Deta, Arad, Șimand, Butin, Șemlac, Pecica, Chișineu-Criș, Curtici, Sântana, Pâncota, Lugoj, Caransebeș, Bocșa, Orșova, Oravița, Făget, Reșița, Balinț, Vinga, Ineu, Cermei and Șipet, according to The Archive of the Jewish Community in Timișoara (today kept at the Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania headquartered in Bucharest; hereafter: AJCT), file no. 56, 1922–1926, sheets no. 123–124. See also Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din Banat*.

³⁷ Hildrun Glass, *Zerbrochene Nachbarschaft. Das Deutsch-Jüdische Verhältnis in Rumänien (1918–1938)* [Broken neighbourhood: The German-Jewish relationship in Romania (1918–1938)] (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1996), 291. See also the assessment and critical comments on the abovementioned book by Rainer Ohliger in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 31.10.1997, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=379>>.

the new legal framework, the political representation issue within Romania and the redefinition of their identity according to the Romanian idea of nation. All this against the background where the Jews (likewise the Swabians, Hungarians, Serbians, Bulgarians or Slovaks) did not consider themselves foreigners in the regions of the former Dual Monarchy, but rather as part of the new nation's citizens.

The very first signs of the unification of the Jewish community of Timișoara appeared in 1922, under the Orthodox Jews' pressure.³⁸ According to them, the interests of the Jews belonging to the former Austro-Hungarian regions were to be represented by the National Union of the Jews of Transylvania and the Banat. Jewish consciousness was reborn due to the Zionist organizations. The progress of the movement was owed to the activity of Alexandru Marmorek, the leader of the Zionist movement in France. University professor and director of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, Marmorek, a native of Vienna, was familiar with the problems of the Hungarian Jews. He arrived in Timișoara at the end of the First World War as a doctor attached to the French Entente troops which were assigned the task of preventing potential conflicts among the Romanians, Hungarians and Serbs in the Banat.³⁹ The *Uj Kelet* newspaper claimed that professor Marmorek drew the attention of the Timișoara Jews to the new international political context in which they would be compelled to cope with nationalist and anti-Semitic attacks. The *Uj Kelet* of Cluj (1918–1940) and *Neue Zeit-Uj Kor* of Timișoara (1920–1940) advocated reconsidering the identity issue in tune with the ideology of the time, the Timișoara newspaper becoming the mouthpiece of the Union of the Jews of Transylvania and the Banat. The Zionist idea was embraced by a part of the local Jewry on the occasion of the meeting held in Timișoara in 1923.⁴⁰ In parallel, Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, the representative of the Union of the Native Jews of Bucharest, invited the Timișoara Jewry,

³⁸ *Temesvarer Volksblatt*, 27 March 1922.

³⁹ See in this connection the article “Marmorek professzor a kelet es Délmagyarország zsidóság külföldi képviselője” [Professor Marmorek, the representative abroad of Southern and Eastern Hungary], *Uj Kelet* no. 1, 1918.

⁴⁰ AJCT, file no. 56/1922–1926, sheets no. 273–289: Az 1923 évi május hó 27 én megtartott bánáti es aradmegye országos zsidó nagygyűlés [The Great Assembly of the Jews of Banat and Arad on 27 May 1923]. The intention was explicitly formulated as early as 14 May 1923 by the presidium of the Israelite community of Timișoara in a memorandum to the Timiș prefect which reads as follows: “The Jews of Transylvania and Banat wish to unify in order to support their common interests. In this view, they organize a general assembly on 27 May of this year [1923] at 5.30 p.m. in the meetings room of the Israelite Community building in Timișoara, Mărășești Street.” According to AJCT, file no. 56/1922–1926, year 1923, sheet no. 339.

through their lawyer, Adolf Vértes, to accept the unification of the Jewish communities of Romania.⁴¹

Though resemblances existed, the way of life and concerns of the communities living in the Banat and Transylvania were not the same as those of the Jews living in the Old Kingdom of Romania. The Jews of Timișoara were mostly Hungarian and German speakers, and after a part of the Banat was incorporated into Romania they also acquired the Romanian language. Their majority belonged to the Neologist (Reformist) denomination, closely attached to the idea of emancipation and the preservation of local values, a reason for which the political ideology promoted by the Jews of Bucharest could not be immediately embraced by the Jews of Timișoara. Consequently, the Jewish inter-community relationships in Romania were kept on formal level for a long time. The assembly held in Timișoara in 1923 revealed that a part of the Jews were interested in clarifying the identity issue. If from cultural and linguistic perspectives they belonged to the cosmopolitan space of Central Europe, from the ritual viewpoint, the Jews of Timișoara oscillated between the Orthodox and the Neologue ones. On this background, the Zionists were those who formulated a first alternative to the concept of citizenship. The attendance of the abovementioned assembly by all three communities of Timișoara (Neologue, Orthodox and status quo), had been given as an example of good cooperation. Prominent figures of the Judaic life in the Banat and Transylvania took part in the event, among others: the chief-rabbis of Timișoara and Caransebeș, the President of the National Union

⁴¹ AJCT, file no. 56/1922–1926, year 1923, sheet no. 317: “The hard sufferings which we had to go through are due – for anybody who will carefully investigate the facts – to the lack of full cohesion between the Jews in the new territories and the Old Kingdom. The Native Jews Union which has had until today the cumbersome mission to give the Jews of the Old Kingdom a lawful status by registering their emancipation in the Constitution, protecting in the meantime in conjunction with the Jewish parliamentarians from damaging the Jews’ rights in the new territories, is the one that calls today the Jews in the new territories for their organisation being deeply assured that this is the only and the most effective means to fight anti-Semitism. For achieving this objective, we are honoured to ask you to participate in the consultation to take place in Bucharest on 27 and 28 May of this year at 4.00 p.m. [...] for which we have convened persons from all provinces. This consultation will set the groundwork for the organization of the Union of the Jews of Romania which comprises the sum of the Jewish citizens in Romania, and the call for a general congress of the Jews of Romania will be decided upon.” On the intention of the Jewish communities of Banat and Transylvania in the new political context, see AJCT, file no. 55/1920, sheets no. 73–75, copy of the letter sent by the Jewish Community of Timișoara to the Ministry of Religion and Arts in reply to the Ministry’s decree no. 38.095/1920.

of the Jews of Timișoara, the President of the Neologue Community of Arad, the Vice-President of the National Union of the Jews of Cluj. The gathering created the premises for a debate about the question of Jewish identity. Topics concerning religion, cultural and sports activities, national propaganda and awakening of Jewish consciousness were highlighted by the speakers. The aim of the event was stated by the President of the Neologue Community of Timișoara, Dr. Adolf Vértes: “I have considered that time has come to invite delegates of the Transylvanian and Banat communities and of the national association ones to the great assembly of today (23 May 1923 of this year) which is devoted to the magnificent idea of uniting our dispersed resources within various political nuances, so that we can turn them to the general benefit of the Jews.”⁴²

The Jews of Timișoara were advancing a policy which was partially under the influence of the Jewish movements in Europe. The idea of a Jewish nation was inspired by the same differences which had been promoted by German culture in the nineteenth century and which a few decades before had inspired the Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs and Bulgarians. Given that the Romanian state required from each minority group to set up its own representative body, the Jewish communities were eager to fulfil this condition, particularly in the cities with a multicultural and intercultural profile. The two parties that the Jews of Timișoara and the Banat were looking at, namely the Romanian National Party (which later became the National Peasant Party) and the Hungarians’ Party, had, however, ignored them. In the 1927 and 1928 elections, the Jews of the Banat and Transylvania ran on the Hungarians’ Party lists and the liberals’ lists respectively, and managed to win only two seats in the Romanian Parliament.⁴³ The fact was quite serious, as the Jewish population in the abovementioned regions numbered about 200,000 people.

Even though the Zionist movement gained ground and the spread of the majority and minority nationalist movements was felt in Timișoara as well, a large part of the Jews – just as the largest part of the city population – were favourable to the idea of social integration and promotion of a civic movement that had begun a few decades earlier. Consequently, they continued to practise multilingual communication and to share values, to oppose ethnicism and nationalism, and to cultivate cosmopolitan and social-democratic orientations through which Timișoara entered into modernity. It is also true that the Romanian state and the local administrations within it could not ignore the very presence and talent of the Jew-

⁴² AJCT, file no. 56/1922–1926, year 1923, sheets no. 273–289.

⁴³ See *Erdelyi Magyar Évkönyv* [Transylvanian Hungarian Yearly] 1930, p. 114.

ish entrepreneurs, so their professional and managerial skills were capitalized. The prestige enjoyed by the Jews for entrepreneurship and initiative averted tendencies promoted by I. I. C. Brătianu's National Liberal Party to replace the former category of entrepreneurs with those of Romanian ethnic origin. During the interwar period the large number of so-called minorities in Timișoara and the Banat enabled the precedence of economic interests over ethnicist-oriented theories and measures. The textile industry, as well as the glove, hat and shoe factories, and the brewery of Timișoara, benefited from the substantial contribution of the Jewish entrepreneurs.⁴⁴ Their businesses were highly appreciated, and cooperation among businessmen belonging to different cultures, languages and religious denominations was bringing economic and political stability to the city. The presence of the Jews was appreciated for creating and running business associations, for the reciprocity of the services provided, for the exceptional contribution to the musical and artistic life.

In lieu of a conclusion

As an industrial and trade centre, interwar Timișoara had a large number of workers, important social organizations, a strong union movement and also a liberal bourgeoisie which was able to handle business wisely in order to maintain a relaxed environment for the employees.

Most of the citizens were sympathetic to social democracy despite the fact that left-wing movements were considered by the authorities as being opposed to the national culture and identity. One cannot speak about a simple matter of capital growth though and, as an example, there can be noticed a certain dynamics in practical matters, extension of inter-groups relationships, creation of guilds and existence of a vibrant artistic and sports life.

While ideologies became more radical and racism and anti-Semitism were becoming references on the Romanian and European political scenes, Timișoara had chosen to cultivate its civic spirit and multicultural and intercultural status, thus opposing conflicting trends.

The aspirations of a part of its inhabitants support the assertion according to which social history cannot be simply reduced to the division of labour and state systems. In other words, as Étienne Balibar would put it,

⁴⁴ See The National Archives, Timiș County Branch, Documentary Fonds Wool Industry. Also according to F. Theiss, *Album jubiliar, 275 de ani: 1718–1993. Fabrica de bere din Timișoara* [Jubilee Album, 275 years: 1718–1993. The Brewery of Timisoara] (Timișoara, 1993).

non-economic social reactions play a fundamental role in such places because they represent the real historical community of individuals.⁴⁵

Translated from

Romanian by Dr. Simona Neumann

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⁴⁵ Etienne Balibar, Foreword to Etienne Balibar & Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Classe. Les identités ambiuguës* (Paris: Editions La Decouverte, 1990), 17: “Ce sont ces réactions qui confèrent à l’histoire sociale une allure irréductible à la simple ‘logique’ de la reproduction élargie du capital ou même un ‘jeu stratégique’ des acteurs définis par la division du travail et le système des États.”

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