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The *Aliyah* of 1949: Unpublished Migration Requests of Jews from Romania as Vehicles of Memory

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ABSTRACT

In 1949, the political context of the People's Republic of Romania and of the newly founded Israeli state formally provided a framework for the immigration of Romanian Jews to Israel, upon the opening of the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1948. Our paper proposes an analysis of the *Aliyah* in 1949 as portrayed in migration requests addressed by members of the Jewish community all over Romania to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest. The requests, never published before, have been hosted since 1997 by the Center for Research on Romanian Jewry within the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. First, we address the history of the fonds, the hypotheses of historians on the submission of the requests, the shape of the material and characteristics of the documents. Second, our in-depth textual analysis allows a refined understanding of writing patterns, engagements, and reasons for requesting migration. Overall, our study contributes to the understanding of archives as "vehicles of memory" (Confino 2011) and of individual and group responses to historical transformations.

KEYWORDS

Aliyah,¹ immigration, Israel, memory, archives.

1) *Aliyah*, in Hebrew, ascent. The term is used in literature for referring to the immigration of Jews to Palestine (Land of Israel) and later, after May 14, 1948, to the State of Israel. The terminology used in the case of immigrating to Israel is *Aliyah*, or going up, while the opposite, *yerida*, is going down.



Introduction

The migration of Jews from Romania is approached in *longue-durée* studies which establish specific temporal divisions and related landmarks: the arrival of the first olim (immigrants) in 1882 and their founding of colonies in Palestine, the British Mandate period, when around forty thousand olim arrived in Palestine and the aliyot after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Our work takes a novel approach and addresses the *Aliyah* phenomenon as related to one specific year (1949) while using unpublished migration requests addressed to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest by Jewish community members from all over Romania. The material offers

rich ground for exploring the reasons for migration, the needs and desires of individuals and groups, and the role of archives as "vehicles of memory."

The year 1949 belongs to the *Aliyah haamonit* (the mass *Aliyah*) time frame (1948-1952), when one-third of the postwar Jewish population, or 120,000 Jews, left Romania (Bines 1998). At the end of World War II, the surviving Jewish population in Romania amounted to approximately 380,000 people, making up the largest Jewish community in all of Europe except for the Soviet Union (Ioanid 2005). Prior to 1949, the 1945-1947 period was a time of illegal immigration (*Aliyah bet*), a solution undertaken both by Zionists and by those who did not find their place in the new sociopolitical realities. The migration of Jews from Romania dur-



ing that period was possible solely with the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee² and took place over land. The clandestine migrants were using the so-called “lifts” (huge transport cases) in which they could stock their belongings. They travelled to Italy by way of Vienna and from there embarked for Haifa, then intercepted by the British Navy and detained in Cyprus, and from there they left for Palestine after months or years (Nastasă 2003). It was a time when the Romanian government was indifferent to the migration problem, and during which the Party documents do not reflect a clear conception of the matter. Emigration was formalized in 1947, and the Jewish Democratic Committee³ was tasked with its organization. In that year, emigration was made possible through “collective passports” and the Jewish Democratic Committee organized “educational” courses for those listed for departure. By the end of 1947, thousands of individuals organized into thirteen groups emigrated. They could carry luggage with them, while having the possibility to send furniture and other objects left with family members in Romania. In the background however, emigration was no longer tolerated, and the Jewish Democratic Committee propaganda counterbalanced the migration-related activity of Zionists. In parallel, migration still took place through regular departures from the Constanța port to Haifa. Until May 1948 and the founding of the Israeli state, around thirty-two thousand Jews had emigrated from Romania; after that, the administrative organization of the migration was undertaken by the Israeli Legation in Bucharest, opened in 1948 (Nastasă 2003).

The postwar realities of 1949 found the Jewish community of Romania in a situation of deprivation, loss, and upheaval. Social assistance institutions such as hospitals, shelters or canteens were forbidden, and the Jewish schools were closed; the international Jewish organizations acting in Romania, the JDC or the Jewish Agency⁴—which covered the necessities of local communities while

the state was ruined by the war effort and the maintenance of the Soviet Army—were dissolved; the nationalization of factories, banks and expropriation of buildings affected the members of the community; the Law of December 16, 1944 on the restitution of the assets belonging to the Jewish community was late in its implementation and did not have any immediate effect on the Jewish population, but on consolidating the image of the Jew as an entrepreneur (Rotman 2004; Lazăr 2018; Oțoiu 2009). The resulting material deprivations and ideological challenges generated confusion and led to divided options for members of the Jewish group: some participated at the installment of the communist regime and others projected their lives into the possibility of emigration.⁵

After 1949, emigration was possible only through individual passports, obtained at the Ministry of the Interior, or the General Headquarters of the *Miliția*. Even if procedures were complicated, the idea of emigration attracted large numbers of people. The applicants received a form several pages long and could pick it up in alphabetical order, on specific days of the week. Upon handing in the form, the *Miliția* was responsible for releasing the passport and scheduling the boat journey, which happened after several months of waiting, or often between one and three years. There was no logic for approvals or rejections even if, semiofficially, the authorities considered the “social importance” of the applicant, with those with high qualifications (doctors, technicians, architects, engineers, etc.) having virtually no chance of departure (Nastasă 2003).

What do the migration requests dated in 1949 reveal about the *Aliyah* of Romanian Jews one year after the creation of the Israeli state? How is the wish to immigrate accomplished textually? What can we learn about the power of archives in stocking, indexing, and revealing specific documents? What can we learn about archives as “vehicles of memory”? These are a few questions that our work aims to answer.

2) The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), founded in 1914, is the world’s leading Jewish humanitarian assistance organization.

3) The Jewish Democratic Committee was created by the Romanian communist government in 1945, with the aim of counterbalancing the other representative organizations of the Jewish population.

4) Founded in 1929, the Jewish Agency for Israel is an international, non-governmental body centered in Jerusalem which is the executive and representative of the World Zionist Organization.

5) Our further work will examine declarations for renouncing migration written in 1951-1952 by members of a Romanian urban Jewish community as ways of securing social benefits (employment, children’s schooling, etc.) and responses to the fear of the Jewish Democratic Committee propaganda.



The *Aliyah* of Romanian Jews in the literature

The Holocaust-related history, the proclamation of the State of Israel, and the changes brought about by the communist regime paint the background picture of the migration-related literature. Rotman (2004), by looking both at the Jewish communities and the Communist Party, shows that the Jewish Democratic Committee JDC, the institution that was supposed to represent the Jewish community, served the political order and led an anti-*Aliyah* propaganda. Ioanid (2005, 2015) examines the “transfer” of Romanian Jews to Israel during the two presidential regimes of 1948-1989 and demonstrates that the Romanian government treated Jews as an export commodity. Ioanid (2015) emphasizes the difference between the two presidential regimes on the Jewish emigration question and the nature of the agreements between the two states.⁶ Oțoiu (2009) looks at “the price to pay” for the *Aliyah* and examines the connection between the *aliyot* throughout the communist period and the state-enforced expropriation of “Jewish goods.”

In terms of the migration-related literature *per se*, Bines (1998) or Leibovici Laiș (2000) take a *longue durée* perspective and examine the migration of Romanian Jews starting with 1882 and related temporal markers: the year 1882, when organizations in Moldova started targeting the immigration to Palestine before the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897; the British Mandate period (1919-1948); the mass migration period of 1948-1951; the interruption of migration between 1953-1957; the restart of migration between 1958-1965; and the migration during the rest of the communist and post-communist period. In her turn, Babeș (2014) makes a long-term periodization for the migration of Romanian Jews while considering three periods: before the World War II, during that war, and after the establishment of the State of Israel.

The first *Aliyah* (1948-1952) of Romanian Jews, which increased the population of Israel by eighteen percent (Bines 1998: 92), was studied in light of the agreement between the Israeli minister of external affairs and his analogue, Ana Pauker (Levy 2008). Under this agreement, the conditions for emigration set by the Romanian authorities were as follows: each Jew who was going to hand in a departure request had to give up Romanian citizenship; no emigrant could own a national passport, just a “one way” travel document; each requester had to leave all of their belongings in Romania; the organization of the departure was assigned to the Jewish Democratic Committee (Lazăr 2018). At the same time, this period (end of the 1940s) was affected by intervening changes in Stalinist policy, namely the anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist reversal, and the beginning of anti-Semitic purges and campaigns. Consequently, the attitude of the Romanian Communist Party regarding emigration is ambivalent: *Aliyah* was tolerated, but at the same time a strong anti-Zionist and anti-*Aliyah* propaganda was organized (Oțoiu 2009). After 1952, the authorities started to slow down the pace of emigration, fearing a negative external image and concluding that Jews should remain in Romania in order to help build socialism. At the same time, the mass emigration of Jews could have had an unwanted effect on the Romanian economy. The international context dominated by the Cold War atmosphere led to the complete blocking of migration until 1958 (Lazăr 2012).



Methodology and theory

This publication results from the postdoctoral project *The Jewish Community of Oradea, Romania, and Its Immigration Waves to Israel: 1948-1989*⁷ examining the configurations of the *aliyot* for a Romanian urban Jewish group in archival documents and in-

6) The Gheorghiu-Dej regime of the late 1950s and early '60s involved a barter agreement under which exit permits were granted in exchange for funding the construction of farms and food-processing complexes. After 1965, the “transfer” was based on obtaining “cold dollars.”

7) Jean Nordmann Foundation postdoctoral grant, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Center for Research on Romanian Jewry), 2018.

8) We choose to privilege the unpublished requests of 1949 as they have the power to reveal the start of the *Aliyah* process in a formalized context, after the opening of the Israeli Legation in Bucharest. The following *Aliyah* waves of Romanian Jews deserve a separate analysis.

9) We made a random choice in view of the requests not being organized in relation to communities. The requests are indexed by the archivist in the form and order in which they were received at the Center.

10) For a more detailed description of the Center, see: http://jewishhistory.huji.ac.il/Centers/center_for_research_on_romanian_.htm. For the history of the Center, see Goshen (2010). For a volume related to the initiator and founder of the Center (Fondul 147, Theodor Lavi-Löwenstein), see Gligor and Caloianu (2014).

11) Zeev Ellenbogen brought the requests to the Center in 1997. Dr. Miriam Caloianu, researcher at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, historian and archivist, set up the fonds upon its receipt. From a legal point of view, the fonds belongs to the Center. There are no copies of these requests elsewhere.

12) The Dinur Center for Research in Jewish History was established by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Ministry of Education and Culture of the State of Israel in July 1974.

interviews. For this analysis, we chose to focus only on previously unpublished migration requests submitted in 1949 by members of the Jewish community all over Romania and addressed to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest, opened in 1948 and raised to the rank of embassy in 1969. The requests addressed to the newly founded Legation offer rich ground for exploring the ways in which the wish to emigrate was put in textual form. Consequently, they provide a valuable typology for emigration-related reasons related to the year 1949, or one year after the creation of Israel and three years before the pause in official emigration policy.⁸ The reasons or sums of reasons motivating the desire to reach Israel and the relationship between the individual and the state are richly explored based on the requests in question.

Secondly, our analysis is highly enriched by the shape of the fonds itself. The requests are not typical for a specific community type, and do not disclose unique details of those communities. Thus, they are not organized in relation to specific communities. Therefore, the content of a single file is a miniature mix of the fonds itself and opens the way to read into a puzzle of requests. The fonds consists of ten files totaling around two thousand requests. Our analysis randomly selects one file out of the ten, totaling 204 requests.⁹ Upon a description of the fonds, we look at the intrinsic value of texts and propose an analysis on two levels: the patterns of formulation and the reasons for requesting emigration.

Together with books, films, museums or commemorations, archives are “vehicles of memory” through which the past is represented in specific ways and formed into shared cultural knowledge by successive generations. The notion of archives as vehicles of memory guides our interpretation, narration and explanation of the emigration requests. This notion is related to a specific understanding of “memory,” namely *kulturelles und kommunikatives Gedächtnis*—cultural and communicative memory (Assmann 1999). This concept views com-

municative memory as interactions of individuals and groups on the everyday level, while it sees cultural memory as knowledge that shapes behavior and experience through generations in repeated practice that is distanced from the everyday. Thus, the notion of “memory” in the “vehicles of memory” concept is a fluid, malleable one that includes specific individuals and groups: the authors of the requests, the historians who interpret the material, the archivist who undertakes its indexation, presentation and dissemination, and, last but not least, the researcher who endows the material with a specific interpretation.



Origin of the archival material

The migration requests and related fonds belong to the Center for Research on Romanian Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Established in 1973, the Center has a unique and highly specialized collection of books and archival documents. The materials stored in the archive include a rich collection of newspaper clippings, articles and documents arranged in more than two hundred file folders according to topics such as: personalities-biographies; Jewish communities in Romania; education and schools; the Jewish press; Jewish theater; the Zionist movement; migration; anti-Semitism; the Holocaust period; Romanian Avant-garde; and others. The archive currently holds more than fifteen private archives that include documents (originals and copies), correspondence, manuscripts, photographs, microfilms, CDs and videocassettes.¹⁰

The examined fonds consists of ten files of around two thousand migration requests in total. The *Preliminary Report Regarding the Study of Migration Requests Submitted to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1950*, dated September 1997 and signed by Zeev Ellenbogen,¹¹ is the only source of this fonds. Zeev Ellenbogen followed the request of

Dr. Aaron Kedar, the Director of the Dinur Center,¹² to revise the migration requests of Jews from Romania in 1950, which had been collected at the Israeli Legation in Bucharest. Some of the requests had been in the possession of the Dinur Center after the State Archives and the Central Zionist Archives were not ready to absorb the material at that time. It seems that only a small part of the requests sent to the Israeli Legation at that time were transferred to Israel in September 1997.¹³ In 1950, the Legation was used as a “secondary center” for absorbing the pressure of Romanian Jews emigrating to Israel. The main center was the Passport Bureau (archivist’s note, of the Bucharest *Militia*). Regarding the submission of the requests to the Legation, the report presents two hypotheses of those who lived in that period: 1) Shlomo Leibovici-Laiş,¹⁴ who participated in the initiative of transferring the material to Israel, considers that the requests were spontaneously submitted during a sustained period in 1950 and were not initiated by a source from the Legation; and 2) Shmaya Avni¹⁵ believes the whole material was gathered during a two-week period in February 1950. At that date, he had received information that a source within the Legation had “refined” the requests, probably without coordination with the Israeli minister plenipotentiary. There were also those who ensured the transfer of requests, in large quantities, from places outside Bucharest. There is room for confirming these hypotheses.

1. Overview of the fonds

The authors of the requests in the ten files come from communities all over Romania and from all population groups: members of Jewish communities who returned from camps in Transnistria as well as survivors of extermination camps in occupied Poland; those deported there in 1944, when north-western Transylvania was under Hungarian rule, as well as members of communities who have not been deported (from the Old Kingdom and south of Transylvania). The

requests confirm the known fact that the wish to leave Romania and emigrate covered the whole Romanian Jewry.¹⁶

There are three recommendations for arranging the material. First, as the requests were submitted in very close periods of time and many are undated, it does not make sense to arrange them in chronological order. Second, as the requests are not typical for some communities and they do not disclose unique details of those communities, organizing them by communities adds no value. Third, the report recommends that the material be arranged in an accessible way, while mentioning the “special interest” documents.¹⁷ For Zeev Ellenbogen and Shmaya Avni, the special interest documents are the biographies of Zionists, or documents which go beyond the limited question of migration requests. The two documents are: 1) The curriculum vitae of one of the first Zionist activists in Piatra Neamţ, a city labeled the “Jerusalem of Romania,” who was born in 1890. He told that he had been among the founders of the first Zionist circles since he was young and was very active in spreading the Hebrew culture and language as a living language. His activities coincide with the activities of those who became prominent members of the Zionist leadership of Romania, A. L. Zissu and Mişu Weisman.¹⁸ Consequently, the report states that the CV is an important document related to the history of Zionism in Piatra Neamţ, and in Romania generally. 2) The permits released by the institutions in the detention camps in Cyprus for illegal immigrants from Palestine in 1948.¹⁹ The permits were released in order to give priority to younger parents to do *Aliyah* in their turn, and were indeed annexed to the migration request submitted to the embassy.

Many requests mention that the family members, especially children, are already in Israel. One may notice that the parents of children who are in Israel are “overrepresented” among applicants. These applicants often note the fact that their son serves in the Israeli Defense Forces (*Haganah*, in He-

13) Preliminary report regarding the study of migration requests handed in to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1950, dated September 1997 (original in Hebrew).

14) Shlomo Leibovici-Laiş (1927-2014), Israeli historian of Romanian origin; president of ACMEOR (Asociația Culturală Mondială a Evreilor Originari din România / World Cultural Organization of Jews Originating from Romania).

15) Shmaya Avni (1923-2003), Israeli journalist and writer of Romanian origin. He published books and articles regarding Zionist activities in Romania (in Hebrew).

16) Preliminary report regarding the study of migration requests handed in to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1950, dated September 1997 (original in Hebrew).

17) See the previous note.

18) A. L. Zissu was president of the Zionist Executive, leader of the Jewish party and theoretician on Judaism.

19) Preliminary report regarding the study of migration requests handed in to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1950, dated September 1997 (original in Hebrew). The camps in Cyprus created by the British government in an effort to stem illegal immigration to Palestine were in place between 1946 and 1948.

20) See the previous note.

21) See note 19.

22) For example, there is a single request for loil Benianim, Bety, lancu – born 1909, 1913, 1939 – Iași – three people, but the family members (parents and son) are indexed separately.

23) In terms of the demographic evolution of the postwar Jewish population of Romania, an estimate of the Romanian section within the World Jewish Congress at the beginning of 1947, based on information provided by the communities, reveals a total of 428,312 persons (representing fifty-six percent of the number registered in 1930). (Gyémánt, 2018: 16)

brew, the Defense), indicating sometimes a prejudice or a reward. The expressions in Romanian are “the Hagana army” or sometimes just “Hagana.”²⁰ It is surprising that the applicants are single families (archivist’s note, husband and wife) or small families. Families with many children are few. When the requests were submitted, many of the Holocaust survivors did not live in their communities of origin, from where they had been deported to camps. Thus, it seems that this state of things implies a migration process of Holocaust survivors to other communities after their return from the camps.²¹

The archivist left the requests in the shape and order of their arrival at the Center and indexed them in a chart per file organized around the following categories: “name,” “year of birth,” “birthplace,” “residence,” “observations.” Under “name” stands the information for all family members involved in the migration request, and not only the name of the signer.²² The family members are indexed by their names or, alternatively, with “wife of,” “son of.” The residence (understood as the place where the individual lived when submitting the request) is mentioned for all individuals. The mentioning of the year of birth, birthplace and/or observations varies by request. When dated, the requests bear dates from February 1949. There are forty-five indexed residence places from all over Romania. The most represented historical province is Moldova (459 people), followed by Wallachia (121) and Transylvania (91). The residence is indexed as a city or small town, e.g., Gherla, Satu Mare. When the residence is a village, it is mentioned in relation to the closest large town or county, e.g., Moldovița (Câmpulung), Borșa (Maramureș).

2. A file of 204 emigration requests

Our randomly chosen file contains 204 requests indexed in a chart following the above-described model. The indexed families are made up of two (76 requests), three (53 requests), four (22 requests), five (8 requests) and six (4 requests) members.

Forty-one requests were made by single individuals. These numbers confirm the statement on the dominance of single families among the applicants. The residences with the highest number of requests are: Bucharest (57); Galați (42); Botoșani (37); Târgu Neamț (32); Piatra Neamț (29); Roman (29); Suceava (28); Bacău (26, among which 11 villages); and Iași (23). We notice that most applicants in our sample reside in places from the Old Kingdom.²³ The birthplace and the residence place differ for 127 individuals. Three individuals have birthplaces outside Romania (Paris, New York, and Budapest). A separate analysis could reveal the shifts of the living place for the multigenerational families, and specific patterns of requests based on regions of origin or residence.

Under the category “observation” stands input related to the postwar situation of the applicant or their family. Some entries have additional remarks, for example: *survivor Transnistria* (39 requests)—“Djurin camp,” “first wife and two children perished on Transnistria,” or “survivor Bershad camp”; *pogroms* (5 requests)—“widow pogrom Iasi” (husband and son of 11 years old perished), “pogrom widow (Iași 1941),” or “widow pogrom București (1941)”; *prisoner* (3 requests)—“prisoner for 6 years in Soviet Union (forced labor in Hungarian labor detachments)” or “prisoner Soviet Union until 1948”; *forced labor* (4 requests) —“prisoner for 6 years in Soviet Union (forced labor in Hungarian labor detachments),” “forced labor (1942) / prisoner Soviet Union until 1948” or “Forced labor 1941-1945 (Fălticeni and Cernăuți) / 1944-1946—soldier in Red Army”; *survivor Auschwitz* (4 requests) —“survivor Auschwitz (entire family perished),” “orphan; parents perished at Auschwitz”; *war orphan* (1 request)—“orphan; Parents perished at Auschwitz.” Other entries related to the postwar situation of the applicant have no additional remarks, e.g., *survivor Holocaust* (3 requests) or *repatriate* (3 requests). The observation field is also filled with the age of the applicant or left blank.

In terms of the predominant “observation” type, the category *survivor Transnistria* corresponds to the highest number of requests. At the same time, we notice a shift from the birthplace to a new residence after the war within the country (e.g., for a “prisoner” category—born in Maramureș, resident of Zalău) or as “repatriate” (born in Bukovina, resident of Timișoara). Through this highly nuanced indexation of “observation” types, the archivist does justice to the life details mobilized by the applicant is their request. At the same time, the information under “observation” is a precious departure point for looking at the war contexts described by the subjects.

As for the writing style, most of the requests are handwritten. Some are in calligraphic manuscript. The handwriting of the signers is usually different from the one on the requests. Some requests are typewritten. Most are formulated in a personal form, but there are some with a repetitive formulation as well. The requests show a large spectrum of educational statuses, from “illiterate” to those with a complete education.²⁴

3. Analyzing the requests

3.1. Writing patterns

Our outlook on writing patterns could identify the recurring styles for beginning and ending the request, the references to Israel, the profession.

The addressee of the requests varies between Minister, Ambassador, Your Excellency, Honor to the Israeli Embassy, to His Excellency the Ambassador of the State of Israel, Honor to the Consulate of the State of Israel, to the Legation of the State of Israel, Bucharest, to the Minister of the State of Israel, or Honored Ambassador of the State of Israel in PRR.²⁵ At the bottom of the page, the addressee is re-mentioned: e.g. to the Minister of the State of Israel in PRR, to the Office of Emigration, Honor to the Consular Section of the Legation of the State of Israel.

The first phrase of the request mentions the name, date and place of birth, age, current address, the composition of the family,

profession and consists of the claim itself: “the undersigned (...) with honor, please be so kind as to dispose of my repatriation to the State of Israel”; “I kindly ask the repatriation to the State of Israel”; “I wish to be inscribed on the emigration lists”; “I wish to be registered and pre-noted for our immigration in Medinath [in Hebrew, State of] Israel”; “I wish to inscribe me and my Family on the departure Lists to the State of Israel”; “we wish to emigrate, please inscribe us on the list of Immigrants”; “I wish to be inscribed on the Emigration Charts”; “please award us the entrance visa in the State of Israel”; “please intervene to the concerned authorities so that I can be repatriated with the first transport to the State of Israel permanently, together with my wife”; “I wish to be put on the repatriation Lists”; “please admit our Repatriation in the State of Israel”; “we would like to become citizens of the State of Israel.”²⁶ Sometimes the wish to leave is presented as an urgent matter: “we kindly ask you to include us in the first *Aliyah* / with the first transport.”²⁷ One year after the creation of the Israeli state, the applicants used the term “repatriation,” as they saw the immigration to Israel as a return to the land of their ancestors.²⁸ At the same time, “repatriation” is also used in the documents—fiction, biographies or newspapers—written in Israel by Romanian Jews during the first immigration years (1950s). On the other hand, the applicants use the term “repatriation” because in 1949 emigration was not yet part of state policy and therefore not part of everyday language.

When listed, the profession appears in the first phrase, together with the personal information. Some identified professions are: hatter, private clerk, carpenter, machine knitter, hairdresser, locksmith, trader, clerk, qualified driver, qualified tailor, tractor driver, precision mechanic, qualified mechanic-driver, fellmonger, lingerie tailor, lawyer, binding foreman, gardener, electrician, clerk in metalworking, shoemaker, coach driver, baker, agricultural worker, watchmaker, mirror maker, belt maker, dentist, purse

24) Preliminary report regarding the study of emigration requests submitted to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest in 1950, dated September 1997 (original in Hebrew).

25) PRR –People’s Republic of Romania, in place from 1947 to 1965.

26) Center for Research on Romanian Jewry (CRRJ), DR / 101, file 2, selections of typical formulations from all requests.

27) *Idem.*

28) My interviews with Romanian Jews who did *Aliyah* in the 1970s and ‘80s, reveal, in their turn, specific representations of the migration idea—the interviewees speak of “immigration,” of going “to the country” (*în țară*), or simply of “leaving.”

maker, charity sister, cobbler, housewife, trade clerk, worker, dyer, washer, weaver, student, accountant.²⁹ In one request, the author gives a profession-related detail—"I am a precision mechanic owning a repair workshop especially for typewriters and calculators"³⁰—and the company stamp appears on the request. Sometimes the profession is used to strengthen the request: "we are healthy and ready to work in Israel, in agriculture, for which we have aptitudes"³¹; "I am a carpenter and I will be able to work this as well." Sometimes the professions of both husband and wife or of the extended family are mentioned. Others just add, "we are healthy people and apt for work," or "we want to bring a contribution to our state too." One request says: "We eat in the community canteen and have no profession for subsistence."³² Or, "we wish to put all out energy and work at the service of the State of Israel that we consider the homeland [*patria*] of all Jews, and therefore ours." Or, "I guarantee that I will not be a burden for the Society or State, I will work with my augmented powers to maintain the integrity of this State and for stimulating its eternal existence for the good of the whole people scattered for millennia."³³ The connection between the profession and the wish to emigrate shows that the applicant sees *Aliyah* as a lifelong project in which he or she puts their full energy, skills and knowledge.

The attachment to Israel can be detected in the various ways in which the country is referred to in the requests, such as "my country" or "our precious country." Israel is labeled as Israel, Eretz, our Land, the Israeli Country, my Country (capitalized), State of Israel (Statul Israel), Medinath Israel, Ereṭ, Eretz Israel, "State of Israel," Izrael, State of Izrael, The Holy Land [*Țara Sfântă*], our precious country Israel. The reference to Israel is made in two contexts—the longed-for destination and the place where a part of the family already lives. The use of both "my country" and "our country" reveals the manifestation of both an individual and group belonging to Israel.

The requests end with specific greetings: some with "Long Live PRR," others with "Long Live the State of Israel," or two slogans together: "Long live the PRR, Long Live the State of Israel / Long Live the Young State of Israel." Others say "we salute you with the traditional greeting *Techi Medinat Israel*" [Hebrew, the State of Israel will live] or "*Shalom uv'raha*" [Hebrew, peace and blessings]. Our analysis of the reasons for emigration, in the next section, shows that the use of the slogan "Long Live PRR" reveals a formal compliance with the customary slogans in use at that time, noting the sharp contrast between the use of the slogan and the engaged tone of the request for emigration. Other applicants use "double" slogans, one related to PRR and one to Israel, thus also complying with the customs in use in PRR, or in the country where the request needs to be approved. Others stick to slogans in Hebrew. An interesting outlook on the use of the slogans comes from the report, which states that the requests mirror the doubts between the presentation of a connection to Israel and a manifestation of loyalty to the People's Republic of Romania. Many requests end with the call, "Long live the People's Republic of Romania" [*Trăiască Republica Populară Română*], together with "long live the country / the fight against the Anglo-Americans, the invaders."³⁴ Regarding the mentioned contrast between the use of the slogan "Long Live PRR" and the engaged tone in the main body of the request (including the reason for emigration), we follow the belief of the automatic use of the slogan. Furthermore, a graphological analysis could reveal more on those who wrote the slogans.

3.2. Reasons for requesting emigration

In 1949, the members of the Romanian Jewish community were subjected to the postwar nationalization laws and related dispossession of goods, the dismantling of traditional assistance institutions and also to personal loss. In this context, the creation of the Israeli state offered this community

29) For a division of professions for Romanian immigrants related the *Aliyah* of 1948-1952, see Bines (1998: 94-95).

30) Center for Research on Romanian Jewry (CRRJ), DR / 101, file 2, No. 480.

31) No. 548.

32) In the autumn of 1944, the social assistance organizations for Jews – canteens, orphanages or hospitals – were reactivated for a short while.

33) No. 336.

34) Dr. Miriam Caloianu (personal communication) points out that these slogan phrases do not reflect the loyalty for PRR but rather the automatism of writing a letter or official request, or even the hope that, if the letters reached the *Miliția* or the *Securitate*, they would be an asset for the applicant.

35) CRRJ, DR / 101, file 2, selections of typical formulations from all requests. The *Haganah*—the forerunner of the Israeli Defense Forces—was the clandestine Jewish defense organization.

the chance for a long-awaited dream. The depicted reasons for migration—the family in Israel, the postwar situation, the projection of migration as an Ideal, and the Zionist merit—allow us to understand the needs and desires of the Jewish community members in this specific sociopolitical context. A request includes a single reason or a sum of reasons, and in the following we propose a typology of these reasons.

The first reason is connected to the wish of reunification with children, siblings or extended family members who are in Israel. Children are mentioned in relation to their military service and to the circumstances of their previous migration context. The child “is mobilized in the army,” “defended the State of Israel,” “fought on the front,” “is under arms in the State of Israel,” “is recruited in the Israeli army taking part in the Negev campaign,” “is in the Hagana,”³⁵ is “a soldier in the Army, at Tel-Lypinsk”³⁶ or “leads the liberation fight of the Israeli state.”³⁷ When no specific details are given about children, they are just said to live in “Eretz” for a long time. The address of the child or family in Israel is occasionally mentioned. Or, children left as *halutzim*³⁸ to Israel or are now in a *hachsara* (preparation camps for agricultural work). Other applicants mention how their children were withheld in Cyprus³⁹ before their arrival in Israel, where they activated in Zionist movements: “I have a 20-year-old son who left on December 22, 1947, with the last *Aliyah*, being held in Cyprus until now when I think he already is in Eretz. He was a leader in *hanoar* [Hebrew, Youth Zionist Movement], and distinguished himself in all the activities required by this quality: lecturer, propagandist, etc. And in Cyprus, among other activities, he also has the quality of *Madrich* [in Hebrew, instructor] in the *Hagana* commandment”⁴⁰; “I currently have two children in Israel who were detained in Cyprus in a camp from December 1947 to February 1949.” In other requests, parents show that children had already immigrated through the Zionist organization ICHUD⁴¹: “with respect I beg you, to help me and

my family to be able to immigrate soon to Eretz Israel. As for reason, I have three small children who did *Aliyah* in December 1947 through the Zionist organization ICHUD.” Last, the applicants show that their children have their domicile in a kibbutz or colony. Thus, the children of applicants are defenders of the Israeli state, left as *halutzim*, are former illegal immigrants detained in Cyprus, are Zionist activists, or part of a kibbutz or colony and their profiles are the core reason for requesting immigration. Others request the reunification with the siblings, parents or “the whole family” (sisters, in-laws or parents). Then, there are aged parents who want to be with their children. Sometimes, in addition to the argument of having family in Israel, the applicants write that the family can support them to start life in Israel: “they could help us with our beginning”; “I am 70 years old, and my daughter has a good situation and can support me”; “my brother who actively took part in the fights in Negev obtained and sent me entry certificates to the State of Israel.”⁴²

The second reason is related to the postwar situation of the applicant. In this respect, the narratives are organized around specific historical events: the Hitlerist pogrom of 1941, the deportation to Auschwitz or the deportation to Transnistria.⁴³ The authors show that they were “raised in work detachments in 1942 by Horthy’s government,” they were “prisoners in USSR,” did “forced labor” or were “evacuated from Podu Iloaiei Iași.” One identifies as a “widow of the Iași pogrom of 1941.” While giving the details related to war sufferings, the applicants request the immigration to Israel, where they have family. The camp survivors describe their situation in terms of loss, suffering and loneliness, destitution and lacking basic needs, or living in a shelter for Jewish orphans. Some write that their children living in Israel insist that they come and live with them, or that they are aged and miss their children.

Some applicants mention precise details related to the war period: “I was deported to

36) Center for Research on Romanian Jewry (CRRJ), DR / 101, file 2, No. 382.

37) CRRJ, DR / 101, file 2, No. 3.

38) Jewish immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe, trained in agriculture and capable of establishing self-sustaining economies.

39) The years 1945–1948, when the British politics was against the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to Israel, were difficult. These migrations took place illegally as well, and not all attempts were successful.

40) CRRJ, DR / 101, File 2, No. 421.

41) No. 530. After World War II, the nuances of the Zionist movement in Romania were reborn. The strongest social-democratic organizations were “Ichud” (the Romanian branch of the “Histadruth Haovdim” party) and the “Hapoel Hamizrachi” organization.

42) CRRJ, DR / 101, file 2, selections of typical formulations from all requests.

43) Another analysis, which groups the requests by historical provinces, will reveal the nuances of motivation related to the postwar situation of specific communities, or between the Jews of northern Transylvania and those of the Old Kingdom.

44) CRR1, DR / 101, file 2, selections of typical formulations from all requests.

45) CRR1, DR / 101, file 2, selections of typical formulations from all requests.

46) The Keren Hayesod (KH) is a global organization established in 1920, which collects funds for socioeconomic projects in Israel.

47) Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael–Jewish National Fund, founded in 1901, is Israel’s largest environmental organization and the oldest environmental organization in the world.

48) *Hakhshara* (in Hebrew, preparation) was a Zionist agricultural training center where Zionist youth would learn technical skills necessary for their emigration to Israel and subsequent life in *kibbutzim*. Gordonia is a Zionist youth movement established in 1923 in Galicia, Spain.

49) CRR1, DR / 101, file 2, No. 420.

50) See Leibovici-Laiş (2010) for an overview of archival sources for the study of Jews from Romania.

Transnistria (1941-1944) and in 1946 repatriated to Romania in order to immigrate to Israel”; “I motivate my request with the fact that my parents, together with my whole family, with my first wife and my child, were deported and exterminated in Auschwitz”; “On 11 October 1941 we were deported to Transnistria where we stayed until May 3, 1944. Then, we returned to our native town Rădăuți”; “I did forced labor in 1941-1943, in Fălticeni and Cernăuți, and after this enrolled in the Red Army in 1944-1946.”⁴⁴ Others just mention that they were “deported to Transnistria” or are “former deportees to Auschwitz, poor people,” “repatriated from USSR” without giving further details.

Third, the *Aliyah* is also the achievement of an Ideal: “having a wife and a child in Palestine, I wish to emigrate to the State of Israel in order to achieve my Ideal and at the same time to collaborate for the rebuilding of our state”; “having kids in the State of Israel who fought for the liberation of our Eretz, we wish to emigrate in Palestine, thus, our Holy Ideal will be accomplished”; “this country in remaking is impregnated into my soul, where for two thousand years our ancestors shed their blood for the accomplishment of this Ideal. I personally put considerable efforts in preparing this day when the Jewish people would have a COUNTRY, a NAME, and A FAMILY bound together in a State with a diplomatic representative in PRR to whom we could address for the facilitation of our departure to Israel.”⁴⁵ Thus, the immigration idea is paralleled with an Ideal, which embodies the rebuilding of the long-awaited and cherished Israeli state. The group identity is reinforced with the use of *our* country, *our* ancestors, *our* Ideal.

Fourth, applicants see the *Aliyah* as the deserved outcome of a long-term Zionist merit. The authors show that they contributed to Keren Hayesod⁴⁶ and Keren Kayemet⁴⁷ funds with very important sums. Or they “founded a Kibutz de Hashera⁴⁸ of the Gordonia organization in the locality.”⁴⁹ Others describe the Zionist environment in which they lived: in the Zionist environment of

Piatra Neamț, they acquired knowledge of Hebrew language and culture and spread it, founded a Zionist synagogue in the city, were the organizers of a great Zionist library and administered the local Zionist newspaper, *Săptămâna*.

Thus, based on the 204 studied requests, the first motivation for migration is the reunification of the family with the children in Israel. Other reasons, which are added to the first one, are the loneliness and lack of contact with members of the family in Romania, especially among the camp survivors, the economic situation, the projection of an Ideal, the long-term Zionist merit. In a single case, the petitioner explains the fact that his factory was nationalized after the return from the camp.



Conclusion

Our work examined the *Aliyah* of Romanian Jews related to the year 1949 as reflected in migration requests addressed to the Israeli Legation in Bucharest. The archival sources of that period regarding the emigration problem contain, on the one hand, the Zionist propaganda actions for emigration, and on the other hand, the answer of the Jewish Democratic Committee in holding endless sessions within the country in order to convince the Jewish population to give up emigration.⁵⁰ The analyzed requests are highly valuable due to their potential in revealing the perspective of the Jewish community members on emigration related to the year 1949. At that time, emigration was not yet part of state politics—before becoming a state policy, emigration for the Jewish community was an individual and group practice, involving two authorities which dealt with formalities—the *Miliția* and the Israeli Legation in Bucharest (as “secondary center”).

Our analysis could reveal the individual and group practices in terms of migration,

in the context of the People's Republic of Romania and of Israel. By analyzing the writing patterns and reasons for requesting migration, we reveal that the impetus for emigration to the newly founded Israeli state covered Jewish communities all over Romania. The wish to leave, motivated by reunification with children or postwar loss and loneliness, shows that the Jewish community members, who project their lives in terms of being in Israel, wrote the last chapter of Jewish history in the Romanian space (Rotman 2003). The requests of 1949 have the exclusive potential of revealing the textual form in which the desire to immigrate was portrayed by Romanian Jews, one year after the creation of Israel. They mirror the interaction between the individual and the state, the personal meanings of migration as well as belonging and attachment forms to a place considered one's own.

The fonds is extremely valuable in terms of its shape and mix of requests it offers – the previously unpublished files are “untouched,” the requests being kept in the shape in which they arrived at the Center. As shown, they are not typical to specific communities, and therefore there is no value in organizing them by communities. It was highly interesting to delve into the “random” mix of what one file has to offer. The recommendations of the historians and the action of the archivist in preserving the file as such shows that the archival institution does justice to the past, by leaving it “untouched,” or by leaving the requests piled in their received order.

We look at the emigration requests as “vehicles of memory,” or as objects with multiple definitions, representations, understandings, mobilized by various actors: the authors of the requests themselves, the archivist, the historians commenting on the documents, or the researcher. Thus, we point at the multiple ownership of the requests, both material and symbolic, and open an inquiry on the right to ownership of individual memory as archived (and therefore institutionalized) memory. According to the

Archival Law in effect, the names and personal information of the request writers can only be published after one hundred years. To date, we are unable to reveal whether or when the applicants made it to Israel.

In a similar vein, together with museums and commemorations, archives are *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989) which replace memory, or living contexts of memory. The *lieux de mémoire* are more volatile and multiple memory forms because they are dependent on the input of different groups and individuals. Like archives collectively, the individual document, such as a migration request, is not just a repository of historical content, but also a reflection of the needs and desires of its creator when viewed in the context in which the document is made meaningful, together with all related interventions over time.

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