

## ELEMENTS OF A NEW JEWISH POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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### **Abstract**

The social and political experiences of the totalitarian systems, just like the spiritual crisis that some contemporary thinkers talk about, invite continuous reflections on the relation between religion and politics in the contemporary ideological constructions of democratic societies. Given the interest in the way in which individual experience can influence or give value to community experience, the present paper tries to investigate a pattern of such an individual experience in the context of the modern Jewish consciousness. It intends to analyse the relation between religion and ideology from the perspective of B. Fundoianu's existential philosophy. His existence and thinking can formulate the paradigm of Jewish existence under the cultural pressure of the religious and the political.

**Key words:** religion, Jewish culture, politics, democracy, ideology.

### **Religion and Totalitarianism**

Twentieth-century totalitarian regimes are related to a type of ideological consciousness that is said either to act or to be based on a religious impulse or to use an imaginary of propaganda fraught with mythical, magic or religious elements. This consciousness is better interpreted and understood by means of a grid that brings forth the elements of symbolic thinking structuring a type of ideological thinking<sup>1</sup>. In this regard, I would like to mention the reflections on Nazism belonging to Karl Gustav Jung or Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

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and Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>2</sup> and those of Alain Besançon (1993) or Robert C. Tucker (1961) about what is generically named communism.

Moreover, a series of unique products of totalitarian systems, like extermination camps (Cohn-Sherbok, ed. 2002) for instance, can be explained by their own intrinsic religious symbolism or even by the absence of a coherent symbolism of the kind. Death camps are associated not only with anti-Semitism or the myth of the master race but also with the indifference or the lack of reaction of the members of religious communities, and with the elimination of values from those moral, social and political practices on which European civilization was built.

For a long time, I have been determined to write a text about religion and ideology with a title stating that the absence of God means the absence of authentic democracy or that the death of God expressed in the values of some society leads to a dying democracy. However, for the moment, I find this encounter difficult although I am personally convinced that people without religion cannot live as humans. One of the reasons for finding that this would be a difficult task is that my recent research on the way in which religion intertwines with politics and on how ideological ideals mix with the religious messianism of the contemporary man indicates that the emphasized presence of divinity in political action results in actions that can hardly be associated with the democratic ideals that I treasure. The same happens with any excessive use of religious messages in public communication and any significant intrusion of theology in politics. In today's society (with its natural tendency towards excess) such trends often take the form of fundamentalist manifestations in various religious contexts and, unfortunately, even in the context of the Abrahamic religions. In the name of spirituality, love and tradition or for the sake of improving human condition,

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Gustav Jung, *Puterea sufletului. Antologie. A treia parte*, translated by Susana Holan, (București: Editura Anima, 1994), 80-133; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Mitul nazist*, translated by Nicoleta Dumitrache and Ciprian Mihali, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1999). For a perspective on religion and ideologies in Romanian context see Ariana Guga, "Beyond Magic and Myth with Mircea Eliade and Moshe Idel", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 13, issue 38 (2014): 229-244.

fundamentalist religious groups exhibit their totalitarian spirit, violent practices and terrorist acts. Nevertheless, such totalitarian reaction is not what I would like to refer to in the present thesis. I am rather interested in an individual experience that can be representative for the religious, cultural and ideological experience of a community. The focus here is on the Jewish existential experience.

What becomes a matter of primary interest for a researcher preoccupied with the relation between religion and politics in Jewish consciousness is a volume dedicated to a specialist in religion and ideology, Leon Volovici<sup>3</sup>(1991), along with the evaluation of the work of B. Fundoianu, a victim of those totalitarian ideological manifestations that destroyed a people. This people chose to have a type of religion for which morality, spirituality, religion and politics form an unbreakable synthesis. For all we know, the modern Jewish community, despite the processes of secularization and resacralization that it has experienced, maintains all these elements in its symbolic consciousness about the world, even if they are camouflaged in cultural concepts, ethical concepts, or in concepts about social development or interpersonal development.

B. Fundoianu is representative for the illustration of this pattern of Jewish cultural consciousness through his works as well as through the contemporary efforts to retrieve his contribution to the cultural creation and the shaping of the modern Jewish consciousness. In this context, the volume entitled *B. Fundoianu – Benjamin Fondane. O nouă lectură*, coordinated by Michael Finkenthal, Claire Gruson and Roxana Sorescu, published in 2013 by Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" in Iași, is an important cultural landmark. The volume is significant for the present theme of debate even if one finds that "the editors did not try to direct the researchers towards

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Volovici is, among others, the author of *Nationalist ideology and antisemitism: the case of Romanian intellectuals in the 1930's*, translated by Charles Kormos, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991) and of *De la Iași la Ierusalim și înapoi. Pornind de la un dialog cu Sandu Frunză* (București: Ideea Europeană, 2007).

specific topics”.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, this could be the reason why the book represents a valuable resource that remains open towards diverse preoccupations for research and interpretation.

### **Democracy, Judaism and Exile**

In order to understand the relation between religion and ideology, it is important to discuss about the text signed by Leon Volovici, one of the most committed researchers of Fundoianu’s works. The solution for the balancing of the relations between the two components mentioned so far comes through the mutual bond of the democratic aspirations and the resources offered by Judaism. Thus, in the interwar period, as one may notice, “in the period of the enthusiastic commitments of the totalitarian ideologies, Fundoianu unhesitatingly remains equidistant from the two elements, faithful to the concept of intellectual liberty and convinced that in this way he continues the Judaic resistance against totalitarianism and constraint. Numerous Jewish intellectuals in France will have to experience some profound Marxist or Maoist crises in the decades to follow in order to accede to a philosophy of resistance and revolt of Jewish origin similar to that formulated by their predecessor Fundoianu”. (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu, eds. 2013: 25-26)

The volume *Judaism și elenism (Judaism and Hellenism)* contains Fundoianu’s collection of articles on Jewish cultural and social-political themes and his ideological preference for Zionism is evident. This might be not only because in his ideological options he was influenced by an important representative of the Judaic culture of the time, A. L. Zissu, but also because he used to publish in Jewish cultural magazines. In the preface of the above mentioned book, Leon Volovici underlines that Fundoianu was preoccupied with Zionist and Jewish themes “mostly from a cultural perspective and in the plan of ideas” (Fundoianu, 1999: 10).<sup>5</sup> Representative for the crystallization of his political vision (in his Romanian period) is the fact that Israel (or Palestine) is “a mythical territory, that stimulates

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<sup>4</sup> in the present text I chose to use both the name Fundoianu and Fondane.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Volovici, “Prefață” in B. Fundoianu, *Judaism și elenism*, edited, notes and preface by Leon Volovici and Remus Zăstroiu, (București: Editura Hasefer, 1999), 10.

the imagination of the writer, suggesting biblical associations, rather than a concrete territory to be regained through Zionist activity.”(Fundoianu ed. 1999: 11) The construction offered is rather utopian and reveals a type of secular, cultural and sometimes political messianism. Under the sign of utopia, Fundoianu notices: “At present, history is in the blood of the new grains, it is in the houses of those who desperately want to live. History is in this whole Jewish country. Even the palm trees seem to be Jewish. And so are the camels which carry oranges in the world.”(Fundoianu ed. 1999: 48) That is why this idealism is reflected in the way in which he approaches the political themes of Judaism of his times. As it is the case with his poetic forms and symbolic constructions, what is specific to Fundoianu’s thinking is not his commitment to fulfilling the religious and political objectives of the Jews but his return to the Bible, i.e. to Tradition. Aiming at some existential finality, Fundoianu comes to affirm that “Zionism is only a political finality. Judaism is a vital one”(Fundoianu ed. 1999: 150). As Michael Finkenthal underlines: “in his Romanian years and in the French period, in a medium in which the political and politics dominated all the spirits, as it happened in Paris, Benjamin Fondane keeps his distance from political engagements and from ideological influences” (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu, eds. 2013: 92).

This is one way of understanding Fundoianu’s identity metamorphoses of which his biography researchers reveal that they occur when penetrating the French cultural context. They are not limited to Fundoianu’s metamorphosis into Fondane, due to his emigration in France. As Camelia Craciun reveals in “Between Fundoaia and Paris. Reconfigurations of the Identity Discourse”, the maturity years are marked by the exile. This leads to a major shift in identity and a profound change in his way of thinking. Thus, “Benjamin Fondane consolidates his representations of identity through a universal metaphor of Judaism as an embodiment of the human condition, a view which dominates his French poetical and philosophical activity” (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 48).

A fruitful idea proposed by Camelia Craciun is the possibility that the issue of "unhappy consciousness" is not just the result of some philosophical influences. We can think that it would just be a reflection of an existential conditions familiar to the exiled or to the Jew who has to exist in a place where he witnesses a radicalization of international politics. We may as well witness a projection into metaphysics of estrangement, alienation, unsettlement and persecution generated by the individual who lives in exile, in a world which he finds truly hostile.(Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 60)

In a remarkable book edited by Steven T. Katz I have read a text written by Yehoyada Amir, a professor of Jewish philosophy, but also a researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, titled "The Concept of Exile as a Model for Dealing with the Holocaust"(Katz ed. 2005: 226-247). Yehoyada Amir introduces us to different ways of understanding exile in the Jewish thinking. His reflections are a hermeneutical initiation which offers us existential solutions. He takes into account strategies for survival in exile, and the mental acceptance of exile. At the same time, Yehoyada Amir is a guide for those who seek to understand the Holocaust as a profound state of crises. This state of crises may be one that leads, in a post-holocaust situation, to the accentuation of the crises by potentiating pessimism, disbelief and damnation. Or it can be managed as a legacy which should increase the will and belief in the possibility of creating a world in which "the decision to believe in the possibility of goodness, in the ability to redeem, and in the spiritual and religious significance of human history"(Katz ed. 2005: 243) will stand first.

Such a poetical – philosophical point of view can always stand beside Fundoianu's perspective and can function as a guide to a universal ethic. Nevertheless, Yehoyada Amir's intention is not to point out a series of moral teachings generated by the Holocaust. Such an attempt is highly prevalent. He believes that we should rather explore the possibility of creating a set of questions, always open, which can help us understand the meaning of the Jewish life and the meaning of our culture. At the same time, the events that took place

and the things that happened in the death camps can represent a good opportunity to rethink some existential and political concepts. Among these concepts there is the significance of exile. Besides the significance of individuals' existence outside their cultural space, and their dissipation on all known cultural spaces, Yehoyada Amir reveals a spiritual meaning of the exile. This dimension is the one that interests us when discussing the reflections concerning the Jewish consciousness from a religious and political perspective. In this aspect, "Exile is always bound with a sense of helplessness in the face of external forces over which one is powerless to direct. ... Exile means living in a world in need for redemption, healing, and completion". (Katz ed. 2005: 233)

### **Biblical Consciousness, Poetry and Ideology**

Given Adorno's rhetorical question concerning the ability to write poetry after Auschwitz, I believe that a good answer is one which doesn't mobilizes words but is obtained through action and signs. A potential sign would be a return to poetry through Fundoianu's poetries from his volume entitled *Priveleşti*. (Fundoianu: 1930) There are two essential ways to create an antidote to totalitarian ideologies: a reconfiguration of the world through poetry or its resignification through religion.

The volume entitled *Priveleşti* can function as a starting point in this direction. A secondary discussion about poetry is the one which appears in *Paradă – ultimul poem românesc al lui B. Fundoianu* (*Paradă – the last Romanian poem written by B. Fundoianu*) written by Mircea Martin. Considering that *Paradă* is a programmatic poem for the volume entitled *Priveleşti*, the critic reveals that "the poem must be all-encompassing, it should not leave out any aspects of life, any temporal dimension, any geography, any real or virtual stance, from the oneiric ones, to the social ones, from the intimate ones, to the exotic ones. The poet wants to institute an imperialism of the imagination and poetry, instead of a historical imperialism" (

Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 227-250).<sup>6</sup> As Mircea Martin explains in the cultural press, the word *Priveliști* “denotes the landscape as well as the gaze that contemplates it, the object and the subject of the gaze. It implies a certain distance – shall we call it contemplative? – from which the object can be contained: it is about a large object and a panoramic view...Nothing – or almost nothing – of the above in B. Fundoianu’s *Priveliștile*. Many of the poems included by the author in his 1930 volume seem conceived as to contradict the expectations implied by its title, and in the same time, to disrupt the act and the idea of contemplation” (Martin: 2011). Although he doesn’t ignore or despise nature’s fascination, Fundoianu seems to feel more attached to its alienations. In a way that can be associated to an existential philosophy, his poetry is one of crises, of a rural decay, of the idyllic over which nostalgia flows no more, etc. Such poetry is like a constant interpellation and as a kind of existential reading grid. Once you entered in its realm, there is always the possibility to sense its return, even if only as a state, as a unified consciousness, or as a meditative state which acts as an off - cut in the wholeness of existence.

I often times receive volumes of poetry. I put them aside for times appropriate for poetic concerns. Discussing *Priveliști* I recall that one of the books I keep on my bookshelves is *Slove Rurale* signed by Vasile Dâncu (2009). On one summer day, I placed in my shirt’s pocket Vasile Dâncu’s little black book, and I went for a walk in the botanical garden in Cluj. I wanted to read it in what I considered to be the closest setting to the one in which its author had written it, in the mountains, between hay fields and trees, connecting with the animals and telling stories to the people. I chose to walk on a path leading to an opening in the upper part of the garden, and I sat on a bench between trees that were laced with singing birds.

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<sup>6</sup> A very important and upscale contribution is Ion Pop’s text “Poezia lui B. Fundoianu în lecturi românești”, in Michael Finkenthal, Claire Gruson, Roxana Sorescu, (eds.), B. Fundoianu – Benjamin Fondane. O nouă lectură, (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2013), 227-250.



While reading Vasile Dâncu's lyrics, this man-made natural paradise revealed to me the full image of an artificiality sought by the postmodern man. In a noisy city, overheated and devoured by more and more concrete, I cannot perceive this oasis that ostentatiously cultivates the natural, the harmony and the coolness but as a manifestation of the artificial in a symbolic manner as it can be interpreted in Baudrillard's works.(Baudrillard: 2008) Under the pressure of escaping every-day existence, the postmodern man preserves this kind of uncanny spaces and fuels them with supernatural elements. This over-addition of artificiality is perceived by the postmodern man living in an urban culture as a privileged experience which we can associate to a secular experience of the sacred. The presence of this kind of supernatural is the one that deconstructs the traditional view and experience of the world.

Such a deconstruction is also present in Vasile Dâncu's lyrics. Presented in most cases as songs, his poems seem to be some kind of incantations from a ritual whose purpose is to deconstruct postmodernity and a world of consumerism. In the same time it represents a recomposition of human condition, threatened by inauthenticity. It takes the form of a demythologizing process of the postmodern world in multiple forms: the demythologization of transfigured suffering embodied by the image of the song from page 13 in which "The stone of a tiring Sisyphus/ is propped today/ on a hill top"; the demythologization of the meaning of life and of the fullness of life as it happens in "Penultimate Song": "The mirror's betrayal,/ the flawed gun,/ the bicycle on the nose,/ the cane on the right,/ these are the sinister trophies/ won in the battle of life"; but also the demythologization of death in "A Song of Departure" in which one finds out that: "you are the shadow of a road/ not yet traveled by".

In the poem "The Old Man" we find out that "Time has left a mark/ even on his library's classics" and we remember the subtle presence of the poet, who in the song from page 10 confesses: "I have been there/ like the shadow over the water", a subtle, but crucial presence, resembling the subtleness of a metamorphosed presence of

sacredness in the postmodern everyday life. Despite several other successive demythologizations, Vasile Dâncu remains exhaustive in numerous metaphysical struggles in which the manifestation of the sacred is as significant as its concealment, the search is as important as its completion; forgiveness is as significant as the memories brought to life only by poetical nostalgias.

Vasile Dâncu's poetry offers a particular ease. It combines the old man's wisdom the child's happiness which breaks into peaces the human nature, or the realm of love, or life's spark which proves to be empty on the outside, as well as on the inside. Vasile Dâncu spreads his poetry throughout this volume as a transparent vale which enshrouds the world's bareness.

In this case, as in the case of Fundoianu's writings, we are dealing with a demythologizing policy which Vasile Dâncu depicts as a proper ground for an initiation to a higher rank. This initiation though, cannot escape ethical monotheism built on a biblical background, even though it is already been interpreted through the generous grid of postmodernity.(Hosu: 2013). As Mircea Martin showed, Fundoianu's nostalgia is heading towards "primordial moments, mythical moments, biblical...the biblical pattern is present even in the poet's imaginant matrix, where ideas and analogies are being distributed regardless of themes, and sometimes, regardless even of intentions".(Martin: 2011)

When Martin Heidegger comments on Holderlin's lyrics - "Full of merits, but still poetic, lives Man on this earth" - takes into consideration that the meaning of a poetical habitation is "to find yourself in the presence of Gods and to experience wonder before the closeness of things"(Heidegger, 1995: 231). Despite the fact that in his philological reflections, Fundoianu expresses his disapproval of Heideggerian philosophy, he assumes the philosopher's intuition regarding poetry and the fact that it is not only an expression of culture, but an important part in the process of understanding and boosting of history, representing the becoming of life. Such a perspective has some consequences regarding the human becoming

and existence. Not less important is poetry from a quotidian, religious, cultural, or political perspective.

Seeing that poetry continued to exist after Auschwitz, I would like to mention an initiatic poetic approach (as Fundoianu's entire existence was) which invites us to take part in a spiritual exercise "...cu Pavel pe drumul Damascului". This is the 7<sup>th</sup> volume of poetry published by Rodica Dragomir (2013). This volume brings to light some of the moments that represent the search for symbolic, metaphysical, and sometimes religious meanings of the human passing through life.

Reading Rodica Dragomir's published book I remember how Tudor Căţineanu was concerned with the analysis of Romanian philosophers from the perspective of two types of reflection, represented by two metaphors: the road metaphor and the house metaphor. (Căţineanu: 1999) The poetical-metaphysical construction proposed by Rodica Dragomir is an excellent configuration of the road metaphor. She prefers the uncertainty of pursuit, the ambiguity of the eruption of meanings, the insatiable communication of love, instead of choosing the alternative of rest and habitation. When she informs us that the road stops at the outskirts of the city, the poet marks the way in which the "buried light", as a kind of treasure hidden near the city's walls, demands to be rediscovered by initiating a new search. Thus, the resting time, the halting, is always being delayed because only the relentless flow of the search can (as in a ritual of initiatic communication) generate the reality of life's meanings.

Rodica Dragomir's poetry resembles the gates from Maramureş. She perceives the road as an initiatic moment, as a way to ritualize the passing, mostly with a playful glance set on a horizon which approaches as it moves away – as happiness does, as love, and as for some, death. The symbolic structure of this poem does not seek to materialize poetics. It rather occurs in the chiaroscuro of a sacred experience, in the ambiguity that life brings in moments of full significance which we recognize throughout our road as moments of passing. In an archaic note, it wouldn't be wrong to call them

moments of accompanying. Sometimes, there is so much silence in Rodica Dragomir's poetry that you can hear the rustle of leaves under the poet's footsteps as she is walking on Valea Rosie in Baia Mare.

With "...cu Pavel pe drumul Damascului", Rodica Dragomir does not join the category of authors that produce a religious poetry bearing an already known theological load. She remains a perpetual apprentice in search of a sacredness which, although present, postpones the revealing of its theological forms. Rodica Dragomir offers us a poetry of recovery on the road of poetical experience, an assumption of the authenticity of transcendence which each and every one bares inside, as a longing for transcendence.

This discussion on transcendence seems meaningful because, as Leon Volovici wrote in regard to ethical, esthetical, ideological and political concerns of the Jewish thinker, "as the Jewish community from my native Moldavia had become a lode of his lyrical *Landscapes*, in his essays published in the 30's, Fundoianu/Fondane transcends Judaism, but using it to offer access to the exploration of the meaning of creation, and presenting it as a possible answer the philosophical existential questions". (Fundoianu: 1999) As I have mentioned before, most part of B. Fundoianu's poetic creation cannot be understood without the biblical background which it implies. This aspect is valid even when the biblical element is absent, because in those cases there is an expression of the Jewish spiritual consciousness which guides Fundoianu, without any concern for the subject in matter. And it is not at all wrong to say that the same guiding spirit is present in his essays, even in his philosophical texts which discuss other topics than Judaism.

As Cosana Eram shows in the volume dedicated to Fundoianu which we use as background of our discussion, "He starts from within a mystically inspired language and makes references to stories in the Old and New Testament in order to make a point about aesthetics. Nonetheless, he does not write a conversion narrative nor does he ever declare any particular religious belief. Benjamin Fondane assumes neither a cabbalist, rabbinic, Talmudic nor a prophetic

stand. As many modern authors, he projects his own vision of the world by using elements in the Bible up to the point of desacralization. Religious characters and events become symbols that he appropriates for his own purpose" (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 154). Such a perspective can lead us closer to an understanding of Fundoianu's view on politics. Revealing are Cosana Eram's affirmations according to which although Fundoianu violently criticizes Andre Breton's political mentality in a surrealist context although he can be compared to Walter Benjamin "whose special blend of surrealist elements and Jewish mysticism has attracted the attention of critics", he declares to have different preferences. Among the distinctive elements there is the fact that "Fondane's interrogations do not follow the path of reconciliation between Judaic theology and Marxist materialism" (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 140). These differences can be better understood when reading Petre Răileanu, who is extremely interesting due to his proposals of ideological, ethical, and esthetical nature, and who seems remarkable in this context if we perceive him from the point of view of Fundoianu's affirmation: "The word "culture" is anti-Marxist".( Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 169)

### **Instead of Conclusions: Politics of Authenticity and Existential Reflection**

B. Fundoianu is a victim of the totalitarian ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's been 70 years since he was killed by the Nazis in October the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1944, together with innocent Jews from concentration camps like Auschwitz, and from other death camps. From the point of view of a writing which connects a personal destiny to the destiny of an entire community, the extermination of a cultural consciousness is paradigmatic for what was seen to be a final solution for his people. It speaks of the death of man, as well as of the death of God, and doesn't leave anything aside when it comes to explaining politics in totalitarian systems.

In an exceptional analysis of the relation between Şestov and Fondane's thinking, Michael Finkenthal ascertains that Fondane

believed that in a world where the idea of the death of God was considered Nietzsche's legacy, the Jewish thinking is confronted with the idea of God's absence. The purpose of the Jew in the modern world is to bear witness on this absence and to offer ways to manage it. Fondane's exegete advises us to notice in these kind of statements the fact that the poet-philosopher finds himself "in search of a sublimate type of belief, capable of guiding him in a world dominated by the confrontation with actual manifestation of evil and by the painful absence of God" (Finkenthal, 2014: 251).

I will not imply here the circumstance in which God can be perceived as a state of exile, even if it would be relevant for the understanding of Fundoianu's unhappy consciousness, as well as for understanding the relation between religion and politics in the Jewish consciousness in post-holocaust. I have sketched the condition of exile which regards man and God alike in relation to Holocaust in my texts about Elie Wiesel and in other analysis.(Frunză: 2010 ) But I believe it is important to mention here Martin Buber's name due to the major influence he had on Fundoianu's thinking. It is true that his theory regarding "eclipse of God" was expressed in his post-holocaust reflections. (Buber.1952) But it has a certain foreshadowing in the reflexive coherence of the Buberian writings. Martin Buber has a special influence on the entire Jewish Diaspora. As Hannah Arendt wrote in an article published in 1935, Buber "was able to win over the youth because he didn't bury himself or Judaism under a great past, but knew how to rediscover the living roots of this past to build an even greater future".(Arendt, 2007: 33)

Both in Michael Finkenthal's "Benjamin Fondane: le poet devant l'histoire", and in Bruce Baugh's "Fondane, Heidegger and the Destruction of Western Metaphysics" (Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 311-344), we can observe how the concept of *unhappy consciousness* is constructed, revealing Fondane's existential perspective. Distrustful of the exclusive power of reason, the poet and philosopher somehow reminds us of the fact that "rational answers are helpless in front of facts and events that seem to be irrational. Thus, we must know what to do in such cases. Benjamin

Fondane offers a *sui generis* answer for escaping the labyrinth, and this answer is found in all his writings, critical or philosophical; but his solutions are formulated in an existential manner, rather than in a political one." (Finkenthal, 2013: 96) Thus, Fondane finds a way to approach Heidegger's philosophy, but in the same time to distance him from Heidegger's philosophy. In this respect, Walter Biemel's statement about Heidegger is relevant: Thus, a dignity beyond any Humanism is truly offered to the individual, in so far as he places man in the centre. Here is man's humanity is thought by approaching existence, his thought is being thought as an intellection of a state of opening that occurs historically, as the truth of existence" (Biemel, 1996:143). In this opening is placed Fundoianu in order to experience Lev Şestov's philosophy, thus building his own existential philosophy.

I would like to note here that the volume coordinated by Michael Finkenthal, Claire Gruson and Roxana Sorescu, trying to sketch a poetic, religious and political consciousness, represents a collection of different articles written by researchers passionate about Fundoianu's works, who are from different generations, different cultural backgrounds, and different approaches. All of these elements represent a coherent puzzle that reveals the image of a Judaic consciousness in search of a deep meaning of authenticity. Certain pieces are left for readers to be inserted and created. It is characteristic to Fundoianu's writings to offer the chance, in a universe characterized by incompleteness, to intervene from within humanity towards poetry and from within poetry towards the individuals who represent the long line of world's passersby.

In the spirit of Fondane, the reality of intellectual construction should be constructed with complex elements which regard man from the perspective of consolation, empathy, the escape from everyday banality, with the precise purpose to give new meanings to everyday life.

Constructs such as those of travel and exile can be filled with accessible contents that can seem authentic to each and every one of

us. As we saw, "the image of travel, migration and exile are intermingled with the Biblical Exodus. In his writings, Benjamin Fondane's the exiled consciousness coexists with the revelation of the sufferings of the Jewish people".(Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013: 61)

These statements belonging to Camelia Crăciun remind me of some of Klaus Rohmann's analysis on human existence as an existence of exile in Richard L. Rubenstein's works. The issue in that analysis was whether the state of exile disappeared with the new political reality of the creation of the State of Israel. Klaus Rohmann finds that although at the beginning Rubenstein was inclined to believe that exile, in its religious and political sense has ended, after numerous visits and analysis on current events taking place in Israel, he discovers that the series of violence and wars suffered by the Jews proves that "the existence of exile ends harder than the geographical or political exile"(Rubenstein, Berenbaum eds. 1995: 17). In this respect, we are offered a more profound explanation of exile, as an expression of "absence of home", the absence of an inner and outer comfort offered by a home, and by the feeling of being at home. In such explanations Klaus Rohmann discovers a new meaning of exile, exile as a fundamental existential category. The particular status of Jews becomes an expression of universal human condition: "To be human is to be exiled" (Rubenstein, Berenbaum eds. 1995: 18). This statement challenges us to understand Jewish religion and politics in a new way.

This emphasis on exile defines Fondane's vision. Always at the borderline between poetry and metaphysics, and constantly "balancing between metaphysical despair and the aspiration towards universal fraternity, the poet becomes a pitiful and suffering prophet, searching for the meaning of existence and the meaning of his own destiny in the Jewish tradition".(Finkenthal, Gruson, Sorescu eds. 2013:29) This is his way of giving himself to humanity.

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