



**Hildrun Glass.** *Zerbrochene Nachbarschaft: Das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis in Rumänien (1918-1938).* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1996. 638 pp.p (cloth). DM 148.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-56230-9.

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## Pattern or Singularity? German-Jewish Relations in Interwar Romania

The changes of 1989 affected historical research on east central and eastern Europe in two respects. First, archives which had been partly closed for westerners were reopened. Second, ethnicity and nationalism were on the agenda again as research issues, but even more so as political issues. Hildrun Glass's prize-winning Ph.D. thesis *Zerbrochene Nachbarschaft: Das deutsch-juedische Verhaeltnis in Rumaenien (1918-1938)*, defended at the University of Munich in 1995 and awarded a prize by the Suedosteuropa-Gesellschaft in Munich, mirrors these two changes. First, the author incorporated into her body of research and evidence not only primary resources located in western, namely German, archives and libraries, but also dug up information in newly accessible Romanian archives in Bucharest, Iasi, Sibiu, and Timisoara. Second, Glass focuses on a current topic of primary significance: interethnic relations among minorities in Romania. Thus, she contributes to the growing body of research and literature on interwar east central European history. These works are used increasingly as a point of reference for social scientists and politicians, either to understand contemporary ethnic conflicts or to make allusions in recreating the national self in times of social and political transition.

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I reorganized and reshaped political and ethnic conditions. Among the nine newly established, enlarged, or territorially decreased states succeeding the multiethnic empires (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and

Yugoslavia), at least five turned into multiethnic political entities themselves. The populations comprised up to one third minority populations, thus inheriting old problems from the past. Minority issues and interethnic relations were very much on the agenda of these states in the interwar period. Prominent among them was Greater Romania, which doubled its population and size after 1918 by gaining territories from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Soviet Russia. The formerly rather homogeneous Romania thus turned into a multiethnic state. Minorities made up around 30 percent of the country's population.

Glass focuses on interwar Romania's second and third largest ethnic minorities—provided one trusts the official censuses which show ethnic Hungarians as the largest minority in 1930, but considerably underestimate Romania's gypsy population. Most of the 750,000 ethnic Germans in Romania and about half of the 800,000 Romanian Jews (based on the 1930 census) became Romanian residents and citizens only after 1918. Thus, Glass's primary focus lies on the newly acquired regions, i.e. formerly Hungarian Transylvania, Banat, and Crisana-Maramures, formerly Austrian Bukovina, and formerly Russian Bessarabia. Consequently, she structures her work on a regional-geographical framework, discussing German-Jewish relations individually in these regions. She goes beyond it, however, and concludes by synthesizing the individual findings and pointing out the relations among the different regional minority populations.

Her analysis transcends the still predominant re-

gional analyses which tend to see the various subgroups of Jewish and ethnic German minorities as rather independent entities; this is particularly true for the historiography on ethnic Germans. Thus, she points out a crucial point in Jewish and ethnic German history in Romania, the formation of a coherent “national” (or Zionist) group or a kind of secondary nation-building among Jews and Germans, if one wants to use this category of analysis. This is an interesting issue that stretches beyond the author’s primary period of interest. It extends into post-war minority history and may contribute to an understanding of the dissolution of the remaining ethnic German and Jewish life in Romania via emigration since the 1950s, more so again for ethnic Germans than for Jews. In this respect, Glass’s work is more than just a history of interwar interethnic relations. It helps explain important shifts within the mental landscape of these two minorities, one that became more and more tied to an external point of reference or “mother country,” or in the Jewish case the emerging idea of it. Structuring the topic among the newly acquired regions, however, leaves out or underrepresents the situation in the old Romanian territories which did not have a considerable German minority, but an important Jewish one.

Starting with a demographic description of interwar Romania’s regions, the author addresses the interrelated fields of ethnic German and Romanian Jewish parties, pressure groups, and eminent individuals, mainly politicians and journalists, analyzing the discourses they generated about interethnic relations. As her results show, both minorities lacked a coherent structure after the First World War and were often more separate than unified. The split among the Romanian Jews went along political and ethnic lines which accompanied or paralleled the spatial lines of division. The economically more backward Jewish population in the Old Kingdom and in Besarabia spoke mainly Yiddish as its colloquial language, whereas the Jews of the formerly Hungarian areas were, linguistically and culturally, strongly Magyarized and the Jewish population in the Bukovina Germanized. The political split among Jews was into pro- and anti-Zionist factions.

Splits among ethnic Germans were first of all religious, i.e. Transylvanian Saxons and Germans in Besarabia were Protestants, Danube-Swabians Catholics, and ethnic Germans in the Bukovina divided confessionally. Ethnic Germans were partly split linguistically because the Danube Swabian elite had strongly assimilated to Hungarian language and culture before 1918. With the advent of a National Socialist movement among Roma-

nia’s ethnic Germans from the 1920s onward, the split became a political one. This crucial development needs to be interpreted dialectically. It fragmented the ethnic German political elites and society into conflicting political camps. Conflicts arose, however, primarily between rivaling National Socialist movements, not between National Socialism and oppositional forces. Thus, in the long run, the successful establishment of a National Socialist movement also unified the ethnic German population to a certain extent.

Glass’s central research question concerns the emergence of National Socialism among ethnic Germans and its impact on German-Jewish relations. She wants to clarify whether the abyss between Romanian Jews and ethnic Germans, which opened up in 1933, may be explained only by the political and social situation of the late 1920s and early 1930s or if it had deeper roots, and then to describe the interdependency of long-term structural forces and political events (p. 15: “ob der seit 1933 klaffende Abgrund im deutsch-juedischen Verhaeltnis in Rumaenien rein situativ zu erklaeern ist oder tiefere Wurzeln hat bzw. in welcher Wechselwirkung beides zueinander steht.”). Thus, the author touches on one of the central and hotly debated issues in German historiography: the long-term preconditions of German antisemitism and National Socialism which eventually caused the Holocaust. This question, as the author writes, has not yet been answered for Romania’s ethnic Germans. If it can be answered correctly, this will not only add an interesting footnote to the debate, but put it into a useful comparative perspective. If there was a culturally based, unique feature of German antisemitism, then it must have been ingrained in German culture at large, regardless of state boundaries. If there was an “eliminationist antisemitism” (Goldhagen) among Germans, it must have also encompassed ethnic Germans abroad.

How then does Glass define her area of research? Although she includes primary sources located in Romanian archives, the vast majority of her evidence is based on holdings in German archives (*Politisches Archiv des Auswaertigen Amtes* and *Bundesarchiv*) or printed newspapers. This choice of sources creates certain problems if one intends to analyze a socially based anti-Semitic movement, because it is centered on elites and their representatives. In this particular case, the question is partly mirrored and reflected in the eyes of German diplomats reporting to the foreign ministry in Berlin about elites in Romania. If one assumes interethnic relations were dominated by an elite discourse and that antisemitism then trickled down from top to bottom, the choice of sources

is convincing. However, this hypothesis is debatable.

Nevertheless, the evidence Glass provides demonstrates convincingly how anti-Semitic discourses among ethnic Germans in Romania were established within the elite and how they related to preconceived notions and stereotypes about Jews. Moreover, she proves these stereotypes were shaped by interaction with Jewish elite discourses, and the interrelation with Weimar and Nazi Germany radicalized the ethnic German anti-Semitic movement. Glass concludes that antisemitism among ethnic Germans in Romania was more than an importation of evil influences from the German Reich. Ethnic German antisemitism in Romania had latent, indigenous roots going back to times before 1933.

The radicalization of ethnic German antisemitism in Romania, however, can only be fully understood when one takes into consideration the impact exercised by the German Reich from 1933 on. This is in part also true for the political mobilization of ethnic Germans in Romania in the 1920s and 1930s. It was heavily dependent on Germany, although, it cannot be explained completely by these external forces. As sources of the German Foreign Ministry show, German National Socialism in Romania had a tendency to be more radical than German authorities themselves were ready to tolerate. Germany intervened several times after 1935 to pacify internal ethnic German struggles and radical demands in Romania so as not to endanger German foreign policy goals.

Glass's analysis is very close to the sources, a strength but simultaneously the weakness of her work. She takes an empirical and historicist stance toward her field of research, thus explicitly rejecting and not engaging concepts and theories of the neighboring, more systematic, social sciences like sociology, political science, or cultural anthropology. Instead, she tends to take seriously the sources and their inherent ideological concepts as they are, and to describe the actors' self-definition. This leaves the reader with the impression that the Romanian case is unique and singular, and cannot or should not be compared with similar developments in other countries like interwar Czechoslovakia:

Generally an empirical analysis only gains little, or it even harms the analysis, if the sources and their inherent meaning are measured against clearly defined theoretical concepts. (In der Regel gewinnt naemlich eine empirische Untersuchung kaum, oder es ist ihr sogar abtraeglich, das in den Quellen zutage tretende Selbstverstaendnis an bestimmten klar definierten theoretischen Konzepten zu messen.) (p. 18)

After three decades of social history in Germany and the struggles and controversies to establish it, after the publication of landmark theoretical studies in social history, this general statement seems rather bold. In this extreme form it has probably only survived within the niche of eastern European history at German universities, an academic environment which is only loosely attached to the rest of historical research, scholarship, and its discourses. By now it is probably a commonplace to argue that history without theory can all too easily end up being just *Bestandsaufnahme*.

A theoretical dimension would not have done any harm to the book or misused the sources. The work would probably have benefited from taking into consideration the debate between constructivists and essentialists about nations and nation-building. Glass does not include any of the works by Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, or Anthony Smith in her bibliography. Such an analysis would have led to a more theoretical sociological and cultural anthropological view of interethnic relations, emphasizing the making of ethnic and national cultures.

Chapter six, "National Identity and the Construction of Borders in the Situation of a Minority," might serve as an example. Glass writes that Transylvanian Saxons, the dominant subgroup within the ethnic German minority, joined the new Romanian state with a solid identity and distinctive national self-confidence. Thus, making an issue of national belonging and identity was of secondary importance. One could argue just the opposite, even taking the same evidence and sources Glass provides.

The contrary argument would run: Transylvanian Saxon and ethnic German identity after 1918 was an identity in transition and maybe in crisis. The old solid regional identities were challenged and shattered, and all the conflicts and ruptures within the community evolving in the 1920s and 1930s are just a symptom of this transformation. The conflict between the two ethnic German leaders Rudolf Brandsch and Hans Otto Roth, one favouring closer cooperation among ethnic Germans and between minorities in general and the other more skeptical about it, is just one example that fits into such an alternative explanation. Glass sometimes tends to essentialize the question of identities and too often takes them as fixed categories. A more constructive approach would examine if and how Romanian Jews served as the Other to create the ethnic German Self within the processes of secondary nation building or reethnicization, and vice versa. Such an investigation would perhaps have con-

cluded that relations to the German “mother country” played a significant role in the transformation of ethnic German identity.

Another theoretical approach would have begun with literature about social communication, nation-building, and modernization. Even if current historical research is not inclined to make reference to modernization theory, it would have been legitimate and helpful to ask why ethnic mobilization became important so late in Romanian history. Focusing on the relative backwardness of the region still has explanatory power for belated nation-building processes. One could at least suppose that nationalism was a force to modernize the premodern or more traditional social and political structures of Romania’s Jewish and ethnic German communities. A historicist approach, however, lacks the methodology instruments to engage in this kind of discussion, nor does it claim to have the intention to do so. The historical imagination is thus severely restricted by the set of sources: *Quod non est in fontes non est in mundo*.

The beginning of the book even contradicts Glass’s anti-theoretical approach. She starts with a well-researched demographic and socio-economic analysis of Romania’s minority populations. The only critical remark to be made about this section is that the data could have been broken down to regional and even local levels. The 1930 census volumes on occupational status provide excellent data for this kind of analysis. This data is published and even available in German libraries (e.g. in the *Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin) so that Glass’s statement on pages 26-27 (footnote 9) suggesting that the results were not published is somewhat misleading.

If the book had continued to analyze the field as convincingly as in this chapter, it would have been highly recommendable from both perspectives, social scientific and historical. However, in line with the author’s approach, the following 529 pages differ from the beginning. They provide a rich and detailed historicist account of the events and debates that grew out of German-Jewish relations in Romania between 1918 and 1938. Thus, praise of the book will be limited to its historicist merits. Working closely with the sources, the author dissolves interwar ethnic German and Jewish history in Romania into a sequence of well narrated stories, sometimes even anecdotes, which make the work an easy and pleasurable read.

But there is more to this book than a sequence of stories. Glass succeeds in providing a coherent and clear picture of Jewish and ethnic German political and social

life and its fragmentations in interwar Romania. One of the numerous merits of the book is its focus on ethnic life and institutions in their full range. The minorities’ social democratic and labor movements were missing in the existing literature, except for ideological and teleological communist writings from before 1989. The reader is thus provided with a detailed and balanced picture, reconstructing the plurality of ethnic life and the gradual changes which took place within the twenty years between 1918 and 1938. Among the best parts of the book is Chapter Seven (“Politics of Minority Organizations Between 1922 and 1932”), which gives a clear explanation of interwar Romania’s electoral laws and practices. Glass convincingly demonstrates the functional nexus between Romania’s electoral laws disadvantaging minorities and their lack of political influence.

Glass’s book is rich and thought provoking. It can barely be adequately appreciated in a short review. Here are two more examples worth mentioning. First, the interdependence of Romanian and ethnic German fascist movements and their general anti-Semitic congruence is a well taken point deserving further investigation. Second, transcending the nation-state and including the international level of interwar minority movements and the Geneva minority congresses (Chapter Fourteen) is a very instructive broadening of the topic, which helps to contextualize the minority issues and put it into the necessary framework of understanding. A very helpful addendum to the book are the thirteen pages of short biographies of ethnic German and Romanian Jewish protagonists, although the list has an ethnic German bias. Only twenty-four of the 107 persons listed belonged to the Romanian Jewish community. This is a general observation that can be made about the book: Glass gives more attention to German-Jewish than Jewish-German relations. However, there is good reason for this, since ethnic Germans were the ones destroying the neighborhood, whereas the Jewish community mainly reacted.

Despite my criticism of the book for its lack of a theoretical approach, it should become and remain a standard work for those who deal with interethnic relations in interwar Romania. One can only hope that a comparable work covering the time between 1938 and 1944-45 will appear soon.

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