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Content

Smelling the Ghetto. Smells in the Warsaw Ghetto According to Ruben Ben Shem's (Feldschu) Diary Victoria NIZAN	5
Disintegration by integration: the Roman pattern Mihai ALEXANDRESCU	26
Moldova and the European Union (2009-2017). A Short Overview Gheorghe CAZACU	36
Book Review Sebastian Balfour, Alejandro Quiroga, <i>The invention of Spain. Nation and Identity since Democracy</i> , Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2007, 239 pp Marina TRUFAN	44

SMELLING THE GHETTO. Smells in the Warsaw Ghetto According to Ruben Ben Shem's (Feldschu) Diary

Victoria NIZAN*

Abstract: This article deals with allusions to smells and odours in Ruben Ben Shem's diary, an extensive journal that was written in the Warsaw ghetto from November 1940 until April 1943. The paper attempts to define the nature of the gap between allusions to smells related to by the diary writer in contrast to our understanding of the information acquired through reading the diary. The difficulty of the attempt relates to elusiveness of odours which causes them to be difficult to imagine, especially if one wasn't exposed to them beforehand.(Katz 1997: 4)

Key Words: Smelling, Warsaw Ghetto, Ruben Ben Shem

Introduction

SMELLS ARE A PROMINENT ELEMENT of the human experience as they are an undetached part of the air we breathe, entering our bodies. While being a part of our survival instincts, they involve the creation of meaning: they alert just as they seduce. (Waskul and Vannini 2008: 54) Indeed, the action of smelling cannot be avoided; smells invade the space and remain there as long as the source of smell is not removed. However, the capacity of the language to represent odours is somewhat limited. The vocabulary for the description of smells is constrained and, consequently, smells are very often related to by using semantic fields that are not directly related to this sense, be it comparisons rather than definitions of the nature of the smell, vocabulary of taste, associations etc. (Rindisbacher 2015: 84)

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During the Holocaust, the experience of smells was very prominent and played a role that, for the ghetto inmates, was no less menacing than the constant violence inflicted. The reason has to do with the impact of smells on the human experience. In other words, the traumatic quality of life in the ghetto destroyed in their residents almost completely previous olfactory experiences, replacing them with new traumatic meanings. The new bonds in one's memory, between the event and its smell, were on the one hand carved in their memories, and on the other hand, made neither the smell nor its effect fully communicable to others. The olfactory quality of an event remained to a large extent an intimate experience. (Gigliotti 2009: 157)

The intensity of smells in a human being's life was researched in an experiment conducted by Herz and Schooler. The research dealt with smells as factors that resuscitate memories. One of the conclusions was that "*odors evoke more emotional and biographical memories than visual or verbal cues.*" (Herz and Schooler 2002: 30) According to the researchers "*olfaction colours the manner* (stress in the original text) *in which we recall the past.*" (*Ibid.*) That explains the significance of smells in the ghetto and also sheds light on the difficulty to separate the event from its smell.

The researcher Langer investigated the inability to forget smells associated with a traumatic experience and examined how deeply smells penetrate our human experience. (Langer 1991: 3) He showed the long-lasting effect of odours, not only during ghettoization or imprisonment in concentration camps but also long after the war. Langer treated Holocaust survivors and found out that a major obstacle in the process of their recovery and healing was bonds created between smells and events which were inscribed in their memory as a unit. His findings suggest that a prominent difficulty in the process of recovery is learning to enjoy new forgotten smells and flavours that once brought joy.

Survivors of Auschwitz, for example, related to the smell of rain in an ambiguous manner as, instead of arousing feelings of delight, rain brought up memories of the camp in which the falling water mixed with human excrement, thus intensifying its smells. (*Ibid.*; Delbo 2001: 1) In other words, the new experience, smelling the rain mingled with the odours of human excrement, was imprinted in their memory in a much more meaningful manner than the experiences of rain before the war. The trauma in the concentration camp erased almost completely previous olfactory bonds creating new ties that were distressful. (Sven-Ake and Engelberg 2000: 218)*

* In his article, the authors refer to research findings that suggest that memories evoked because of smelling something, are not primarily represented in the memory. This may indicate how intimate the relationship between smells and emotions is and how they are linked to a certain event.

Odours were so intense and constantly present at the ghetto that by the type of smells, one could guess quite accurately which period is being described. Thus, in the winter of 1940-41, the origin of smells was mainly garbage and sewage but, in the spring, and summer of 1941, the smells of the collapsing sewage system and the decaying bodies lying in the streets spread all over, not only because of the warm weather, but also because their quantities rose dramatically. As of the end of July 1942, when deportations started, large areas of the ghetto were emptied of their residents who were first sent to the Umschlagplatz, where deportees were incarcerated before deportation, and then loaded onto train cars sent to Treblinka.** Smells shifted spaces too, the Umschlagplatz and the trains were the most infested areas in the ghetto. The characteristic smells were of human excrement, vomit etc.

In the ghetto, smells were an almost permanent reality that could not be avoided. Odours were there, accompanying everyone almost constantly. Yet, accounts of the period naturally concentrate on occurrences, though they do mention smells. The attitude to smells is characterized by relating to them as a décor to what takes place in the arena, somewhat like a blanket covering the area. In that respect, for the ghetto's prisoners, the smells themselves were not only indications of the events. Their constant presence, even behind closed doors and windows, made it impossible to forget about the harsh reality that was raging outside one's door.

This article presents how there is no discussion about the Warsaw Ghetto without paying attention to its smells, and yet, how understanding smells escapes us. Our vocabulary, olfactory wise, is too small and inaccurate, while the ability to imagine a life in a constantly infested area is almost impossible. The issue of smell will be examined for its elusive manifestations which on the one hand, demonstrate the imminent and constant threat it posed for the Warsaw ghetto residents and on the other hand, its marginality in comparison to the perils in the ghetto. In other words, even though the olfactory element remained abusively present, its significance was minor in comparison to the occurrences. However, its role in the feelings experienced by the people of the ghetto was outstanding.

1. Smells in Ben Shem's Diary

The German occupation established the Warsaw Judenrat, the Jewish Council, on October 4th, 1939. The complete isolation of the Jewish population

** The Umschlagplatz is a German term which refers to a collection point or reloading point. It was an area set up by the Nazis next to the train platform where deportees were held before loading them onto train wagons going to death camps

was a process that lasted about a year and on November 16th, 1940 the ghetto inmates were locked behind a surrounding wall until the destruction of the ghetto during the Jewish rebellion in May 1943. Behind the walls of the ghetto, the Judenrat was forced to assume municipal responsibilities such as cleaning, burial etc., but their resources were very limited and shrinking with time.(Huberband 1987: 353-354)

Until the deportation started, the main cause of death in the ghetto was hunger and disease. (Friedman 1954: 76)* Ben Shem mentions that the Jewish council failed in fulfilling its role: streets were not cleared off garbage and dirt kept piling up everywhere. (Shem - image 14; Engelking 2001: 91) On the other hand, Adam Czerniaków, the head of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, reports in his diary about the huge difficulties they were facing in evacuating garbage from the ghetto, difficulties which were very often imposed by the Germans. (Czerniakow 1970: 167-8)

Ben Shem's diary alludes to an array of smells, most of which have bad connotations. Furthermore, it seems that in the ghetto, even when there are good smells, very quickly they mingle with bad ones, removing any separation, and thus polluting the few good smells that could penetrate the stink. Hence, odours that were often associated with the positive became negative in the conditions of the ghetto, a twist that was aggravating and painful for everyone.

As mentioned before, movement naturally dominates the space in which any event takes place. Smells, however, are invisible and silent but they do engulf the movements in an undetectable manner, unless one is there. By relating to smells Ben Shem casts light on the invisible, hidden, elusive context that is part of the complete image and indicates the boundaries of spaces. The descriptions of smells are unable to convey the exact nature of the odour, the sensation of their constant presence, their unavoidable nature, the phenomenon of becoming accustomed to smells. For those who were never there, smells are like a transparent blanket one can see through but is unable to feel. Ben Shem's special attention to smells makes it possible to penetrate the almost perpetual sensation of life in the ghetto where bad smells seem to overtake the space in an increasingly alarming manner. Alluding to smells, creates an image of the ghetto in all three dimensions because readers get an idea, but only an idea, of what the air was like.

* Friedman, one of the first historian to research the Holocaust and a survivor himself, writes that the Governor of Warsaw, Ludwig Fischer and Governor General Frank declared in an address in Lvov (On April 1, 1942), that ghettoization was a means to exterminate Jews by starving them.

In this paper, the discussion of smells in Ben Shem's diary will be divided into three parts which correlate to events. The first part will focus on smells before the deportation, that is from November 1940 (when the Warsaw ghetto became isolated) until July 22nd, 1942 when the deportations to Treblinka started. This period is characterized by the formation of a cloud of bad smells hanging above the ghetto almost constantly and covering almost all the area. The second part will focus on descriptions of smells after the deportation began. This period represents the shifting of smelly spaces into two areas: the Umschlagplatz and the train cars in which people were packed like sardines. The third part will deal with two incidents that have to do with *foetor Judaicus* (Jewish stink). (Wurgaft 2006: 58)

2. Smells before the Deportation – 11. 1940-7.1942

2.1 Good Smells and Violence

In January 1941, most of the residents of the ghetto found it difficult to get enough food, and about a third were on the verge of starvation. As the situation deteriorated, there were more violent incidents caused by hunger. According to Ben Shem, there were about 100,000 people who have become beggars, a situation that was bound to lead to their death. (Shem – image 108).

On two different occasions the smell of bread, a smell that in the reality of the ghetto was rare, drove people to violence. One incident concerns A. B. and his family. The incident discussed begins by a description of L.'s pitiful apartment. Ben-Shem writes it was at the end of the courtyard and that his flat was characterized by a "sour" smell noticeable even from the outside (Shem – image 34). He came to visit them but found the front door locked (it was usually kept open). He knocked on the door and when it was finally opened, he found everyone in a pitiful situation.

From bits of words Ben Shem realized what had happened. L. managed to sell some of his valuable books in return for half a loaf of bread and some butter. The "treasure" (Ibid.) was brought home and while L. left again to get tea and a glass of hot water from the neighbours who had promised to supply it, his son, who was lying in bed "smelled the bread and without saying a word, got up as if to go to the toilet (which was in the kitchen) and in the short time L. was at the stores, he managed to finish all the half loaf of bread." (Ibid. ; Gutman 1989: 113)

According to Ben Shem, the boy has actually eaten less than half a loaf of bread as, while L. was carrying the bread home, he nibbled almost half of it and

so the boy had, in fact, eaten what was left (a quarter of the loaf). When L. returned home with the tea, the bread was nowhere to be found. L. attacked his wife, both physically as well as verbally as he suspected that she had committed the "crime". Sadly, even after the truth was discovered, L. kept shouting at his wife while trying to console the boy who was by then crying. Ben Shem writes that the fight was finally calmed down by providing them all with the longed-for bread.

This incident exposes the influence of hunger on the relationship within the unit of the family. The boy (according to the records at Yad-Vashem, was about 9 years old) was aware of the fact that the little piece was meant for all of them but was unable to resist the temptation introduced by the smell, which probably surrounded him completely. The father, who knew, that the precious half a loaf of bread is supposed to satisfy three hungry people, bit into it, later to violently turn against his own family.

This incident is preceded in the diary by a description of the kind of sacrifice L. does to provide for his family. L. owned a huge library of almost 3,000 books of which he *"lovingly took care of neglecting everything, the wife the house..."* (Shem – image 33). In the ghetto, L. had to sell his books to get provisions for his family. Ben Shem discusses the issue of selling the books saying, *"in the morning he eats Nietzsche, for dinner two volumes of Keyserling and for supper Le Petit Larousse of which some has been left for breakfast"*. (Ibid.) This literary choice may have to do with L.'s strong and emotional bond to his book which have become from "food for thought", actual food.

The smell of bread causes chaos also at the *"point"* when Ben Shem's committee decided to try and help the refugees he visited a few days earlier. (Prais 2015: 314)* On June 8th, 1941, Ben Shem reports that they had brought bread to the *"point"* and although they knew that a one-time a quarter loaf of bread per person would not do much to help the starving, they still decided to do it as *"there is value to good will too."* (Shem – image 130)

As soon as they got to the *"point"* and the smell of bread penetrated the nostrils of the *"point's"* residents, they became frantic. Ben Shem writes that before he and his company could make up their minds what to do, *"they (the "point's" residents) determined and not us."* (Shem – image 131) The pandemonium was indescribable, and Ben Shem writes that he thought scenes of this sort could have been possible only in Middle Ages: the children screaming, adults shouting, cursing, crying, having spasm attacks, all of which

* The *"point"* was a name given to hostels in the ghetto in which refugees who had been forced into the ghetto were housed. They became notorious for their extremely terrible living conditions.

could not be controlled, not even when the "point's" guards hit them brutally using clubs. Ben Shem writes that he and the others, including the manager of the "point", were simply too frightened to intervene and that some of them had tears rolling on their faces.

Both these incidents reveal the pitiful situation of the starving. On the one hand, we notice the sublime attempts of Ben Shem to appease the suffering, faced with the deep sensation of helplessness to rectify the dreadful situation and on the other hand, the experience of good smells, which, instead of comforting, resuscitate in the starving extreme violence. The aroma of fresh bread acted as an infuriating trigger that made people aggressive and uncontrollable. These reports are confirmed by the Warsaw ghetto physicians, whose research showed that starvation had a devastating effect on people not only physically but also mentally as they became irritable, later to sink into apathy (Grumpert 1949: 289). The smell here illustrates the deterioration of the emotional and mental capacities of those who experienced hunger but highlights the superior feelings of kindness, compassion and understanding on the part of those who tried to help.

2.2 The Smell of the Cosmos Versus the Smell of the Micro-cosmos

As of the spring of 1941, the deterioration of the situation in the ghetto becomes not only visible but also smell-able. In the spring of 1941, April to be exact, Feldschu reports that the sun gets *"into the ghetto fearlessly but rather than warming, it lovingly prefers the toilets and especially the huge piles of garbage in the streets which immediately leads to emission of smells that are so horrible, so suffocating and annoying that a headache attacks you as soon as you leave the house."* (Shem – image 99)

This entry is quite long and stresses the frustration and pain experienced by everyone living in the ghetto. The stink is contrasted with the beauty of the wilderness and open spaces of the "behind the wall": *"How much do our soles yearn the wilderness, the field, movement... You want to expand your lungs and breathe it in and suddenly, suffocation... you run... trying to breath out the 'spring air' (inverted commas in the original text) ..."* (Shem – image 99) Further on, Ben Shem concludes this a very long and painful entry by alluding cynically to the fact that nature acts in fact as an enemy agent: *"Everything works solely for us. The lice prepare a terrible plague, the sun stinks. The war is a disappointment for us..."* (Shem – image 100) According to Ben Shem, the streets of the ghetto felt exposed and defenceless because in the entire ghetto there was only one tree and it was in the cemetery. The colour of green is not to be seen in the ghetto, he says agonizingly. (Shem – image 99)

The frustration, anger and deep sense of despair are manifested through the contrasting description of the world outside the wall to that of the inside. The stink and suffocation oppose the good smells one recalls of what spring consisted of. Here, unlike what has come to be known as the Proust Effect, the process is opposite.¹ It is the stink that makes the writer remember, compare and yearn for the smells of the past.

This situation of continuous stink was not a passing nuisance. On May 1942, that is, about two months before the deportations begin, Ben Shem reports with satisfaction that he and his Friend Propes have found a corner where they could meet on their afternoon walks and enjoy "*...the sun which comes straight from the Polish streets and has not yet been detained in the ghetto streets where it absorbs the stench and filth. A sun just like before the war.*" (Shem – image 280) The corner in question was close to the wall surrounding the ghetto and that is why it was relatively free of bad smells. This entry, almost a year after the passage concerning the spring stink, illustrates the continuous reality of an aching cloud of smell that was engulfing the ghetto.

2.3 Death and Life

As early as the end of December 1940 Ben Shem alludes to the huge number of dead, mostly due to hunger, and says that if their numbers were smaller, people would not be so indifferent. According to him, a smaller number would raise their fear but as the quantities were so high, people have become indifferent (Shem – image 17). The spring of 1941 exposes the difficult situation and, according to the diary, physicians at the ghetto were worried that the warm weather would spread the plague (epidemic typhus). Indeed, between June-August 1941 typhus does spread and the number of the dead becomes a much more burning issue.

On May 28th, 1941, the dimension of the epidemic is so prominent that Ben Shem writes that: "*In normal years the dead are apart, and the living are apart, a separation that doesn't exist anymore.*" (Shem – image 125) This observation is interesting as the scale of the epidemic becomes evident, indicating how deeply Jewish culture and religious observation have been violated. According

¹ Hamilton Paula, 'The Proust Effect: Oral History and the Senses', URL: https://www.academia.edu/6931894/The_Proust_Effect_Oral_History_and_the_Senses, accessed 31.1.2018. The Proust effect relates to a phenomenon described in Marcel Proust's book *A La Recherche du temps Perdu. Volume 1, Swann's Way*, when he writes about drinking lime blossom tea and tasting a madeleine cookie which revive in him memories of the past that were directly related to these smells and taste.

to Jewish law, the dead are considered defiled and the clear-cut separation between the dead and the living is observed strictly and meticulously by the religious and the non-religious alike. This entry, therefore, alludes to the total desecration of life in the ghetto, as the dead lie in the streets, and the ghetto authorities are unable to overcome the growing number of dead. People have been drawn into extreme conditions of distress and are dying in the streets. "... *The epidemic eats Jews up ... and when the snow will melt all the filth that froze will begin to stink... Lately it has become the custom to literally die in the streets... It takes twelve hours...*"(Shem – image 94)

Around July 1941, Ben Shem goes to the cemetery for a funeral of a friend. Frustrated he writes "*I couldn't stand at the shop gate (the cemetery gate to where the dead are brought before their burial) because of the smell of those blotted and plagued, despite the very strong lime which is poured there, the smell is so strong that your eyes fill with tears and it creeps inside you evoking nausea and faint...*" (Shem – image 144) By July, the majority of the dead brought to the cemetery are anonymous as they were found on the streets. Undertakers struggle to cope with the burial of an enormous quantity of people and therefore everything is done in haste and without ceremony. Ben Shem writes that the only thing which is observed before pushing the dead to the mass graves is the separation between men and women (Winick 2017: 105).

By August 1941 one can learn about the appalling conditions that have developed as this entry relates not only to the smells of the dead but also to the impact of the smells on the living "... *the bad smell in the ghetto from each man and woman and the constant suffocation makes one's improperly washed shirt, because of lack of soap, stick to the body...and in this way you run all day long from one corner to the other fearing kidnapping and not only from the Germans but also from your brothers, the Jewish Police and the sight of thousands of beggars and hundreds of dead whose flat corpses lie right before your eyes in the streets...*"(Shem – image 172) The incapacity to escape, to find but a temporary relief from the penetrating reality is well expressed here by using the language of the senses: the sights one cannot avoid and even one's own body smell, a living proof to the declining poor sanitation in the ghetto.

2.4 Memories Evoked by Smells

Maybe it is understandable that the diary of Ruben Ben Shem has little allusions to the Proust Effect: smells evoking good memories. In the ghetto, most of the smells are either bad or distorted versions of good. Yet, the diary

does contain two incidents which involve recollection of the past through smells experienced in the ghetto.

When Ben Shem walks around the ghetto, in a bad mood caused by his frustration due to his unsuccessful attempts to find a way to escape, he recalls that there used to be a synagogue in the area (the synagogue may have been near or in 6 Zamenhof, in a passage in the yard). Ben Shem writes that he suddenly hears a buzz that was very close, but that he had ignored until then. The buzz is what makes him remember the synagogue and he writes that as soon as he opens the door, his face "... *was shock waved by the smell of a familiar synagogue* (in the text Ben Shem uses the Yiddish term *cloise*) *mixed with frost mist and tens of bodies stuck inside worn out old clothes.*" (Shem – image 65) Here, Ben Shem describes in a most touching manner the fervent prayer, the men who were praying and the shabby room. About the fire place he says that it is "sobbing" as "*bits of coal are ending their miserable life*", and the walls are "tearing" (Ibid.) but, despite the miserable setting, there is warmth, a warmth he attributes to the passionate prayers.

Even if Ben Shem recalls the old and familiar synagogue because of the smell that hits him in the face once he opens the door, the description shifts immediately to the present, around February 1941. In other words, the odor indeed evokes the past, but it seems that being reminded of the past doesn't make his mind drift to the old synagogue but rather to stick to the present. The room is full of men praying, bringing back the old tunes, people of whom some do not understand the meaning of the words (prayers are always in Hebrew), but all of them feel the prayer. The keen prayer of the present overcasts what Ben Shem has known before because of the contradiction with the outside, a world of murder, frost, hunger lice etc. (Shem – image 67)

However, Passover of 1941, which fell on a Friday, April 11th was different. Feldschu recounts that when he comes back from the synagogue, the house is filled with happiness, excitement and good smells: "*In the kitchen my wife and relative 'make noises'* (in inverted comma in the original text) *and from the kitchen the smells of the Pesach (Passover) soup with kneidlakh and the smell of wine...*" (Shem – image 97) Ben Shem keeps describing this beautiful image of a family gathering during one of the most important events of the Hebrew calendar, the Jewish holiday of Pesach which celebrates the divine intervention to free the ancient Jews from slavery in Egypt.

In his diary, he dedicates a lot of attention to that evening and says that each of the lines of the prayer and blessing was pronounced more emphatically this time, making an analogy between their present confinement to the ghetto and the traditional story. "*I mumbled 'commemorating the departure from Egypt'* (in quotation marks in the original text) *and with all my heart I*

participated in the exodus from Egypt and in all the exoduses of my people from trouble to the open, from slavery to salvation." (*Ibid.*) This beautiful passage conveys the sensation of a break, a break from the raging chaos outside the door, a break between the space of the house immersed in the traditional smells of the Pesach cooking, a break from the bad smells outside. The description of the apartment manages to create an image of a microcosm inside the ghetto, a microcosm that reaches far beyond the ghetto walls, into ancient Egypt, the exodus over which the All Mighty supervised attentively, and therefore the description appears to be calling upon God to recreate the same miracle again.

Nonetheless, more memories are evoked, and they are attributed not to the smells, but rather to the music, the traditional chants of the holiday which make Ben Shem's mind drift to past holidays, when he was still living with his parents. He recalls his father's household that by now, he says, may have been destroyed, comforting himself that *"the tune exists in the heart of every Jew religious or not ... in the warehouse of his soul..."* (*Shem – image 98*) This observation is contrasted with the horrors outside the house where *"... he reigns, one millimeter from the windows but here, in the room, my house rooms, he has no control."* (*Ibid.*) This very long entry from April 1941, comes just before the account discussing spring in the ghetto, the spring which intensified all the bad smells. Perhaps the description of the family gathering of Pesach is the strongest contradiction to the horrors outside the door, not only in terms of action but also in terms of smell.

3. Smells after the Deportations

3.1 Smells in Situations One Must Imagine - Smells in the Ghetto

After July 1942, when deportations began, the ghetto space and geography changed completely. It has shrunk in size as the Germans forced people out of their homes and had them march first to the Umschlagplatz and then transported to Treblinka. The emptied areas were separated from one another and those remaining were mostly living in the shops' premises. (*Gutman 1989: 75*)*

The remaining population in the ghetto by September 1942 consisted mainly of people who had work permits which were supposed to provide protection from deportation. They were practically enslaved to the shops and

* The shops were German factories established in the ghetto and after the deportation started, many Jews strived to become part of them as they believed it might save their lives.

were not allowed to circulate between the different areas of the ghetto. They were terrorized constantly, especially those who had a family, because most women and children did not have work permits and were constantly targeted, even when they were in the shops (*Ibid.*). None of those employed at the shops lived in their own house. They were given permission to reside in certain apartment buildings which were empty. These belonged to those who had already been deported.

Between September 13-15, 1942, Ben Shem writes in his diary about the journey of a certain man who managed to escape from the round up area. Ben Shem finished this report by saying that when he looked at the man's face and eyes, he understood his shock and he was certain that ***"the smell would remain in the man's senses and the stink would accompany him for his whole life and forever would it spoil any happy moment he might experience in the future."*** (*Shem – image 458*) Just like Langer realized the role of smell involved in traumatic events, so did Ben Shem's instinctively recognize the power of smells to affect a man's life in the long run. (*Langer 1991: 3*)

The incident takes place about two months after the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto started. Feldschu and his family are on the run, and, so far, have managed to avoid the deportation by obtaining a work permit to the shop of Oskar Schilling, specialized in wood products. Ben Shem writes that when he was coming home at noon time, a horrible smell bursts out of the ground floor apartment.*

At first it is suspected that the origin of the stink was a sewage pipe that broke. The door to the ground floor apartment is opened by a frightened woman whose clothes are stinking too. Feldschu says that inside the flat the stink becomes even stronger. *"As we insisted on understanding what was going on, the woman burst out crying and opened the door to a small room with an iron bed where her husband was lying...."* (this mark appears in the original text) *I had never seen this kind in my life. In his eyes, fear inhabited, a fear that frightened us too. His nose and the whole face was ... moving, unsteady while the stink dissipated from him."* (*Shem – image 458*)

The man tells him that he left his house on Sunday, September 13 to go to "square." (*Ringelblum 1989: 312*)** He was certain he wouldn't be sent to the

* What Ben Shem refers to as "home", is not really his apartment. He was forced out of his apartment into buildings that were allocated to the shop of Oskar Schilling where he was working. The buildings in question were apartment whose residents had been caught and deported to Treblinka.

** The corners of streets where Jews were going through selection – the quadrangle of Gesia, Smocza, Niska and Zamenhofa streets.

Umschlagplatz as he was young and healthy and therefore, fit for work. He was wrong. The police were anxious to provide the Germans with the right number of people and so they ignored his qualities. The man managed to escape but was noticed and chased diligently by Ukrainian guards. Finally, he managed to creep into a sewage pit planting his whole body including his head inside the infested substance leaving only part of the nose out. The Ukrainians shot into the hole but didn't hurt him and left. The man stayed inside that slimy liquid for a whole day.

Obviously, Ben Shem himself is shocked, not only by the horrible smells surrounding the apartment that he too is forced to inhale but also by the sight of that agonizing man whose instincts to live had made him sink in the stink. The man's instinctive choice to hide in the sewage pit is representation of the shrinking space of living, eradication of any separation between what is human to what is not. The lack of verbal communication between the victim and the pursuer is an indication that Jews are no longer perceived as living souls, but they are meat, hunt, a quantity.

The pursuer's attempt to catch the man would not go as far as reaching inside the sewage pit. The victim's survival instincts did not betray him but, possibly, took humanity away from him. After all, some of the basic aspects of being a human are respect, pride, and appreciation for aesthetics. This episode is interesting as two instincts collide - the primal survival instinct and the instinct to avoid what stinks as stink, to all of us, represents danger, threat, and suffocation. The man faced with death chooses to stink, but the experience, brought to him by his senses, is so agonizing that, although alive, he is severely traumatized. Yet, here smells, even the worse ones, are salvation...

3.2 Smells at the Umschlagplatz and the Journey to Treblinka

The smells people were exposed to at the Umschlagplatz and the trains were especially traumatizing. If, up until the deportation, people have had a few hours a day during which they could be in their own space, their house, the street, work etc., the process of the deportation robbed them entirely of this privacy. The deportees were forced into extremely crowded areas and even the right to privately go to the toilet was denied to them.

Consequently, the immediate space of detention was inundated with horrible smells caused by bodily reactions to the stress, fear and trauma. People not only lost the little freedom that they had until then but they were forced now to be in physical contact with others as they were squeezed into small areas. As the guards ignored the personal needs of the gathered, people

were forced into discharging aching bodily pressures in public. People were held for hours, if not days, in extremely crowded conditions which impaired their human dignity, as the pressure inflicted on their body invaded their minds and their capacity for self-control ([Low 2016: 613](#)).

On August 5th, 1942, a man called P., was kidnapped, taken to the Umschlagplatz first, and then put onto a cattle wagon going to Treblinka. Being young, he was chosen to work in Treblinka and this provided him with the opportunity to run away, which he did. ([Arad 1984: 4](#)) Having nowhere else to turn to, he went back to his brother's house at the Warsaw Ghetto from where he was deported in the first place. ([Shem – image 507](#)) Ben Shem and other people went to that family to hear from the escapee what was waiting for them at Treblinka.

The man had a hard time giving this testimony and was clearly in shock. Bit by bit, and with the help of his brother, he recovered enough to tell his story, while sparing no details from his listeners. According to this report, they were held at the Umschlagplatz for at least 24 hours, and later spent about 7 hours in the wagons. Ben Shem writes that the man said that from the perspective of a man who had been to Treblinka, staying at the Umschlagplatz was "*at the most a prologue, an introduction, a corridor, where one witnesses bits of the play but not the play itself.*" ([Shem – image 497](#))

Rooms at the Umschlagplatz were packed with people and the air stank of faces, vomit and urine while noises of cries, pleading, and gunshots anguished and horrified the people inside. The stink was unbearable and so was the noise. All of that was driving people out of themselves.² People sold their gold watches for a glass of mouldy water, mothers provided their children with liquid by using their saliva... ([Shem – image 497](#)) In this torturous way people were held at the Umschlagplatz overnight.

Things became even worse when they were loaded onto the cattle wagons to begin the journey to Treblinka. It was sheer horror. P. talked about the first moment of being loaded, being pushed fiercely inside, the door closing and the temperature in the car raising, making the conditions even worse than they were before. The man describes feelings of not having enough air, people pushing and hitting each other in an attempt to make some space for themselves, people vomiting, urinating, getting spasms of diarrhea. A young man fainted, and to help him they picked him up above their heads to approach him to the little window, to "*the air, and that air meant the air of the Umschlagplatz courtyard,*

² Polish Research Institute at Lund University, *The Physicians of Warsaw*, Sweden, date of the protocol: January 5, 1946, protocol No. 83, Institute member at the protocol: Luba MELCHIOR, Translation from Polish by Kris Murawski, P. 5.

air filled with disease, sickness, feces, stench and dead bodies from shooting as well as various other corpses." (Shem – image 496)

He talked about people wanting the journey to begin, pounding on the door anxiously, shouting for the train to go, people struggling to breath, vomiting, as well as the horrible smells that engulfed them all because many people, and especially the children, had defecated on themselves. The effect of the dreadful smells was devastating and "*penetrated the inside of each men.*" (Ibid.) This disgust is instantly extinguished when one man reminds the others of the purpose of that journey: "*We are traveling to our death, do you understand, to die!*" (Ibid.) P. says that this cry mad them all silent for a moment at which point many people from all corners of the wagon burst out crying frantically.(Stenslund 2016: 345)*

The description of the journey in Ben Shem's journal is very long. If the detainees felt the time in the wagons was interminable, almost an eternity, Ben Shem's writing certainly provides some of this sensation. The train had stopped at least twice on the way, and some people died in the car, some fainted, and some tried as much as they could to break the walls of the car and escape. Yet, smell-wise, the air in the wagon became a little better as "*the train was travelling fast, and the air of the fields penetrated the wood boards. There was a lot of wind in the car.*" (Shem – image 499)

The lengthy description indeed manages to convey the feeling of a pre-death situation, of reduced space, of seemingly squeezing a lot of people into one flesh, while bodily excrement escapes uncontrollably. Yet, having thin prospects of life, people forget about their present distress, focusing on ameliorating the present by praying, and attempting to save their future by breaking the wagon's wall, trying to escape (Gigliotti 2009: 49)**

4. The Smell of Jews

It seems that the smell of the ghetto bothered an Austrian soldier-physician who went for a visit to his Jewish acquaintance. Around April 1942, the soldier spent several hours at the house of his acquaintance and the gist of the discussion was the physician's conclusion that Jews had a special smell, according to him "*a really inhuman smell...*"(Shem – image 256) The passage describing the visit begins by Ben Shem asking himself if Jews have indeed

* Here the writer talks about people getting used to smells without the disappearance of odororous molecules. The phenomenon is called olfactory adaptation.

** Gigliotti writes that "*As indicated from Jäcklein's testimony, train journeys were death spaces and those who managed to survive its stresses were in states of shock and decline ...*"

been lowered to such a degree that they have become a different biological species. The soldier-physician claimed that *"he had debated the issue and came up with no solution, not to the kind of smell and not to its intensity. He deliberately left the ghetto to walk in Polish streets and then came back to the ghetto and he was immediately struck by that same strange smell."* (*Ibid.*) The Austrian compares the unique features of the smells in the ghetto to distinct odors of farms. According to him: *"... the same goes with the ghetto which has a specific smell of its own, not human in any case ..."* (*Ibid.*)

Maybe not all the discussion was reported in the journal but, from what was written, it seems strange that the Austrian did not raise any questions as for the reasons the ghetto smelled so badly. Didn't he see the starving people? The dead lying in the streets? Did he not realize that in the Polish streets it was much cleaner and there were no dead bodies around? Strangely, it seems that the Austrian soldier-physician had isolated his "research" and narrowed it to analysing the nature of the smell, and not its causes.

Ben Shem concludes this passage, cynically, by saying that Jews have undeniably *"...been elevated and have been taken out of the class of man, ...our organism became a different zoological type..."* (*Ibid.*) Strangely, this entry does not seem to contain any criticism towards the Austrian soldier's clearly unscientific conclusions. Objectively, the ghetto and its residents indeed smelled, but there were factual reasons for that, reasons that were deliberately ignored here by Ben Shem, probably because he lamented the situation, rather than agreed that Jews have become a new species. The accusations of the Austrian, while truthfully describing the odour of the ghetto, certainly had an Anti-Semitic flair (*Junginger 2017: 16*)

The smell of Jews follows them after the deportation too. Ben Shem reports about the unlucky journey of a man called N. whose wife and daughter were arrested on their way from the ghetto to the longed for hiding place in the Arian side. It seems that the smell of garlic was the pretext for their arrest. The story is that when the concierge at the Polish building saw the women and their belongings, he *"smelled, understood, tasted the bone and sent two agents to the house."* (*Shem – image 612*) When those arrived and checked the women's forged identity documents, including their church membership certificate, they still arrested the women claiming that they both had smelled of garlic, and therefore, they were certainly Jewish. Ben Shem says that their fate was doomed.

Was it the women's appearance? Their frightened eyes? The smell they carried with them from the ghetto? Clearly, both the concierge and the agents were interested in what Ben Shem calls *"the bone"*, (*Ibid.*) that is the money involved in turning in Jews. The pretext, the smell of garlic, is an allegation

strongly rooted in the European Anti-Semitism (Largey and Watson 1972: 96). Therefore, the smell could be understood as defining your origin, and, because of it, lethal for Jews in Holocaust.

Conclusion

Employing the lens of smells and odours to understand the ghetto offers a unique opportunity to gain insight into ghetto life from the perspective of the hidden, unspeakable and despicable. Ruben Ben Shem's diary reveals and exposes a reality of experiences that are sensual in their nature, and this characteristic makes the discussion of these issues, even if not a taboo, certainly difficult and rare. Yet, relating to smelling and odours is eye-opening because it sheds light on the hidden constant presence of the veil of bad smells that is hanging above everyone in the ghetto. This angle enables us to penetrate into the world of daily emotions of the ghetto residents which were constantly bonding the violent surroundings and the smells that accompanied them.

The descriptions of smells in the diary manage to convey the idea that the ghetto was a universe of its own. Literally a universe, as the cloud of malodorous smells, which was covering the area, plainly, if invisibly, isolated it from the rest of the world, both physically and morally. If the ghetto could be imagined as a huge balloon full of bad smells, the evacuation of the people to the Umschlagplatz and the trains would be the image of evaporating air, which represents the emptying and shrinking of life.

Yet, Ben Shem's accounts, as creative and explicit as they may be, still fail to fully expose that sensation created by being continuously surrounded by bad smells. The journal leaves the notion of smells and odours in the complex zone of the inexplicable.³ As mentioned before, the occurrences in the ghetto that have become more common and more violent respectively increase the intensity of smells. It called upon the ghetto inmates to find their capacity to learn to live with those smells, to accept them as part of their life (Zufall and

³ Rachel J. Herz, URL: <https://www.wellspringwritingworkshops.com/single-post/2017/04/30/Handout-Exercise-Spring-2017-Workshop>

Herz is quoted to have said on the October 2011 in the issue of *The Scientific American*, that "Smell speaks to our primal mind... More than that, smell acts like a laser, cutting straight through to our emotional cores... No other sensory system has this type of intimate link with the neural areas of emotion and associative learning..." .

Leinders-Zufall 2000: 473-81)* Ben Shem's diary exemplifies it curiously enough, as bad smells are referred to only when they exceed a certain norm, a norm that kept deteriorating steadily. Even though it is clear from the text that smell was a continuous nuisance that accompanied the life in the ghetto, the descriptions of smells are relatively limited in number.

Through allusions to smells it is possible to get an idea of what daily life was like, regardless of the impossible violent behaviour that characterized life in the Warsaw ghetto. Smells of before the deportation do not reveal more about the extremely stressful daily life in the ghetto but do shed light on the sensation of life. If events were not harsh enough, the smells certainly rendered the realities of life much more difficult and penetrating in every possible way. There was nowhere to escape from odour (Friedman 1954: 76).

When good smells spread through the ghetto, rather than having a calming effect, they became incentives for losing any regard to values by reviving the extinguishing instinct of life. L's apartment smells "sour", (Shem – image 34) while the "point" stinks and the good smells of bread do not appease but rather incite to degradation.

Smells evoking memories hardly exist in the ghetto. On the contrary, smells are usually so bad that if they don't conjure bad feelings, they certainly don't resuscitate good ones. Yet, Ben Shem recalls the familiar synagogue where he used to pray but this smell of the synagogue in the ghetto is not nostalgic as it is nothing like the past. On the contrary, in the ghetto it is despite the present that the prayer is as fervent as in the past, and this is what fascinates Ben Shem.

This is contrasted with the smells of Passover eve, with its good smells of food, the description, particularly striking, as it is almost a time capsule, a space within a space. In the household, as Ben Shem says, "one millimetre from the windows..." (Shem – image 98) a different world reigns. The smells in the house isolate and shelter the apartment from the smelly cloud outside, while highlighting the internal spaces, both the physical, and the spiritual.

The smells of the ghetto define it as well as its residents as they smell too, thus creating an invisible border between the ghetto and the Arian side. It seems that the forces of nature are overpowered, once they enter the universe of the ghetto. Here the effect of men defeats the healing powers of nature, only to render them very powerful in accentuating what men has been able to "create" in the ghetto: the filth, the dead, the disease. Nature in the ghetto worked against the living, the sun's warmth intensifying the bad smells

* The article states that "In the context of sensory processing, odor adaptation refers to the ability of the olfactory system to adjust its sensitivity at different stimulus intensities..."

indicating the germs' reproduction thus spreading disease etc. The ghetto becomes the incarnation of obscurity mirroring the opposite of a divine creation, a man-made universe.

Possibly one of the most memorable incidents involving smell of Ben Shem's diary is his description of the man who spent a day hiding in a sewage pit. Here, the man's animalistic survival instincts clash with his human instinct to avoid what stinks, as it represents disease and death. The man survives but the price for his survival is severe trauma. The ghetto forces its inhabitants to include in their lives the unspeakable, and survival requires letting go of dignity.

The smells and odours that have attacked the unfortunate who have been captured and sent to the Umschlagplatz and later to Treblinka stand out. Maybe more than anything, the smells there represent the total assault, the diminution, the final, complete disregard to any human value in relation to the victims, but also to the perpetrators. The stink and suffocation in the rooms of the Umschlagplatz and the train wagons, the agony and torture of the victims become an allegory to the real end, the gas chambers of Treblinka.

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Disintegration by integration: the Roman pattern

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Abstract: *In this paper, I attempted to picture the main hypothesis of the fall of an old great power. I emphasised some of the reasons why we should read that period outside the myths. Pax Romana was an ancient system of governance that was adapted neither to territorial and political needs nor to external threats. This weakness determined the process of disintegration of the Roman Empire.*

Key words: *Pax Romana, governance, barbarization, bureaucratization, anxiety*

Introduction

IN A PERIOD WHEN the European integration process seems to be threaten by external factors, my thoughts go back in the Ancient ages when the integrity of the Roman Empire seemed to be dissolved also by external forces. Then there were two main enemies: Barbarians invasion and attacks of other actors. Institutional and social establishments were threatened along with commercial networks.

In another confusing period, in interwar attacks that Nazi politics carried out against the liberal democracies of Europe, the German-Jewish writer Lion Feuchtwanger wrote his famous romantic novel *Spanish Ballade*. In its preamble, the author sketched another image of the Dark Ages in Al-Andalus or Muslim Spain. It was about an Iberian world in which three different cultures seemed to interfere: Christian, Jewish, and Islamic. This world where the German novelist introduced his characters was dated, more specifically, in the 8th century. (Feuchtwanger 1966). At that point, it was increasingly clear to any contemporary that hoping for a return to 'the old good times' of the Roman Empire was an illusion. Probably, the elders lurked their children with stories about the legends of heroic Roman legionnaires.

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About that community and the reality of those times, generations of historians were concerned about deciphering their meaning. The world historiography has retained the seminal work of Belgian historian Henri Pirenne. His thesis, formulated in 1935, has strongly influenced the interpretation of historians from the decades that followed. Pirenne, on the basis of sources available eight decades ago, developed a theory that explains the economic crisis of the West in the eighth century as an outcome of the disappearance of Pax Romana that had assured the Mediterranean unity, and on the other hand of the impact of the Arabs on maritime trade.

Beyond the tragic characteristic of that reality, the Belgian historian provides the image of two worlds that hardly find the ways of a dialogue. The obvious logic is that of a zero-sum game:

"With Islam a new world was established on those Mediterranean shores which had formerly known the syncretism of the Romans civilization. A complete break was made, which was to continue even to our own day. Henceforth two different and hostile civilizations existed on the shores of Mare Nostrum. And although in our own days the European has subjected the Asiatic, he has not assimilated him. The sea which had hitherto been the centre of Christianity became its frontier. The Mediterranean unity was shattered." (Pirenne 1959: 152-153)

Can we consider that *Pax Romana* would have been able to preserve the Mediterranean unity in face of the Arabs intrusions? Obviously, this is a counterfactual approach to this issue. This is why I start by noting that *Pax Romana* was destroyed by the Roman Empire itself. Therefore, the economic crisis of the Western Europe was, actually, the outcome of the misgovernment of the Roman Empire.

My argument starts from Gene W. Heck's explanation opposing the Pirenne's thesis (Heck 2006: 13-35). Heck's revisionist approach is grounded in three arguments: (1) there were not the Arabs who brought the Dark Ages to the West, but they brought back the instruments of capitalism and trade; (2) unlike the Carolingian West, Islam had adapted its doctrine to new realities; (3) when, finally, Christian Europe came out of the Dark Ages, it preplanned the corporate structures, the banking tools from the Muslims. (Heck 2006: 6-7)

If Heck focused his argumentation mostly on the seventh and eighth centuries to counterbalance the Pirenne's thesis of Arabs impact, I would like to point out another aspect of Pirenne explanation saying that "the sea which had hitherto been the centre of the Christianity became its frontier. The Mediterranean unity was shattered." (Pirenne 1959: 153).

Pax as order

What does 'the Mediterranean unity' mean? Always this unity has been associated to *Pax Romana*. Hardly can we translate the Latin word '*pax*' into *peace*. A much contested term, peace in its turn means stability, order endorsing, in a holistic approach, different values and imposing the "moral circle" of a hegemonic power. Hence peace sets out culture and language.

Pax Romana was a system of governance of the Roman Empire. This was a concept encapsulating three attributes of the Emperor: *auctoritas* (guarantying political and social concord), *imperium* (providing civil order) and his function as *pontifex maximus* (symbol of religious harmony) (Parchami 2009: 25).

Looking long and comparatively with other conglomerates of nations that history has retained from Antiquity, the Roman Empire had about two centuries and a half of glory. From the eyes of other actors with whom Rome had entered into interaction, the Empire had a more destructive effect than a civilizational one. States like Persia had not ceased affirming their superiority and viewed their Western rival as an enemy that should have been stopped, if not pushed into its old frontiers.

The northern and eastern bounders were targeted by Germanic and Parthian incursions, and then more and more their territories were attacked by other tribes. Were Barbarians the only cause of Roman disintegration? The "barbarization" of the Empire was possible first and foremost with the complicity of the imperial authorities, but also encouraged by a general state of mind so plastic described by the French historian Maurice Bouvier-Ajam:

"War, invasion, rebellion, misery, banditry, murder and debauchery wreaked havoc. Hate reverend everywhere: religious, racial, political, and social. The power was conquered by plotting and assassinated and was lost in the same way. Privileged abused their privileges while there was still time and without any illusions about tomorrow. Rich people's expenses were extravagant, and their vices did not know boundaries [...]. The violence of the barbarian who did not respect the treaties, the army or cohort leader, the revolted or cupid soldier, the brigand knight or the highway bandit paralyzed everything and led to exodus."
(Bouvier-Ajam 2008: 15)

* This is my own translation after the Romanian edition of Maurice Bouvier-Ajam's book.

After 180 AD and up to 476 AD (if we take Gibson's thesis about the fall of the Western Roman Empire), four major causes of this geopolitical transformation in the West can be identified:

- a) The empire was over-militarized and over-bureaucratized, making it increasingly difficult to govern;
- b) Society had lost civic conscience and loyalty to the state, feeling increasingly abandoned;
- c) Imperial authorities had confused the 'integration' of barbarians with 'barbarism', resulting in a general state of anxiety among the Roman aristocracy;
- d) Since the fourth century, the emperors had encouraged unfair competition between the West and the East until their antagonism.

Pax Romana of the first two centuries after Augustus was undoubtedly a peace imposed on the world, by a hegemonic actor. How many peoples would have been willing to accept its brilliance at the expense of their own civilizations? The ambition of the first emperors was to transform the Mediterranean Sea into a *Mare nostrum*, but at what cost to the conquered peoples and to the Empire? Elements of urban, economic, legislative and even military civilization can hardly be denied or overlooked. However, the lack of flexibility and adaptability of the Empire is known, which results in a certain degree of intolerance towards religious, cultural or administrative alteration in the new provinces (see studies by [Kurt A. Raaflaub 2007](#)).

What this Empire succumbed was misgovernment and corruption. This system was expected to be peaceful internally, but as every hegemonic power 'to secure its vast boundaries, it found itself constantly fighting wars and repelling incursions.' ([Parchami 2009: 35](#)). In other words, such a colossus needed both internal peace and a permanent external war. Of this binomial lacked internal peace, but instead it had the 'chance' of an external enemy that should have stimulated internal unity. Nevertheless there were too many external enemies, and society too much divided inside.

When over is too much

The expansion of the Empire had led to the need to increase the army's power, but the things have seen such a risky evolution. If Augustus had the wisdom to strengthen his army power by putting it under the control of the Senate, after 180 AD the Senate and the Army had come to compete for authority in the Empire. The absence of a cross-check and, in parallel, the expansion of bureaucracy at the level of the Empire, had led to the increase and gradually the generalization of corruption. This seems to have manifested

itself freely during Commodus (180-192), becoming in time, even vital for survival or promotion depending on the situation. For example, Marcus Aurelius Cleander, who was at the forefront of the Pretorian Guard and the police forces, was only one day selling 25 consular posts, so popular was the traffic of functions. (Cary and Scullard 1975: 489-490).

Increasingly into this blender of private and public interests drown both Romans and Romanized barbarians. Naturally, there has developed a chronic suspicion of betrayal, detraction, assassination, or civil riots. Historians still wonder whether it was real corruption (McMullen 1988) or just about the rhetorical manifestation of aristocratic anxiety (Kelly 2006). Once again, the sources read and interpreted by historians give us competing images of the same age. In essence, it is about defining the cause and effect correctly.

Over-militarization had come as a natural consequence of the increase in the number of legions. For example, Septimius Severus (193-211) created three new legions: two in Mesopotamia and one in Italy at Albanum (to counterbalance the power of the Praetorians). Observing the tendency of the Severan Dynasty to rely on the army, to the detriment of the Senate, military claims had to be met increasingly with new privileges, which were usually tax and financial. More in detail, David M. Nicholas (2014: 8-14) also shows the high level of corruption in the Roman administration where the public and the private were in confused contractual relationships.

In the third century, the Roman state was already over-militarized and over-bureaucratized. Under these conditions, the Decurions were hardly financially rewarded because of the lack of land, and more and more mercenaries had to be recruited. In essence, the recruitment base remained among the Laeti (non-free Germans, war captives who had received land at the border in exchange for military service), and later among the *limitanei* (soldiers who were asked to work the earth and defend the border) (*Ibid*: 16).

What the Roman historian Tacitus called "the secret of the Empire" became in the third century the seed of disharmony and disintegration. The remark of the ancient historian that emperors can be created anywhere outside of Rome was a conclusion of the fateful year 69, when at the death of Nero the imperial diadem was claimed by four generals: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. This "secret of the Empire" provoked a half-century (235-284) of the assassinations until the coming of Diocletian (284-305). Beyond the chaos created, the effect on the system was profound. At a time, in the competition between the Senate and the Army, the emperors have come to ignore the tremendous value that "*cursus honorum*" had had for a stable and predictable policy. From an elective monarchy or a republican empire, the reality of the third century describes a military monarchy in which the Equestrian Order took

over parts of Senate authority. This transfer is more clearly seen when, at the beginning of the 4th century, when the main duties of *praefecti praetorio* were taken over by military commanders (*magister militi*).

Finally, in the third century we will witness the tendencies of the Empire's crushing, and two of the most well-known cases were: the Galician Empire (260-274) founded by C. Latinus Postumus, one of Gallienus generals and the famous kingdom of Palmyra (260-273) with Zenobia in his head.

Anxiety and Loyalty

All the while, the communities within the Empire lived in a social, economic and religious diversity that were all too much rationales of anxiety in the absence of an effective relationship between the State and society.

Caracalla's decision, in 212, to extend the status of Roman "citizenship" was probably originally a purely financial calculation, as the budget of the Empire was getting thinner. Equally, it could be the signal of a uniformity trend that had not been capitalized by all of its successors. This policy of equalizing the conqueror's status with that of the conquest could have caused an anxiousness of the royal aristocracy, which saw, one by one, their status competed by a standardising policy. This anxiety also transpires in the literature of the time. However, since Septimius Severus (193-211), a Roman criminal law principle had been preserved, which was devastating in the Middle Ages. This principle was that the law takes individuals into account. In fact, Severus divided the citizens into *honestiores* (privileged) and *humiliores* (unprivileged) (Cary & Scullard 1975: 494).

On the other hand, the logic of tax privileges created a mentality among the people, damaging to the Empire. Social differences accompanied by a sense of insecurity had led both to civilian riots and to a decrease in loyalty to the Empire, which translates as either passivity to barbaric migration or through collaboration with newcomers.

Above all, religious diversity had fragmented society. This, as it increased its predominance, determined at different times an antagonism between the State and society. Diocletianus (284-305) temporarily restored imperial authority, but the relationship with society was far less inspired. Mentioned in Christian literature as "the Great Persecution," his order to destroy the increasingly numerous Christian communities shows, on the one hand, the maintenance of obsolete means of destroying the internal adversary, as in the beginning of the first century, and on the other hand, the inability of the authority to preserve internal peace in a society so complex and

heterogeneously ethnic and religious. As a downed enemy does not mean a threat, his adversity will be overflowed when circumstances allow him.

Much more open to counselling, Constantine the Great (306-337) knew how to play the card of religious tolerance so well that the Christian community has remained grateful to him so far. In the letter he sent in 324 to the bishop of Alexandria and his doctrinal adversary, Arius, the Emperor said so clearly that the problems of the Empire were so many and complex that he would have wanted to have at least the Christian community and peace: ("Restore me then my quiet days, and untroubled nights, that the joy of undimmed light, the delight of a tranquil life, may henceforth be my portion.") (Vasiliev 1952: 55-56). From there, Constantine knew how to play the role of mediator among the various factions of Christians who accused each other of heresy. The Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea (325) is the most eloquent exposition in this respect.

Beyond this talent, the emperor still preserves the image of a brilliant reformer and organizer in the perspective of many historians. However, Constantine was the one who built his own city on the Eastern side of the Empire and made it his capital. Leaving aside interpretations that might reflect Imperial megalomania or any strategic calculation, Constantine's initiative burdened the budget of the Empire and also caused the onset of a division of the imperium that was not formally acknowledged until much later. Going forward with the same interpretation, we can see that the Egyptian province, recognized as a granary of the Empire, became part of the East, rather than part of the Empire. In less than a century, the West had become increasingly exposed to interactions with barbarian tribes and kingdoms.

Moving the capital was not by itself the factor that triggered the process of disintegration of the Empire, but a succession of chained decisions created the premises of such an effect. If in the third century we notice competition between the Senate and the Army, where the former came out visibly weakened, in the end of the next century we can notice the weakening of the central power in favour of the province. An effect of the tax system introduced at the level of the Empire, after the fourth century, was that the financial power moved from the centre to a group of richer individuals. When they wanted to weaken the power of the Senate, the emperors from the Severan Dynasty and their successors increased the number of senators. More and more, senatorial aristocracy preferred to remain in the provinces, having the effect of absenting in Senate assemblies. More and more deprived by civilian authority over the provinces, this aristocracy, increasingly critical of the ability of the central power to govern the Empire, had developed from generation to generation a financial potential that could not only a class survival, but also the influence in the territory. This is partly explained by the fact that many of the

5th Century contemporaries had not observed the *de facto* defection of the West Empire. The aristocracy had long been preoccupied with maintaining its own status and local authority acquired by tradition. Families such as the Sagrii, Pontii, Aviti, Apollinares, Magni (in Gallic territories) knew how to develop a matrimonial system that allowed them to stake financial power, surviving the Empire long after it ceased to exist (Geary 1988: 30). The Roman-Barbarian symbiosis became apparent in time, and differences were no longer found between the Romans and the Germans, but between the elite and the rest of the population.

We return to H. Pirenne who left us an interesting description of the 5th century Empire:

"As against its advantages, we must remember that the Empire was obliged to keep armies in being on the frontiers of Africa and Asia while it had to face its enemies in Europe. Further, it had to deal with civil disturbances; there were many usurpers, who did not hesitate to enter into understandings with Barbarians. [...] while the populations of the Empire were passive, and incapable of resistance; without civic spirit, they despised the Barbarians, but were ready to submit to their yoke." (Pirenne 1959: 21).

An unfair competition

The "barbarisation" of the Empire was accomplished with the Empire's complicity. Population movements in the north and east of the Empire had a long duration with varying intensities and impacts. The research of the last decades gives us more and more a complex image to those times. The interpretations are no longer so categorical, and the dissolution of the Empire in the West is no longer so dramatic on the part of these migrating nations. Poor governance and social and political instability in the interior have been the ones that have, in essence, determined a certain type of transition from the classical imperial period (*Pax Romana*) to the crushing of sovereignty. As the systemic crisis of the third century attracted the first strong attacks of Germanic peoples, so 376 AD remains a milestone in the awareness of the decline of this system. Thervingi Goths, Visigoths and then Greuthungs (Ostrogoths) have entered interaction increasingly closer and diverse Empire. Thervingi relations with the Romans were covered in 332 when Constantine the Great signed a treaty with their king, Ariarich, which recognized their status as *foederati*. What chance that they managed to achieve peace with the

Empire, and got support from the state to consolidate imperial tutelage! Their admiration for the Roman world has now been transformed into collaboration. Of course, discontents and incidents still existed, but in 369 a new treaty treats these Goths as equal to the Empire, not just the *foederati*. As history is overwhelmed by peculiar moments that cause human society to question the opportunity of preserving traditions at the expense of saving solutions, so was the year 376 when the kingdom of the Turks was destroyed by the hunts of Asians who had come from Asia. From this moment on, the Thervingi relations with the Empire became complicated. By penetrating the Empire and retained in history by now as Visigoths, they had 40 years of migration and conflict in the Empire. It was not until 416 that the kingdom of Aquitaine was finally established, with its centre in Toulouse controlling part of Hispania.

Since the beginning of the fourth century, the western part of the Empire has been increasingly exposed to "barbarism." Since 395, Rome has ceased to be capital. Honorius settled his residence in Mediolanum (Milan), as seven years later, when the Visigoth Alaric besieged this city, the emperor moved to Ravenna. Who encouraged Alaric to penetrate the Italian Peninsula? The sources tell us that it is precisely the co-emperor of Constantinople. In 397 Arcadius called Alaric military commander (*magister militum*) of the Eastern Illyricum Prefecture, being the first model to impose imperial authority on a Roman province. Finally, the complexity of these tensioning moments had found a too weakened empire to resist resistance. As a result, Honorius had no problem concluding a treaty with Athaulf, Alaric's successor. Motives can be framed in the logic of choosing the least evil, for this treaty put Athaulf in the post of the Empire's defender against Jovinus who attacked Gaul. The state ration of that time brought him the same Athaulf, in 414, into a marriage to the famous Galla Placidia, the sister of Honorius and Arcadius.

For a long time, we can remark that the Empire's policy of resistance to the Nordic and Eastern nomadic population movements has been replaced by a policy of compromise, increasingly condemned by corruption that has become systemic.

The ease with which the Roman emperors shared favours for various received services shows the loss of discernment or the inability to manage state affairs. For example, Arcadius, the Emperor of Constantinople, repudiated Fravitta, an ally got, as consul, because he defeated Gainas, another rival of Aryan who had threatened his capital. On the other hand, the same Arcadius had no reluctance to call Persian king Yazdegerd I as the guardian of his younger son, Theodosius II, which shows the precariousness of the system.

Final Remarks

The introduction into the Roman army of whole bodies of barbarians in order to defend the Empire of other barbarians shows the degree of barbarism of the army. However, I think that the issue itself was not the "barbarisation" of the army, because in fact it was also an expression of the integration of new peoples, but the fact that the state did not work coherently. If the state and society were to continue to develop on the basis of a real partnership and the efficiency of governance, "barbarism" could have been called "integration" today and could be seen as a success. In all of this fifth century marauding, imperial power has lost its authority in the provinces, increasingly controlled by a local aristocracy that has learned to coexist and cooperate with a barbarian elite eager to integrate. The admiration of the Barbarian kings in the West is recognized for the ancient splendour of the Empire. In fact, they did not have the title of "Emperor" until "Carol" but "military masters", "consul" or "kings", always seeking, the Roman Emperor from Constantinople. When the Empire ceased to exist in the West and who inherited it, we will see in the next chapter.

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MOLDOVA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION (2009-2017). A SHORT OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *The author of this article is trying to analyse the dynamic of the relations between Republic of Moldova and the European Union after 2009. At the heart of the debate will be the main events and documents signed between the two sides. Based on this analysis, the author aims to present the main lines based on the bilateral reports between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the analysed time segment.*

Key-words: European Union, Republic of Moldova, Eastern Partnership, Action Plan, Association Agreement.

Introduction

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IS A SMALL COUNTRY strategically located in South-Eastern Europe. The importance of the geopolitical localization of the country is given by the fact that it is situated at the borders of two worlds. At one hand, Moldova is located at the eastern borders of the European Union (the border with Romania on river Prut). On the other hand, Moldova represents the western limits of the former Russian Empire and former Soviet Union (Dima 1998; Serebrian 2006; Bocancea 2016).

It is important to mention the fact that the location of the Republic of Moldova between NATO and the European Union, on the one hand, and the former Soviet Empire, on the other, puts the young European state ahead of a difficult decision. The last 25 years since independence from the Soviet Union was a period of profound political turmoil in the Republic of Moldova. In this context, the political decision-makers in Chisinau had to make some complicated and crucial decisions at the same time for the Moldovan Society

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(Enache, Cimpoeșu 2000: 42; Kaplan 2014: 194). On the external side, it was necessary to provide an answer to the question of the direction in which Chisinau foreign policy should be directed? Should it remain in the orbit of the former Soviet Union or concentrate its efforts on approaching NATO and the European Union?

The government of the Republic of Moldova decided to make a major switch in in the foreign policy of the country. After 2009, the year when the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova loosed the majority in the Parliament (***, "[Alegerile parlamentare anticipate în Moldova din 29 iulie 2009](#)", 2009; ***, "[Alegerile parlamentare anticipate în Moldova din 28 noiembrie 2010](#)"; ***, "[Informații generale despre alegerile parlamentare aticipate 2010 în Moldova](#)"; ***, "[Alegerile parlamentare în Moldova din 30 noiembrie 2014](#)"), the ministry of the foreign affairs of the country took the decision concentrate their efforts to achieve European integration. The government of the Republic of Moldova considered, from that moment, the option of European integration not only a „fundamental desideratum of both internal and external policy of the Republic of Moldova“ but also a „major of political and social cohesion“ of the Moldavian society (***, "[Relațiile RM-UE](#)"). In other words, the representatives of the Ministry the Foreign Affairs of Republic of Moldova and of the entire government considered that European integration can be a possible way out from the political chaos which dominated and still dominates the Republic of Moldova.

As far as the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union is concerned, it should be noted that this takes about two decades (***, "[Comentariul MAE IE cu privire la Concluziile privind Republica Moldova adoptate de Consiliul Afacerilor Externe al UE](#)"). Nevertheless, the intensification of the bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Western Euro-Atlantic structures can only be discussed after the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova was elected in 2009. With the elections in July 2009 (***, "[Alegerile parlamentare anticipate în Moldova din 29 iulie 2009](#)"; ***, "[Informații generale despre alegerile parlamentare aticipate 2009 în Moldova](#)") and with the accession to governance of the Alliance for European Integration there is a change in the external political vector of the small state in south-eastern Europe. This change implied the inclination of the Balance in favour of a policy mainly on cooperation with NATO and the European Union against a policy favourable to Moscow, previously practiced by Communist leaders.

Moldova-EU relations. The beginning

At the formal level, as mentioned on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, the bilateral reports between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union were formally registered in 1994 (***, "Relațiile RM-UE"). On November 28, 1994 a partnership and cooperation agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Moldova (***, "Acord de Parteneriat și cooperare între Comunitățile europene și statele membre ale acestora și Republica Moldova"). This agreement was intended to establish general guidelines for cooperation between the two parties. The agreement established a partnership between the two sides. Among the objectives of this agreement were: Ensure an appropriate framework for political dialogue between the parties, develop trade and investment, provide a basis for legal, economic, social, financial and cultural cooperation, as well as support Moldova's efforts for consolidating their own democracy, developing the economy and ending the transition process a market economy. The document provided several proposals of measures to be taken to ensure a favourable climate for trade between the two sides, respect for intellectual property, economic cooperation.

As can be seen from this document, the agreement was intended to establish some rules and principles upon which to base further cooperation between the two sides (***, "Acord de Parteneriat și cooperare între Comunitățile europene și statele membre ale acestora și Republica Moldova"). This document establishes the legal framework of the bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the political, commercial, economic, legal, cultural and scientific field. By signing this agreement, an important step has been taken to bring the two sides closer together and to intensify interaction in various fields of activity. In analyzing this document, I concluded that the 1994 agreement, like the basic principles and the use of its provisions, with the basic political treaties signed by the Republic of Moldova and other states (these agreements were signed by the Republic of Moldova in the opening of diplomatic, economic and cultural reports with Romania, Ukraine, Russia and other states). The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement marked a new beginning for Moldovan diplomacy for the existence of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state. It is important to note that this type of agreement is a common one for the European Union in the context of its expansion to Central, South Eastern and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War.

Eastern partnership

One of the most important frameworks on which the bilateral relations between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova are developed is the Eastern Partnership. In a simpler formula, this type of partnership can be translated as the EU's policy mix of US cooperation with the Central and Southeast European states, which until 1989 and 1991, depending on case, were member states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova catalogs the Eastern Partnership as a "step-by-step initiative to deepen the European Neighborhood Policy to support and accelerate the European Union's eastern-eastern dimension (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) their gradual rapprochement with the European Union (see more at [***, European Neighbourhood Policy \(ENP\)](#)).

This concept is a new one in terms of international relations as it was officially launched on May 7, 2009 at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague. The Eastern Partnership is part of the broader European Neighborhood Policy, conceived in the context of the 2004 enlargement. To avoid creating new dividing lines and bringing the new neighbors of Eastern and Southern Europe closer to the political, economic and values of EU-specific standards ([***, "Ce este Parteneriatul Estic?"](#)). It can also be said that the Eastern Partnership is a political instrument on the basis of which the European Union conceives its state with the two partner countries. A first dimension is a bilateral dimension, which implies the signing and implementation of the Association Agreement, Free Trade Areas and deepening of the visa regime ([***, "Discuții pe marginea vizelor: misiunile Uniunii Europene la Chișinău", 2010; ***, "Dialogul RM-UE privind liberalizarea regimului de vize"](#)). The second dimension is multilateral. This dimension is based on thematic platforms and flagship initiatives. As you can see, the Eastern Partnership is another way in which the European Union is trying to strengthen its relations with the states of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, it is an attempt to bring the standards in these areas closer to what they are accustomed to in the States that are already members of the European Union ([***, "Ce este Parteneriatul Estic?"](#)).

The EU-Moldova Action Plan

In the context of the enlargement of the European Union in areas where Communist regimes have been established, the European Union has taken

some steps to work with the new states emerging from communism. In this context, the proposed action plans proposed by the European Union to each state in this area of Europe. The EU-Moldova Action Plan falls within the context of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, an extension that has led to a historic change for the union in political terms, the economic class. This context, and now it is mentioned by some specialists, further strengthened the economic ties between the two sides. The framework of this agreement aimed to establish political, economic, cultural and security ties between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. If the partnership and cooperation agreement that was signed in 1994 established some general principles on which to base the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union for a period of 10 years, then the actions brought some changes in more detail and proposed to strengthen the strategic cooperation between the two parts (***, "Planul de acțiuni UE-Moldova").

In this context, the text of the action plan mentions that both parties wanted to raise the level of political cooperation, to continue the efforts of the European Union to solve the Transnistrian conflict, to intensify the trade relations and to lift the barriers that stand in the commercial domain, to stimulate investments and to increase economic. Among other types of aspects mentioned in the Action Plan we find mentions referring to the opening of a delegation of the European Commission to Moldova. This would have facilitated the cooperation between the two sides and the gradual integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European structures (***, "Planul de acțiuni UE-Moldova"). The Action Plan was a second important step in strengthening cooperation in various fields of activity between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. This plan involves deepening cooperation in areas such as economy, politics, culture, security, the legal field, freedom of expression, investment and growth, as well as many other spheres. The agreement itself is implementing its provisions for a period of 3 years and is aimed at intensifying the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union (***, "Planul de acțiuni UE-Moldova").

The EU-Moldova-Association Agreement

A third and very important step in strengthening the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was the signing of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union (signed on November 28, 2013) at the Vilnius summit on 28-29 November 2013 (***, "Parafarea Acordului de Asociere RM-UE"). This document is of particular importance both for the political decision-makers in

Chisinau, for the population of the Republic of Moldova, doors for the authorities of the European Union. The Association Agreement is an important step towards the gradual integration into the European structures of the candidate countries for accession to the European Union. Such agreements have been signed by the European Union with all former communist states in central and south-eastern Europe. This type of agreement is an important indicator, a sign that points to the states in this area that they have reached a quite advanced level in the European Integration process (***, "Acordul de Asociere RM-UE").

The Association Agreement between Republic of Moldova and the European Union is an important document signed with the purpose to strengthen the ties between the two sides. In other words, we could mention that the association agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union has contributed to the consolidation of the political base on which the ties between the two sides were based. This agreement provided the possibility of previous cementation with a new one and the elevation of the advanced level of cooperation, which offers multiple opportunities for future collaboration. This assertion is reinforced by the fact that the text of the agreement contains a number of provisions involving more elaborate and detailed collaboration in certain areas and sectors of activity (***, "Acordul de Asociere RM-UE").

This type of agreement is in line with the European Union's main line on the Eastern Partnership. It is important to mention that such kind of documents was previously signed by the European Union with countries like Ukraine and Romania. As with the Association Agreement signed with Ukraine, the EU-Moldova Association Agreement contains some general stipulations that come to confirm the line of single-mindedness regarding the Eastern Partnership. The introduction of this document is similar to that of the Association Agreement with Ukraine. The introductory part discusses "common values and close ties" between the two sides. These links, as set out in the text of the Agreement, have been established in the past through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States on the one hand, and the Republic of Moldova, on the other, and which develops within the framework of the European policy of neighbourhood and the Eastern Partnership. The signing of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union constitutes the consolidation of the basis of relations between the two parties. This is possible because, through this agreement, both parties are willing to meet certain common goals. These objectives, as set out in the text of the document, relate to the promotion of political association and economic integration between the two sides. All this could be done, as the decision-

makers who drafted the text of the Agreement, based on some values communes and close ties, including by increasing the Republic of Moldova's participation in policies, programs and agencies of the EU.

Final Remarks

As a result of these discussions, conclusions can be made as a basis for future research on the analysis of bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that these connections are quite tight and should be cultivated in the future. This analysis shows that although we cannot talk about a very clear policy and vision of the Republic of Moldova towards the European Union, there is an option in the minds of the politicians in Chisinau. At the same time, Moldovan politicians have taken the first steps to establish political ties with the European Union. These efforts need to continue in the future. In order to achieve the set goals, the politicians in Chisinau need to be aware of the importance of the political choices they have made since 2009. Moreover, the political decision-makers in Chisinau must understand that they have engaged in a mission, and the results obtained within it depend on the future political class and the entire population of the Republic of Moldova.

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Book Review

Sebastian Balfour, Alejandro Quiroga, *The invention of Spain. Nation and Identity since Democracy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2007, 239 pp.;

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AFTER THE DEATH OF FRANCO and up until the present day politicians, journalists, teachers and historians have attempted to offer explanations on how the Spanish political system works. If the transition was an ambitious plan that counted on ample support both within and outside of Spain, why does it still have repercussions on current policy in Spain contemporary society?

Historians Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga are both specialists in Contemporary Spanish policies. Balfour is Emeritus Professor of Contemporary Spanish Studies in the LSE's Department of Government. His major works are *The Politics of Contemporary Spain* which was edited by him in 2004 and *The invention of Spain. Nation and Identity since Democracy* is one of his important works which has with Alejandro Quiroga.

Quiroga is a Spanish historian, who is currently Lecturer in Spanish and European History at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Newcastle University. His research field covers topics such as nationalism and ethnic conflict, Fascism and conservative political thought or the power of sports in contemporary Spain. The present book represents his major work, but he is also the author of several articles on Spanish nationalism.

Their book is based on a deconstructivist perspective which reveals how the text is always internally conflicted and is far from any definite meaning. They

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try to show how concepts of nationalism or identity clash and how this can generate multiple interpretations. It all starts with the question *Is Spain a Nation?*. And from here, they deconstruct the intricacies of concepts like nation, nationalism and identity. They agree on the idea that the unipolar identity imposed by Franco regime eroded the legitimacy of Spanish nationalism, because such a regime was full of totalitarian symbolism regarding the concept of nation. Hence, the result is that Spanish nationalism has had to undergo an implicit removal and to disguise itself in different forms.

The invention of Spain represents an important contribution on the Spanish national question from the transition to the present moment (which is 2007) and analyses conceptions about nation and identity in Spain and their use in everyday discourse since the end of Franco's regime in 1975. What makes this book even more appealing is the fact that it reunites a spectrum of contemporary Spanish politics from Franco's regime through conservative, left-wing parties and governments, to regional nationalists. The political system in Spain has become polarized over an array of issues, but none more so than the question of nation and identity. Therefore, these two concepts have been viewed through different lenses during the transition to democracy. Quiroga and Balfour argue that Franco's regime had profoundly discredited the concept of the Spanish nation by the mid-1970s and many in the left had embraced the cause of peripheral nationalism. Consequently, in 1975, the Communist Party of Spain's (PCE) manifesto defined the right of self-determination of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia as *inalienable* (p.83). Both authors point out the representations of the nation concept from the past to its impact on the present, because in 1976, a year later, the (PSOE) went a step further and declared that *all nationalities and regions had the right to break free from the Spanish state* (p. 84) .

Meanwhile, a crisis of identity and governance in present-day Spain should be treated with scepticism because there are real problems relating to social cohesion and the role of the state in many situations. Balfour and Quiroga also argue that the issues of the Spanish politics have foundations in the Constitution of 1978. The debate over the concepts of the nation and identity is also framed by the Constitution, who is called *the touchstone of Spanish democracy* (p.56).

The book shows how Spain is now claimed by many to be a nation of nations and regions, a post-traditional nation state or a post-national state. For the peripheral nationalists, meaning Basque, Catalan, and Galician nationalists in particular, it is merely a state of nations and regions (p.139) . The authors point out that in Catalonia, for example, nationalism is the most pronounced and this region represents as a nation by virtue of its linguistic and historic distinctiveness. Catalan identity was constructed in opposition to Castile, a

region considered responsible for hampering the progress of Catalonia. (p. 140) .

These being said, it is here that we can observe the deconstructivist approach challenging the argument of the writers and which casts doubt on most of the principles sustaining political parties. For the writers, the emergence of Catalan and Basque nationalism changed everything because these movements created national identities that were not only alternative but, especially in the Basque case, antagonistic to the various Spanish national identities, while never defining them.

The shortfalls of such a work are precisely in its deconstructive perspective, because the authors do not assume any clear conclusion at the end of this approach, thus leaving all interpretations open to further debate.

The book under review here shares similarities in methodology with Gregorio Alonso's *The Politics and Memory of Democratic Transition* (2011) and Bonnie Field's *Politics and Society in Contemporary Spain* (2013), and all of them have established themselves with writing focusing on the relationship between the politics and the concepts of nation and identity. Even if it appeared before those other two, in 2007, Balfour and Quiroga's book is more complex, in terms of sources used, which includes references of a wide range of primary and secondary literature from Constitution, and different reports, to memoirs and letters of various politicians.

Written in an away which makes it easy to read, this book looks at these problems both as part of historical debate and as a contemporary political problem. During and since the transition, Spanish nationalist discourse has evolved to meet the challenge of new concepts of nation and identity, so this work represent an extremely important way to read the problems of Spanish contemporary society to find out the causes which triggered the effects of today's situation in Spain politics and society.