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On Places, Emotions, Senses and Affects. A Case Study on the Cluj-Napoca Jewish Community

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ABSTRACT

This article is the result of a long-time research (entirely conducted with qualitative methods) on the Cluj-Napoca Jewish community. The research developed gradually: from a first stage, when I paid attention to the process of community cultural identity representation (searching for coagulation factors, definability criteria, as well as for interlocutors' responses regarding their feeling of belonging to the Jewish community), to later stages, documenting life histories (as salvage ethnography was a necessity), to analysing migration in the post-1989 period and its consequences on Jewish residents in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. In all stages, the topic of place attachment was very much present in the interlocutors' narratives and responses. The main goal of this article is to analyse the ways in which place attachment has a very important role in the process of the Jewish community construction and representation. Meanwhile, I explore the ways place attachment is defined by the community members, which are its characteristics and functional mechanisms. The methods engaged to approach these topics are participant observation, semi-structured interviews, life histories and content analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since 1992, when "Place Attachment" (Low and Altman, 1992) was published, becoming a landmark book on the topic, conceptualisation, theories, applications, interpretation on it intensified and the literature produced was more and more complex and vast. The topic is approached nowadays in pluridisciplinary and interdisciplinary manners, combining perspectives from human geography, psychology, phenomenology, memory studies, bringing into discussion the idea of competing theories (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2017).

Firstly defined as "the bonding of people to places" (Low and Altman, 1992, p. 7), which is in itself a very complex way of looking at the topic, at later stages the literature on it involved in-depth analysis on place identity, sense of place and place meaning (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Manzo, 2003; Scannell and Gifford, 2010a), underlining the multiple facets of the ways in which the attachment to places is defined, manifested, represented and conceptualised by individuals, as well as by communities.

These blocks of literature approach mainly the criteria through which place identity should be defined, who are the place actors, what specific elements make the place alive, focusing on the interpersonal relationships, individual and community lives which transform a practiced space into a place (Russell and Ward, 1982; de Certeau, 1984; Peet, 1998). Often, the topic of place attachment brings into discussion

simultaneously issues related to the cultural identities of the groups (living and practicing the place). The sense of place is constructed and represented in these cases by community sets of values, ways of life, daily routines, rituals produced and developed specifically in certain places (Rowles, 2000; Trentelman, 2009; Erickson, 2010).

Other approaches, focusing on how and why place meanings are constructed under the pressure of environment on culture, analyse in particular the ways in which cultural sets of values shared by certain community members are generated and developed in specific environments (Mesch and Manor, 1998; Owen and Videras, 2006).

Meanwhile, the temporal dimension is introduced in certain analyses produced on place attachment. These studies focus on the relationship between practiced space and time (Lewicka, 2017). They attempt to explain place attachment on the basis of the residents' length of the stay in a place, underlining how and why memory and nostalgia play a role in this process.

Other paths to understand the diverse hypostases of place attachment consider the nowadays world dynamics, developments, transformations and bring into analysis problems of displacement, extreme mobility, and late modern forms of nomadism (as the places people occupy are not more than temporary stations) (Baumann, 2002).

More recently published anthologies on the topic, having as aims to put on the agenda theoretical, methodological and applications of it explore its phenomenological roots; the connections between the main principles of interpersonal attachment theory and place attachment theory; what happens to people's connections with place in a society exposed to mobility; how place attachment relates to mobility and how different forms of memory may contribute to people's emotional bonding with places, discussing as well the community level place attachment and its relationship to social capital development; human-environment relations (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2017). They give a sense of how the topic is addressed nowadays, with all its articulations, problematic parts, ambiguities, and limitations.

2. METHODOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

This research has quite a long history. It started in 2005 and since then, with a few breaks, it has been developing gradually. First of all, the research questions focused on the ways in which the cultural identity of the community is defined and how specifically the feeling of belonging of community members is considered and represented.

Documenting these cultural identity issues (the actions, specific behaviours and responses in difficult, problematic circumstances), the community coagulation factors had been systematically identified. From their whole plethora (religious factors, commemorations and celebrations of special events for the Jewish community members, high culture performances), this article focuses on the topic of place attachment, seen as the one keeping the community alive, having a very important role in the process of identity construction and representation in nowadays contexts (a considerable part of the interviews are highly relevant concerning the way the place attachment is presented and underlined, explaining what specific role it has in the community cultural identity definability and representation).

The relation to the place as such (the native place for a part of the interlocutors or place of adoption for others) and its constituents – buildings, parks, family workshops, factories – is very much present in the residents' narratives. The interlocutors make also references in the interviews to the ways in which the interpersonal relationships were constructed, to genuine human interferences, to communication with others, and ways of life. At this level, the research aims to document this type of attachment and to analyse it in context, on different layers, identifying the recurrent elements in the interviews but also specific ones.

I have encountered the voices of interlocutors who are in the city, therefore having an active relationship with the place, but also of those who were born in Cluj-Napoca but are not the place residents anymore, living in other parts of the world (all twenty interviews have been conducted in Cluj-Napoca). Although the interlocutors' age is very different (aged people in case of the current residents) and younger people (in their forties and fifties in the case of those who left the place and the country), the same ways of expressing the attachment to the place through appealing to memory and nostalgia is present.

Another topic which is present in our analysis, systematically approached (as it is/it was very much present in the interlocutors' narratives) – the property recuperation/restitution – is deeply related to the one of place attachment.

Symbolically, the intention to recuperate properties, as parts of a specific cultural landscape is to recuperate certain cultural values, lifestyles, daily routines, social networks, an entire life belonging to a time frame before disruptions, displacements, tragic events. It has a dynamic, pragmatic dimension, somehow demonstrating that the community is alive, therefore the cultural identity construction and representation topics are present.

The research was done exclusively with qualitative methods, engaged in the effort of understanding the community dynamics, the ways in which the interlocutors are defining their belonging to community and places.

3. HISTORICAL DATA ABOUT THE CLUJ JEWISH COMMUNITY. THE INTERWAR AND POST-WAR PERIODS

In order to frame the research as adequate as possible, I consider important to reconstruct, on the basis of official approaches, the history of the Cluj-Napoca (Cluj, Kolozsvar) Jewish communities. In brief, the history of these communities is part of the history of Transylvania (Carmilly-Weinberger, 1970) and from its complexity, I bring into discussion the topics of their marginality and exclusions, displacements and ruptures, the triple cultural affiliations (Jewish, Hungarian and Romanian, due to different historical and political contexts). From the very complex history of the Transylvanian and Cluj Jews, I have selected data which are helping in the process of understanding better the main topic of our approach, place attachment. Certain interlocutors' attitudes, reactions, perspectives, feelings and thoughts are understandable, reconstructing the whole communitarian picture, the group historical accumulations, challenges, anxieties, and traumas.

The particular relationship between memory and history is included in the article, deriving from the necessity to put and to link the interlocutors' narratives (where subjectivity is present) with objective, historical times. An analytical frame that points out the complicated interactions between history and memory is appropriate and extremely useful in our effort to interpret empirical data.

The subjective histories and the objective historical time have peculiar links and dynamics and offering a few historical landmarks with respect to the Transylvanian and Cluj Jews is of help in the effort to deconstruct them. The presence of the Jewish communities in Transylvania was attested prior to the period mentioned in the title of this subchapter and the information regarding the presence of the Jews in Cluj-Napoca (Cluj, Kolozsvar, Klausenburg) is to be traced back in 1769. The presence of a Jew is mentioned that year; in 1780, according to the census, eight Jewish families are mentioned in this settlement (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

Other data concerning the Jewish community's religious life, cemeteries, authorities' perspectives regarding the possibility given to the Jews to settle in this place are present in different historical sources in the early decades of the 19th century: a prayer room opened in 1807, the functional synagogue for forty families (1818), a ḥevra kaddisha founded in 1837, fifteen Jewish families allowed to remain in the place in 1839, etc.

The presence of the Jewish communities in Transylvania and specifically in Cluj (Kolozsvar, Klausenburg) and their dynamics are to be placed in broader historical and geopolitical contexts: the post-1867 Austro-Hungarian dualism, the newly born Romanian state (since 1918), the annexation of Northern Transylvania to Hungary (1940), the retrocession of this part of the province to Romania (after the Second World War), the totalitarian and post-totalitarian periods.

In the next paragraphs, I will make references only to a few excerpts of the complex history of the Transylvanian and Cluj Jewish communities, in an effort to frame as adequate as possible the interlocutors' narratives, the empirical data collected when doing fieldwork.

Regarding the interwar period, the settlement of the Jewish population in Transylvania and in Cluj is attested in the 1930 census. According to it:

> "in 14 urban localities, the number of the Jews was over 2,000, the towns with the most significant Jewish population being Oradea (19,838 people-24.1/% of the total population), Cluj (13,504), Satu-Mare (11,533), Sighetu Marmaţiei (11,057-40% of the total population), Timişoara (9,368-10%), Arad (7,000-10%), Târgu-Mureş (5,193-14.8%)" (Gyemant, 2004, p. 256).

As mentioned above, Cluj had at that time the second largest Jewish population in Transylvania, and the community life was extremely dynamic. When referring to the Transylvanian/Cluj Jewish communities in the interwar period, a relevant topic is that one of the ways in which the community members were defining themselves culturally. How and why do they affirm their feeling of belonging to the group, according to criteria such as language and religion are questions addressed quite often by historians; responses to them are present in the interlocutors' narratives, too.

The case of the Transylvanian Jewish communities is summarised as it follows:

> "As for the maternal language criterion, 111,275 people declared themselves as Yiddish speakers, namely 62.3% of the Jewish population, the rate being higher, around 66% in historical Transylvania, Maramureş and Crişana and ten times lower in Banat (6.7%). About ½ of the Jewish population spoke Hungarian, German or Romanian as maternal languages, which reveals the substantial progress of the process of cultural-linguistic assimilation" (Gyemant, 2004, p. 255).

At this point, the empirical material, collected through fieldwork, is juxtaposed, revealing more a cultural fluidity and multiple cultural affiliations of the community members, with salutary consequences on them. In the following subchapters of this article, I demonstrate how it worked properly, underlining that, due to specific historical, political contexts and circumstances the Jewish community in Cluj (as well as communities in other Transylvanian places) were culturally open both to Hungarian and Romanian groups.

The radicalisation of the political discourse in the interwar period in Romania and the appearance of

extremist parties with an antisemitic ideology had terrible consequences on all Jewish communities in Romania:

> "Liga Apărării Naţional Creştine – LANC [The National-Christian Defense League], led by A.C. Cuza, and Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail [the Legion of the Archangel Michael], founded in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, which developed into Garda de Fier [Iron Guard] in 1930. Destroyed in 1933 by the liberal government led by I. G. Duca, the Iron Guard re-emerged as Totul pentru Ţară [Everything for the Country] Party, gaining 15.56% of the votes in the 1937 election" (Muzeul Documentar și Muzeul Virtual al Holocaustului din Nordul Transilvaniei, 2022).

The discriminatory legislation promoted during Tătărăscu government (January 1934-1937): The law for the settlement of agricultural and urban debt (7 April 1934), the law for the employment of Romanians in enterprises (16 July 1934), but mostly the explicit antisemitic laws and ordinances during Goga-Cuza government (29 December 1937- 10 February 1938) and the royal dictatorship (10 February 1938-5 September 1940) continued and deepened the persecutions against Jewish population all over Romania (Transylvania and Cluj being included as well).

After the annexation of Northern Transylvania to Horthyist Hungary on the 30th of August 1940, the Jewish population in this region is the target of 98 laws, decrees and governmental ordinances, with a strong antisemitic character. They deprive the members of the Jewish communities of fundamental human and citizenship rights, properties, goods, attempting to eliminate them from the economic and social circuits (Muzeul Documentar și Muzeul Virtual al Holocaustului din Nordul Transilvaniei, 2022).

The data regarding the antisemitic legislation in the interwar period, as well as during the war are historically documented, being also present and personalised in different interlocutors' narratives.

Concerning the totalitarian period, I discuss mainly the attempts to homogenise the Jewish communities, through certain top-down totalitarian decisions such as the unification of the Sephardic, neolog and orthodox communities (11.08.1949: Rotman, 2003) and migration to Israel, the topics being historically documented, and present as well in the interlocutors' narratives. The subchapter "Fieldwork Data on Property Recuperation and Place Attachment" focuses on the post-1989 restitution legislation, with its traps and consequences on the Jewish community. Although the data considered in the paper refer mainly to the Jewish communities in Romania, I specifically make references to the Cluj-Napoca one.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA, RESEARCH PROCESS

As previously mentioned, this research has as main aims to focus on the topic of place attachment for the Jews of Cluj-Napoca; in particular I aim at identifying the ways in which the residents/interlocutors define, construct and represent the feeling of belonging to the place, and how and why memory and nostalgia are present in their narratives when discussing the place attachment topic.

Mainly, how the relation with the place is exactly defined by the members of the Cluj Jewish community, how and why it is present explicitly and implicitly in the interlocutors' narratives? – are key research questions. The temporal dimension, the past oriented discourses constructed, the ways the interlocutors motivate their present in the focused-on place (Cluj) through appealing memories are approached in this part of the paper. Following the interlocutors' narratives logics, when explaining how specifically they filter the current socio-cultural and geographical realities, I constantly have noticed that nostalgia is present and should be analysed as adequate as possible in the context. Defined not only as:

> "a sentimental longing for what is not, but a powerful psychological tool on which people rely in order to restore self- continuity disrupted by major life events (…) it helps to put together broken parts, builds a bridge between past and present, increases self-esteem and life satisfaction, and reinforces social ties (Lewicka, 2017, p. 53).

As the empirical evidence supports these perspectives, I am going to engage such conceptual tools in order to structure and interpret the fieldwork data.

5. FIELDWORK DATA ON PLACE ATTACHMENT

An important part of the interlocutors are persons who preferred to stay in Cluj, having specific motivations to choose this, even if they had coped with very difficult periods (only if we refer to the recent past – the post-1989 period – with all its uncertainties triggered by economic, political and social transformations, but on the basis of arbitrary decisions) (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999).

The other part of interlocutors are persons who left Cluj, especially in the late 1990s-early 2000s, and chose other destinations, such as Israel, USA, and Canada. They had specific, different motivations to leave the place and the country, partly described in the interviews. Neither in the first case, nor in the second one, did I attempt to analyse and explain the reasons they had to stay or to leave; my intention was rather to pay attention to the specific ways in which place attachment should be observed and has certain peculiarities, analysing the interviews.

Indeed, a considerable part of the interlocutors, with a long-term experience of/in the place, exposed to deeply traumatic events (the 1944 deportation) had constantly the tendency to refer to it in a nostalgic way, reconstructing verbally the place

"atmosphere", appealing to memories and reviewing their own biographies in relation to their homes, family, personal workshops, and workplaces. Remembering a certain place brings also into the narratives people of different ethnicities (Jewish, Hungarian, and Romanian), social networks, interpersonal relations, daily routines, work programmes and habits.

Interlocutors are recurrently referring to different Jewish communitarian places in Cluj, clearly indicating where they are situated nowadays (which streets, which parts of Cluj-Napoca). Synagogues, ritual baths, community official buildings, workshops mainly with Jewish employers, small factories, hospitals are first of all recalled in the interlocutors' narratives, as they had been in former times. These places, these references are important for them as they serve as landmarks, which facilitate the processes of rememorating the social connections established, a vivid atmosphere of living together, of sharing ideas, perspectives, values, developing friendships; ways of relating to other cultural communities, with other languages, religious and ethnic values. The obvious attachment to these places has a deeper meaning and reveals an attachment to a lifestyle, to certain socio-cultural values of a blurred past:

> "There were several synagogues in former times here: on Paris and Horea streets, also one near the river (river Someş, crossing Cluj n.a.). I remember them all and even if I am old now, I can accompany you and show where they are. Together with my family we used to go to the Poale Tzedek (neighbourhood- n.a.) one, you know, the one downhill (down the Cetăţuie – a small hilly area in the central part of Cluj-Napoca- n.a.). We went there regularly but on special occasions, it was a pleasure to meet our fellows. Many friends of ours used to go, it was our place"… "and you know, dear, we had very close friends and relatives and we so much liked to be together and to celebrate when it was something to be celebrated and to party when having time for this" (Judith).

Another adequate example of how remembering a place triggers other memories, bringing on the agenda details on the life of a couple is the following:

> "my husband was the owner of the shop here nearby (in the central part of Cluj, n.a.), the same street where we lived at that time; very near this flat where I live now. We had been married recently in those years, and it was important for me to know that he was not far from me – every afternoon, I waited for him and my heart was beating powerfully. It was such a big love. I had to move to another flat, after he passed away, but I chose one in the same vicinity. I wanted to feel he was somehow present" (Roza).

Places in Cluj-Napoca are included in the interlocutors' narratives, when describing their own perspectives on the community members' triple cultural affiliation – Jewish, Hungarian, and Romanian. All these narratives are constructing a very particular image of Cluj as place and demonstrate a peculiar attachment to it, through memories and nostalgia:

> "My cousin had a small shop at the corner of the street, he had many customers, Romanians, Hungarians. Everyone felt there at home. My husband talked in Romanian to the Romanian customers, and in Hungarian to Hungarians" (Gyongyi).
>
> "I got sick once and I went to see a doctor. He had his medical praxis not far from our neighbourhood, in a house (then, he explains where the place was – n.a.). Seeing my Hungarian name, he started to speak to me in Hungarian. I answered in Romanian, fluently, he was a Romanian doctor. He continued, you must be then a Jew if you speak so well both Hungarian and Romanian" (Erno).

Narratives on places aggregate and engage narratives on ways of life, and the attachment to places (or different designates related to it) involves affects, emotions, senses related to other community fellows and other cultural groups members. Place attachment in the case of the focused-on group is a very complex issue, involving elements such as place as a practiced space, a temporal dimension (past, memories and nostalgia are definitely part of their narratives), interpersonal relationships, social networks, feeling of belonging to the group, cultural identity issues.

Having empirical support in this respect, one can conclude that the ways in which memory and nostalgia function here, triggered by mental images of places (designates) involve also senses: visual memory is clearly challenged and quite a few narratives gathered when conducting interviews are relevant in this respect (Luck and Hollingsworth, 2008). Then, other narratives bring into discussion "taste, touch and smell" (Bal, 2008); in this case the narrated atmosphere has certainly a lot to do with place attachment:

> "I remember the ways my mother prepares herself for Shabbat and for other religious and family events, as a person but mostly for others. All had been occasions to celebrate and those smells and tastes of what she cooked followed me wherever I was. It was part of my home, intime atmosphere but also part of my native place. I am always happy when I found them where I go. But they are never the same, then it is painful as I miss my parents, my childhood, the atmosphere there" (Moshe).

The place and attachment are encountered in the interlocutors' descriptions and analysis, when talking about a peculiar cultural diversity of Cluj, seen mainly on linguistic, ethnic and religious layers. All these above-mentioned cultural categories have specific links with different components of the place. For instance, in the interviews, it was clear which had been the Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Neolog neighbourhoods, what particular languages and dialects they spoke and why, what specific synagogues they used to have, and a whole atmosphere related to the practice of these elements was reconstructed in their narratives:

> "in former times, there were a Sephardi, a Neolog, an Ashkenazi communities, here, downtown, living peacefully" (Marcus).

Also, the above-mentioned triple cultural affiliation (conceptualised by interlocutors as well) –

Jewish, Romanian and Hungarian – is a very interesting mark:

> "I used to translate texts in Romanian for my Hungarian Colleagues, and in Hungarian for my Romanian colleagues" (Jeno).

All these empirical data are related to the main idea of this article, place attachment specifically describes how material culture (places, objects) are linked to the immaterial one, deeply and subtlety underlining that they cannot be understood separately.

Other interlocutors do not have a very long-term experience of staying in Cluj-Napoca, but most of them were born here and their childhood, adolescence, education periods had been lived, experienced here. They migrated in the early 2000s to Israel mostly, continuing their lives in new settlements and having successful careers in new places. From the interviews I have done, one sees that the same mechanisms of describing the place (or places of Cluj-Napoca) are triggered. Recurrently, they appeal to their memories with respect to the place, and specific forms and contents of nostalgia are present, due to particular cultural and historical accumulations, to particular individual and family histories.

Making references to different designates-objects, places (homes, schools, places related to activities they took part in), they manage to reconstruct piece by piece the "atmosphere" of their childhood and teenage period.

If putting together and comparing the whole picture of the place as resulted from the interviews, although two temporal frames (in historical, objective time) are on the agenda – one of Cluj in the interwar period, and the other of Cluj-Napoca in totalitarian times, the subjective memories and implied nostalgia with respect to the place and constructed social networks recurrently filter the historical realities. Very difficult and oppressive times are somehow suspended, and positive image on places, objects and activities related to them, social relationships are full of light, being narrated in a special emotional way, loaded with personal understandings and significances.

Another recurrent response in the interviews is the one narrating how and why the connection to the native place, and the special attachment developed in relation to it facilitated a lot the settlement in new places (Jerusalem and Haifa in the interlocutors' cases). The feelings and thoughts related to the fact that they are rooted and will always keep a relation with the native place are very strong. They often brought different personal, home objects with them and put them in new places, symbolically transborder(ing) together with objects –experiences of their prior existence in the native place. Interviews in this sense are underlining how simple objects – for instance handwritten courses from the Faculty period, brought in the new place, helped a lot to keep the memory of the first place alive, demonstrating the attachment to that place, wrapping up personal experiences, desires, actions and personal/social networks:

> "It is so pleasant for me to open one day the Anatomy course. It is a good occasion to remember my colleagues who are now in different countries, with some of them I am still in touch, the professors, lecturing in amphitheatres in the Buildings of the Faculty of Medicine, my colleagues, the exams periods. I know that the part of my existence there is brought here and then, I don't feel as losing the connection with the native place, on a contrary. It is here and as alive as me. I feel even more determined to continue my career here; it is a way of honouring my native place" (Noha).

Other objects brought from family homes have a very deep significances for the interlocutors' who moved from a place to another, from a country to another:

> "I have brought the Menora, it was my favourite piece. My parents inherited it from my mother's parents and so on. I put it in my favourite place in my living after departure. When I look at it daily, strange emotions are around me, also anxieties. I realise that I am getting older as I know it since my childhood, but yet it gives me a sense of continuity and I do not miss my parents that much seeing it. Neither Cluj…" (Sorana).

It is very interesting how objects, and their descriptions of functions they had, remade the link of the persons (interlocutors) with the intimate first place of that object (native homes for instance), but also with the larger place. The attachment to the interlocutors' parents and ancestors, to their roots and native places are reconstructed in these narratives. The objects recall individual, family, community, place memories and have a deep role in the processes of the interlocutors' identity self-definition and strengthening.

The narratives, without any exceptions, continue with descriptions and data on interpersonal relationships, social networks, reconstructing the social life of the objects, their circulations. The place, with all its components are invoked, mostly as a practiced space (with active people, with daily routines, with social ties and networks, etc.):

> "When seeing my childhood books and tapes, those which I managed to bring here, in my new place (Jerusalem) and in my new flat, I remember my classmates, having those books of the same childhood collection, the games we have invented and played after reading some of them, with characters who have impressed us the most. We played them in the schoolyards or during holidays, when gathering around one block of flats of one of our colleagues or another. But mostly, seeing the tapes, I remember the parties, also in communist flats when we listened to Modern Talking and danced till 10-11 in the evening" (Yael).

The distances are made fluid these ways, the departure/displacement and accommodation to new place experiences are not that painful.

The two types of narratives gathered from interlocutors who decided to stay in Cluj (having clear

motivations for their decision) and from those who chose to leave the place, especially in late 1990s-early 2000) are both illuminating for our effort to understand the elements, the links and the mechanisms determining place attachment: the ways it is produced, why it does function as such, how it can be moved to other places, if a primary place attachment could facilitate adaptation to new environments. Clearly, the attachment to the new places is facilitated and strengthened, as the interlocutors' who left Cluj-Napoca have successful adaptation and career histories in new places. These conclusions support perspectives underlining that: "Empirical evidence shows that higher place attachment is associated with higher life satisfaction, better social capital and higher overall adjustment" (Lewicka, 2017, p. 51), explaining that mobility encourages in specific ways attachment to place(s). In the focused-on place, even if various forms of displacement were produced, in a way or another, in different periods of time, the bonding with it is present, lived and also exposed/narrated but not in a superficial, declarative manner.

6. FIELDWORK DATA ON PROPERTY RECUPERATION AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

The empirical material collected when conducting fieldwork in the Cluj Jewish community revealed a topic which was very much debated in the early decades of 2000s – that one of property restitution/recuperation. The topic was triggered by several laws and ordinances, decisions of the State (through several institutions) to give back individual and community properties confiscated after 1948. In the post-1989 context, through other top-down decisions, materialised in a considerable number of ordinances applied in the late 1990s-early 2000s (40/1999; 83/1999; 13/1998; 112/1998; 94/2000;101/2000;184/2002), decrees reviewing the 177/1948 one, laws – (501/2002 176/2002; 458/2003; 66/2004) individuals and communities were challenged, although the intention was to reconsider the totalitarian period legislation. The Jewish communities had been affected by all these decisions in specific ways. As explained in the part of the article including historical references, in Romania the nationalisation issue had certain characteristics in the interwar period and then, in the communist/totalitarian one.

Most importantly and related to the main goal of this article, the topic of property recuperation is to be viewed in relation to the ways in which the interlocutors define their attachment and bonding to the place through it.

As mentioned above, the process of recuperation of properties is symbolically a way in which the past could be recuperated, and individual and community members' attachment to place is expressed through it in a specific, dynamic and pragmatic way. The main interrogations at this level are: how and why the recuperation of properties is an indicator of place attachment, and are there chances to document it? How, for instance buildings and other goods have certain meanings for community members as well as for the community as institution? Are they important parts of the place? How and why is place attachment imbedding the subjective and collective complex feelings, affects and thoughts and how and why does it generate the actions to recuperate the properties?

Following the interlocutors' responses, the intention is to document how place attachment is the complex set of attitudes, perspectives, feelings, and thoughts determining the involvement in the process of property recuperation.

In brief, after documenting (through semi-structured interviews and life histories) which were the entities involved in the process (the "state" involved in restitution, with its institutions), the empirical data on community voices demonstrated the complex links between property recuperation and place attachment, underlining that place attachment had a dynamic dimension. They demonstrate that property recuperation processes and the community members engagement with them are expressions of a deep attachment to place, with all its components. To recuperate them is a possibility and a chance to recuperate sites of memories, a peculiar atmosphere always recounted by a considerable part of the interlocutors.

Meanwhile the feeling of belonging to the community is reassured, the involvement in the property recuperation issue demonstrating its manifestation.

However, there are several recurrent responses in the semi-structured interviews I have done. The negative consequences of nationalisation are systematically underlined by interlocutors:

> "This principle of nationalisation should have been abandoned immediately after Revolution as we intend to change the direction of society. But it is far from being that way" (Salamon).

All these excerpts from semi-structured interviews are relevant, underlining how damaging the nationalisation was for the Jewish community members and how they felt threatened as a group, their cultural identity being challenged, as well as their place attachment.

Another interesting point is that the community members who were still in Cluj-Napoca deplored the fact that in certain situations:

> "There are no descendants to claim properties, so, no problem, all these properties remain state property. The state is the beneficiary of our tragedy. There are buildings in this situation, as well. In Cluj, Mâloasă Street, no. 7 belonged to one of our families. Nobody returned. It became state property. The state sold it to the tenants. So, it is no restitution regarding it" (Erno).

The same interlocutor has his personal history related to that place, and after reflecting on the situation he started to narrate that:

> "I regret this profoundly. It is so, because my childhood was related to that place. We lived there and my childhood is related to that vicinity. I had so many friends there, we used to play a lot, I have memories and I miss so much that atmosphere" (Erno).

Or, another excerpt on how disadvantaging had been the property restitution laws in the mid-1990s and how the recuperation of properties (memories, affects, senses related to places) was made impossible:

> "I have friends in New York and Israel. At that moment, they have directly contacted Romanian Embassies, trying to regain the Romanian citizenship. But this procedure lasted too much, more than 2 or 3 months. They did not have any chance, as they could not regain the citizenship on time" (Marcus); (reference to the law 112/1995).

The Cluj, Jewish residents had been actively involved in this discussion; aged, their attachment to places is strongly underlined through these attitudes:

> "But then, when my children visited me the last summer, I have started to tell them stories from their childhood, with their mother taking care of them and with their fellows. We have remembered together the playgrounds where they met their mates and played till evening in summertime. A few months later, they have asked me how to do to be able to reconnect with the place. I am pretty sure they will do their best to recuperate…" (Ezra).

There are several ways in which the interlocutors' place attachment is demonstrated, as real and alive. One is underlined in excerpts from interviews, in which references to several components that constitute the Place (Cluj-Napoca, Cluj, Kolozsvar, in this case) are done or recalled. The other way analysed in this paper has a dynamic, pragmatic dimension and refers to how, in practical terms, individual and community former belongings can be recuperated and through these processes, sites of memories, identities, life experiences reappropriated.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The ways place attachment is articulated, manifested, represented in the case of the focused-on community are very complex and this article underlined them, at least partially, following the logics of the interlocutors' narratives, their perspectives, feelings, and thoughts. There are certain specific responses, peculiarities of the interviews done on the topic, due to subjectivities and personal filters involved, but there is also a recurrent dimension: the presence of memory and nostalgia when referring to senses, feelings, affects and self-reflections on the place, a peculiar way the interlocutors understand their present lives through appealing almost obsessively to the past.

The article illustrated two dimensions of place attachment – a narrated one, with a therapeutic function for the interlocutors, which gives sense of their present existence in place, and a dynamic one, manifested in their involvement in the process of property recuperation, with all its analysed meanings.

The place attachment as it is narrated by interlocutors has the capacity to bring the past at present: the images of the various components of the place (buildings, land parcels, family/ home objects, neighbourhoods) are filtered through recounting. Being recounted, these parts of the place have an idealised representation in the narratives, and the whole atmosphere described around them has a peculiar flavour.

Part of them are identifiable and touchable even nowadays: this is why the two temporal dimensions (past through appealing to memories of the place) and present are put together. This overlapping process is liberator for interlocutors, narrating in itself having a therapeutic function.

The other specific topic, property restitution, clearly demonstrating a dynamic dimension of place attachment, has a relevant role for individuals and community, as they are involved, kept alive and motivated by and through it.

I aimed at analysing in this article only these two facets of place attachment, being aware of the fact that there are many other paths and angles to be followed when exploring such a complex topic.

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