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**The Vienna Diktat Between History and
Memory**
THESIS SUMMARY

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The second Vienna Arbitration represents, paradoxically, the historiographic subject on which Romanian historiography seems to have established already an interpretive consensus and an appearance of exhaustiveness that presents the researchers with the subject as a depleted field, whose depths have been investigated and no longer hold interest. Through historiographical and epistemological stubbornness, I have reached the conclusion that the subject is only seemingly "resolved" from a historiographic point of view, and a multitude of interpretative openings reveal themselves generously to the researcher who goes beyond the "established" historiography.

Thus, the present research aims to highlight the distinctions between the historiographic discourse of "Jupiterian sovereignty", shaped along the lines of specific national memory historiographical works, and the discourse delivered by oral history. Subsequently, the analysis will also follow and attempt to explain the metamorphoses and interventions that have contributed to the ossification of the historiographic discourse and the apparent sterility of the subject. To achieve its goal, the analysis starts with a series of research questions, the first of which seeks to capture the historical context, followed by the analysis of the main characteristics of the historiographic discourse regarding the second Vienna Arbitration, in particular, and the period 1940-1944 in the history of Transylvania and Romania, in general. It is a captivating period in terms of the lessons that can be derived from the "experience of trauma", and more. Topics such as national pride, ideal judicial authority, modernization efforts, discrimination based on nationality and race, uplifting moments, shocking tragedies, and, at times, the bizarre and even hilarious aspects of everyday life, all provide reasons to study this period.

The analysis starts from the consideration that it would be of real benefit for Romanian historiography to move away from the clichés and generalizations characteristic of a young and recently emancipated historiography, to abandon the characterization of entire periods in narrative-ideological blocks such as "historical tragedy" – as found even in very recent works – and to focus on the research and trends from other historiographical spaces that, even if they do not converge with the previous vision, do offer a theoretical and interpretative framework marked by a higher degree of objectivity, without considering that this entails in any manner an act of infidelity towards one's national history.

The state of stagnation in deeply ideological themes and approaches specific to a historiography subordinated to political power is the subject of the second chapter of the work.

Many works produced as a result of political orders are considered methodological and interpretive acquisitions even today, although historiography seems to disown them, albeit rarely and succinctly. However, many of the research conducted after 1989 continue along the lines established during the period of communist nationalism. One of the authors analysed within the third chapter mentions, for example, that the conduct of the war and Romanian-Hungarian relations were “acutely” perceived in the rhythm of daily life but does not provide further details that would be of major interest to a researcher interested in delving deeper into the subject. Who perceived these relations in this way? What are the arguments supporting this thesis? What are the scholarly works suggesting this interpretive line? Who are the witnesses or memoirists mentioning the imbalances produced by the Vienna Act in daily life? The author does not provide such details.

Oral history investigations suggest, with few exceptions, observed especially in areas where conflicts and crimes occurred, such as the localities of Ip, Treznea, or Moisei, which were analysed in the third chapter, that life continued as before, sometimes even better than before. Witnesses interviewed in the eastern border area of Transylvania, for example, state that the transition took place without violence, and that all residents of the commune received assistance from the Hungarian authorities. Furthermore, those who fled to Romania were said to be "already in trouble with the law" anyway.

In most of the analysed cases, one can observe a discursive-ceremonial reconfiguration or, in other cases, an elimination of local or individual memory from official discourse, a phenomenon that also occurs in areas where the Romanian-Hungarian conflict was more acute, such as the commune of Treznea in Sălaj County. Here, the rituals of memory organized before and after 1989 exclude the villagers from the symbolic circle formed around the memorial, relegating them to a marginal and eccentric position, almost as extras in the spectacle of memory. At the very centre of the ceremony are representatives of state institutions, a fact that is observable in other ceremonies analysed in the same final chapter of the work. Therefore, we can observe that what currently operates and weighs upon such ceremonies is not the past itself, but rather representations of past events that have undergone a process of moderation within a specific cultural framework and are congruent with a certain political agenda. Individual memory is often marginalized, almost silenced at times, the underlying message being that nothing is more important than the national past, a national past delivered through a dogmatic, manufactured memory that often presents a Manichean perspective, a world in stark colours, divided into black and white, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, "ours" and "foreign". Politicians and those involved in the processes of constructing national culture and

memory have long recognized the importance of commemorations, both for the construction of legitimizing narratives and for mobilizing and disciplining popular support for these representations. The power of commemoration to constitute a moment in which the present, past, and future are brought together within a symbolic action can lead to conflicts over the meanings of the past between politicians, intellectuals, and "consumers" of culture and memory. Hence, the state's stake in imposing its own version and marginalizing local or individual memory (or aspects thereof that do not correspond to the national version) and integrating any regional identities within the broader framework of the nation.

Thus, the new or rehashed discourse of the imagined community is created, staged, and perpetuated primarily through the educational system, where textbooks function as "ideological highways", as Mirela Murgescu calls them. It is a form of concentrated memory, "ready to be consumed", and cases in which there are attempts to nuance or explain it can give rise to veritable cognitive earthquakes – as was the case, for example, with the public scandal caused by the appearance of an "alternative" history textbook for high school students, analysed in the fourth subchapter of the final chapter. This is evidence that, in its entire process of crystallization, historical consciousness or national memory has largely followed the guidelines established by political discourse. It is not surprising, therefore, that proposals to integrate Romanian history into a broader framework of world history have been treated as a veritable assault on the "sacred" value of national past. We thus observe the presence and iridescence of a top-down process of memory transition, whose aim was primarily to reconstruct identities and to forge, quote, and recite a sequentially ordered discourse regarding the community's trajectory and its experience in the world.

The second line of analysis in the work examines the reasons for and through which historiographic discourse has come to be formulated in this way, in an attempt to establish the existence of a state reason that constantly formulates and reformulates this narrative in order to contribute to overcoming a dilemma by crystallizing a framework discourse about the past. Thus, the process begins in the immediate period after the territorial concessions, when the Antonescu administration was concerned with documenting how the military, and later the civilian authorities, managed the transition. In my opinion, the process was an organic one, given that not long ago the Transylvanians had been transformed into *homo nationalis*, and schools had become true bastions of Romanian identity.

Furthermore, the existence of this ideological line and the continued presence of the national project can also be observed in the way political leaders conducted negotiations with their Hungarian counterparts. The almost obsessive insistence on the "population exchange"

solution and the refusal to consider any other option demonstrate the determination to maintain borders and populations intact.

We can thus observe that, even risking a military conflict, the Romanian delegation insisted on the ethnic nature of the negotiations, while the Hungarian side viewed the entire dispute as a territorial issue. We can notice a differentiation between the message delivered at the political level and subsequently in historiography, and the one present in oral history testimonies, which, except for those originating from conflict-affected areas due to military changes, do not capture the ethnic component of the discussions or negotiations, nor do they capture the political shift in ethno-national terms.

Following the trajectory set by the political discourse surrounding the events, historiography has heightened divisions and generated a narrative that, in most cases, abandons nuance in favour of strong tones, and often even adopts the terminology. None of the witnesses whose interviews I have analysed discuss the period of territorial concessions in such impassioned terms as historians do.

Thus, we observe how there is a filiation between the propagandistic discourse of the era, aimed at reclaiming lost territory and willing to employ any kind of discursive manipulation to achieve this goal, and most historiographical works that delve into this period. This filiation does not do justice to the genre of historiography. It establishes a series of narrative templates for the nation, intended to be used by the mnemonic community to interpret multiple specific events in a unified manner by placing them within a schematic framework.

The conclusions of this secondary analytical line, I believe, provide a better understanding of the lack of historiographical nuance in approaching the mentioned subjects. Nuances and historiographical debates have, for the most part, been limited to defining the significant event: was it an arbitration? A dictate? A decision? A re-annexation or a conquest? Was Transylvania "brought back", as certain Hungarian historians argue?

Another subject of interest for Romanian historiography has been the thorough research on the Hungarian administration in northern Transylvania, with the analysis focusing primarily on the diplomatic background and circumstances leading to the Vienna decision, the sufferings of the remaining Romanians in Northern Transylvania (with an exacerbation and exaggeration, in my opinion, of Hungarian atrocities, leading to a demonization of Hungarian rule), and then the moment of the August 23rd act and the liberation of Transylvania.

At the same time, topics such as social movements of the era, the living conditions of Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, the intra-community problems caused by propaganda, and a less subjective analysis of the nature of Romanian-Hungarian relations in

Transylvania were almost entirely ignored. The nuances of these topics can be observed through the proximity to oral testimony, which must be brought to the forefront of the historiographical discourse.

We are discussing, therefore, about a historiography that introduced and re-centred commemoration, but eliminated the specific nuances of individual memory and replaced them with a national memory, fully in line with the national ideal, formulated through a series of statements and performative ceremonies that constructed a different reality, a reality of the nation, whose main architects are the intellectuals. We are thus discussing the existence of a national narrative, shaped along the lines of a dominant symbolic system - in the sense that it had the widest dissemination - which shapes the memorial and political perceptions and actions of societies. History and national memory have created the nation, and the nation has been recreated through history and national memory.

Most of these themes and leitmotifs have survived until after 1989 when a significant part of historiographical production could have, at least theoretically (and ideally), reorient itself towards a more detached approach, liberated, even partially, from the specific ideological constraints of "rollerism" and "protocronism". However, few works dedicated to the Second Vienna Award follow this methodological and interpretive approach, and many authors have chosen a Europeanized "disguise" while, in their metatext, their works remain largely indebted to a nationalist attitude, at best.

Furthermore, the analysis will focus on the reciprocal borrowings between national memory and history, understood here in the sense of national history, the state's narrative of its own development. Although we cannot discuss about a monolithic structure, given that institutional weaknesses and the inability to achieve certain objectives are significant reasons for the failure to successfully implement all commemorative policies, the state has played a clear centralizing role in the effort to forge a national memory. The effort of the elites has centred around the construction of narratives and rituals about the past in order to obtain political legitimacy, a process in which the appropriation of memory was attempted through mobilizing memories in a politicized social context, which, as emphasized in the study, does not authentically reflect memories. Education or a certain set of formative processes mediate the textual experience of the event - this mediation is based on a set of textual resources of the nation that are interposed or interpose themselves (through the force of the distilled and emotional nature of the message) between the event and its societal understanding. There have been situations where this process has been successful, and traces of history can be found in oral testimonies; however, more often than not, there is a distance between institutional

intentions and the people who are supposed to be mobilized by these commemorative rituals, a tension that marks the distinction between memories as individual or local products and commemorative discourse as a politicized social rearticulation of memory.

Thus, the manner in which history penetrates memory in order to shape it becomes visible, along with the resistance of local and personal memory to historical interventions, as well as the points in which memory adopts the historical framework and incorporates it as such. In order to track and quantify the narrative borrowings between memory and history, the use of oral testimony proves to be indispensable. Therefore, the message conveyed by "bottom-up memory" must be carefully analysed as to identify the differences in approach that, in terms of historical writing, often overlook the everyday and focus primarily on the "battle for Transylvania".

Oral testimony is particularly relevant for the period from 1940 to 1944 and often brings nuance or even contradicts history. The image of the Hungarian administration in general, and of Hungarians in particular, is predominantly positive: behavioural characteristics prevail - Hungarians were polite, even more polite than Romanians, as stated by a witness from the village of Poiana Ilvei. They would sanction troublemakers, especially young Romanians, but did not interfere with the organic flow of daily life. Consequently, Sunday dances continued to be organized in the village. They were civilized and made efforts to improve the standard of living. For example, they disliked that Romanians ate polenta, so one of the first products distributed after the installation of the Hungarian administration was wheat flour. They resorted to requisitions only later, when the progress of the war demanded it. A resident from the village of Remeți, in Maramureș County this time, believes that things "improved" after the arrival of the Hungarian administration.

One aspect mentioned by many of the interviewed witnesses, out of approximately 56 interviews, is the imposing presence of Hungarian gendarmes, referred to as "cendori", who were described as "serious people, with a sense of duty, and correct". They wore feathered hats and ensured order in the community. The conflicts between Romanians and Hungarians mentioned in the interviews used for this chapter did not arise from ethnic reasons in any situation analysed. As one witness mentioned, the cause of the disputes was most often "too much brandy". Romanian holidays were respected, although in times of necessity, dictated by the progress of the war, young people were sometimes called to work on Sundays alongside the "cubicași", workers brought from Hungary to work on railway lines and fortifications on the border in the Bistrița area. Out of all 56 interviews, only one witness claims that the population was hostile to the Hungarian military and civilian administration. Another witness,

on the other hand, mentions that "the communists, our own brothers, behaved worse than the Hungarians under occupation". However, there were also cases where a too friendly attitude towards the Hungarians was condemned by the community, and those who "flattered the Hungarians" were seen as traitors or "false".

In the interviews conducted with the survivors of the massacres in Sălaj County or their families, the tone is strongly negative, permeated by the themes propagated annually at the commemoration ceremonies for the victims in the generational transmission of memory. Thus, the Hungarian soldiers who came to the village are depicted as extremely devious, and this attitude is also transferred to the local Hungarians who previously lived alongside Romanians. This creates two opposing sides, and oral testimony, strongly influenced by historiographic and political discourse, undergoes a similar metamorphosis (note that the interview was conducted in 1997).

Finally, we observe the distinctions between the two types of discourse on the same phenomenon, as in the case of the Rashomon effect, which presents a series of methodological implications and certifies, in my opinion, the validity of such an analytical approach for Romanian historiography. I believe that we should be able to observe and analyse the constant changes in history and memory, the swings of historiographic and political discourse between the two, as well as the need to identify the reasons behind these changes. These changes happen primarily due to the actions of the state, which relies on a multitude of resources to deliver an official version of the past, a "distributed collective memory", especially through the education system, with the aim of producing competent and loyal citizens who are "immune" to various factional loyalties or restructuring the community following events that have shattered the political and social order.

Essentially, the research aimed to analyse the discursive reverberations of a "blow" received by the nation and the manner or manners in which this blow is narratively managed, through words, actions, and monuments, and perpetuated through national commemorative ceremonies. Collective memory is thus influenced more by the conditions existing at the moment of recollection than by the conditions at the moment of its formation, tending to sacrifice accuracy in order to formulate a past that can be used, that can serve the nation. At the same time, the analysis also examines the effects of this significant social event on ordinary people, on the grassroots memory that rarely gets represented in the corpus of constitutive texts of the nation but can provide information about the impact experienced by ordinary individuals when encountering the movements of history. I chose to include testimonies from areas where the conflict was more acute to support the thesis that tense moments and even tragedies were

due more to military changes than to political and administrative ones, but they were extrapolated to the entire territory and throughout the entire period of Hungarian administration to be included in the discourse of national memory, the main characteristics of which I have highlighted above.

My hope is that this interpretive model will prove valid and useful to researchers focused on the archaeology of national memory and that it can be applied to other significant social events as well.

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