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Challenging Narratives: Unveiling Encounters between Jewish Children/Adolescents and Italian Military Units in Transnistria during the Holocaust

As Italian military units, in alliance with Nazi Germany, entered the former Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, their lives intersected with those of the Jewish population, weaving a complex narrative of encounters across specific locales and routes until Italy's capitulation in 1943.[1] Situated between the Dniester and Bug rivers and once a part of the Ukrainian SSR, Transnistria provides an important backdrop for uncovering these previously unexplored confrontations. In late August 1941, Romania, aligned with Germany, assumed control over Transnistria. Following the establishment of its administration in September 1941, provisional ghettos and labor camps were established, to which Romanian authorities brought local Jews and deported nearly 150,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina; an additional 25,000 Roma were deported to the camps and ghettos of the region in 1942.[2] Postwar testimonies from

1 Italy participated in Operation Barbarossa under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. The decision to align with Nazi Germany was driven by a complex mix of ideological, geopolitical, and resource-related factors and ambitions. Integrated into the overarching German command structure, Italian military forces deployed in the Eastern Front included the CSIR (*Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia*), the ARMIR (*Armata Italiana in Russia*), which replaced the CSIR in 1942, and the *Carabinieri*, a military police force. When the Axis experienced defeats, Mussolini was ousted, and Italy allied with the Allies in 1943. See: Bastian Matteo Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front, 1941–1943: Operations, Myths and Memories* (Hempstead, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 87–89. For documents published in Italian, see: Nuto Revelli, *Mussolini's Death March: Eyewitness Accounts of Italian Soldiers on the Eastern Front* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

2 On June 22, 1941, Romania joined the war against the USSR, aiming to reclaim Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, which had been lost as a result of a 1939 German-

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Jews who survived the Holocaust in Transnistria are the sole sources to illuminate the intricacies of Jewish-Italian interactions in this region. In this particular geographical context, young survivors' accounts are more numerous and tend to emphasize Italians' affinity for children and their specific efforts to assist young Jews, suggesting deeper and more varied interaction than Italians' encounters with adult Jews in Transnistria.

This article questions the nature of the encounters between Jewish children/adolescents and Italians, exploring the complex spectrum of experiences and perceptions and the ways they were shaped by crucial factors such as age and gender. It also examines the tension between the almost uniform portrayal of Italians as kind-hearted and nuanced layers of interactions that reveal episodes of violence perpetrated by Italians and cases where Italian assistance to young Jews was the result of barter rather than humanitarianism. This study contends that Jewish children and adolescents, influenced by their age, gender, and circumstances, exhibited significant agency and self-rescue in their interactions with Italians, even during moments marked by childlike naïveté. Offering a micro-history that delves into the experiences of young Jews in Transnistria, this essay bridges a key gap in the scholarship and, thus, contributes to a more complex understanding of the Holocaust within the broader history of Italy's participation in the war against the Soviet Union.

Jewish encounters with Italians in Transnistria, informed by regional distinctions and evolving wartime contexts, varied widely, unfolding in the midst of the Italian combat units' movement toward the Donbas, soldiers' subsequent retreat from the Don region, and periodically near rear bases established across the region. Despite the relatively unknown history of the Italian military in Transnistria, certain key movements and

Soviet pact. With the Tighina Agreement on August 30, 1941, Romania gained administrative control of Transnistria to secure, govern, and develop the region economically. While Romania's treatment of Jews was less systematic than Germany's, Jews in Transnistria suffered from disease, mistreatment, forced labor, and sporadic killings. Romania's rule over Transnistria lasted until March 1944. See: Dennis Deletant, "Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the 'Jewish Problem,'" in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 156–89; Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, and Mihail E. Ionescu, *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2005), 32–37. Among more recent studies are: Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Vladimir Solonari, *A Satellite Empire: Romanian Rule in Southwestern Ukraine, 1941–1944* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Roma Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022).

locations are clear from the existing sources.[3] In 1941, as the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia (CSIR) traversed the region of Transnistria en route to Dnipro and engaged in their inaugural battle against the Soviets in August, Italian troops were perpetually mobile.[4] It was not until the late autumn of 1941 that they established stationary positions, securing parts of the Donbas.[5] Conversely, the aforementioned rear bases acted as vital logistical centers, connecting Italy to the Eastern Front. These bases served not merely as compact military stations but predominantly housed the *Intendenza*, the logistical branch of the military encompassing the *Comandi Tappa*.[6] Such bases were established in various locations in Transnistria, such as Zhmerynka, Balta, Kryve Ozero, and Pervomajsk.[7] Historian Raffaello Pannacci emphasizes that the Italians

3 Notably, the challenges refer to the lack of precise information in archival sources regarding the specific identification and numbers of respective units at certain locations, as pointed out by historian Raffaello Pannacci, email message to author, August 7, 2023. I would like to thank Raffaello Pannacci for the insightful exchange and expert guidance he provided me regarding the historical context of the Italian presence in Transnistria.

4 They commenced their journey from the Romanian collection zone in Câmpulung on July 12, 1941, traversing Transnistria and passing through Balta and Pervomajsk (Holta). The "Battle of the Two Rivers," Dniester-Bug, in mid-August 1941, also played a crucial role in the early stages of the war. For this operation, the Italian division D. Pasubio, for instance, gathered near Yampil and proceeded via Vil'shanka, Olhopil, and Kryve Ozero. The D. Celere Division also moved through Transnistria during this period.

5 Including Horlivka and Yenakiieve, extending their reach back to Donetsk, and advancing even further eastward in the summer of 1942, the bolstered Italian army (ARMIR) progressed from Luhansk to the Don River. Ministero della Difesa Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, *Le Operazioni del C. S. I. R. e dell'ARMIR: Dal Giugno 1941 all'Ottobre 1942* (Rome, 1947); Costantino De Franceschi and Giorgio de Vecchi, *I Servizi Logistici delle Unità Italiane al Fronte Russo (1941–1943)* (Rome: Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 1975). Many thanks to Nicolas Virtue and Thomas Schlemmer for the suggestions provided in this context.

6 These were specialized command centers or offices assigned to oversee operations of specific logistical bases or waypoints *(tappe)* within the extensive logistical network, aiming to amplify operational efficacy for front-line combat units.

7 Zhmerynka hosted an Italian "*Comando Tappa*," which was overseen by a higher command in Bucharest and tasked with providing support and accommodations to transitioning Italian troops, while also safeguarding communication lines and monitoring the local population. Balta served as a major Italian hub, hosting "*Tappa No. 16*" and a rail command to assist units and manage supplies during the war. It also housed a grain-collecting unit, the "*Sezione staccata per l'economia di guerra*," until Italy's 1943 armistice with the Allies. The latter also operated in Kryve Ozero or Pervomajsk. See: De Franceschi, *I Servizi Logistici delle Unità Italiane al Fronte Russo (1941–1943)*, 167–71; Archivio dell'Ufficio storico dello Stato maggiore dell'Esercito

maintained a presence in the rear areas of Romania and the former Ukrainian SSR significantly longer than along the Don River and in Russia itself.[8]

There has been increased interest in Italy's participation in the war against the Soviet Union among historians in the past two decades. Thomas Schlemmer's work has been groundbreaking in this regard, offering a thorough analysis of the Italians' motivations and effects of their presence on occupied populations, and contesting established beliefs and national myths.[9] Raffaello Pannacci's recent monograph sheds light on Italy's understudied activities in Russia and Ukraine during the Second World War, challenging the view that it was solely a "German war." Pannacci stresses Italy's strategic goals in the Soviet Union and links them to the country's earlier colonial and Balkan campaigns.[10] Historian Bastian M. Scianna's work contrasts the Italian army's actions with those of their German allies and examines the narratives that influenced postwar views of Italy's role in the war.[11] The latter refers to the construction of the national myth of *"Italiani brava gente"* ("Italians, the good people") in postwar Italy, which is linked to the participation of Italy in Operation Barbarossa.[12] Despite this pioneering research, there is still much work to be done concerning Italy's role during this period, especially the ways it intersected with the Holocaust.[13]

(Aussme), L/14, box 77, file 10: *Enti dell'Esercito Italiano istituiti fuori della Madrepatria per l'organizzazione logistica del CSIR*, document issued by the High Staff of the Italian Land Army (probably 1941); Raffaello Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS: La Presenza Fascista fra Russia e Ucraina (1941–1943)* (Rome: Carocci Editore – Studi Storici, 2023), 151–153.

8 Raffaello Pannacci, email message to author, August 7, 2023.

9 Thomas Schlemmer, *Italiener an der Ostfront 1942/43. Dokumente zu Mussolinis Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2005).

10 Raffaello Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS: La Presenza Fascista fra Russia e Ucraina (1941–1943)* (Rome: Carocci Editore – Studi Storici, 2023).

11 Bastian M. Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front, 1941–1943: Operations, Myths and Memories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

12 This myth emerged to reshape Italy's wartime memory, promoting a narrative of heroism and moral righteousness in response to Italian Fascism and perpetration of wartime atrocities. Standing in contrast to depictions of Italians as Nazi collaborators, it painted Italian troops as honorable and humane, differing from their German allies. See: Filippo Focardi, *Il Cattivo Tedesco e il Bravo Italiano: La Rimozione delle Colpe della Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2016), 179–83.

13 A few dedicated studies are available for the areas of Italy, the Balkans, and Poland. See: Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Davide Rodogno, "Italiani Brava Gente? Fascist Italy's Policy Toward the Jews in the Balkans, April 1941–July

By examining the connections between the experiences of Jewish children and youth in Transnistria and the Italian presence in the region, this study examines on an overlooked chapter of history and links it to long-neglected dimensions of Holocaust historiography. For a long time, the experiences of children were largely ignored; historians denied them agency and relegated youths to the margins of historical research. There was a shift away from this perspective starting in the late 1980s and 1990s as new historical approaches led scholars to turn to previously neglected areas of research including the history of childhood.[14] In any discussion about the history of children during the Holocaust, Deborah Dwork's pioneering work *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* deserves a special mention.[15] While there is a considerable amount of scholarship on the occupation in the former Soviet Union, studies addressing the experiences of children are relatively rare. However, this has changed in the last decade, with notable contributions on children's experiences of war by Yuliya von Saal and Anika Walke on Belarus, Irina Rebrova on the North Caucasus, and Natalia Timofeeva on Russia.[16] Among the few works specifically exploring children's experiences in Transnistria is Dana Mihailescu's study, which offers insight on the postwar accounts of Jewish orphans.[17]

For my analysis, I mainly draw on the postwar oral histories and written testimonies of Jewish survivors born between 1924–1937 (hereafter referred to as Jewish child survivors) that are held in the USC Shoah

1943," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2005): 213–40; Giorgio Rochat, "Leopoli 1942–1943. Militari italiani dinanzi alla Shòa," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 69, no. 2 (2003): 387–94.

14 Joanna Beata Michlic, "Mapping the History of Child Holocaust Survivors," in *No Small Matter: Features of Jewish Childhood*, ed. Anat Helman (New York: Oxford Academic, 2021), 81–82.

15 Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

16 Yuliya von Saal, "Mehr als Opfer—More than Victims: Kriegskinder und Ihr Überleben in den Kinderheimen im besetzten Belarus," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* H. 3/4 (2020): 403–31; Anika Walke, "Jewish Youth in the Minsk Ghetto: How Age and Gender Mattered," *Kritika–Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 3 (2014): 1–28; Irina Rebrova, "Oral Histories about the Daily Life Experiences of Children during World War II," in *Children and War: Past and Present*, ed. Helga Embacher et al. (Warwick: Helion & Company, 2013), 86–100; Natalia Timofeeva, "Minderjährige Häftlinge der NS-Konzentrationslager in der Gesellschaft und im Gedächtnis Russlands," in *Kindheiten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Francesca Weil, André Postert, Alfons Kenkmann (Halle Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2018), 500–14.

17 Dana Mihailescu, "Early Postwar Accounts of Jewish Orphans from Transnistria," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2022): 353–71.

Foundation's Visual History Archive (VHA), the collections of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), and Yad Vashem, as well as in edited volumes.[18] I supplement the analysis of oral testimonies with official documents when relevant. Given the precisely defined scope of my analysis, the VHA is an unparalleled resource. It encompasses a total of 632 testimonies that include references to encounters with Italians, broadly aligning with events associated with the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union, Romania, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Over half of these testimonies originate from Jewish survivors born between 1924 and 1937. A substantial portion of the testimonies, 162 to be exact, relate to Transnistria and involve survivors born during the specified period.[19] However, only thirty of them were either born in or deported from Romania, Bukovina, or Bessarabia, resulting in a collection of narratives from interviewees who hailed from the former Ukrainian SSR and Moldavian ASSR. Consequently, many of the survivors grew up near the very ghettos they were forced into later on. The disproportionate representation of interviewees from the region presents a significant challenge for this study when comparing experiences related to encounters between Italians and local and deported Jewish youths. In total, I reviewed one hundred interviews from the VHA related to the Italian presence in Transnistria, most of which were conducted in Russian. Of these, forty-five testimonies—representing various age groups and genders, form this article's core source base. Although I found testimonies scattered across different regions of Transnistria, the bulk come from Balta and Jugastru counties *(județe)*.

The emphasis I place on late postwar testimonies is due to the paucity of Jewish testimonies that address the Holocaust in Transnistria from the war and immediate postwar period. With the sole exception of Golda Wasserman's testimony from 1944, I was unable to uncover any information regarding interactions between child survivors and Italians in the early postwar accounts available to me.[20] Regarding the Italian view on

18 The VHA, founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994, serves as the principal repository for the testimonies examined in this study. As one of the world's most extensive digital collections, the VHA encompasses over fifty-five thousand video testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides that were recorded between 1994 and 2000.

19 The VHA holds only a sparse collection of records related to Jewish-Italian encounters for localities within the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* under German occupation.

20 Wasserman's testimony belongs to the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee collection at the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF) and was subsequently included in "The Unknown Black Book" by Ilya Altman: Ilya Altman, *The Unknown*

Jews, I found few sources from military affiliates related to other locations within the Soviet Union. These illustrate Italian reactions to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, but they do not detail Italians' direct interactions with Jews.

Historian Christopher R. Browning highlights the value of postwar testimonies in understanding the Holocaust and Jewish experiences but urges a critical approach. Personal histories, shaped by various factors like timing and circumstances, can be influenced by memory lapses or selective sharing, which affect the comprehensiveness of the information. The format of interviews and the interviewer's approach can further impact the testimonies collected from survivors.[21] The incorporation of postwar testimonies from former young survivors into analyses proves to be an even more complex issue. Defining "children" and "adolescents" within the context of the Holocaust is challenging as varying experiences and settings can make age classifications fluid or subjective.[22] However, in order to establish parameters for the analysis, I decided to concentrate on individuals between the ages of four and seventeen at the onset of the occupation in 1941.[23] I set four years old as the lower age limit based on research into the development of autobiographical memory, particularly the insights of Robyn Fivush and Jessica McDermott Sales, scholars of psychology and the behavioral sciences. They state that children starting at age three can accurately recount their personal histories and progressively enhance their ability to create clear narratives as they mature; at the same time, their memories are particularly shaped by emotional content, leading them to recall emotional details more vividly than non-emotional ones.[24]

Robert N. Kraft, a cognitive psychologist, delves into how Holocaust survivors recall and share traumatic experiences via videotaped testimonies.

Black Book: *Materials for the "Black Book" edited by Vasily Grossman and Ilya Ehrenburg* (Moscow: ACT: CORPUS, 2015).

21 Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 39–43, 84–85.

22 On this matter, see also: Susan R. Suleiman, "The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust," *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 277–95.

23 In many cultures and scientific studies, a child is considered someone under the age of thirteen. The age of thirteen also holds historical and cultural significance in Jewish tradition. It marks the coming of age for boys (Bar Mitzvah) and girls (Bat Mitzvah), leading to a fluid distinction between children and adolescents in the context of this study.

24 Robyn Fivush and Jessica McDermott Sales, "Children's Memories of Emotional Events," in *Memory and Emotion,* ed. Daniel Reisberg and Paula Hertel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 242–43.

He highlights the lasting strength of these memories—which can remain vivid even after several decades—while differentiating between "core memory" (vivid sensory experiences) and "narrative memory" (structured stories derived from core memories for communication).[25] In the context of Starachowice camp survivor testimonies, Browning also highlights the concept of "core memory." Despite testimonies collected from survivors in different regions over a fifty-six-year period, Browning notes a consistent and reliable shared memory. He argues this core memory allows for credible evaluations of individual memories based on clarity, detail, consistency, and historians' insights.[26] Drawing on Browning's work, historian Joanna B. Michlic examines the enduring emotional intensity of child survivors' memories, asserting that key wartime events remain largely preserved over time. Although these memories, which often encompass both traumatic experiences as well as moments of positive emotional valence, might not be exact or detailed, Michlic emphasizes their vital contribution to understanding the emotional and experiential facets of survivors' histories.[27] Given that Italians hold a special place in the memories of survivors who were children or adolescents in Transnistria, predominantly in a positively emotional sense but occasionally in a negative one, their recollections provide a valuable window into these unexplored encounters.

Italians and Jews in Transnistria: Encounters and Memories

To allow for a deeper analysis of Italians' interactions with the Jewish population in Transnistria in subsequent sections, it is essential to understand the Italians' attitudes toward Jews and determine the primary patterns of interactions between them as described in young survivors' testimonies. The Italian occupation in Eastern Europe was marked by a mix of policies influenced by various factors such as regional differences, personal beliefs, Fascist propaganda, and combat conditions, all of which affected Italians' feelings about and behavior toward Jews. Historian

25 Robert N. Kraft, "Emotional Memory in Survivors of the Holocaust: A Quantative Study of Oral Testimony," in *Memory and Emotion,* ed. Daniel Reisberg and Paula Hertel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 353.

26 Browning, *Collected Memories*, 46–47, 81–82.

27 Joanna Beata Michlic, "The Aftermath and After: Memories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust," in *Lessons and Legacies X: Back to the Sources: Reexamining Perpetrators, Victims, and Bystanders*, ed. Sara R. Horowitz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 141–48.

Xosé Núñez Seixas concluded: "While some of their members were strongly motivated by fascism, anti-communism and/or anti-semitism, many others were simply conscripted soldiers, adventurers or even non-enthusiastic warriors who had enlisted for different reasons."[28] The Italians played multiple—conflicting—roles in the Holocaust, with a marked difference between their influence and actions under German command in the Soviet Union and their independent policies in areas such as southern France or Yugoslavia.[29] While they did not establish Jewish ghettos or perpetrate mass killings under German command, scholarship has examined Italians' collaboration and the range of soldierly behaviors in German-occupied Europe.[30] In short, many Italians were evidently aware of the atrocities perpetrated against Jews early on, although their depth of understanding varied.[31] In terms of collaboration, historian Dieter Pohl cites the Royal Army handing Jews over to *Sonderkommando 4b* in Horlivka, while Thomas Schlemmer's work delves into the *Carabinieri*'s 1942 internments of Jews.[32] Further complicating the narrative, Scianna states that some Italian soldiers aided German extermination plans by

28 Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, "Unable to Hate? Some Comparative Remarks on the War Experiences of Spaniards and Italians on the Eastern Front, 1941–1944," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 2 (2018): 287. Similarly, historian Davide Rodogno affirmed that the attitudes of Italian military leaders were diverse and not all soldiers held the same antisemitic beliefs. See: Rodogno, "Italiani brava gente?," 214–16. Pannacci examined antisemitism among Italians, intertwining gratitude for Mussolini's defense against perceived threats like Bolshevism with a generic antisemitism that blamed Jews as war instigators and profiteers. See: Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS,* 245–50.

29 Nicolò Da Lio, "The Italian Soldier's Journey in the Soviet Union," last modified October 17, 2017, https://www.swwresearch.com/post/the-italian-soldier-s-journey-in-the-soviet-union.

30 Virtue, "Fascist Italy," 62.

31 Within weeks, Italian soldiers reported on the German execution of Jews. There were also instances when Italian military members directly witnessed glimpses of Jewish camps and labor battalions. See: Virtue, "Fascist Italy," 62–63. In 1941, the Ministry of the Interior received reports from returning soldiers who spread rumors about the summary executions of Jews. See: Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front*, 246.

32 Dieter Pohl, "Einsatzgruppe C," in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42. Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, ed. Peter Klein (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 1997), 80; and AUSSME, L 14/85-5, Comando dei Carabinieri Reali dell'8a Armata: Activity report for the period 10.5.–30.9.1942, in Schlemmer, *Die Italiener an der Ostfront*, 36. This pattern was also evident in towns like Yenakiieve and Donetsk. See: Natalia Terekhova, "Italian Policies Regarding the Jewish Population during the Military Occupation of Soviet Territories," in *The "Jewish Question" in the Territories Occupied by Italians*, ed. Giovanni Orsina and Andrea Ungari (Rome: Viella Historical Research), 163–65.

categorizing Jews, while Pannacci underscores their exploitation, particularly in regions like Donetsk and Synelnykove, where illicit searches led to looting for personal gain.[33] Nonetheless, several authors, including Núñez Seixas, concluded that there is "not enough evidence to demonstrate that the ordinary Italian combatants were willing accomplices in the Holocaust."[34] The majority appeared indifferent or bewildered by the methods of the Germans, but they did not defy German orders or actively oppose the persecution and murder of Jews.[35] At the same time, various authors have noted that acts of support and rescue of Jews were also part of the complex historical landscape. However, these episodes were not as prevalent as commonly believed and portrayed.[36] Rodogno emphasized that while some Italians aided Jews, it would be misleading to claim all persons were motivated by humanitarianism.[37] Historical research has revealed a diverse range of behaviors among Italian soldiers, with some strictly following German directives due to fear of reprisals, and others displaying varying levels of tolerance and protection for the Jewish persons they encountered.[38]

In reviewing testimonies, particularly from the VHA, it became evident that discussions about Italians were rarely initiated by interviewers.[39] Rather, interviewees typically brought up Italians unprompted, either in chronological narratives or through open-ended questions focusing more on emotions and specific experiences than on sequential events. These narratives frequently contrasted the actions of different occupiers, thus

33 Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front*, 246; Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS,* 252.

34 Núñez Seixas, "Unable to Hate?," 282.

35 Schlemmer, *Die Italiener an der Ostfront*, 36; Gladstone Virtue, "Fascist Italy," 60.

36 This is particularly evident in the case of Italian–Jewish relations and the treatment of refugees in wartime Italy. See: Sullam, *The Italian Executioners,* 7; Joshua D. Zimmerman, "Introduction," in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922–1945*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

37 Rodogno, "Italiani brava gente?," 226–35.

38 Rochat, "Leopoli 1942–1943," 387. The behavior toward Jews was also influenced by factors such as time. According to historian Jonathan Steinberg, the defeat further reduced the willingness of Italian soldiers to participate in the persecution of Jews, as their aim to preserve their self-esteem and avoid negative perceptions motivated them to prioritize fundamental values. See: Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941–43* (London: Routledge, 2003), 173.

39 The VHA was designed to chronologically explore prewar, war, and postwar experiences, with interviewers using a standard set of questions. This methodology encouraged survivors to provide details on significant narratives. Nonetheless, the structured format and the interviewer's involvement could conceivably impact the interviews. See: Browning, *Collected Memories,* 45.

involving subjective and emotional dimensions, such as negative experiences with Germans, Romanians, and Ukrainians. In the few instances when a precise timeframe can be determined, the significance of the locations of Italian–Jewish encounters became apparent. For instance, recollections involving Italians in Olhopil (Balta *județ*)[40] predominantly pertained to the war's initial phase, while for Balta (the administrative center of the Balta *județ*), they spanned the entire period between 1941 and 1943. Generally, specific Italian units were not identified and were broadly referred to as "the Italians" or "Italian soldiers/troops." Interviewers typically followed up on survivors' mentions of Italians, focusing on how they were distinguished and how they treated them personally or Jews in general. Based on these testimonies, the Italians were identified by their distinct uniforms, language, and physical appearance; for survivors who were young children at the time of the war, older children or adults pointed out Italians to them.[41] Former young survivors integrated additional characteristics into their memories of Italians, predominantly details about their food preferences or the flavor, texture, and shape of foods associated with the Italians.[42] This makes sense given that most interactions were tied to young persons' search for food. Khasia Gringruz, then twelve, had an encounter with Italians in Yampil (Jugastru *județ*), which was embedded in her memory: "I remember their *makarony*.[43] I will probably never forget this taste, maybe I had much better and tastier food, but this taste will never fade from my memory and from my palate, and my understanding of kindness."[44] Additionally, some interviewees remembered the Italians' aversion to the cold, recounting how they

40 During the Romanian occupation of Transnistria from 1941 to 1944, the region was divided into thirteen administrative "*județe*" (counties): Anan'yiv, Balta, Berezivka, Dubăsari, Holta, Jugastru, Mohyliv, Ochakiv, Odesa, Ovidiopol, Rîbnița, Tiraspol, and Tulchyn.

41 David Reznik (1935), Segment 46, Interview 24559, VHA, USC, Aug. 14, 1998; Boris Zaidman (1934), Segment 33, Interview 31952, VHA, USC, May 27, 1997; Roza Bronshtein (1924), Segment 42, Interview 44903, VHA, USC, June 15, 1998.

42 Ruven Sheinfel'd (1930), Segments 75–76, Interview 19068, VHA, USC, Aug. 18, 1996.

43 Probably derived from the Italian "*maccheroni*," the term "*makarony*" in Russian and Ukrainian (and "*makaronen*" in Yiddish) broadly denotes various pasta types. Historically, when "pasta" was not a common term, "*makarony*" was utilized to describe all dough-based foods with distinct shapes. Most survivors used "*makarony*" in their testimonies, with a few instances where "*lapsha*" (more specific to noodles) denoted Italian pasta, and a singular case where the term "spaghetti" was employed in an English-speaking interview. For the etymology in Russian, see: Vladimir Lebedev, *Etymological Dictionary of the World Russian Language* (2019).

44 Khasia Gringruz (1929), Segment 43, Interview 24559, VHA, USC, Dec. 9, 1996.

would freeze and burn anything accessible to them during the winter. In particular, some interviewees recalled that Italians in Chechelnyk (Balta *județ*) endured winter conditions by staying in tents on the ground.[45] This narrative could indicate that the distinctiveness of Italians' origins (from warmer climates) possibly mirrored young Jews' own experience of the cold winter weather at the time, thus establishing an emotional connection between the two groups.

Most frequently, however, descriptions of the Italians in Transnistria focused on their attitudes and behavior toward the Jewish population. The narrative of benevolent Italians has deeply permeated recollections and emerges from testimonies offering varying degrees of detail. In some cases, this narrative was employed in a generalized sense, encompassing the entire Jewish community and declaring, for example, that the Italians were "friends of the Jews" and treated them very well.[46] Other testimonies proffered examples of the benevolent actions and aid extended by Italians to Jews. These acts included offering food and especially their compassionate treatment of children. Tatyana Dralyuk, who was four years old at the beginning of the war, recalled how she snuck out of the Kryzhopil (Jugastru *județ)* ghetto and was offered food by Italian soldiers, reflecting on the deep impression they left: "Ever since then, a deep respect for Italians has become ingrained in me, their representatives have left a warm imprint on my soul."[47] Some survivors explained the affection for children by suggesting that Jewish children reminded the soldiers of their own children or siblings back home.[48] The absence of violent acts perpetrated by the Italians was also highlighted.[49] For some survivors—such as Mariia Bronshtein, who was deported from Bessarabia to Olhopil at the age of eight—their interactions with Italians stood out as some of the few precious memories they had from that period of their lives: "They [the Italians] did what they could to bring joy to the children. Even though they were only there for a short time, those were the most pleasant memories of the war."[50] Larry Rotenberg, then six years old and deported from Bukovina, also stated that during the entire Holo-

45 Michael Beider (1927), Segment 96, Interview 6920, VHA, USC, Dec. 4, 1995; Iakov Dinovitser (1929), Segment 28, Interview 38756, VHA, USC, Oct. 6, 1997; Iakov Leibman (1934), Segment 19, Interview 42774, VHA, USC, Mar. 31, 1998.

46 Miriam Auerbach (1926), Segment 30, Interview 14816, VHA, USC, May 2, 1996.

47 Tatyana Dralyuk (1937), Segment 43, Interview 23185, VHA, USC, Feb. 23, 1998.

48 Ada Shistik (1931), Segment 28, Interview 39307, VHA, USC, Nov. 19, 1996; Tatyana Dralyuk (1937), Segment 43, Interview 23185, VHA, USC, Feb. 23, 1998.

49 Aron Goreshnik (1933), Segment 25, Interview 19473, VHA, USC, Aug. 28, 1996.

50 Mariia Bronshtein (1933), Segment 104, Interview 22714, VHA, USC, Nov. 7, 1996.

caust in Obodivka (Balta *județ*), he experienced real compassion only once, during an encounter with an Italian who gave Rotenberg his ration of spaghetti.[51] In light of their personal experiences, some juxtaposed their perception of Italian soldiers with Italy's Fascist history, which they discovered only later. Moisei Belotserkovskii, who was eight when the war began, was surprised to learn of Italy's Fascist history after the war. He recalled the Italian soldiers as compassionate and good-hearted and felt that their actions did not align with the reputation of Fascism.[52] Others shared a similar view, noting that from their experience, most Italians did not want the war, and although there were Fascists among them, the majority were good people.[53]

While analyzing interactions between child survivors and Italians, it is notable that VHA interviewers never asked about how communication took place. Some witnesses provided insights into this aspect on their own initiative. Local Ukrainian Jews explained that they dealt with the language barrier by relying on a combination of body language, the limited Russian proficiency of some Italians, and the assistance of those among the Jewish population in Transnistria who were familiar with the Romanian language.[54] Considering that a substantial portion of the testimonies originated from interviewees from the Moldavian ASSR, it is plausible to assume that some of these children or adolescents also possessed varying levels of proficiency in Romanian.[55] Some interviewees also noted that they gradually learned Italian or picked up key phrases for communication, while others already possessed knowledge of foreign languages that facilitated interactions.[56] It appears that familiarity with Romanian or another foreign language similar to Italian was especially important for initiating communication and accelerating the acquisition

51 Larry Rotenberg (1935), Segment 48, Interview 61026, VHA, USC, Nov. 4, 2022.

52 Moisei Belotserkovskii (1933), Segment 37, Interview 46931, VHA, USC, May 26, 1998.

53 Riva Altman (1929), Segment 52, Interview 38816, VHA, USC, Dec. 10, 1991; Aleksandr Cherner (1935), Segment 56, Interview 38965, VHA, USC, Dec. 12, 1997; Frima Flikshtein (1936), Segment 49–50, Interview 33816, VHA, USC, Sep. 8, 1997.

54 Fridrikh Soroker (1934), Segment 21, Interview 9400, VHA, USC, Feb. 11, 1996.

55 This included Boris Slepoi (1934), Segment 62, Interview 40879, VHA, USC, Jan. 29, 1998. The Moldavian ASSR, which existed from 1924 to 1940, was an autonomous republic within the Ukrainian SSR. The primary languages spoken were Moldovan, Ukrainian, Russian, and Yiddish. The Soviet Union promoted the use of the "Moldovan" language, which was essentially Romanian written in the Cyrillic alphabet, as part of a broader policy to discourage Romanian nationalism and emphasize the separateness of Moldova and Romania.

56 Ada Lisi (1925), Segment 248, Interview 34471, VHA, USC, Oct. 20, 1997; Ida Umanskaia (1924), Segment 37, Interview 33447, VHA, USC, Aug. 11, 1997.

of Italian language proficiency.[57] The depth of communication in relation to age is also crucial to consider. Ada Lisi, who was sixteen years old at the time, illustrated how her proficiency in French allowed her to communicate with the Italians about the circumstances of Jews in Balta and the conditions of Italian Jews. She recalled having learned that although Italians expelled Jews, they did not kill them.[58] Sofia Linetzky, who was fourteen when she met the Italians, credited them for their efforts to engage in conversations with Jews, demonstrating an interest in their lives.[59] In these scenarios, language proficiency coupled with a certain level of understanding could have enabled more in-depth conversations, potentially shaping memories and perceptions reciprocally. It is vital to note, however, that language alone was not a definitive feature of Jewish-Italian interactions, and its significance could vary depending on the context and region. Finally, despite the varied backgrounds and experiences of both deported and local Jewish children and adolescents, there were no discernible differences in their memories concerning the portrayal of Italians or their treatment by them.[60]

Children and Adolescents' Encounters with Italians: Labor, Barter, Begging

Beyond the narrative of Italians who helped Jewish children out of compassion, a substantial number of testimonies relate stories of bartering with, begging from, and working for Italians as part of children's or teenagers' experiences during the Holocaust in Transnistria. These experiences shed light on the agency of some young Jewish fugitives in their interactions with Italians. Several studies have shown that the Holocaust significantly impacted traditional family and gender dynamics. Harsh

57 Alexander Berkowits (1930), Segment 62, Interview 13792, VHA, USC, Mar. 29, 1996. As the war progressed, especially in areas like Balta where witnesses had prolonged contact with Italians, this effect seems to have waned as many young Jews increasingly learned and understood Italian. These experiences had a profound impact on some witnesses' memory, leading them to weave specific Italian terms or phrases into their interviews. Ida Umanskaia (1924), Segment 37, Interview 33447, VHA, USC, Aug. 11, 1997; Abram Kopman (1933), Segment 68, Interview 44163, VHA, USC, May 12, 1998; Semen Gol'dner (1931), Segment 74, Interview 28894, VHA, USC, Feb. 25, 1997.

58 Ada Lisi (1925), Segment 68, Interview 34471, VHA, USC, Oct. 20, 1997.

59 Sofia Linetzky (1929), Segment 17, Interview 6949, VHA, USC, Dec. 5, 1995.

60 However, it is important to reiterate that testimonies from those who were deported represent a smaller subset of sources used in my analysis.

conditions forced many children and adolescents to mature faster and take on new roles and responsibilities—ranging from breadwinners and caretakers to smugglers, resisters, and rescuers—much earlier than would normally be expected.[61]

Young Breadwinners and Narratives of Sustenance: Begging and Italian Aid

One of the ways especially younger children could interact with Italians was by begging for food. In numerous ghettos and camps in Transnistria, sneaking out was part of everyday life for many Jewish children. Leaving these areas without permission was not allowed and was severely punished in many places, making it much more difficult for adults to leave without being caught or recognized.[62] Sneaking out resulted partly from childlike curiosity, but it mostly served to ensure survival by enabling children to smuggle food into the ghetto, thereby becoming breadwinners for their families. Children also begged from passing Italians or at Italian military bases to which they arrived either by chance—attracted by smells and sounds—or due to their previous contacts with the military. At the age of six, Menashe Karp ventured beyond the boundaries of the Balta ghetto in search of food. Reflecting on this experience decades later, Karp mentioned that his mother, who was frequently away because of forced labor, could not adequately care for him and his brother, often returning with no provisions. Outside the ghetto, the Italians occasionally offered him a roll, while Romanians ignored his pleas for food.[63] As news of the Italians' generosity spread, in some places, Jewish children started queuing up in front of their kitchens and begging for food.[64] It is worth noting that survivors occasionally mentioned separate groups of boys and girls, indicating the formation of gender-specific collectives of varying sizes. In Balta, a group of boys around the ages of ten or eleven

61 Sliwa, *Jewish Childhood in Kraków*, chap. 2; Barbara Engelking-Boni, "Childhood in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Children and the Holocaust: Symposium Presentations*, ed. Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC: USHMM, 2004), 41; Lenore J. Weitzman, "Resistance in Everyday Life: Family Strategies, Role Reversals, and Role Sharing in the Holocaust," in *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939–Present*, ed. Joanna B. Michlic (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 46–47.

62 Ovidiu Creangă, "Rabnita," 747.

63 Menashe Karp (1936), Segment 45, Interview 40670, VHA, USC, Mar. 6, 1998.

64 Michael Beider (1927), Segment 73, Interview 6920, VHA, USC, Dec. 4, 1995.

would regularly undertake the perilous journey across the Kodyma River to reach the Italian military base so they could obtain food for their families and community. The winter posed additional dangers, as recounted by Moisei Teper, who, along with others, fell through the ice but was saved by his peers, an experience that demonstrated the unity and friendship of the cohort.[65] Girls like Mania Tesler, born in 1931, also formed groups to traverse the challenging terrain to reach the Italian base in Balta.[66] Children also formed pairs, such as ten-year-old Ada Shistik and her friend Eva, who secretly left the Olhopil ghetto to beg the Italians for food. They would then distribute the rolls or soup to as many as eleven people in their ghetto housing.[67]

Orphaned children without parents or extended family members also supported themselves through begging. Polina Sorkin, who was ten years old at the beginning of the war, was separated from her remaining relatives and eventually ended up in Balta, where a temporary orphanage was established in 1943. She recalled how some children from the orphanage would band together to beg from Italians passing by during their retreat and then share the food they collected with the other orphans.[68] A few other witnesses also recounted going out alone to beg from the Italians but eventually sharing the food with or distributing it to the Balta orphanage.[69] These examples illustrate different facets of children's individual and group/collective agency. They not only highlight collaborative dynamics but also point to the existence of support networks that were understood to be surrogate families.[70] In most of the cases recounted by survivors, the children experienced kindness from the Italians, returning with enough rations to sustain several people for days or even weeks. However, some young survivors also remembered instances of cruelty and violence in the context of begging, especially when there was a risk

65 Moisei Teper (1930), Segments 37–41, Interview 21592, VHA, USC, Oct. 20, 1996. See also: Aizik Reznik (1931), Segments 50–51, Interview 25253, VHA, USC, Dec. 12, 1996.

66 Mania Tesler (1931), Segment 36, Interview 37194, VHA, USC, Dec. 13, 1997.

67 Ada Shistik (1931), Segment 28, Interview 23185, VHA, USC, Nov. 19, 1996.

68 Oral history interview with Polina Sorkin (1931), Accession Number 1999.A.0122.161, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Sept 3, 1992, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508221.

69 Ruven Sheinfel'd (1930), Segments 75–76, Interview 19068, VHA, USC, Aug. 18, 1996; Duvid Port (1933), Segments 42–43, Interview 35321, VHA, USC, Aug. 18, 1997.

70 Natalia Aleksiun, "Uneasy Bonds: Jews in Hiding and the Making of Surrogate Families," in *Jewish and Romani Families in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Eliyana R. Adler and Kateřina Čapková (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 85–103.

that the Germans would be able to observe the Italians' interactions with the Jewish children.[71] Overall, when analyzing the phenomenon of children begging from Italians in Transnistria, it is essential to recognize the diverse factors, including the severity of enclosure, the securitization of the ghetto, and the proximity of Italian military bases, that influenced these interactions.

The Multifaceted Nature of Barter involving Young Jews and Italians

Bartering presented an additional avenue of interaction between the young Jewish population in Transnistria and Italians, serving as a key means of improving the chances of survival during the Holocaust. Italian military units' engagement in barter was influenced by various issues, including local circumstances, the dynamics between the Italians and their German allies, and developments on the front lines.[72] Despite supply shortages that led to the violation of German-imposed regulations and resulted in the looting of local resources and the plunder of the local population, historian Maria Teresa Giusti notes that Italians frequently shared their scant food supplies with the needy, particularly children.[73] However, this sharing was, at times, reciprocal.

For several Jewish child survivors, the experience of bartering with the Italians during the Holocaust in Transnistria left a lasting impression. Italians were often portrayed as cultured and civilized, in contrast to Romanians or Germans, who were perceived as more likely to steal.[74] This more positive evaluation of Italians' behavior differs from what is known about the ways Italian troops acquired some of the resources they exchanged—i. e. through plunder or looting—but none of the interviewees reported being aware of these unsavory details. When he was sixteen, Moni Crivosei witnessed Italian soldiers near the Chechelnyk ghetto

71 Polina Sharova (1932), Segment 32, Interview 9780, VHA, USC, Feb. 16, 1996; Faina Mil'man (1934), Segment 67, Interview 37175, VHA, USC, Oct. 18, 1997; Mikhail Fridman (1936), Segment 70, Interview 29149, VHA, USC, Feb. 21, 1997.

72 Igor I. Barinov, "Italian Troops on USSR Occupied Territories in 1941–1945," *RUDN Journal of Russian History*, no. 4 (2011): 7.

73 On stealing and confiscating from the local population, see: Commander Falconi of the 52nd Artillery Regiment, 1942, in G. S. Filatov, *La Campagna Orientale di Mussolini: L'Odissea delle Truppe Italiane in Russia Vista dall' "Altra Parte,"* trans. Karina Kupsto Vigneri (Milan: Res Gesate, 2023), 124. On sharing food with children see: Giusti, *La campagna di Russia*, chap. 10.

74 Filipp Portianskii, Interview 43351, Seg 149.

coming to barter with Jews at night, noting that this enabled Jews to exchange valuables for food and other items offered by the Italians.[75] While this type of barter mainly involved adult Jews, bartering with children and teenagers occurred at different levels. Sources indicate that the primary mode of barter involved Italians trading food stuffs for captured or hunted animals, with mainly Jewish boys and male adolescents participating in these exchanges. Gerch Zayats, then thirteen, recalled how teenage boys used to catch frogs for the Italians in Balta:

> It was good to meet Italians […] Italians love frogs very much, and there was a river and so they said, 'Catch frogs'. We went in […] and all together we caught frogs for them. We brought them the frogs, and in return, they gave us some bread rolls.[76]

Younger boys also caught frogs in Balta for the Italians. Boris Khait, then five years old, described how older youths showed the younger boys how to catch frogs, which they then traded for cookies *(gallette)*.[77] Anna Faingersch also noted the Italians' preference for sparrows. She recalled how boys in Balta, including her five-year-old brother, used to make improvised slingshots and meet up to shoot sparrows. They would exchange the birds with Italians in return for sugar or, occasionally, candy. She mentioned that the Italians' accordion playing initially attracted the children.[78] These examples underscore the pivotal role of community and inter-age collaboration. Manifestations of traditional gender roles also emerge from these recollections, with Anna Faingersch's younger brother hunting birds while she ensured the cleanliness of their ghetto dwelling and retrieved potato scraps from a hospital.[79] The Italians' shortage of supplies, particularly fresh meat, appears to have also prompted requests for cats.[80] While some Jewish survivors recalled witnessing Italians shooting cats on the street, there were also accounts of Jewish children catching cats and handing them over to the Italians.[81] During a Yad Vashem interview, Grigory Majorov, then thirteen, re-

75 Moni Crivosei (1925), Segment 86, Interview 13158, VHA, USC, May 10, 1996.
76 Gerch Zayats (1928), Segment 34, Interview 5962, VHA, USC, Nov. 6, 1995.
77 Boris Khait (1937), Segment 13, Interview 14260, VHA, USC, Apr. 16, 1996.
78 Anna Faingersh (1935), Segments 55–56, Interview 18796, VHA, USC, Aug. 20, 1996.
79 Anna Faingersh (1935), Segments 55–56, Interview 18796, VHA, USC, Aug. 20, 1996.
80 Eating cats is also documented for the soldiers of the Spanish Blue Division during the Eastern Campaign. Valeria Possi, "La Narrativa Testimoniale nella Letteratura Spagnola e Italiana sulla Campagna di Russia," *Artifara* 16 (2016), 210.
81 Polina Kerber (1921), Segment 45, Interview 31982, VHA, USC, Jul. 29, 1997.

counted that he witnessed the Italians dismembering a cat right in front of him, after exchanging it for a roll.[82] Narratives about cats in survivors' testimonies conveyed astonishment regarding Italian habits or justified bartering as a means of survival.

The final dimension of barter illuminates the role of gender in encounters between Jewish children and Italians. However, this is the most under-researched theme because of the limited number of sources and, conversely, the wide range of possible interpretations of the Russian term *"devuschka."*[83] This term primarily surfaces in the testimonies of Russian-speaking Jewish survivors, with no evidence of its adoption by Italians. A few interviewees also pointed out two Italian terms for young females: *"signorina"* and *"ragazza."*[84] The use of *"devushka"* likely represents the survivors' own linguistic interpretation, which was molded by the dominant linguistic and interpretative paradigms that framed their postwar testimonies. Several survivors recounted Italians specifically seeking Jewish *"devushki,"* sometimes linking this to narratives about engaging in relationships or sexual interactions in exchange for resources, termed as "sexual barter" by historian Anna Hájková.[85] Although relationships between Italians and non-Jewish Soviet women are well documented, references to Jewish adolescents and women engaging in similar types of relationships are almost nonexistent.[86] A rare exception can be found in a letter from a senior military official to Mussolini, stating that Italian officers

82 Testimony of Grigory Majorov, born in Lugansk, 1928, regarding his experiences in Lugansk, his escape from a killing pit, imprisonment in Cherkasskoye labor camp, and time wandering Transnistria, Item ID 4012190, File Number 11545, Tape Number V.T/2719, Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives, May 18, 2000.

83 In Russian, two terms are used: "*devochka*," referring to a little girl but also potentially including teenagers, and "*devushka*" (plural: "*devushki*"), which applied to a female person in the age of transition from adolescence to young adulthood or one who has reached sexual maturity but has not yet married. See: C. I. Ozhegov, N. Y. Shvedova, *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language*.

84 Based on the definition of the terms of the Italian Encyclopedia of Sciences, Letters and Arts, initiated by the Giovanni Treccani Institute, the first term, "*signorina*," designates an unmarried young lady and is a courteous form of address, similar to "miss." It can also describe the transitional period from childhood to adolescence, often highlighting the onset of puberty. The second term, "*ragazza*," predominantly describes young females in adolescence or early adulthood, and, in informal contexts, can mean a girlfriend or romantic partner.

85 Anna Hájková, "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto," *Signs* 38, no. 3 (2013): 503–33.

86 Raffaello Pannacci, "Sex, Military Brothels and Gender Violence during the Italian Campaign in the USSR, 1941–3," *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no. 1 (2020): 75–96.

in the Soviet Union had "taken Jewish lovers" and shielded them from German roundups.[87] Jewish accounts from Transnistria often mention sexual barter with Romanian occupiers and occasionally Germans, but narratives involving Italians are distinct. After emphasizing the sophistication of the Italians, Ilia Kogan, then fifteen, humorously noted that when the Italians took "the liberty to approach our Jewish girls, they weren't *un*successful as they were good-looking young men who sang charming Neapolitan songs."[88] Similarly, Fridrikh Soroker mentioned sexual barter while highlighting the Italians' good behavior and sophistication:

> They […] didn't cause any harm to anyone […]. The only thing was that they specifically sought out young, beautiful *devuschki*; those who were average looking didn't capture their interest […], and there were *devushki* who had been with them, both Jewish and local Ukrainians […]. They thanked them, gave them food, or what else, I don't know. So, but the Italians behaved very cultured with all of us.[89]

Both survivors distance themselves from the Italians' actions, using phrases like "taking the liberty" or "the only thing was." But they also soften the narrative by emphasizing the Italians' cultured demeanor. Notably, only male survivors have discussed sexual barter with Italians, raising questions about the role of gender bias in such testimony. Could surviving women have addressed this facet of Jewish-Italian relations with a similar sense of humor? Might they have also interpreted the Italians' attempts to engage with them as crossing a boundary? How might the perceived sense of Jewish men's inability to provide or their helplessness in preventing the exploitation of "their women" factor into this dynamic? The overall scarcity of accounts concerning this issue may also be rooted in the ongoing stigmatization of non-normative sexuality—including promiscuity—and abusive sexual behavior.[90] Navigating

87 AUSSME, H/1, p. 1, f. 14: undated letter by M.C., in Pannacci, "Sex, Military Brothels and Gender Violence," 80.

88 Ilia Kogan (1927), Segment 66, Interview 38145, VHA, USC, Nov. 19, 1997.

89 Fridrikh Soroker (1934), Segments 22–23, Interview 9400, VHA, USC, Feb. 11, 1996.

90 Michlic also delves into the gender dynamics of rescuing Jews during the Holocaust in Poland, highlighting the social stigma faced by women and girls who were sexually abused. Notably, the postwar discourse was marked by silence on this issue, often with men recounting these instances rather than the female victims of sexual abuse or barter themselves reporting on their experiences. See: Joanna B. Michlic, "Gender Perspectives on the Rescue of Jews in Poland: Preliminary Observations," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 30 (2018): 407–26. On the stigma

the topic of sexual barter, particularly in relation to former young survivors, generates various challenges both for individuals who experienced or witnessed it and for scholars delving into this sensitive research area. Historian Nicholas Stargardt underscores the taboo of discussing wartime sexual experiences. Women, especially those who were children during the war, confronted significant problems when trying to articulate these encounters, occasionally opting to relay their experiences through more detached third-person narratives.[91] Concerning Jewish children in the Theresienstadt Family Camp in Auschwitz, Hájková suggests not viewing their involvement in sexual barter as a moral failing. Instead, she sees it as evidence of adaptability in swiftly changing circumstances and calls for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of such acts instead of shallow judgments.[92]

Between Coercion and Agency: Jewish Children and Youths Laboring for Italians

Forced labor was a fundamental part of everyday life for children and adolescents in Transnistria. With few exceptions, in the so-called "death camps" where Jews were left to die of hunger and disease or where those who were deemed unable to work (mainly the sick, the elderly, and children) were interned, the majority of the Jewish population was forced to perform labor.[93] Officially, men and women over the age of fourteen were considered capable of working, but unofficially, younger children sometimes worked as well. They would pretend to be older to increase their chances of survival or to take the place of other family members who were able to work. The circumstances of forced labor in Transnistria varied depending on the location, the local Jewish leadership, and the arrangements made by/with Romanian authorities.[94] Jewish survivors'

surrounding wartime sexual abuse victims in Hungary, see also: Andrea Petö, *Das Unsagbare erzählen. Sexuelle Gewalt in Ungarn im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021).

91 Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), Chapter 11.

92 Anna Hájková, "Introduction: Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma," *German History* 39, no. 1 (March 2021), 1.

93 The term "death camp" in part derives from the terminology used by the survivors themselves, which includes references to places like the Pechera camp in Transnistria, among others.

94 Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 239.

memories of forced labor under Romanians and Germans were predominantly negative, marked by exploitation, violence, and emotional distress. In contrast, the activities that former child survivors referred to as "work" performed for the Italians generally had a positive connotation. However, the experiences and memories of this labor were not uniform; as with barter, gender and age played an important role in shaping how survivors interpreted these interactions.

In most cases recalled in testimonies, work involving younger boys and girls was connected to their initial contacts with Italians that had been established through begging or Italian offers of food. Adolescents' involvement in work for the Italians primarily stemmed from two scenarios. While some youths took the initiative, offering their services in an attempt to improve their living conditions and ensure their survival, others were recruited. A few survivors noted that the Italians also asked the Romanian authorities for workers, and the Romanians then allotted Jews for the tasks. For the Balta ghetto, Gennadii Rozenberg, then fourteen, noted that the Jewish committee also allocated workers to "purchasers," be they Germans, Romanians, or Italians.[95] Work under the Italians largely occurred beyond the confines of the camps and ghettos and was concentrated in Balta county. The first type of work usually involved male adolescents and included more physically demanding jobs. Gennadii Rozenberg recounted his experience of working for the Italians alongside other teenagers. They were tasked with loading sacks of wheat onto the vehicles of the Italians so that it could be transported out of Balta. Rozenberg expressed uncertainty regarding the existence of other peoples who were as sympathetic to him and the other young workers as the Italians, who provided the adolescents with food identical to their own, ensuring that the children were never afflicted with hunger during this period.[96] The other type of work primarily consisted of cleaning and was performed by children of both genders, although in certain settings, such labor was performed exclusively by teenage girls. Multiple Holocaust survivors from Balta who were between seven and twelve years old when the war began recalled how they would receive leftover rations as compensation for scrubbing the kettles used by the Italians. In this context, Riva Chernina highlighted the agency of her sister Dora, who was ten years old at the time, and elucidated the pivotal role Dora undertook in the daily battle against hunger:

95 Gennadii Rozenberg (1927), Segment 88, Interview 39548, VHA, USC, Dec. 18, 1997.
96 Gennadii Rozenberg (1927), Segments 89–90.

> They [Italians] cooked huge kettles with *makarony* [. . .], and they took little children, put them in these kettles and children cleaned these kettles and scraped off the *makarony* [. . .], and our Dorochka was also, it was a very big luck, you can't even imagine it, she got. . . you could say, an incredible occupation. Thanks to her, our family didn't starve. She gathered all these scraps, and these Italians [. . .] allowed her to take them home, and she fed not only our family with them.[97]

Riva Chernina's testimony stands out for explicitly emphasizing her sister's role as a breadwinner, a role that defies the traditional boundaries of childhood and underscores the forced maturation of children during the Holocaust. Additionally, she frames the opportunity to work for the Italians as an incomprehensible stroke of luck. This case demonstrates that agency and luck were not portrayed as mutually exclusive conditions for survival; rather, they were complementary forces that might be intertwined with one another.

Although the dominant narrative features children experiencing fair treatment while performing cleaning tasks for the Italians, the testimony of Motel Liubarskii, nine years old at the time, deviates from this pattern and sheds light on instances of violence perpetrated by the Italians against young Jewish workers:

> The Italian soldier was given a kettle with food [. . .], and what was left of it he gave to one of us, and we ate it, and [. . .] you had to scrub out that kettle [. . .] and give the kettle back to the owner. I recall there was such a tragic case, that was the first time, and we didn't know yet what was required of us, and so a boy took this kettle, ate the food, and returned the dirty kettle. Yes, that was terrible, this Italian was wearing such shoes, which we called *stukalki* [knockers], [. . .] and so he hit him on the back with this *stukalka* and probably damaged his spine. Well, and after that, we already became more experienced and smarter and understood what was demanded of us.[98]

Motel Liubarskii's testimony challenges the perception that the Italians' provision of food to Jewish children was driven solely by humanitarianism, revealing a complex reality in which acts of violence were perpetrated against children. Moreover, Liubarskii's testimony offers a narrative that

97 Riva Chernina (1937), Segments 58–60, Interview 45969, VHA, USC, May 5, 1998.

98 Motel Liubarskii (1932), Segments 18–19, Interview 2354, VHA, USC, Apr. 24, 1995.

moves from initial childlike naïveté and innocence to growing wisdom brought about by a profound, painful experience.[99]

Another crucial aspect of relations between Jewish youths and the Italian military presence in Transnistria is closely entangled with the categories of age and gender. According to survivors' accounts, some teenage girls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years old who worked for the Italians mainly performed duties aligned with traditional gender roles and ideology. First, the entrenched gender norms of Fascist Italy may have influenced the attitudes and behavior of Italian units toward this category of workers.[100] At the same time, within the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of the prewar Soviet Union, most of the Jewish child survivors who addressed their experiences of working for Italians had grown up in an environment that promoted secularization and assimilation into broader Soviet society.[101] In Transnistria, the girls working for the Italians were primarily tasked with washing, sewing, ensuring the tidiness of accommodations, and assisting in the Italians' canteens and kitchens. Sarra Shvartsman, who was sixteen years old at the time, recounted her experience of being assigned by the Romanians—at the request of the Italians—to work in a section of Balta together with her

99 This perspective resonates with the findings made by sociologist and psychologist Barbara Engelking, who noted that "children's roles were a parody of real childhood; nonchildren's roles were a heavy burden." See: Engelking-Boni, "Childhood in the Warsaw Ghetto," 41.

100 During the Fascist era in Italy, there was a distinct tension between traditional and modern views of women. The regime simultaneously promoted the image of the "*donna madre*," representing the traditional rural mother (the backbone of the family, bearing many children, caring for the home, and nurturing the family) and the "*nuova italiana*" or "New Italian Woman," symbolizing modernity and progress. While Mussolini aimed to elevate Italy's status to match other European powers, he remained rooted in traditional values, particularly concerning women's roles. See: Jennifer L. Monti, *The Contrasting Image of Italian Women Under Fascism in the 1930's* (Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects, 1997), 35–38.

101 The 1920s and 1930s were transformative decades for Jews in the Soviet Union. The Soviet regime's policies and campaigns aimed at diminishing religious influence and promoting secularism. On this, see: Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Regarding gender, although the state promoted gender equality by enshrining it in its laws and encouraging women to work in professions that were previously dominated by men, there were still deeply ingrained traditional beliefs about women's primary role as caregivers and homemakers, often resulting in these laws being more symbolic than transformative. See: Jason Wahlang, "Role of Soviet Women in the Second World War in Comparative Perspective," *International Journal of Russian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2021): 61; Martine Mespoulet, "Women in Soviet Society," *Cahiers du CEFRES* 30 (2006): 7.

friend Ada. Their duty was to mend the sacks used for the transportation of wheat in order to prevent leakage. Sarra held mixed attitudes toward the Italians. She recognized the benefits of working for them but also noted the behavior of Italian soldiers, especially toward women and girls. While some would offer compliments like "*bella ragazza*" (beautiful girl) or sing for and with them, bringing a little joy into the girls' lives, others "took pleasure in humiliating and teasing Jewish girls."[102] During their work, they would play tricks on Sarra and her friend, sending them to places for no reason, deriving amusement from the girls' confusion.[103] Sarra Shvartsman's testimony refers to the multifaceted nature of young Jews' interactions with the Italians and the challenges associated with gender-related behaviors and attitudes. This references the unpredictable nature of interactions with Italians, where kindness and maltreatment could coexist, and experiences escalated beyond those usually confronted by young Jewish males. Young Italian soldiers, distant from home and seeking female contact, came from diverse backgrounds. Their origins—for example, rural or urban—influenced their perceptions of women, which likely led to a range of behaviors directed toward young Jewish females in Transnistria.[104]

A stain marring the generally positive portrayal of Italians in Jewish testimonies relates to an unusual account of sexual violence. In 1944, survivor Golda Wasserman recalled how in the Tulchyn ghetto (Tulchyn *județ)* in 1942, young *devushki* were selected for Italian and Hungarian commanders under the guise of "work":

> About fifteen kilometers from the ghetto were Italian and Hungarian reserve divisions. When the commanders of these units requested it, the commander of the Romanian gendarmerie of Tulchyn would pick out healthy young *devushki* in the ghetto and send them to work in the kitchen and bakery of these divisions, as it was officially called. When the *devushki* returned, they had usually been raped and infected with venereal diseases. [. . .] Every time the commandant selected new *devushki* to go to "work". [. . .] I was one of 25 *devushki* assigned to the "work" mentioned above. We were led by two soldiers, a Hungarian and an Italian. [. . .] Sonja Fux, Sore Wital, Klara Meidler and I decided to push the two soldiers into the swamp and run away.[105]

102 Sarra Shvartsman (1925), Segment 44, Interview 23629, VHA, USC, Nov. 26, 1996.

103 Sarra Shvartsman (1925), Segment 44, Interview 23629, VHA, USC, Nov. 26, 1996.

104 On this subject, see Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS,* 275–76.

105 "The Escape of Twenty-Five *devushek* from the Tulchyn Ghetto: Memoirs of the Partisan Golda Wasserman," in Altman, *The Unknown Black Book*, 83–84.

The survivor concludes her narration of this episode by recalling that, at great risk, they succeeded in pushing the armed soldiers into the swamp and escaping. By turning the usual portrayal of Italians and power relations—including gender hierarchy—upside down, she is asserting her and the other girls' agency and resistance. Golda Wasserman's account prompts questions about the effects of sexual violence on memory and the assumptions about Italians regarding such violence. Women who experienced sexual violence often used various coping strategies due to the trauma and associated stigma many victims of sexual assault experienced. Eva Fogelman, a psychotherapist and social psychologist, suggests that some Jewish women might have concealed or denied such experiences, regardless of their age when the incident(s) took place.[106] The role the Italians played in this particular context remains inconclusive. Several Jewish survivors noted instances of sexual violence disguised as "work" perpetrated primarily by Romanians across various Transnistrian ghettos, suggesting it was common during the Romanian occupation. Some Jews near the Tulchyn ghetto seemed aware of the potential threat of sexual violence disguised as "work" and may have associated this fear with Italians. In her testimony collected by Yad Vashem, Ida Bristechko recalled how the head of the ghetto in Kryzhopil in Tulchyn district reacted when the Italians requested young females for work:

> They said, give us *devushki* to work in the kitchen. Musik Schneider, the head of the community, said, for the kitchen I'll give you experienced women, and he sent women, he wanted to see if that was true. We owe them very much, the Italians [...] these women started working there.[107]

Ida Bristechko's account highlights a shift from initial doubt to gratitude toward Italians, marking a moment when they gained the Jewish community leader's trust. However, it is unclear whether this concern was merely precautionary, influenced by their experiences with Romanians, or whether it was based on actual incidents involving Italians. Golda

106 Eva Fogelman, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women during and after the Holocaust," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, MA: University Press of New England, 2010), 258.

107 Testimony of Ida (German) Bristechko, born in Krizhopol, Ukraine, 1924, regarding her experiences in the Krizhopol Ghetto, item Id 3564558, File Number 5464, Tape Number O.33.C/1119, Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives, May 9, 1989.

Wasserman's testimony appears distinct for explicitly referring to rape perpetrated by Italians. Musik Schneider's strategy to discern the Italians' intentions likely stemmed from wartime and postwar references to young females' vulnerability to sexual violence and the imperative to preserve their honor.[108]

Overall, it is challenging to determine the extent to which Italians were involved in sexual violence. Although there are records of Italians committing sexual crimes against local civilians during the Eastern Campaign, no official reports mention such acts against the Jewish community.[109] However, the frequent interactions between Romanian and Italian militaries suggest possible unofficial cooperation.[110] Golda Wasserman's account implicates Italian officers in sexual violence, behavior that was echoed in narratives concerning Romanians and potentially fostered within Italian Fascist ranks, as Steinberg's psychosexual theory suggests.[111] Assessing this in specific cases like Wasserman's is complex due to the lack of similar narratives and the scarcity of official records that address the subject, challenges compounded by military tribunals' tendency to ignore sexual violence. Moreover, Pannacci notes that certain atrocities committed by Italian troops in the Soviet Union, including sexual crimes, were often decriminalized or perpetrators were treated with leniency by their superiors.[112] Despite the problems generated by these approaches to sexual violence at the time, Scianna still concludes that Italians were generally not regarded as "prone to rape."[113]

Similarly, survivor testimonies concerning female adolescents working for the Italians consistently advance a positive portrayal of Italians in Transnistria. Ida Gaisinskaia offered her perspective on the treatment of young female Jews working in the Italian canteen in Balta, contrasting it

108 Monika Flaschka, "'Only Pretty Women Were Raped': The Effect of Sexual Violence on Gender Identities in Concentration Camps," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, 77–93.

109 Bogučar agricultural attaché (f. to Hoppe) to Captain Köhler dated 29/8/1942, in Schlemmer, *Invasori, non Vittime*, chap. 3; Document 13, Report of the 221st Security Division to the Commander in the Central Army Region, 20 February 1943, in Schlemmer, *Die Italiener an der Ostfront*, 153.

110 For example, the Italians and Romanians exchanged officers, and some Romanians accompanied the CSIR to improve logistical and operational cooperation. Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front*, 196.

111 Steinberg noted that sexual brutality toward women was expected behavior within the fascist movement, especially for those in higher positions, which included many Italian commanders. Steinberg, *All or Nothing*, 176.

112 Pannacci, *L'occupazione Italiana in URSS,* 280–85.

113 Scianna, *The Italian War on the Eastern Front*, 247.

with her perception of the behavior of the Romanian occupiers: "There have been Jewish *devushki* working for them [the Italians], and they have not harmed them because Romanians [. . .] implied intercourse with her, but not the Italians; they were the kindest, the most cultured."[114] Polina Shtofmakher referred to a similar narrative, stating that her sister, who had just turned eighteen, cleaned rooms for Italians in Zhmerynka (Mohyliv *județ*), contrasting their gentleness with German aggressiveness.[115] Finally, Petr Roitman's account depicted Italian soldiers as rescuers as they intervened to protect the young Mania Dubirnaia from German soldiers attempting to rape her in the village of Obodivka.[116] The accuracy of this account remains unverifiable and the potential for alternative scenarios is plausible since the precise historical context and timeframe is essential for interpreting such acts of Italian resistance to the German military in the region.

Conclusion

Historian Joanna B. Michlic contends that children's Holocaust experiences were influenced by the following factors: their wartime location, age, the presence of parents, and their interactions with non-Jews.[117] In Transnistria, complex regional dynamics combined with encounters with Italians, whose experience in the region was similarly complicated, deeply affected the memories of many Jewish child survivors. This essay has highlighted the multifaceted nature of interactions between Jewish children and adolescents and the Italian military in Transnistria. Delving into the nuances of these interactions offers insight into the diverse range of experiences of, responses to, and perceptions of such encounters.

One of the significant contributions of this analysis has been debunking the dominant historical narrative that assumes that children were treated with compassion by Italians, or that the assistance offered by Italians was driven solely by humanitarianism. This narrative suggests that children and teenagers played a passive role in these interactions, obscuring their agency. The presence of Italian troops in Transnistria created a unique landscape young Jews could navigate through a distinct

114 Ida Gaisinskaia (1920), Segments 141–142, Interview 39990, VHA, USC, Jan. 26, 1998.

115 Polina Shtofmakher (1932), Segment 58, Interview 21650, VHA, USC, Oct. 27, 1996.

116 Piotr Roitman (1928), Segment 65, Interview 6312, VHA, USC, Nov. 21, 1995.

117 Michlic, "Mapping the History of Child Holocaust Survivors," 80.

set of opportunities that had the potential to increase their and their relatives' chances of survival. Whether it was catching and exchanging animals or scraping *makarony* from kettles, many Jewish children's experiences during the Holocaust were only possible in the context of their encounters with Italians, and these encounters, in turn, shaped these child survivors' memories of the Italians in Transnistria in the years and decades that followed. Moreover, various testimonies highlight the dynamics of agency and the prominence of surrogate families against the backdrop of Jewish children's interactions with Italians.

Concerning this background, despite the diverse prewar experiences and paths of both deported and local Jewish youths in wartime Transnistria, their testimonies offer a relatively consistent portrayal of the Italians and their treatment of Jewish children, with no significant divergence, although testimonies given by those who had been deported to the region were less represented in the analysis. Foreign language proficiency, particularly in Romanian or languages similar to Italian, fostered meaningful conversations and influenced mutual perceptions. However, its relevance shifted depending on the military context, region, and time, as local Jews increasingly acquired Italian language skills. Age and gender became increasingly important in the various contexts examined, shaping children's experiences and perceptions of their encounters with the Italians. The process of assuming new roles and responsibilities, along with the shifting dynamics of age and gender roles, shaped many different aspects of life during the Holocaust in Transnistria; yet, the effects of these aspects are especially visible within the spheres of barter and work, where certain particularities and demarcations emerged. Recollections of bartering between young Jews and Italians were influenced by gender: boys predominantly traded animals they hunted or caught, whereas girls were associated with sexual barter. Witnesses often portrayed Italians as cultured, especially in their interactions with Jewish women and girls. While deviations from this idealized image were acknowledged in accounts of sexual barter, their tone and word choice made these encounters seem less taboo as compared to narratives involving Germans and Romanians. Regarding the labor performed for the Italians, male adolescents typically handled physically demanding tasks such as the transportation of wheat, while smaller children of both genders and especially teenage girls were assigned cleaning duties, reflecting the preservation of a traditional gender division of labor, particularly during adolescence.

The impact of age and gender as key variables is also important for understanding experiences that diverged from the narrative of the "good Italians." Childish naïveté shaped survivors' memories of experiences that

did not conform to expectations of Italians' unconditional compassion for Jewish children, and gender influenced young female survivors' attitudes toward the Italians, especially if they had experienced the Holocaust during their teenage years. Some testimonies emphasized the intricate dynamics between Italians and Jewish females, the latter of whom experienced a spectrum of treatment from kindness to abuse, which was likely influenced by the diverse backgrounds and attitudes of Italian soldiers. Golda Wasserman's distinctive narrative about Italians as perpetrators of sexual violence also raises questions about the potential for other such cases of Jewish girls and adolescents who experienced sexual violence disguised as "work." Overall, this study reveals simultaneously Jewish youths' agency in the framework of the Holocaust and Italians' treatment of Jews in Transnistria in ways that were not uniformly benevolent. As such, it challenges monolithic generalizations and simplifications about both groups' experiences of the Holocaust.

From the existing sources and scholarship, both of which are limited in their comprehensiveness, Transnistria emerges as a particularly distinct setting to understand the Italian military's role in the Holocaust. The records do not suggest that Italians engaged in anti-Jewish actions in Transnistria. Moreover, the lack of Italian control and responsibility in the region, amplified by the Italian military's spatial distance from direct German supervision, likely provided Italian troops with a greater realm of action during their time there. This increased latitude might have led the Italians to adopt a more compassionate stance toward the Jewish community in general, and children in particular. However, it could also lead to different outcomes.

The abundance of positive memories about Italians in the testimonies of Jewish child survivors also prompts questions about the impact of the "*Italiani brava gente*" narrative. I suggest that this narrative may have reinforced survivors' pre-existing positive perceptions of their encounters with Italians in Transnistria without drastically altering their core recollections. Delving deeper into microhistorical research that emphasizes the regional dynamics of the Holocaust, and placing it alongside comprehensive comparative analyses of Jewish-Italian interactions in German-, Romanian-, and Italian-occupied territories like Yugoslavia, Greece, and France could offer important insights into the issues discussed here, as well as answer lingering questions.