INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF

Norbert Nadler

By Julie Dawson, Institute for Contemporary History, University of Vienna

HVT-0536

> The most immediate impact of atrocity is on the cosmos of each individual self; and it is that impact we need to grasp first if we are to understand something of the nature of such events and their consequences.
>
> -Eva Hoffman[1]

Almost twenty years ago, in her review of several new publications on the Romanian Holocaust, historian Irina Livezeanu lamented the fact that the "Romanian Holocaust has mostly been the object of neglect and distortion," reflecting on why "the topic has not fully emerged into the 'limelight' of scholarly attention."[2] Though ultimately critical of the works reviewed, she nevertheless applauded the publications as an important step, noting, however, in her conclusion that the incorporation of memoirs or similar ego-documents and testimonies would "give orders and statistics a human perspective and help with the challenge of interpretation."[3] Several years later, in 2012, historian Roland Clark performed a new survey of the field, taking stock of the progress made since Livezeanu's implicit challenge to future scholars.[4] Though new publications

---

[1] Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 163.

[2] Irina Livezeanu, "The Romanian Holocaust: Family Quarrels" in *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 16 nr. 3 (2002), 934-947.

[3] Livezeanu, "Family Quarrels," 947. Shortly thereafter Peter Weber also noted and regretted the lack of testimonies in the early works on Transnistria, arguing for their incorporation in future studies and introducing and elaborating on four testimonial sources. Peter Weber, "Eyewitness Testimonies as Source of a Historical Analysis of the Deportations to Transnistria (1941-1943)" in *Études Balkaniques* (2004) 4, 28-34.

[4] Roland Clark, "New Models, New Questions: Historiographical Approaches to the Romanian Holocaust" in *European Review of History*, 19:2 (2012), 303-320.

had advanced the field and provided fresh insights, from a methodological perspective the area remained remarkably monotone, with only a few larger studies incorporating interdisciplinary methodologies, moving beyond examining larger narratives, or utilizing, as Clark puts it, "the nuanced perspectives that cultural and gender histories" can offer.[5]

Since then, significant advances in scholarship in the field of Transnistria and the Romanian Holocaust have been made.[6] It is thus all the more surprising that a study devoted to the largest of the Transnistrian ghettos, that of Moghilev-Podolsky, does not exist.[7]

My impetus to work with oral histories and my decision to focus on the testimony of Norbert Nadler was explicitly related to this gap in scholarship. My current larger project examines the postwar diaries of a young woman, Blanka Lebzelter, who survived the deprivations of the Moghilev-Podolsky ghetto together with her mother.[8] Lebzelter's recently found post-war diaries record a range of vivid and intimate details about survivor life in Romania from 1948-1961, but it is clear that the war and the associated trauma experienced during that time formed her existential foundation. The traumatic losses of the war weave their way into Lebzelter's daily interactions and reflections - and yet in her writings she consistently and carefully sidesteps describing the Transnistrian period. For myself, as her biographer and as a historian examining the context surrounding her writings, the almost complete omittance from her texts of these three crucial and formational years, poses a discrete challenge.[9] My larger analysis, which

---

[5] Clark, "New Models," 315.

[6] For a full survey of scholarly publications on Transnistria and its ghettos, please see my article "Survival in the Ghetto of Moghilev-Podolsky: A Microhistorical Inquiry" in *S.I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*. Vol. 9 No. 1, 2022: 79-93. Please note that significant material overlaps with the present article. My thanks go to the Fortunoff Archive and the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for making my research possible.

[7] Of course, both the encyclopaedias devoted to the camps include , there are entries on Moghilev: See Moghilev-Podolsk, in: Geoffrey P. Megargee et al (eds.), *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos vol. III* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 715-717 and Mogilev-Podolskiy, in: Guy Miron (ed.) *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust, vol 1: A – M* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 493-496, as well as the several pages devoted to the ghetto in Ancel, *Transnistria vol. 1*. The one book dedicated exclusively to Moghilev is the memoir mentioned above written by Siegfried Jägendorf, arguably the most privileged (Jewish) man in Transnistria. Though he played a crucial role in the rescue of many lives and the book is valuable to scholars on many levels, his experience was hardly representative of ghetto life. Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*.

[8] For an introduction to the diaries and my project, see "'What meaning can the keeping of a diary have for a person like me': Spaces of Survivor Agency under Postwar Oppression," in *European Holocaust Studies Vol 3*: *Places, Spaces and Voids in the Holocaust,* eds. Natalia Aleksiun and Hana Kubátová (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 299-311. Gaëlle Fischer also drew on the diaries in her article "Between Liberation and Emigration: Jews from Bukovina in Romania after the Second World War," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* no. 62 (2017): 115-132.

[9] Blanka Lebzelter kept four diaries from 1948-1961, totalling over 800 entries. In addition, in the mid-1950s she wrote three long letters filled with biographical details to her deceased brother, to her fiancé (also killed in 1941), and to her mother. Though in these letters she recounts in graphic detail the pogrom during which her brother and her father were murdered, she writes almost nothing about the years in Transnistria. In the letter to her brother she

examines the diaries from perspectives of gender, communist history, trauma theory, and survivor experience, requires that I gather tactile details of what Lebzelter confronted within the Moghilev-Podolsky ghetto for almost three years.

The task set myself then, while a fellow of the Fortunoff Video Archive and the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute, was to attempt to conceptualize and make tangible the "horror," as Lebzelter termed it, of the Moghilev-Podolsky ghetto. Though, as outlined above, Transnistria has in the meantime been addressed by scholars from multiple perspectives, a microhistorical approach is still seldom taken. I was keen to examine the experience on an intimate and individual level and probe the specificity of Moghilev-Podolsky itself. In this Critical Edition essay, I organize my study around one man's testimony, while quoting from and drawing on other testimonies, as well as incorporating other primary sources, such as memoirs or diaries, and secondary sources.[10]

Choosing a Narrative: Norbert Nadler

Due to my underlying quest to apprehend Lebzelter's experience, I sought a testimony from an individual with similar biographical traits: a young adult, no longer a child, nor yet a parent, from an educated, Bukovina background. I eventually selected an interview by Norbert Nadler, a man of Lebzelter's age who lived under circumstances close to Lebzelter. Like her, Nadler survived life in the ghetto with family members but without a sweetheart, partner, or children. He was a native German-speaker, middle-class, from a solidly-rooted Czernowitz family, all characteristics of Lebzelter. As she did, Nadler moved to Romania after the war and emigrated in the early 1960s. It is this man's testimony that I use as a framework and his narrative whose thread I follow below.[11] I begin each thematic section with an excerpt from Nadler's interview

---

summarizes the three years in two sentences: "During the war Mama and I spent three years in the Nazi extermination camps. We were forced to suffer the most horrible torments there, hunger, cold, vermin, a small, hard board to sleep on and at the mercy of henchmen who could string us up at any moment or hunt us to a cruel death." LBI; Blanca Lebzelter Collection; AR 25437; box 1; folder 1; "Mein Bruder [My Brother]" (1955).

[10] The following testimonies from the Fortunoff Archive were drawn upon: Leah K., HVT. 4166; Edgar H., HVT. 3726; Elsie B., HVT. 1228; Mikel C., HVT. 1204; Norbert N., HVT. 0536; Dora and Salo R., HVT. 0012; Shmuel S. and Dora R., HVT. 0013; Michael S., HVT. 1749; Pearl T., HVT. 2639; Yuri R., HVT. 3294; Zvi O., HVT. 3767; Ernest E., HVT. 1499; Max K., HVT. 1964; Dori L., HVT. 0593; Gusta K., HVT. 1608; Olga F., HVT. 2602.

[11] I initially intended to choose a woman, but the female testimonies held by the Fortunoff Archive differed from Lebzelter significantly in that all interviewees were either children in the ghetto (and often orphaned) or else already mothers, who therefore suffered the death or near-death of their own children. While acknowledging the significant discrepancy in experience that gender entails, I found that the role of mother within a ghetto brought with it an exceptional array of concerns and priorities, rarely applicable to non-mothers.

and a second quote from another testimonial source; the quotes are followed by contextualization.

The Backdrop: Czernowitz

> *"Czernowitz was an old, Jewish town …"*[12]
>
> *"Nowadays, of course, Czernowitz is nowhere."*[13]

> [00:01:02.14] NORBERT N: OK. My name is Norbert Nadler. I'm born August 18, 1922 in Czernowitz. This is in, uh, north-- northeastern part of Romania. It's a place-- when my mother was born, it was Austria-Hungary. When I was born, it was Romania. Right now, it's Russia.[14]

Norbert Nadler was born in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, on August 18th 1922.

Pre-Shoah Bukovina and specifically Czernowitz have achieved almost mythical status in the collective memory of its pre-war Jewish population and their descendants. Cradle of the writers Paul Celan, Edgar Hilsenrath, Aaron Appelfeld, and Rose Ausländer, to name only the most prominent, the region and the city were singular spaces with an ethnically diverse population and polyglot culture. Historians, literary scholars, and sociologists are still trying to reckon with its rich and complex legacy and untangle, understand, and elucidate memories and impressions of nostalgia, belonging, terror, and trauma.

Bukovina was annexed by the Habsburg Empire from the Ottomans in 1775 and boasted a medley of languages and cultures. By the turn of the century, no group in the town of Czernowitz had an absolute majority: over 30% of the population was Jewish, with the remaining portion divided into smaller percentages of Romanians, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, and other groups. In 1930 the urban population of Bukovina was 33% Romanian, 30% Jewish, 14.7 % German, and 13.9% Ukrainian. Affectionately dubbed "Klein Wien" (Little Vienna), by World War I the Jewish population was largely assimilated and German-speaking. At the same time, prominent Hassidic courts were settled in smaller towns nearby, creating a vibrant

---

[12] Josef Burg in *"Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot…": Jüdische Überlebende berichten* (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung, 1999), Gaby Coldewey et al eds., 7.

[13] Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, xiii.

[14] The interview took place in 1984 when the region was part of the Soviet Union; today it is in Ukraine.

mingling of tradition and modernity within a defined space. In the wake of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire after World War I, Bukovina was awarded to Romania. But despite the hardline Romanianization measures of the interwar period, Czernowitz and its Jews, especially, retained the sheen of the Austrian Empire. Time and again, in memoirs and testimonies, those who grew up during the interwar period remark on their German or Austrian cultural identity.

Youth Movements

> But by no means were the Czernowitz youth all attached to the same ideals. In the neighboring building a group of the "Shomer," the leftist young Zionists met, and less than a stone-throw away the Marxist-Zionist circle of Jewish workers, "Poale Zion" had its meetings. When the weather was nice and the windows open, we could hear their arguments. Of course, we recognized each other but avoided each other with indifference or even contempt.
>
> -Edith Silbermann[15]

> [00:01:43.43] NORBERT N: My late father was a tailor.[16] We were, as a family, I wouldn't say poor, but really modest background. He was a communist socialist. And so was my late grandfather from [the] other side, who was a kind of leader of the Socialist movement of the Jewish people in this town.[17] We were a close family.

Indicative of the vibrant and overlapping social and political spheres in the town, Nadler mentions in close succession both his education in Communist ideology via his father's tailor shop and the fact that his mother was a secretary to one of the most prominent Zionists in the city.[18] While Zionism had a strong following in Czernowitz (perhaps more cemented in collective

---

[15] Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 96. Edith Silbermann née Horowitz made this comment after describing her own involvement in the illegal communist youth organization.

[16] Nadler's father, Baruch Itzik Nadler, was born in the southern Bukovina town of Câmpulung Moldovenesc on November 24th, 1889. His mother, Amalia/Amelie (both spellings used in documents) Nadler, née Freiberg, was born in Czernowitz on January 22nd, 1897. Personal communication on July 17, 2021 with Nadler's wife, Judith Nadler.

[17] According to Czernowitz birth records, Amalie Freiberg (Nadler's mother) was born in 1897 to Süssie Freiberg, a wallpaper hanger (*Tapezierer*), who lived in Synagogengasse either 16 or 68. This is in the heart of the "old" Jewish quarter, where the old cemetery, the hospital, synagogue street, and Judengasse were located.

[18] It seems that Nadler's mother was secretary to none other than Mayer Ebner, one of the most important leaders in the Jewish community in the pre-war period. Dr. Leon Arie Schmelzer writes that three delegates from Bukovina

memory due to post-war diaspora publications), like all central and eastern European cities with significant Jewish populations, Czernowitz (and Bukovina) youth participated in the breadth of Jewish social-political movements, from far left Communism to rightwing Zionism.[19] Notably, besides his mother's pride in working for a prominent (Zionist) community leader, Nadler does not otherwise mention involvement in Zionist activities. Many of the youth saw the traditional Zionist movement as an inadequate form with which to confront contemporary issues. According to one biographer, poet Paul Celan explicitly rejected the "petite bourgeois Zionism of his [father]" and was instead active in the non-Zionist leftwing antifascist movement.[20] Similarly, Prive Friedjung recalled the left-wing political atmosphere amongst craftsmen such as those in Nadler's shop and linked this specifically to Yiddish: "For me, Czernowitz means the symbiosis of Yiddishism and revolutionary thinking."[21] Today, probably due to Celan's lasting influence, the German-language legacy overshadows the Yiddish character of a city which brought forth or was home to such famous poets as Itzik Manger and Eliezer Schtaynbarg and was the site of the first Yiddish language conference in 1908,[22] but in the interwar period, Czernowitz maintained manifold identity markers – cherished at once by Yiddish and German speakers, Communists and Zionists alike.[23]

---

were sent to the First Zionist Congress (Dr. Isak Schmierer, Dr. Leo Picker, Dr. Mayer Ebner) and only the latter was living at the time described by Nadler. See "Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, Hugo Gold ed., (Tel Aviv: Olamenu Press, 1958), 92-93. For more on Ebner, see also Corbea-Hoisie, Andrei. 2010. Ebner, Mayer. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Ebner_Mayer (accessed September 9, 2021).

[19] As noted by Gaëlle Fisher, the explicit Zionist dimension of the two-tome post-war publication *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* "served to inscribe the history of Bukovinian Jews in a decidedly Zionist tradition," with other experiences being underrepresented or not mentioned at all. Gaëlle Fisher, *Resettlers and Survivors: Bukovina and The Politics of Belonging in West Germany and Israel, 1945-1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 141. Among other articles in the publication devoted to Zionist themes, see Dr. Leon Arie Schmelzer, "Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, ed. Hugo Gold (Tel Aviv: Olamenu Press, 1958), 91-112. Despite the detailed information on the establishment, members, leaders, and activities of Zionist organizations in Czernowitz, it is impossible to ascertain what percentage of the Jewish population was actually involved in the reported activities.

[20] Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979), 60-64.

[21] Prive Friedjung, *"'Wir wollten nur das Paradies auf Erden'. Die Erinnerungen einer jüdischen Kommunistin aus der Bukowina* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 132.

[22] On the history of the Bund in Bukovina, see Dr. Joseph Kissman "Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Arbeiterbewegung 'Bund' in der Bukowina" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, ed. Gold, 129-144. Kissman's daughter, Ruth, was close friends with Edith Silbermann, who in her memoirs described in detail the left-leaning activities of their youth circles, which included Paul Antschel (later Celan). See Edith Silbermann, *Czernowitz – Stadt der Dichter. Geschichte einer jüdischen Familie aus der Bukowina (1900-1948)*, ed. Amy-Diana Colin (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 93-98.

[23] Nevertheless, there was sometimes friction. Beyle Schaechter Gotteman (1920-2013), the first Yiddish poet to receive a National Heritage Fellowship in 2005, grew up speaking Yiddish in Czernowitz. She noted: "We were a little different, in that we were trying to preserve our culture. We were speaking Yiddish in a town which was very

School Life and Education

> "It was lovely in Czernowitz mostly because I was young…"
>
> -Mella Horowitz[24]

> [00:02:17.92] And I went to grammar school in Czernowitz. I went to high school in Czernowitz. And then-- this was under Romania. It was not really a bad life. Also, we knew as Jews we have our limitations. We knew there were days we shouldn't go certain places, because you could be-- you could have been beaten up. You knew that some schools have been closed to you. And therefore, the Jewish community in these places was pretty much independent. We had our own kindergarten. We had our own schools. We had our own high schools.

Czernowitz had a range of public, private, and semi-private schools. In his remark on "our schools" Nadler was probably referring to private Jewish learning institutions but may also have meant state institutions whose student body was primarily Jewish.[25] Many memoirists have positive memories of their school experience, despite a pervasive awareness of precarious status.

---

assimilated or striving to be assimilated. And my father was what you call a Yiddishist, or a militant Yiddishist. He was having fights with everyone. Why do you teach your children Yiddish? And why do you give them Yiddish names? I always had this argument. And my father was very much convinced of the right-- that he was right. And he was very sincere and very dedicated, very honest." Beyle S., HVT-0181 (1982); Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies; Yale University, New Haven, CT. In contrast, Yiddish poet Josef Burg (1912-2009), who remained in Czernowitz throughout his life, commented "But Yiddish was not frowned upon. Also the wealthy, who would otherwise prefer to speak German, attended Yiddish performances and events. […] Intellectuals and artists were especially interested in Yiddish." Josef Burg, "Ich freue mich, daß ich ein jiddischer Schriftsteller bin," in *"Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot…": Jüdische Überlebende berichten* (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung, 1999), 17.

[24] Mella Horowitz in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan: Lebenserinnerungen Czernoitzer Juden,* Coldewey et al. eds. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 3.

[25] I have not located a complete listing of all the schools that existed in Czernowitz in the interwar period. As children or teenagers, the school system naturally impacted profoundly many later memoirists. Experiences and the recollections thereof are diverse: though often characterized by nostalgia and fond memories, many also recall systematic antisemitism. It must be kept in mind that the memoirists or interviewees were young and though aware of social and political tensions, they may have been less cognizant than their parents of the present or future implications of a discriminatory educational system. As one woman recalled "Czernowitz was lovely mostly because I was young." Reflecting the bandwidth of memories in Nadler's generation is "'Schön war es in Czernowitz hauptsächlich weil ich jung war': Die Jahre vor dem Krieg," in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan: Lebenserinnerungen Czernoitzer Juden,* Coldewey et al. eds. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003) 3-15. See also "Gymnasium, 1932-1940" in Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 102-125.

During the interwar period the educational system was a fraught space, with Romanian nationalists striving to wrench the inherited Austrian system into a nationalist framework.[26] Nevertheless, for the attendees, many of the institutions, both public or private, may have felt "Jewish," either by way of the educators or the student body make-up. Edith Silbermann (1921-2008), who also described her schooling experience as overall a positive experience, attended a semi-public school, the Hoffmann Gymnasium, at which only three girls were non-Jews.[27] The inherent hostility and systematic discrimination of the Romanian school system may have been impossible to overlook, yet as Nadler asserted, the Jewish population understood the framework in which it was to function: "it was not really a bad life." This was to change abruptly in 1940.

Soviets for a Year

> For many in our area […] the sight of the Soviet tanks approaching our town symbolized […] an invincible force projecting a great deal of security.
>
> - Yosef Govrin[28]

> [00:08:09.80] So when the Russian[s] came over, I was full of joy. Finally, we are going to be equal citizens. And we are going to have all the rights and so on. Didn't take me too long to realize what we went into. You don't know the communists unless you live under them, under their rule.

On June 27th, 1940, northern Bukovina became part of the U.S.S.R. In 1940 in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union.[29] The particularity of the short period of Soviet rule, often called the "first Russian

---

[26] See especially Irina Livezeanu, "Bukovina: An Austrian Heritage in Greater Romania" in *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1995), 49-87. For an overview of Jewish education in Bukovina, from the perspective of postwar Zionist emigrants to Israel, see Hermann Sternberg, "Das Unterrichtswesen der Juden in der Bukovina" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina, vol. I* ed. by Hugo Gold (Tel Aviv: Olamenu, 1958), 75-83, especially "Die Zeit der Rumänischen Verwaltung," 81-83.

[27] Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 103-104.

[28] Yosef Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction. Recollections of Transnistria and Illegal Immigration to Eretz Israel, 1941-1947* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 13.

[29] Until 1918, Bessarabia had been part of the Russian Empire, in 1940 it was turned into the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. However, in 1941, following Operation Barbarossa, Romania retook both Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. By 1945 these regions were reconquered by the Red Army; northern Bukovina became part of the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic and Bessarabia became again the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1991 the

Year," for the Czernowitz Jewish experience is sometimes glossed over in light of what followed. In fact, 1940 was a pivotal year for the population and radically traumatic for many. Nadler's testimony captures the range of sentiments, relief giving way to confusion and dismay and eventually, disillusion.[30]

Most Jews initially experienced the Soviet arrival as a reprieve after the raw antisemitism of interbellum Romania. Whether or not they were politically involved with leftist movements, the majority of the Jewish population believed life would improve under the "egalitarian" Soviet regime. In his memoirs, Alfred Kittner recalled: "At that time, as Jews we were already very persecuted and thus experienced this cession [by the Romanians] as liberation. Of course, we did not know how everything would be arranged, but for the moment we were free of the worry of discrimination."[31] It did not take long, however, for many to realize the promises of equality made by the Soviet state were a sort of 'Potemkin village'. Structural discrimination was exchanged for apparent equality, girded by restrictions of movement and social vulnerability, suspicion, and general uncertainty. As Nadler explained, there was "no predictability anymore. You didn't know where you-- where you are."[32] More devastatingly, following Soviet policy, those deemed "exploiters" were deported to Siberia and many never returned.

Deportations to Siberia

> My father was deported. I experienced the Holocaust before-- a year before it started. Because my father was deported, and he was the best-- this was the greatest shock of my life. He was deported to Siberia, and he never came back.

---

latter became the Republic of Moldova. The state of the Republic of Moldova is not to be confused with the Romanian region of Moldova, in the eastern part of Romania.

[30] Several memoirs also capture the specific and traumatic shock experienced by youth after the arrival of the Soviets. Pearl Fichman describes in greater detail than most the year and unraveling of expectations, see Fichman, "Russians Overnight" in *Memories*, 61-73. Silbermann also provides minute detail on the entry of the Soviets and gradual changes, Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 126-139. Silbermann writes that many Jewish families from Bessarabia or (southern) Bukovina gave up their relatively secure conditions there and fled to Czernowitz in order to escape the growing antisemitism in Romania, hoping they would fare better under the Soviets. They were, however "soon taught better." Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 127. Probably the most concise yet thorough historical overview of these events, including contextualization within broader developments of World War II, can be found in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "Are we really in the Soviet Union" in *Ghosts of Home*, 99-121. For a variety of voices, see Gaby Coldewey et al., "'Man hat gehofft, dass unter dem russischen Regime alle Menschen gleich sein werden'. 1940/41 – Das Jahr unter sowjetischer Herrschaft" in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan. Lebenserinnerungen Czernowitzer Juden* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003) 26-39.

[31] Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 47. Siegfried Benzer: "After all, according to the imagination of the people, the Soviet system was the only possible solution to antisemitism." Siegfried Benzer in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 30.

[32] Norbert N., HVT-536; Fortunoff Archive.

-Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman[33]

> [00:11:09.65] NORBERT N: […] Here they told us you are equal, but equal to what, we didn't know. And here came the-- you did a mistake, you talked to somebody, and you ended up in jail, you ended up questioned, you ended up deported.

Most of the deportations to Siberia occurred in June 1941, shortly before the Russians withdrew again. Some took place, however, shortly after the occupation, in the summer of 1940.[34] Yiddish Poet Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman described a tortuous process during which her father was arrested, tried, released, tried again, and eventually deported.[35] This incident marked profoundly her perception of the war period; later persecutions and close encounters with death under the Romanians were experienced, in her retelling, as less traumatic than the loss of her father to the Soviet Gulag. Her statement, quoted above, bears witness to the common conflation of the experiences under Soviet and Fascist German or Romanian rule into one period of unprecedented affliction, during which self-evident social norms, especially a just judicial system, collapsed.

Following sporadic deportations in the wake of the Soviet occupation, the pace settled somewhat.[36] As Nadler notes, everyone was given an identity card and a social "categorization" and tried their best to "figure out the nature of the regime," as one woman recalled.[37] Almost a year passed. Despite the general disenchantment and underlying sense of insecurity, many had begun to navigate the new system and, if not master, at least feel comfortable in Russian. Then, suddenly, in June 1941 mass deportations began. The formula was familiar: the deportees

---

[33] Beyle S.; HVT-0181 (1982); Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies.

[34] Julius Wolfenhaut references his father's arrest on July 31st, 1940 and subsequent sentence to seven years in a prison camp (as discovered later by the family). Wolfenhaut and his mother were then arrested in the middle of the night almost one year later, in early June 1941, loaded onto cattle cars, and sent to Siberia. Julius Wolfenhaut, *Nach Siberien verbannt. Als Jude von Czernowitz nach Stalinka 1941-1994* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 2005) 57-63.

[35] She does not give dates, but this was prior to her marriage in early 1941.

[36] For many, the initial months of the Soviet occupation are recalled with a degree of euphoria, gradually dampening into disappointment. But as many memoirists describe, there was a "honeymoon" period, during which the Soviet government brought in visiting dance and theater troops, Yiddish stars, and similarly public-pleasing spectacles. Memories of this time are particularly vivid but will not be discussed in more detail here. See Pearl Fichman, "Russians Overnight," in *Before Memories Fade*, 61-73; Edith Silbermann, "Das erste Russenjahr 1940-1941" in *Czernowitz*, 126-139; Alfred Kittner, "Erstes Russenjahr 1940-1941," in *Erinnerungen*, 47-54; and for an excellent synthesis, Hirsch and Spitzer, "'Are we really in the Soviet Union?'" in *Ghosts of Home*, 99-121.

[37] Fichman, *Memories*, 64.

included “people who had been employed in the service of the [Romanian] state, members of the middle-class parties, including Social Democrats, business owners who had more than two or three employees, in short: anyone considered to be an ‘enemy of the people’ by the Soviet government.”[38] The city was stunned. Edith Horowitz returned to Czernowitz on June 20th 1941, after spending a month in Charhov. On her return, she writes “[I] found the city darkened and the people crestfallen. During the four weeks I was gone, there had been deportations to Siberia. The German invasion of the Soviet Union was imminent. The Soviets knew there would be war. Thus, before their own army had to retreat, they wanted to get rid of all potential detractors […].”[39] Approximately 4,000 Jews were deported from Czernowitz during the Soviet occupation.[40]

The Return of the Romanians

> The first [person] that I saw was a policeman in the familiar uniform of the Romanian police. It was a strange feeling that crept over me and those like me. On the one hand, we were happy to be rid of the Russians, since the dark side of the regime had revealed itself very quickly. On the other hand, we had the not unfounded fear that the Romanians would take revenge on the people who had stayed behind, those who had greeted the Red Army with joy.
>
> -Alfred Kittner[41]

> [00:12:15.42] NORBERT N: So this lasted for a year. And then the-- and then the German[s] invaded Russia. And a few days after the war broke out, Czernowitz was taken by the Romanians. Now it's not-- no denial of this here. That when the Russian came in, the Jewish population was jubilant in Romania. Now the Romanians, the Germans, start taking revenge on us.

---

[38] Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 54. For more on the experience of these deportees, many of whom remained for decades in the Soviet interior, see Margit Bartfeld-Feller, *Wie aus ganz andern Welten. Erinnerungen an Czernowitz und die sibirische Verbannung* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 2000); Julius Wolfenhaut, *Nach Siberien verbannt. Als Jude von Czernowitz nach Stalinka 1941-1994* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 2005).

[39] Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 139.

[40] Coldewey et al, *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 38. For these final deportations, see also Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 116-117.

[41] Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 55.

On June 22nd 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. The Soviet personnel, whether military or civilian, hastily packed up and fled the city. Russians who had been brought in to teach at the university or work in the administration left, as well as many students and others who were particularly supportive of or involved in the communist regime. Great uncertainty reigned as families and friends tried to gauge the wisest move. Fichman recorded the tension and uncertainty stretching over days: "[In] that last week of June 1941 people were petrified at the imminent arrival of the German troops." She goes on to explain that though many of her friends and acquaintances departed, she realized she could not leave her mother and father behind.[42]

Edith Horowitz, who had in general done well under the communist regime, also decided to remain, together with several friends. Her friend and neighbor, Gustav Chomed, fled with the army.[43] Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman lived, in the meantime, in a village north of Czernowitz where her husband, a doctor, had been stationed. They initially fled in their horse and carriage, only to turn back eventually and return to Czernowitz.[44]

The sense of foreboding was to prove all too accurate. In the first week of July numerous pogroms took place in the villages and small towns of northern Bukovina. Perpetrators of brutal killings, including those of women and children, included the Romanian and German army, as well as Ukrainian and Romanian peasants.[45] In Czernowitz thousands were killed, including the head rabbi, Dr. Abraham Mark, and the cantor of the landmark central temple.[46] In quick succession the Jews were forced to wear a yellow star and restrictions on movement were put in place. Young men were conscripted to repair the buildings and structures destroyed by the

---

[42] Fichman, *Memories*, 73.

[43] On the decision to remain, see Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 140; on Chomed, see ibid., 351.

[44] Beyle S.; HVT-0181 (1982); Fortunoff Archive. They narrowly escaped death many times on their journey back, but eventually made it to Czernowitz where Beyle survived the war.

[45] For the massacres that took place in northern Bukovina villages around Czernowitz see for example Simon Geissbühler, *Blutiger Juli. Rumäniens Vernichtungskrieg und der vergessene Massenmord an den Juden 1941* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), especially 59-71.

[46] The exact number of those killed in the first days in Czernowitz is unclear. Radu Ioanid states 2,000 were killed the first day of the invasion, while another 400 were killed on July 9th. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 101. Matatias Carp writes of 2,000 being killed in less than 24 hours on July 6th, 1941. Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 169. Coldewey et al. write that more than 3,000 were shot on the banks of the Prut in those first days. Coldewey et al., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 41. Ancel states that various sources give the numbers killed a range from 2,000 to 5,000. Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 271-273.

retreating Red Army.[47] Still, as Nadler notes, "we had what to eat, we had where to sleep." In the successive deprivation of rights, the final blow of removal from one's home had not yet struck.

Ghetto and Deportation

> The ghetto had already been blocked off with barriers when it came to my mother how important our sewing machine would be. Foolhardy as she sometimes was, she bribed a gendarme, and with a peasant's cart that was standing on the other side of the barricade, she went and got the sewing machine, set it up in the courtyard and began to sew backpacks from pieces of thick-woven sheets for everyone in the family. […] It was rumored that the ghetto was only meant to be a collecting point, from where we would be deported to the other side of the Dniester River.
>
> - Edith Silbermann[48]

> [00:14:41.37] NORBERT N: […] [W]ithout any official announcement, nothing in the papers, nothing on the radio, you find small notices on the doors. You have to know that in Czernowitz there were streets where Jews was living and streets where non-Jews were living. And in a place where we were living, we were just on the border.[49] And [we] find a notice, said tomorrow by 11:00 in the morning, you have to be in the ghetto. We didn't even know where the ghetto was located. It was by the word of mouth where we are to go.

The Czernowitz ghetto operated for only several weeks. Nevertheless, its creation and the implications thereof represented a fundamental rupture for the Jewish community. From the moment that the notices were posted, any lingering doubts – or hopes – regarding how the Jews were to be treated evaporated. For those who had been born, educated, and matured under the

---

[47] Fichman writes "The Jewish population was ordered to sew on a yellow star, of a prescribed dimension, on every garment worn outdoors. We were permitted to go out in the street for two hours only, from 10 till noon; that was for the purpose of buying food. Those who were doing hard labor at the bridge or the electric station received a permit to go to and from work, at those particular hours." Her future husband worked on a bridge; Paul Antschel (Celan) at reconstructing the post office. Fichman, *Memories*, 75.

[48] Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 143.

[49] Norbert Nadler and his family lived at Dreifaltigkeitsgasse 53. The ghetto area originally included the lower part of this street. Personal communication with Judith Nadler, July 17th, 2021. The ghetto's boundaries changed and shrank as people were deported. For a map of the streets as dictated on October 11th, 1941 see Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 125.

Austro-Hungarian Empire it was an unprecedented and inconceivable event. "This cannot be possible! This violates the Declaration of the Rights of Man," protested Max Gottfried, a lawyer, and neighbor of the Nadler family.[50] Such astonished disbelief was particularly palpable amongst the older generation, who had enjoyed dignified careers and whose world rapidly became utterly unrecognizable.

On Saturday, October 11th 1941, during the festival of Sukkot, notices were posted around the town. Fichman recalled:

> On a cold windy Saturday morning, there appeared notices, ordinances, pasted on buildings and lampposts, to the effect that every Jews was ordered to move into a certain section of town, formerly mostly populated by the poor Jews. That section was designated as the Ghetto. By 5 [sic: 6] o'clock on that afternoon, no Jew was allowed to reside in town any longer, everybody had to reside within the confines of the Ghetto. Noncompliance was punishable by death, execution on the spot.[51]

The area designated as the ghetto was historically a Jewish neighborhood, with street names revealing its anchored place in the town's history: Judengasse [Jews Street], Synagogengasse [Synagogue Street], Alter Markt [Old Market], Uhrmachergasse [Clockmaker Street], Tischlergasse [Carpenter Street].[52] By the interwar period its slender, unpaved lanes were rarely sought out by middle and upper-class Czernowitzers. Edith Horowitz ventured to the area prior to the war, searching for a girlfriend whom she suspected would know how to help a mutual friend with an unwanted pregnancy. She wrote, "It was the first time that I had entered this quarter, located in the lower city, a jumble of narrow lanes, swarming with children, adults with sidelocks robed in caftans, and street venders, loudly calling out their wares. A world completely foreign to me."[53] Zvi Yavetz, who grew up in one of those "narrow lanes," wrote repeatedly about the differences between "upper" and "lower" Czernowitz, recalling being playfully ridiculed by other pupils due to his muddy, literally, address: "all of those who belonged to the Czernowitz "establishment" lived in "upper Czernowitz," that is, above the Springbrunnenplatz. This area was considered a "garden city" and differed completely from "lower Czernowitz,"

---

[50] As recalled by his daughter, Lotte Hirsch, in Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 125.

[51] Fichman, *Memories*, 77 For an extended narrative of events that day and the following week, see the recounting by Lotte and Carl Hirsch in Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 122-132. For a compilation of various experiences of the ghetto and the period thereafter in Czernowitz see "'… aber mit Geld konnte man damals viel machen': Czernowitz 1941-1944" in Coldewey et al., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 40-50.

[52] The streets had been renamed by the Romanian and then the Soviet regime, but residents still referred to the original, German names.

[53] Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 83.

which lay in the Prut valley, where mostly poorer Jews lived."[54] It was into this "lower Czernowitz," adjacent to the train station and previously home to around 10,000, that 50,000 people were now ordered to move, within a matter of hours.[55] Families and acquaintances crowded together, those living outside the prescribed borders moving in with families whose homes lay within the boundaries.[56] There was rarely indoor plumbing.

However, the squalor that promptly arose was not to last long. Deportations began almost immediately, beginning with those streets which lay closest to the train station, at the "bottom" of the ghetto.[57] There was great confusion amongst the population regarding whether it was better to try to remain in the ghetto or to leave and hope for better conditions elsewhere. Opinions were divided and families, too. Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman recalled:

> But some went voluntarily. They wanted to start a new life. Like in our family, we had this man with his two sons. He was a roofer, worked with tin, with metal. And he was not a rich man, certainly, but he hoped to start a new life. He got an authorization [to stay]. He tore the authorization, and he went with the other Jews to Transnistria. […] Yes, he voluntarily went. You know you see people can be so naive, what can be bad? We'll start a new life in the Ukraine. They'll be resettled. That's what they were told. They'd be resettled. He never came back.[58]

Paula Israeli stated that Romanian soldiers insinuated a particularly incredible fallacy – that those who left first would receive their own houses and be able to leave for America.[59] But tales of such shameless improbability were not necessary; ghetto conditions were wretched, the east was unknown and worse circumstances were, for many, unfathomable, at that time.[60] Nadler stated:

---

[54] Yavetz, *Erinnerungen*, 155.

[55] The number of 50,000 crammed into a space formerly housing 10,000 is generally agreed upon. See for example Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 825. Dr. Nathan Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter aus Czernowitz und Transnistrien" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* Vol. II, 56.

[56] Fichman describes 45 people sleeping in a two-room apartment (with a kitchen). Fichman, *Memories*, 77. Silbermann describes 15-20 people in a small house without indoor plumbing, but says their situation was good relative to others. Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 143. The Hirschs moved with eleven family members into a cousin's apartment, Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 124.

[57] Transports began on October 13th, 1941. Coldewey, *Zwischen*, 42.

[58] Beyle S., HVT-0181 (1982), Fortunoff Archive.

[59] Coldewey et al., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 42-43.

[60] Govrin refers to an agreement signed by Germany and the Soviet Union following the partition of Poland according to which "neither of the two would wage hostile propaganda against the other." He asserts that it was due to this agreement and its ramifications – namely that the Jewish residents of Czernowitz were unaware of Nazi

> [00:18:38.46] […] And certainly we couldn't-- we couldn't stand anymore, this ghetto. There was no way you can take a bath. There was very little water. You have to stay in line to go to a washroom. We were filthy. You couldn't wash your laundry, there wasn't-- so, I think whatever it's going to be, it's going to be-- it may be better than it is here.

As he indicates, this was not, however, the consensus accepted by all: "But some had been more-- uh, had more foresight than I had. And were trying to do whatever they can to get out of the ghetto, not to leave."[61] Silbermann's parents were determined to stay. Her mother insisted on finding accommodation as far from the train station as possible in order to "buy themselves time." Her aunt, however, believed that the earlier one arrived in Transnistria, the better choice of accommodation one would have; she left on one of the first transports.[62]

As can be seen by the language used in these stories, a singular feature of the Czernowitz ghetto and the deportations that took place is the impression that some sort of *choice* existed. A striking amount of agency was often, though not always, possible. At first, at least, one could simply move to another street in order to avoid deportation. Fichman and her parents did so: "As we had seen on the first day what was happening, we three decided that it was better to try to leave later. Thus, we made up our minds to go from place to place, maybe a miracle would still happen. We moved four times, to different locations."[63] Marianne Hirsch's parents recall walking with the others in their street towards the train station and then simply turning around, paying a small bribe, and reentering the ghetto.[64]

Those who managed to avoid the initial transports by moving, hiding, or other maneuvers, often succeeded in remaining in Czernowitz throughout the war – the hoped-for "miracle" did in fact occur. Diarist Getzler records that by October 16th 6,000 Jews had been deported, when the mayor, Dr. Traian Popovici, arrived with a message for the leaders of the Jewish community that he had managed to have the deportations halted so that lists of those deemed "necessary" for the

---

violence towards Jews in the territories occupied since 1940 – which contributed to their hesitancy to flee into the Soviet interior. Govrin, *Shadow of Destruction*, 31-32.

[61] That is, to get out of the ghetto and back into their former homes in Czernowitz.

[62] Silbermann's mother tried to persuade her to stay, arguing "They are sending us to our deaths!" The aunt later took her own life. Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 144.

[63] Fichman, *Memories*, 78.

[64] Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 125-132. Bribes – or *bacşiş* (baksheesh) – were deployed successfully for everything from evading initial deportations to receiving authorizations to stay in Czernowitz and are generally mentioned in some form by all survivors. See also Coldewey et al, "'…aber mit Geld konnte man damals viel machen.' Czernowitz 1941-1944" in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 40-50.

functioning of the city could be made.[65] Thereupon lists were made of those (and their family members) whose technical services were required by the city and gradually permits were issued by Corneliu Calotescu, the governor of the Bukovina territory during the war, authorizing the holders to return to their original homes.[66] At this point, the war-time fate of the Czernowitz Jewish population diverges into two drastically different experiences. Many of those that remained in Czernowitz – a total of around 20,000 permits were initially issued – survived. They were allowed to return to their own homes (these generally had been plundered), they worked, and even maintained a sense of normalcy unusual for Jews in central and eastern Europe.[67] The rest, almost 30,000 Jews, were deported east, to Transnistria. Nadler and his family went east.

Ataki, Gateway to Moghilev

> In the first night in Ataki I saw what human misery means. I saw people who no longer had a human face. […] In the night I saw how a person goes mad. The struggles of the brain to save its own mechanism, the spasms of the mind. In the night the pharmacist Garai went mad. […] The poor man could not become accustomed to the thoughts that he will no longer have a house, that he will never again be a pharmacist, and that he, who

---

[65] Dr. Nathan Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter aus Czernowitz und Transnistrien" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* Vol. II, 57.

[66] Fichman's family received a permit and returned to their home on Nov. 11th, 1941, one month after the ghetto was established. According to her memoirs, Calotescu permits ceased being issued shortly afterwards, upon which the mayor Traian Popovici, a Czernowitzer himself who had always been supportive of the Jewish population, personally signed authorizations for those remaining in the ghetto, approx.. 3,000, enabling them to also return to their homes. The ghetto was then disbanded. Fichman, *Memories*, 80-81. Dr. Train Popovici was later recognized by Yad Vashem as a righteous gentile. In the end, however, the authorizations were not equal. In June of 1942 those with Popovici authorizations were collected and deported to Transnistria. Silbermann writes that neither could a Calotescu permit always guarantee safety: " If there was any bit of air left to breathe in the train cars, then families with a valid Calotescu authorization, upon whose homes Romanian neighbors had cast an eye, were also herded in. Police, hunting through the streets like dogcatchers, caught people with valid papers during raids. Such infringements were daily events. The same fate could fall on us at any time." Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 154. In general deportations to Transnistria continued to occur in various phases throughout 1941 and 1942, see especially Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter" in *Geschichte der Juden/Bukovina*, 56-61; Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 190-193; Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 47-49. Many, including Paul Celan, escaped the second wave of deportations by hiding. Kittner records an arduous and lengthy process of evading deportation until July 1942, when he was finally caught, Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 55-62. For the purpose of this study, I do not look at the continuing war-years for the Jews who remained in Czernowitz, though there are many memoirs on this material: For Fichman's experience in Czernowitz during the rest of the war, see Fichman, *Memories*, 79-92; Silbermann's family also managed to remain, and for her experience of those years see Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 140-170; For Lotte and Carl Hirsch see Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 188-196.

[67] See Silbermann's memories of this period, "Zwischen Hangen und Bangen. Erste Liebebeziehung" in *Czernowitz*, 159-170. She concludes the chapter by admitting that the two war years from June 1942-March 1944 were "the happiest of my life, I was in love."

had always been a dignified citizen, was thrown out and expelled, in the filth, with all the Jews.

-Miriam Korber[68]

[00:21:34.42] And then, they didn't bring us-- in Ataki they didn't bring us to the railroad station. They stopped the train in the middle of a field. It was a rainy day. And who has ever been in Bessarabia know[s] what the mud in Bessarabia is. We were in mud until here [gesturing]. And here, you're supposed to get out. You get out, you get out into mud to-- to your knees.

Ataki was a small, unassuming Bessarabian town on the Romanian side of the Dniester, across from the larger city of Moghilev-Podolsky. Located today in the Republic of Moldova, Ataki (Otaci today) is about 150 km or 95 miles as the crow flies, due east from Czernowitz. The arrival in Ataki and transport over the Dniester River looms large in the memories of survivors. Here, at the latest, all became aware of the gravity of their situation. If overt violence had been in some way evaded thus far, it was now impossible to bypass, whether this entailed physical beatings by Romanian soldiers or soldiers and peasants stealing belongings with impunity.

It was a brisk, wet autumn. The rain and mud ingrained themselves into the memory of many survivors. Ella Warzmann recalled, "It rained very, very hard that day. […] We walked and the rain poured and the Romanians beat [us]."[69] Mirjam Bercovici-Korber, deported from the southern Bukovina town of Câmpulung Moldovenesc, also recalled the "hideous" weather and trudging through the "dung and muck," during her several days in Ataki in early November 1941. The fundamental shift in realities was immediate, foreshadowing what was to come: "In Ataki we saw that hunger is not a disgrace,"[70] she soberly recorded at the time.

Whether they remained in Ataki for days or continued immediately, crossing the river by ferry was inevitable.[71] Nadler's telling of the ferry crossing is somewhat ambivalent, but many recall

---

[68] Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert. Jüdische Überlebensschicksale aus Rumänien 1941-1944. Ein Tagebuch* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1993), 55-56.

[69] Warzmann in Coldewey, „Jüdische Deportierte aus Czernowitz in Transnistrien. Zwei Augenzeugenberichte" in *An der Zeiten Ränder. Czernowitz und die Bukowina. Geschichte Literatur Verfolgung Exil* (Wien: Theodor Kramer Gesellschaft, 2002), 212.

[70] Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert,* 56.

[71] The earliest deportees report crossing via a bridge, which was destroyed at some point in time. Most recall traumatic crossing on ferries or barges. The bridge was rebuilt by Jewish forced laborers during the war. One laborer

the crossing as a particularly traumatic experience, with children separated from parents, people shoved off and left to drown or even shot. In her narrative of the events of the war, experienced as a girl of eight years, written soon after arriving in Israel in 1949, Chana Koffler recorded such a violent arrival in Ataki:

> Early in the morning we were driven to the [river] port. As we got to the Nester [Dniester] three hundred Storozynetzer people were thrown [into the water] before us. I noticed this and began to scream, "I want to live still." Suddenly an order came that the rest of us should be transported over to Ukraine. Meanwhile we were left to stand in the mud. It was raining, it was cold, it was not possible to even pull a foot out of the ground. We stood this way until the evening. During the night we were loaded onto the barge like pieces of cattle. Many fell off and drowned, and so we arrived in the port city of Ukraine, Mogilev.[72]

Miriam Korber was more fortunate and crossed without incident. After having reached the Dniester via horse-drawn wagon, "we all crossed with a boat," she wrote. Later, from the other side, she realized their luck: "The nights in Moghilev were dreadful. We lived beside the Dniester and every day we saw people crossing the river. But they did not cross as we had. Beaten, driven, ransacked, they had to cross during the night. What wailing and weeping, the crying of the mothers and that of children who had lost their families, this choir increased our distress."[73]

Moghilev-Podolsky: Transnistrian Transit Point

> In Moghilev we met an old acquaintance, who took us in. The other people who had been deported with us and were unable to find a room, had to continue on, but we could stay in Moghilev and that is why we survived.
>
> - Felicia Gininger[74]

---

reported that following completion near the end of 1942, the bridge was destroyed once more by large chunks of ice in the river; he called this "providence," since it meant that workers were required yet again. Earnest E., HVT-1499, Fortunoff Video Archive.

[72] Chana Koffler, "Leaving Home," 1949. Translated by Julie Dawson. Personal collection of Howard Wiesenfeld.

[73] Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert,* 58. See also Coldwey et all, "Das Durchgangslager Ataki," in *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 52-53.

[74] Felicia Gininger, „Goethe kann man nicht verbrennen, sagte Mama'" in *"Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot…": Jüdische Überlebende berichten,* Gaby Coldewey et al., eds., (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung, 1999), 26.

> [00:02:24.96] We come over there. In the meantime, it become dark and it's evening. We didn't have where to go. And we saw some ruins. So, we went into this ruins. It was an old factory. I do not know what kind of factory. We found one room. And in this room there were already some fifteen people. So, we went in, another ten.

Transnistria, literally "beyond the Nister [River]," was an arbitrarily created territory between the Dniester and southern Bug rivers ceded by Nazi Germany to Romania in summer of 1941. The region had belonged to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic but had not existed as a unified territory.[75] The region became a dumping ground of sorts for Jews deported by the Romanians from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dorohoi (administratively joined to Bukovina in the interwar period, though not part of historic Bukovina). Herded into hundreds of makeshift "camps," which could denote anything from abandoned (or occupied) homes, to shacks, shelters intended for animals, or empty terrains surrounded by a fence, thousands would perish from starvation, disease, and exposure. What has come to be known as the "Romanian Holocaust" or "Transnistrian Holocaust" saw the deaths of between 250,000-300,000 Jews at the hand of the Romanian state.[76]

The town of Moghilev was originally designated as a transit point for the Jewish deportees, but due to poor organization and the sheer number of deportees, it came to harbor one of the largest ghettos in Transnistria. An estimated 50,000-60,000 deportees passed through or remained

---

[75] I will not rehash the administrative details of the territory, as this has been done by others. See Vladamir Solonari, *A Satellite Empire: Romanian Rule in Southwestern Ukraine, 1941–1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Life beyond the River: Transnistria" in *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), esp. 186-189; Diana Dumitru, "Jews and Their Neighbors in Occupied Transnistria" in *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust. The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. 176-181. The Jewish population in the region of Transnistria before the war was approx. 300,000 with 180,000 of those in the only major city, Odessa. Veidlinger, *Shadow / Shtetl*, 187.

[76] That the deaths followed an antisemitic ideology of "purification" of the state has been proven by scholars. For a concise overview of numbers, dates, and administrative orders, see Dennis Deletant, "Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the 'Jewish Problem'" in *The Shoah in Ukraine. History, Testimony, Memorialization*, Wendy Lower and Ray Brandon, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 156-189. For a comprehensive analysis see Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-allied Romania* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010). The exact numbers of the dead are disputed and difficult to verify completely. I use the figures quoted by Deletant: he cites 147,000 Jews deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia, out of which 90,000 perished (57,000 survived). In addition, an estimated 130,00-170,000 local Ukrainian Jews were killed or died of starvation and disease. Deletant, "Transnistria," in *Shoah in Ukraine*, 157 and footnotes 4 and 5. Numbers for Transnistria in general are also complex. Hilberg's figures differ somewhat: he estimates that of 160,000 deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia, approximately 51,000 were alive (109,000 dead) in September 1943. Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews*, 847-848. Precise figures aside, experts generally agree that more or less 1/3 of the deportees survived.

here between October 1941 and February 1942.[77] Between 15,000-20,000 Jews were housed here at various points; during a 1943 census 12,588 Jews were registered.[78]

Moghilev had seen battle and part of the city was destroyed. There had also been recent flooding. The ravaged town appeared as a sodden ruin, dank and crumbling: "Moghilev had been through a large flood. The houses were all wet, many were without windows and doors," recalled one survivor.[79] The first order of business was to find a place to sleep. Initially the deportees could reside wherever they found shelter. Survivors describe sleeping in the ruins of barracks,[80] a gymnasium,[81] schools,[82] cellars,[83] a cinema,[84] and the town hall.[85]

Similar to the experience of deportations from Czernowitz, many of the deportees were – at first – unsure whether it was better to try to remain in the town or to continue eastwards. Several survivors describe leaving Moghilev deliberately, while others did all they could to evade further deportation. Over the course of the war, if those deported farther east managed to escape, they frequently attempted to return to Moghilev, seeking what many hoped would be a degree of anonymity – and perhaps security – in a larger population.[86] Nadler's family determined to stay and quickly recognized the priorities for survival: shelter and employment, which should, in turn, ensure food.

---

[77] Of the pre-war population of almost 9,000, Coldewey et al. state that 3,000 were still living there in late summer 1941. Coldewey, *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 56-57. In 1939, the Jewish population was 8,703 or 40% of the total population. Slutsky, Yehuda, and Shmuel Spector. "Mogilev-Podolski." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 418. Vol. 14. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. Gale eBooks (accessed September 18, 2021). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587514071/GVRL?u=43wien&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=af59c050.

[78] Due to continual deaths, new arrivals, and regular deportations further east, population numbers were in constant flux. See USHMM Encyclopedia of Ghettos, 577-578 ("Ghettos") and Moghilev-Podolsk, 715-717.

[79] Coldewey et al, *Zwischen*, 57.

[80] Druckmann in *Juden aus Czernowitz*, 42; Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction,* 39.

[81] Coldewey et al.,"*Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot*," 61.

[82] Edgar H., HVT-3726, Fortunoff Video Archive.

[83] Coldewey et al.,"*Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot*," 25.

[84] Ernest E., HVT-1499, Fortunoff Video Archive.

[85] Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 59.

[86] Miriam Korber records that, remarkably, her family paid Germans to transport them on trucks farther east, see Korber, *Deportiert*, 58-59. In contrast, Yosef Govrin describes simply stepping out of the convoy line, together with his mother and aunts, and slipping into a nearby carpentry shop, in order to remain. Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction,* 40. See also Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 57-58. One woman, a girl at the time, escaped from multiple Transnistrian death camps further east and returned each time to Moghilev. Initially she went to her aunt, then to a Ukrainian woman outside the ghetto who cared for her. Leah K., HVT-4166; Fortunoff Video Archive.

Work and Social Status

> I thought with the time, I could give lessons for which I could get a few potatoes or a few Marks and maybe even a little room.
>
> -Lydia Harnik[87]

> [00:06:31.94] So my brother-in-law had the first idea, say, OK, I can do any work you want. So, there was a tool and die factory. [He] said, yeah, I worked always in tool and die. So, he went over there. Start[ed] working in tool and die, start[ed] learning. The factory was-- was managed by Jews, Jewish engineers from Romania, already which was over there. And they were trying to teach you. You get at least a meal a day. And the meal was so big that you can take a little bit home for-- to have another half meal at home. And he has the authority [authorization] to stay because he was working.

Nadler's brother-in-law probably worked at what is known as Jägendorf's Foundry (turnatoria in Romanian). Siegfried Jägendorf was an engineer originally from the southern Bukovina town of Radautz. He was a leader of the community in the ghetto with connections to the Romanian authorities. He immediately set to work convincing the authorities of the need for the foundry to be repaired and secured workers for the undertaking. Precise numbers of those saved through the foundry are hard to come by. Lists of personnel from 1943 and 1944 include around 600 workers; but because the benefits of employment in the factory, both official in the form of residence permits, and unofficial, in terms of food and implications thereof, extended to family members, the number of people who survived due to the enterprise is certainly many times higher than the number of those with permits alone. Furthermore, there is some indication that there was maneuvering room to "adopt" people onto employment permits.

Jägendorf was not viewed positively by everyone and remains a controversial figure, some seeing in him a dandy who worked to save first and foremost those closest to him and ensure himself material comforts, while others see a man working to save as many as possible under harrowing conditions. Undisputed is that many lives were saved as a result of the foundry's operation. Nevertheless, even if one assumes a generous multiplication factor – i.e., that the foundry saved between four to five times above the number of 600 official workers, this amounts to between 2,000-3,000 lives. In a ghetto of around 15,000 people, this is a significant fraction of the

---

[87] Lydia Harnik, „Man liebte weiterhin Österreich," in *"Czernowitz is gewen an alte, jidische Schtot…,"* 41.

population, yet hardly a majority. Moreover, those employed were more likely to be educated, technically trained, or with personal connections to the well-off leadership, that is, they were already of the privileged class. What of the less fortunate? Indeed, as Nadler's and other testimonies reveal, there was stark social stratification within the ghetto. Nadler elaborated on this point, "Because the Jews have just right [a]way been divided. The Jews from the occupied territory, from-- from Moghilev, they were the worst. The Jews from Bessarabia, they were the second worst. And we, from the Bukovina, which came in, we were considered a little bit better."

In an article on ghetto leadership, Gali Mir-Tibon discusses this hierarchy at length. The divisions fell primarily along the lines of national borders. Thus, those Jews who were living in the Soviet Union at the time of the Romanian occupation (i.e. those from Moghilev) were at the bottom, above these were those from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, who had lived for one year under the Soviet regime, and at the top were the Jews from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi, who had remained residents of the Romanian state. Those who had had greater affiliation with the Soviets were suspected by the authorities of espionage, while those from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi were considered the "most" Romanian. Socioeconomic status – which both resulted from and mirrored these shifting national boundaries – also played a role. Those who had never experienced life under communism arrived better off financially. With both valuables and hard cash, they were in a position to offer attractive bribes. Those from Moghilev, who had survived battle, occupation, and Einsatztruppen, had nothing left with which to barter. Most likely they possessed little to entice the occupying Romanians in the first place, having been part of the Soviet State already for twenty years. Those from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina also arrived with few possessions, having already been dispossessed and made frail through marches by foot over the summer and early fall. Czernowitzers, in contrast, though from northern Bukovina, generally arrived by train and with certain possessions intact. A significant portion was, moreover, of the educated middle class, and brought with them small valuables such as jewelry.

The original Jewish residents of Moghilev did, however, have one point in their favor – shelter. Without shelter not only was one exposed to the elements, but also in grave danger of being rounded up in regular "raids" and sent further east.

Disease and Starvation

> I came to Moghilev and will not forget the scenes of the people who were killed. They were sitting in front of their houses, mothers holding children, sitting, and they were all dead. Death became part of my life.

-Leah K.[88]

> [00:09:28.26] Now the first winter you got the typhus. […] And I would say between the hunger and the typhus, probably half of the population was exterminated. You were going out in the morning. It was cold. It was bitter cold. We didn't have anything to heat. We were seeing dead people on the street, in sitting position, in lying position, in closed position. And people were going, taking them out on the-- getting them to the cemeteries. They couldn't even dig graves at that time, so they just covered them up with snow.

When Nadler first arrived in autumn 1941, Jews could and did live throughout the ruined city. A closed ghetto was only established in summer of 1942, when the Jewish deportees were forced to live in established and restricted areas, cordoned off with barbed wire.[89] With the closing of the ghetto, the already straitened conditions became even more dire. Nadler recalled, "so we were standing in the ghetto and they're not letting you out, but not letting in anything in the ghetto-- no food, no clothing, nothing. So, people-- it was not-- it was not an extermination camp. It was a starvation camp."

Death by disease or starvation went hand-in-hand, and the true cause of death was often indistinguishable.[90] Epidemic typhus (*Flecktyphus*) was rampant during the first winter of 1941 to 1942, killing thousands.[91] Corpses littered the streets of the town:

---

[88] Leah K., HVT-4166.

[89] Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 131. Despite the fact that technically the "ghetto" was only established part-way through the war, I use the term "Moghilev ghetto" throughout the present work both for simplicity's sake and because it is not clear to which degree the majority of the deportees perceived or palpably distinguished the administrative change. For most, dreadfully impoverished, the entire period upon arrival until liberation was experienced as a period of brutal restrictions regarding residence, whether due to lack of funds, the ravaged state of existing shelters, or official sanctions. For more on the establishment of official ghettos see Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 129-130. Survivors commonly refer to the Transnistrian sites interchangeably as ghettos, lagers, and/or concentration camps, whether or not these were "officially" created as such by the authorities.

[90] Hilsenrath makes this wry point in the conclusion of his book, when the main character is thought to have succumbed to typhus, but in fact died of starvation after he is robbed of food by an acquaintance.

[91] On the typhus epidemic in Moghilev see Ancel, Transnistria vol. 1, 357-362. Ancel writes that in April 1942 there 4,451 cases with 28% of the ill succumbing to death. Ancel, Transistria vol 1, 360. Hirt-Manheimer writes that approx. 7,000 Jews were infected in Moghilev, of whom half survived (source not cited). Aron Hirt-Manheimer, in Jagendorf's Foundry, 57. The true number may lie somewhere in between these two figures.

> Even more horrible was to move around in the streets in the mornings. Corpses were taken out of the houses and dumped on carriages. […] Even when the death toll from typhus abated, the number of the dying did not decline, since many succumbed to other infectious diseases or starvation. This meant that the terrifying scene of wagons collecting the dead continued almost the whole time we were in the Moghilev ghetto.[92]

Typhus is spread by lice and thus outbreaks occur under squalid living conditions, such as were unavoidable among the deportees of Transnistria. The disease runs its course in approximately two weeks, but thousands did not survive what was referred to as the "crisis," occurring around day twelve or thirteen. Those that did survive and with the good fortune to have access to regular food were confronted with the constant danger of being further deported to sites of greater deadliness.

Raids and the Privilege of Connections

> I remembered that in Czernowitz a man worked, whom we named "Hitzel," and he patrolled the streets with his cart to catch dogs. It was exactly like this now, in the streets of the Moghilev ghetto.
>
> -Emil Wenkert[93]

> [00:12:56.78] And this Bureau of Evidence[94] was supposed to give the lists. So they [i.e. the Romanians] weren't coming to take you out. It was the dirty work of the Jews who have to bring up the people to be transported to-- to the places. So I had this friend at the Bureau of Evidence. And he knew a day or two before when such an action is going to come. And he knew more or less which places are going to be involved. So this was the reason how we survived this fall of '42.

---

[92] Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction*, 43. The ubiquity of death as manifested in the ever-present corpses appears to have also been one of Nadler's most disconcerting memories. At the close of the interview, when asked whether he would like to add something, he responds: "No, I don't know. Maybe you have something to ask me. I tell you, you cannot-- you cannot explain in words this winter of '41, '42 […] Frozen dead bodies on the street, lying around like litter."

[93] Emil Wenkert, *Czernowitzer Schicksale. Vom Ghetto nach Transnistrien deportiert. Jüdische Schicksale 1941-1944*, Erhard Roy Wiehn ed., (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 2001) 24.

[94] Nadler's reference to a "bureau of evidence" is a direct translation of the Romanian, *birou de evidența,* indicating a generic registration office which kept track of place of residence and dealt with identity cards or papers.

The Jewish committee of Mogilev understood that survival depended on the deportees being made useful, even indispensable, and correspondingly created as many jobs as possible.[95] However, the leaders were also taxed with peopling lists for deportations further east; some of those deported went to work camps, some to so-called 'death camps.'[96] The Jewish police, referred to by many survivors with fear and disgust, was charged with rounding up the deportees. Being caught and put on one of these trains was generally understood as a death sentence.

Two different sorts of deportations from Moghilev took place in 1942. First, the Romanian authorities were worried that the typhus epidemic would spread to populations outside the ghettos, especially to the soldiers. To curb the overcrowding and the unhygienic living conditions contributing to the epidemic, a command was issued in the summer of 1942 to send 4,000 Jews from Moghilev to Scazineți and 3,000 to Pechora. At these sites, the population was essentially cordoned off and left to die.[97] Secondly, Jews were sent as forced labourers for the Nazi-run

"Organisation Todt," which used slave labourers to construct roads and bridges. There was little prospect of returning from forced labour for the Nazis.

Survival was guaranteed for none, but as Nadler indicated in the reference to his acquaintance at the registration office, those with connections, whether familial or otherwise, had better chances. Yosef Govrin recalls the hierarchy of survival:

> Three main problems faced us. First, vigilance – we had to remain constantly alert to avoid being caught and deported further eastwards. Second, basic existence – how could we make a living? The reservoir of our belongings was almost dried up. What would we

---

[95] The committee was formed by order of the vice prefect of the Moghilev district on November 18th, 1941. Most members were Jewish and the membership changed often. See Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 71-72. For a detailed analysis of the actions of the leadership of the ghetto, see Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper." Mir-Tibon designates their maneuvers "rescue-through-work, which essentially meant providing a flexible Jewish workforce, appropriately trained, with almost no demands in terms of remuneration, thereby presenting itself as valuable to the Romanian authorities and worth maintaining." Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 133-134.

[96] Pecioara was designated "lagărul morții" or death camp by the Romanians, see Pecioara, in: *USHMM Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos* vol. III, 742.

[97] Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 134 and Coldewey et al., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan,* 65-58. According to the *USHMM Encyclopedia*, approx. 4,000 Jews perished in Pecioara, 350 were liberated in spring 1944. See Pecioara, in: *USHMM Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos* vol. III, 742-743. Death numbers for Scazineți are less clear, 1,500 were alive when the camp was dissolved in September 1942, see Scazineți, in: *USHMM Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos* vol. III, 756-757.

> do when there was nothing more to sell? And third, integration – how to become part of the daily life that had been organized in the ghetto?[98]

The narratives accessible to us today are, by nature, almost exclusively those of the relatively privileged, who inhabited rungs higher up the hierarchical ladder. Those who survived did so primarily because through some means they were able to procure work, food, and shelter. In his interview, author Edgar Hilsenrath states explicitly that his experience was privileged,[99] while Nadler acknowledged as much in the following exchange:

> DAVID TERMAN: Why do you think you survived and the others did not?
>
> NORBERT N: Because we were working. We were working. And not only we were working, we were working in the right places.

In linking their survival to their employment, both men nod to the elevated position of workers in the ghetto hierarchy. Securing work was vital, but hardly possible for all. Published studies about or by former leaders of the ghetto describe the leadership committee as arranging for work for thousands of deportees, but Nadler's account suggests a more nuanced reality, in which great responsibility lay on the individual to procure work. Hilsenrath's novel, *Night*, which describes in harrowing detail the life and death of those clinging to the lowest rungs of the ghetto, is entirely void of leadership figures: the impoverished characters seek work, housing, and sustenance on their own; despite herculean efforts, they often fail.[100]

An interview with one woman, an orphan, and thus representative of one of the few narratives accessible today of the least privileged, described the brutal reality for a child lacking all protection. The woman recollected her attempts to procure assistance from the official orphanage, "I know that money was sent but I never got any help from the *Judenrat*. Every time I went for a garment, a shoe, [they said] 'we don't have, we don't have.'" For a time, she slept at the orphanage, which she described as "hell." Then, she along with some others, heard that children from the orphanage were being put on the deportation lists and they fled, taking shelter in "a bombed-out house" and sleeping "on rags, branches, like the birds." Later, after a Ukrainian woman had taken her in and was housing her outside the ghetto, she was caught by two of the Jewish police:

---

[98] Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction,* 44.

[99] Edgar H., HVT-3726.

[100] I believe the novel *Night,* with its 600 pages and rich social detail, represents a unique source on ghetto life in Moghilev. In his own oral history interview, Hilsenrath states, "*Night* is the ghetto of Moghilev-Podolsky, but I used a fictional name." Due to methodological considerations of incorporating literary works in this historical analysis, however, I refer to it rarely here.

> "The minute they heard me speak to them [in Romanian], they kidnapped me. They pulled me into the ghetto and they put me on a death train to Pechora. They let out someone else. And I remember that the other person gave this Kapo a package of cigarettes. This is what my life was worth."[101]

As the example above demonstrates, while the relative security afforded by regular employment and personal connections was an unheard-of luxury for the majority of those in the ghetto, family too, was an irreplaceable force. Nadler also survived because he was with family who protected each other and provided for one another. In a world where morality stood on end, family members represented the last and final bastion of protection. In a statement exemplifying the tight web of work, sustenance, and familial support, Nadler explains:

> [My father received] at least one meal a day. And this was very much. This was very much. And I remember, I didn't touch a meal at home because I ate outside. My brother-in-law didn't touch a meal at home because he-- my late father didn't touch a meal at home because he ate with the peasants. So, whatever came in home was for the rest of the family.

Liberation – and Epilogue

Moghilev was liberated by the Soviets in March 1944 and the family was scattered: the men were unceremoniously drafted by the Red Army and the women, for a short period, sent to work in Russian mines. This experience was entirely typical for the Bukovina survivors. The Soviets drafted all men they encountered in the liberated Ukrainian zones and all memoirs and testimonies speak of various attempts, often futile, of the menfolk trying to evade being drafted.[102] Many also dwell at length on the chaotic year following liberation, some expressing almost as much emotion and uncertainty as when in the ghettos.[103] By late 1945-1946, most survivors had regrouped in Czernowitz, now once again part of the Soviet state, and the next chapter in the dismantling of mythic Czernowitz commenced, with the mass emigration of thousands of Bukovina Jews across the Soviet border and into Romania.

Nadler and his family joined this wave. He spent the next years in Iași, studying medicine, then received a medical position in Câmpulung Moldovenesc, his father's hometown. He met his wife,

---

[101] Leah K., HVT-4166; Fortunoff Video Archive.

[102] For example, Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 99-100 and Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 29-30.

[103] See for example, Elsie B; HVT-1228; Fortunoff Archive. The interviewee discussed the months after liberation in far greater detail than the period in Transnistria. This could be due to trauma. In her memoir Chana Koffler also dedicates significant space to the period following liberation (1944) and prior to emigration to Romania (1945 or 1946), "Leaving Home," 1949. Translated by Julie Dawson. Personal collection of Howard Wiesenfeld.

Judith Pitsch, a fellow Czernowitzer, during a trip to the southern Transylvanian fortress town of Brașov.[104] They married in 1954 and lived in Câmpulung until 1960, when, after years of petitions, they received an exit visa and made Aliyah to Israel.[105] Nadler went on to work in medicine in Israel and the United States. Judith would become the director of the University of Chicago library, building a Judaica collection rich in material on Bukovina.

Conclusion

My work stems from the belief that tracing the lives and experience, in however fragmented a form, of those who were of little consequence to the authorities is a crucial task. These voices are challenging to find, as many left little or no historical mark; by default, they are often grouped together as anonymous masses in historical studies. By focusing a lens on the voice of one person, however, we can access individual experience. In their introduction to *Microhistories of the Holocaust,* Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttmann describe how "reducing the level of analysis increases knowledge, because smaller spaces can better elucidate the complexities of decision-making, help reestablish the 'space of the possible,' show how reality was experienced at the individual level, and ultimately provide more compelling insights into the events that contemporaries faced in their day-to-day lives."[106] In Nadler's life, his ability and initiative to secure regular work proved crucial, as did the personal connection within the Jewish ghetto administration which enabled him and his family to evade further deportations. The existence of multiple family members, many of whom were able to procure at least limited daily meals, facilitated the survival of the women, who were less likely to obtain work in the factories or as hard labourers and consequently, more likely to be viewed by the Jewish committee as "non-productive" and convenient for deportation.[107]

Through narrating and contextualizing Nadler's story, I sought to concretely reconstruct stations of passage for survival (or death) for individuals within the Moghilev-Podolsky ghetto, highlighting possible spaces of agency under coercive conditions and examining the implications

---

[104] Judith and her family survived the war in the city. Her father, a pharmacist, had received one of the authorizations to remain. These biographical details were provided by Judith Nadler, personal communication from July 17th and July 24th, 2021.

[105] The ten to twenty years that many survivors spent in Romania is a realm of research deserving far more attention in its own right. Unfortunately there is not space here to discuss this period.

[106] Claire Zalc/Tal Bruttmann, "Introduction. Toward a Microhistory of the Holocaust" in *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), 3.

[107] Mir-Tibon specifies that single mothers and their children were specifically selected for deportation due to this reasoning. Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 136. Mir-Tibon chose a fictional framework in which to reflect on the plight of these women and children and of the men in power who chose them for deportation, Gali Mir-Tibon, *Reshimat Ha-Imahot* [The List of the Mothers] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2017).

of privilege, or its absence, in daily life. The exercise is not one of representation for all those who were left mute; working on this microhistorical level highlights "the normal exception, which is both difficult and stimulating."[108] Indeed, Nadler's story is "both exemplary and exceptional"[109] as he survived where thousands of others did not, yet was able to do so as a result of concrete circumstances, encountered in variation by others. While I hope that this study contributes to the discourse on Transnistria and especially on aspects of life in the ghetto of Moghilev-Podolsky, it should also reveal the breadth of potential inquiry within the field that still exists.

[108] Zalc and Bruttmann, "Toward a Microhistory," 4.

[109] Zalc and Bruttmann, "Toward a Microhistory," 5.

Transcript

Part 1

[00:00:58.21] CREW: OK, rolling.

[00:01:00.07] DEBORAH CARDON: Could you tell us you your name and where you were from?

[00:01:02.14] NORBERT N: OK. My name is Norbert Nadler. I'm born August 18, 1922 in Czernowitz.[1] This is in, uh, north-- northeastern part of Romania. It's a place-- when my mother was born, it was Austria-Hungary. When I was born, it was Romania. Right now, it's Russia. Yeah. And, uh, was a city [of] about 100,000 people. I would say roughly 60,000 were Jewish. Yeah.

[00:01:39.02] DEBORAH CARDON: Can you tell us a little bit about your family, and who was in it, and kind of describe it?

[00:01:43.43] NORBERT N: Yeah. My late father was a tailor.[2] We were, as a family, I wouldn't say poor, but really modest background. He was a communist socialist. And so was my late grandfather from [the] other side, who was a kind of leader of the Socialist movement of the Jewish people in this town. We were a close family.

[00:02:17.92] And I went to grammar school in Czernowitz. I went to high school in Czernowitz. And then-- this was under Romania. It was not really a bad life. Also, we knew as Jews we have our limitations. We knew there were days we shouldn't go certain places, because you could be-- you could have been beaten up.[3] You knew that some schools have been closed to you. And therefore, the Jewish community in these places was pretty much independent.

---

[1] German: Czernowitz; Romanian: Cernăuți; Yiddish: טשערנאָוויץ; Ukrainian: Chernivtsi / Чернівці. Czernowitz was the capital of Bukovina, which became part of the Habsburg Empire in 1775 when it was annexed from Moldova. After World War I, the region became part of Romania. In 1940 it was divided into northern and southern parts and the northern section was handed over to the Soviet Union as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. In June of 1941 the Romanian army invaded the northern section and reclaimed it. In 1944 the Red Army retook Czernowitz and northern Bukovina and it remained part of the Ukrainian S.S.R. Since 1991 it has been part of Ukraine. Southern Bukovina remained Romanian territory throughout World War II and until the present day.

[2] Nadler's father, Baruch Yitzhak (Itzik) Nadler, was born in the southern Bukovina town of Campulung Moldovenesc on November 24, 1889. His mother, Amalia Nadler, nee Freiberg, was born in Czernowitz on January 22, 1897. Personal communication of July 17th, 2021 by Nadler's wife, Judith Nadler.

[3] In his memoir Zvi Yavetz recalled: "The night of New Year's Eve no Jew would be on the streets. One was afraid of drunken Romanians and Ruthenians who would ruthlessly beat up anyone who looked Jewish. In the Czernowitz suburbs – Manasteriska, Kaliczanka and Klokuczka – it was especially dangerous, and the police, if they got involved at all – would primarily arrest those who had been beaten up. The names of the arrested would appear in the newspapers a few days later. Then there was no longer any doubt: those who had done the beating were Romanians

[00:02:56.70] We had our own kindergarten. We had our own schools. We had our own high schools. We had our own hospitals. We had our own orphanages.[4] We had our own hospitals for the mentally retarded people. And, uh, there was, uh-- you could say, we [had] a double taxation at that time. We were taxed by the government.[5] We were taxed by the Jewish community.[6]

[00:03:22.89] We were pretty much independent. I remember as a young boy, the town Czernowitz was pretty much a dead town during the high holiday season. Because practically all the merchants, the majority of the doctors, of the lawyers, were Jewish. And on the other hand, also because the majority population was Jewish, you couldn't find a-- a Jew if you went to a, uh, to an official, or at the city hall, or you were somewhere else. There were no Jews over there. There was no place where Jew can work or had to work.[7]

[00:04:01.57] But still, we were free to travel. We were free to go. We, uh-- when it was quiet in the city, we weren't afraid to go out at night and so on.

[00:04:10.59] DEBORAH CARDON: So you remember it as OK as a--

[00:04:15.18] NORBERT N: Yeah, a very-- a very nice place. We had-- all my friends are from there still. And uh-- the ones who [are] left alive. I remember in school, for example, we were-- there was one Gentile in the entire class, yeah. So high holidays, the school was-- was an official holiday.

---

and especially (mostly drunk) Ruthenians; the beaten – Jews from Pruthgasse, Bilergasse, Alten Bahnhofstrasse and Brükkenstrasse. After January 6th (Three Kings' Day) normal life returned to Czernowitz." Zvi Yavetz, *Erinnerungen an Czerowitz. Wo Menschen und Bücher lebten* (München: C.H.Beck, 2007), 156. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German or Romanian are my own.

[4] Yavetz recalls the maintenance of these institutes, paid for by the Jewish community's purse, as one of the key election points in 1937 (election for the community president and council members). Yavetz, *Erinnerungen*, 186.

[5] The subject of taxes was probably a common discussion topic within the family and social circles when Nadler was a boy. Yavetz devotes a page to the Kafkaesque state tax situation in the 1930s: "In Romania at the time there were 72 different kinds of tax offices; each office had its own seal or stamp. The stamps had to be stuck onto the purchased goods. You could barely see the bread due to all the stamps and a newspaper warned the public not to consume the stamps along with the bread." Yavetz, *Erinnerungen*, 163.

[6] Nadler refers to community dues, still common across Central Europe today. As an official member of the Jewish community, one was required to pay dues (designated "tax") from which community institutes, employees, and other expenses were paid. These dues were a subject of constant negotiation (and sometimes bitter complaint); they were waived or drastically reduced for the more impoverished of the community and in general determined on the basis of an individual's financial situation.

[7] It is not clear whether Nadler is continuing the thought that during the holidays, there were no Jews at these places of employment (city hall) or whether he meant that Jews, under the Romanian regime, were not employed as government clerks as often as they had been under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

[00:04:37.88] DEBORAH CARDON: So there would-- there was no intermingling between people very much at all, between Gentiles and Jews in your community?

[00:04:44.23] NORBERT N: In my age group there were very little intermingling. Where we did intermingle was on the sport field, playing soccer or ice hockey. Then we have to compete with other teams. And certainly, not all of them being Jewish. There were a good number. Then we had, uh-- we had neighbors which weren't Jewish. And as kids, we, uh, were coming together. But in a social life, to say that my parents had Christian-- Gentile friends, or Gentile friends were coming to our house, no.

[00:05:18.81] DEBORAH CARDON: They didn't.

[00:05:19.20] NORBERT N: Never happened. I don't remember at least.

[00:05:21.75] DEBORAH CARDON: Can you describe your parents a little bit, kind of give us an idea of what they were like?

[00:05:26.16] NORBERT N: Yeah. My, uh, my mother, she's still alive. She was a secretary many years ago. And she was a secretary to one of the lawyers in Czernowitz. He was, uh, was a leader of the Zionist organization over there. And he was one who participated in the first and the second Zionist Congress.[8] And she was telling me all of this with-- with pride. She met my late father in the First World War, in Vienna.[9] They got married, and uh, and then they came back to Romania, where he was able to make a living with the help of a brother, which he had in New York.

[00:06:08.85] DAVID TERMAN: How many of you were there in the family?

[00:06:11.04] NORBERT N: I have two sisters. Both of them in Israel, yes.

[00:06:17.67] DEBORAH CARDON: Can you go ahead then and tell us what happened?

[00:06:20.33] NORBERT N: OK, in 1940-- oh, let me tell you this way. As I told you, my father was a tailor. And we had a number of people working for him. It was at home. And because the Jews were excluded from all political activities, naturally they were-- they were

---

[8] It seems that Nadler's mother was secretary to none other than Mayer Ebner, one of the most important leaders in the Jewish community in the pre-war period. Dr. Leon Arie Schmelzer writes that three delegates from Bukovina were sent to the First Zionist Congress (Dr. Isak Schmierer, Dr. Leo Picker, Dr. Mayer Ebner) and only the latter was living at the time described by Nadler. See "Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, ed. Hugo Gold, 92-93. For more on Ebner, see also Corbea-Hoisie, Andrei. 2010. Ebner, Mayer. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Ebner_Mayer (accessed September 9, 2021).

[9] Many Jews from Bukovina fled to Vienna during World War I to avoid the fighting around Czernowitz.

joining these political parties, where they were welcome. This was mostly the left and the far left. So I've got quite-- quite a bit of communist education in the-- in the workshop of my late father.

[00:07:00.39] But I remember that two of our-- of our workers, of my late father's workers, went at that time to fight for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War.

[00:07:12.23] DEBORAH CARDON: [INAUDIBLE]

[00:07:12.65] NORBERT N: Yeah. Another one I remember, we weren't too far away from the Soviet Russian border, about 30, 40 kilometers. And in summer, it was-- the River Nister was there.[10] It wasn't too deep. So they were swimming over to go to the Russian paradise and never came back.[11] Never heard from them anymore. So I was-- I was exposed quite-- quite a lot to leftist propaganda, leftist literature.

[00:07:39.62] And in 1940, suddenly there was a-- an ultimatum from the Soviets to Romania, that Bessarabia, and the northern part of Bukovina, where Czernowitz was located, should be given over to the Russian. Bessarabia, because it was their territory before. The northern part of Bukovina, they pretended at that time was going to be given over for a limited time, only as a compensation for the exploitation of Bessarabia.[12]

[00:08:09.80] So when the Russian came over, I was full of joy. Finally, we are going to be equal citizens. And we are going to have all the rights and so on. Didn't take me too long to realize what we went into. You don't know the communists unless you live under them, under their rule.

---

[10] The Dniester river flows through western Ukraine, down to Moldova and empties into the Black Sea. Historically it formed the northern border between Galicia and Bukovina.

[11] Pearl Fichman describes a similar episode, in which two friends swam the Dniester to enter the Soviet Union. She learned later that they had been sent to Siberia, because, according to Fichman "The Russians believed that a real Communist was to suffer rather in a Romanian prison, continue fighting, rather than escape to Russia." Pearl Fichman, *Before Memories Fade* (New York: Pearl Fichman, 1989; 2005), 46. Edith Silbermann similarly recounts how the leader of the communist group in which she was a member in her youth was arrested by the Romanians (in the interwar period) and, upon release, fled to the Soviet Union, where he was immediately arrested and sent to Siberia as a spy. Edith Silbermann, *Czernowitz – Stadt der Dichter. Geschichte einer jüdischen Familie aus der Bukowina (1900-1948)*, ed. Amy-Diana Colin, (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 94.

[12] On June 27th, 1940, northern Bukovina became part of the U.S.S.R. In 1940 in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Romania was made to cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union. Until 1918, Bessarabia had been part of the Russian Empire, it was now turned into the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. However, in 1941, following Operation Barbarossa, Romania retook both Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. By 1945 these regions were reconquered by the Red Army; northern Bukovina became part of the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic and Bessarabia became again the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1991 the latter became the Republic of Moldova. The state of the Republic of Moldova is not to be confused with the Romanian region of Moldova, in the eastern part of the country.

[00:08:28.64] DEBORAH CARDON: Why, what happened. What were they like?

[00:08:30.50] NORBERT N: First of all, free press is disappeared. The radios have disappeared. You have only loudspeakers and will give you only what they want you to-- to hear.[13] So first disappointment in Czernowitz was that we were polyglot. We were speaking German, we were speaking Romanian, we were speaking Yiddish, we were speaking Ukrainian. And here we were expecting the Russian. We came talk to them. How's life about there [How's life over there]?

[00:08:58.28] The army who came over was all of Uzbeks, Cossacks, uh, uh, Far Eastern people.[14] We did not know to speak Russian. So there was no way you can find out what's going on there. And then shortly thereafter, have started all the arrests and deportation, very shortly thereafter. The first disappoint with the Russian we had when they gave us our ID cards. The ID cards, I cannot remember exactly, how there were, how many categories you had.

[00:09:30.54] So if you were a miner, a railroad worker, a peasant, a small-- a small peasant-- not big, because if a peasant has a little bit more, uh, more land, you were considered a *Kulak*--[15] you had one ID card. If you were in merchant, you have another ID card. If you were a politician you had a third ID card. And you couldn't move without an ID card, everywhere.[16]

[00:09:56.24] And on basis of ID cards, you were deported if you didn't have the right ID card. They would send you to Siberia.[17] So I remember shortly thereafter-- first there was the time, the

---

[13] Fichman writes that the Soviets ordered all private citizens to turn in their radios to the authorities, though she suggests that her family had kept theirs: "True, we could listen to the radio in our homes, but were afraid of being found out." She describes the loudspeakers "at every street corner" in the Soviet Union, though does not describe this as the case in Czernowitz. Fichman, *Memories*, 69-73. The only newspaper available in Czernowitz during this first Soviet year was *Radianska Bukovina* (Red Bukovina).

[14] Other memoirs do not remark on this, though almost all note the difficulty of suddenly needing to communicate in Russian. Silbermann writes that many young people from the Caucasus and farther east came to study at the university and describes one encounter with a Caucasian Soviet soldier with dark skin and black hair and eyes. Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 131. Writer Alfred Kittner describes the Red Army commander, to whom his newspaper presented a special celebratory and welcoming issue ("Festnummer"), as a tall man "with Mongolian features." Alfred Kittner, *Erinnerungen 1906-1991* (Aachen: Rimbaud, 1996), 47-48. Even if the overall numbers were small, the presence of non-Europeans made an impression on a town otherwise unaccustomed to foreigners.

[15] Wealthy peasant, persecuted under the Soviet regime.

[16] Fichman writes: "Every citizen had to have a so-called 'passport,' an identification booklet, issued by the militia, with all the personal data: place and date of birth, nationality (for us was the label [sic] Jew, not Russian or Ukrainian or Moldavian), occupation and place of work, data on military service. People were supposed to carry that passport at all times and anybody in an official uniform or secret police could stop you for identification. The word 'passport' was a misnomer, for you could not travel any place on the strength of this identification." Fichman, *Memories*, 64.

[17] Fichman writes that whoever had owned a home or a business "received a 'passport 39,'" which translated to deportation to Siberia. Fichman, *Memories*, 69. Jacov Weiner stated similarly, "no one knew at the time what this '39' meant, because not everyone had this notation. One only knew: there is something different, the one is good, the other

thing, change your money. And this was a robbery. And then comes ID cards. And you really were so afraid of these ID cards, what kind of ID cards are you going to get. You didn't know.

[00:10:21.95] And the third thing was the CVs, the curriculum vitae. Wherever you go, you have to give a curriculum vitae. And this curriculum vitae was always compared with the previous curriculum vitae. And if you made a mistake in the curriculum vitae, you were in trouble. So we didn't know at the beginning-- there weren't-- there weren't copy machines as you have here. You have to write two, three curriculum vitae to have. If you have to come back, and make another curriculum vitae.

[00:10:50.18] And, uh, so we realized right away that we are in a—we got out of something, we got into something else completely different. And everybody was trying to get out, but you couldn't get out anymore.

[00:11:05.45] DEBORAH CARDON: This was much worse than anything you had-- it sounds very different from what you had described.

[00:11:09.65] NORBERT N: It was. OK. In Romania, as I-- as I told you, it was not a democratic country. We had our limitation. We knew at least where our place is. Here they told us you are equal, but equal to what, we didn't know. And here came the-- you did a mistake, you talked to somebody, and you ended up in jail, you ended up questioned, you ended up deported. You, uh-- first, yeah.

[00:11:39.56] DEBORAH CARDON: So there was no predictability anymore.

[00:11:41.18] NORBERT N: No predictability anymore. You didn't know where you-- where you are. It was-- I'll tell you later, it was in the Russian army, you will find out-- it was so that you were afraid to talk. You were afraid to open your mouth. At least in, before, you know that when you are in a society of Jews, you're all right. Now here you didn't know because Jews were the communists, too. And everybody was-- was fighting for his own existence.

[00:12:14.38] DAVID TERMAN: So then what happened?

[00:12:15.42] NORBERT N: So this lasted for a year. And then the-- and then the German invaded Russia.[18] And a few days after the war broke out, Czernowitz was taken by the Romanians. Now it's not-- no denial of this here. That when the Russian came in, the Jewish

---

bad. Probably it indicated the capitalists that were later evacuated." Gaby Coldewey et al. eds., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan. Lebenserinnerungen Czernowitzer Juden* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 32.

[18] On June 22nd, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa.

population was jubilant in Romania. Now the Romanians, the Germans, start taking revenge on us.

[00:12:42.68] The first two days, I think 6,000 prominent Jews, the most prominent Jews in Czernowitz were taken out and have disappeared for good. They were killed somewhere.[19] We never find out where. Then we were left in our apartment for the time being, but we lost all our jobs, whatever we had. We lost our business, whatever it was.

[00:13:08.13] DAVID TERMAN: What were you doing at that time?

[00:13:09.33] NORBERT N: At that time, I was still a, uh-- I was 18 years, 19 years old. I was finishing high school. Uh, my late father was still working. He was an independent tailor. He could do something. My sister got married during this time. My brother-in-law was at that time try to advance into the Russian, uh, during this year when the Russian were in. So he stayed very low. He didn't-- he didn't make a move.

[00:13:43.30] Still we had what to eat. We were selling what we had. The-- there was still, uh, peasants who brought us the milk, and the eggs, and the butter, and the chicken, and so on. And then shortly thereafter, they start taking us out to work. This was force labor-- forced labor without any pay. But at least it gives you a paper in the hand to know where you are, where you live. That you can go on the street unmolested, because you go to work.

[00:14:11.32] And naturally, you have to wear the yellow-- to wear yellow star right away. You had to be-- at 6:00 in the evening, you had to be at home. You couldn't, uh, you couldn't move anywhere. You couldn't travel. But still we had what to eat, we had where to sleep. We were, um-- It was crowded. Because my sister had to move in with us. But still, it was all right. And this was from June till the beginning of November.

[00:14:40.44] DAVID TERMAN: 1941.

[00:14:41.37] NORBERT N: Of '41, end of October. As they, without any official announcement, nothing in the papers, nothing on the radio, you find small notices on the doors. You have to know that in Czernowitz there were streets where Jews was living and streets where non Jews were living. And in a place where we were living, we were just on the border.

---

[19] The exact number of those killed in the first days in Czernowitz is unclear. Radu Ioanid states 2,000 were killed the first day of the invasion, while another 400 were killed on July 9th. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 101. Matatias Carp writes of 2,000 being killed in less than 24 hours on July 6th, 1941. Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 169. Coldewey et al. write that more than 3,000 were shot on the banks of the Prut in those first days. Coldewey et al., *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 41. Ancel states that various sources give the numbers killed a range from 2,000 to 5,000. Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 271-273.

[00:15:07.23] And find a notice, said tomorrow by 11:00 in the morning, you have to be in the ghetto.[20] We didn't even know where the ghetto was located. It was by the word of mouth where we are to go. So everybody was trying to carry whatever you could carry out of the apartment. And we had a-- my late father had a sister. She was killed. And she was living in a place where the ghetto was.

[00:15:35.88] So we're trying to move in there. She was a, uh-- she was-- it was a childless family. And her mother lived with her. So they had a one-bedroom apartment. And we moved in five. And her husband has also a brother-- has two brothers, if I'm not mistaken. And they moved in about five. So imagine how many people were just in this ghetto.

[00:15:59.81] DAVID TERMAN: There were 12 or 15 people in the apartment.

[00:16:01.47] NORBERT N: Oh, a lot.[21] We were sleeping all over. It started getting cold-- October, November over there, it started getting cold. And then suddenly we start having problem with food because you couldn't get out to buy. They wouldn't send food into the ghetto. And then another morning, here, the first transport is leaving.

[00:16:25.17] And the situation in the ghetto was pretty bad. So some of us, and I was one of them, was happy to leave, see. But some had been more-- uh, had more foresight than I had. And were trying to do whatever they can to get out of the ghetto, not to leave.

[00:16:45.60] So I would say about-- there's a first transport in October, November of '41, about 30% of the Jews left.[22] About 30% of the Jews were able to secure some kind of document, that they can stay in Czernowitz. And there were two types of documents too, good documents and bad documents. And you had to pay a lot of money for such a document. And some 30% just haven't been taken because the quota of deportation has been-- has been fulfilled.[23]

---

[20] The notices were posted on Saturday October 11th, 1941.

[21] The number of 50,000 people moving into a space formerly housing 10,000 is generally agreed upon. See for example Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 825. Dr. Nathan Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter aus Czernowitz und Transnistrien" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, Hugo Gold ed., (Tel Aviv: Olamenu Press, 1958) Vol. II, 56.

[22] The transports began almost immediately and were organized by street, with those closest to the train station being deported first. Carl Hirsch recalled "We're [in the ghetto] on a Sunday. We're here Monday, Tuesday. On Wednesday [October 15] everyone living on the Steingasse (where we were staying) and surrounding streets was supposed to go to the train station for deportation." Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 125.

[23] Diarist Getzler records that by October 16th 6,000 Jews had been deported, when the mayor, Dr. Traian Popovici, arrived with a message for the leaders of the Jewish community that he had managed to have the deportations halted so that lists of those deemed "necessary" for the functioning of the city could be made. Dr. Nathan Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter aus Czernowitz und Transnistrien" in *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* Vol. II, 57. Thereupon

[00:17:21.21] DAVID TERMAN: Where did you think people were going?

[00:17:23.91] NORBERT N: We never imagined what could have been. I-- I really think that what they're doing has some justification at that time. This was my way of feeling. Because it was just after the big-- the big battle around Odessa.[24] And we were seeing the newspaper, full of name of dead Romanian which had been killed in Odessa. And here, not a single Jewish name, naturally. Because no Jew was in-- so we were considering they were taking us to-- to work for the war effort. And I saw some justification in it. First--

[00:18:04.02] DEBORAH CARDON: You were getting newspapers? How did you get your information?

[00:18:07.65] NORBERT N: There was Romanian newspapers, official newspaper.

[00:18:09.19] DEBORAH CARDON: And you were able to get those in the ghetto?

[00:18:10.68] NORBERT N: Oh, sure, they gave them to us. Yeah, sure, it was propaganda.[25] The newspapers were under Antonescu which was the head of the Romanian government at that

---

lists were made of those whose technical services were required by the city (and their family members), and gradually permits were issued by Corneliu Calotescu, the governor of the Bukovina territory during the war, authorizing the holders to return to their original homes. Fichman's family received a permit and returned to their home on Nov. 11th, 1941, one month after the ghetto was established. According to her memoirs, Calotescu permits ceased being issued shortly afterwards, upon which the mayor Traian Popovici, a Czernowitzer himself who had always been supportive of the Jewish population, personally signed authorizations for those remaining in the ghetto, approx. 3,000, enabling them also to return to their homes. The ghetto was then disbanded. Fichman, *Memories*, 80-81. Dr. Train Popovici was later recognized by Yad Vashem as a righteous gentile. In the end, however, the authorizations were not equal. In June of 1942 those with "Popovici" authorizations were collected and deported to Transnistria. Silbermann writes that neither could a "Calotescu" permit always guarantee safety: " If there was any bit of air left to breathe in the train cars, then families with a valid Calotescu authorization, upon whose homes Romanian neighbors had cast an eye, were also herded in. Police, hunting through the streets like dogcatchers, caught people with valid papers during raids. Such infringements were daily events. The same fate could fall on us at any time." Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 154. In general, deportations to Transnistria continued to occur in various phases throughout 1941 and 1942, see especially Getzler, "Tagebuchblätter" in *Geschichte der Juden/Bukovina*, 56-61; Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 190-193; Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 47-49. Many, including Paul Celan, escaped the second wave of deportations by hiding. Kittner records an arduous and lengthy process of evading deportation until July 1942, when he was finally caught, Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 55-62. For the experience of those who remained in Czernowitz see Fichman, *Memories*, 79-92; Silbermann, *Czernowitz*, 140-170; Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 188-196.

[24] The so-called "Siege of Odessa" lasted from August 3rd – October 16th, 1941. Casualties (including dead, wounded, and missing) for August through early September numbered over 58,800; for mid-Sept. to the end of the siege, were over 39,000. Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995), 52; 56.

[25] Regarding receiving news during this period, Fichman writes "We were cut off from the outside world for years. One could buy a Romanian newspaper and read about the German victories. […] Here and there some Romanians told about the news heard over the BBC and the news travelled incredibly fast, through the grapevine. However, since information was whispered as it spread by word of mouth, it often turned into something different. Some people went out during the allotted two hours just to get news, from an 'unimpeachable source.'" Fichman, *Memories*, 77.

time.[26] Sure, the newspaper was-- everything was censored. Everything was given out. But it was-- no, you couldn't hide, [that] there were so many people that are been killed. Before Odessa, they couldn't-- so the newspaper were full of, every day, of announcement, and, uh, and really a lot of Romanian had been killed over there.

[00:18:38.46] So I think, OK, we have to work if the others are fighting. It's all right. And certainly we couldn't-- we couldn't stand anymore, this ghetto. There was no way you can take a bath. There was very little water. You have to stay in line to go to a washroom. We were filthy. You couldn't wash your laundry, there wasn't-- so, I think whatever it's going to be, it's going to be-- it may be better than it is here.

[00:19:05.55] Also, [a] few of us have seen the way the transport is going. Because I wasn't in the first transport. I was practically in the fourth or the fifth transport. But seeing the way the transport was going, that it cannot be to a good destination.[27]

[00:19:22.14] DEBORAH CARDON: How could you tell that? How could you--

[00:19:23.61] NORBERT N: You were going-- you were going to the railroad station. You didn't go to the railroad station where you can see from-- afar you could see that they've been-- that the people have been pushed into cattle wagons, lots of them.[28] Those wagons have been closed from the outside. And here, you don't know where you're going. Nobody was telling you where you're going.

[00:19:45.24] Still, I have arranged at that time with friends, [we] said we should go together. We were friends. And the parents knew each other. And we decided we were going to get together. And we even took my late grandmother with us, my mother's mother, we took with us. And also, they said take food for two days and take only-- I do not remember how much luggage you can take with you and not more. But they were very liberal, letting us take as much luggage as you want.

[00:20:19.35] And you will see later why. Because they got it anyhow. So it doesn't make-- it didn't make a difference where they-- where they got it.

---

[26] Ion Antonescu (1882-1946) was the Romanian dictator, called the *Conducător* (leader), from 1940-1944.

[27] Probably Nadler means after seeing the way the transports were carried out, people began to have their doubts about whether the destination could be so good after all. Many memoirists note this change of sentiment. Coldewey at al. write: "Not until the people saw the dirty cattle cars at the train station, into which more than fifty people were being corralled, did many realize that this was not going to be about the 'colonialization' of Transnistria." Coldewey et al., *Zwischen*, 43.

[28] The train station was at the bottom of a hill, just beside the Ghetto and thus visible from afar.

[00:20:26.40] DEBORAH CARDON: Who were the people who went? Who did you-- did you go with-- did your family go with you?

[00:20:30.87] NORBERT N: Yes, family went, my entire family, sure. No, they haven't divided families at that time. My entire family went. And my late grandmother was going with us. Uh, the-- uh, my father's sister, where we were staying in the ghetto, and the other grandmother was supposed to come next day, but they closed the transports. So she was staying for another six months. And she ended up much worse.[29]

[00:20:59.38] So we went over there. And they start putting us in this, uh, wagons, like cattle. I can't remember how many we were, but we're sitting like herrings, one near the other. Fortunately enough, the trip to a station called Ataki,[30] which was already on the Nister, through Bessarabia, was only a, uh, a ride from about 5:00 in the afternoon until next morning, around 7:00-8:00 in the morning. It was terrible this night in the wagon, but it was only one night.

[00:21:34.42] After all, it was only one night. And then, they didn't bring us-- in Ataki they didn't bring us to the railroad station. They stopped the train in the middle of a field. It was a rainy day. And who has ever been in Bessarabia know what the mud in Bessarabia is. We were [standing?] in mud until here. And here, you're supposed to get out. You get out, you get out into mud to-- to your knees.

[00:22:00.70] So you were happy to get out yourself, not to take your luggage with. So half of the luggage was left right where it was. And I remember how difficult it was for me to-- to get my grandmother with me. And on the way, I have to leave her, and then bribe somebody to get back and bring her. Because we couldn't get-- the mud was up to here. And then they took us about two, three kilometer. It was a-- it was a trip forever. And on the side [of the] road were standing peasants.

Part 2

[00:00:00.15] NORBERT N: So a peasant was standing over there and offering to take our luggage, naturally against payments. So the moment you put your luggage on these wagons, they

---

[29] Nadler does not elaborate on his other grandmother's experiences. The majority of those that remained in Czernowitz in general fared better than those deported to Transnistria, though a second large wave of deportations occurred in 1942 and these deportees often ended up in harsher camps. Sources generally speak of 50,000 Jews in Czernowitz in 1941, and Popovici states that 28,391 Jews were deported from Czernowitz. Popovici, "Mein Bekenntnis," in *Geschichte der Juden/Bukovina*, 69. 188-196. Hirsch and Spitzer compare the numbers from several sources and come up with similar figures: 50,000 Jews in Czernowitz in 1941, approx. 30,000 of whom were deported while 20,000 received authorizations to remain. See Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 185.

[30] Ataki. Small Bessarabian town or village on the Romanian side of the Dniester, across from Moghilev-Podolsky. Located today in the Republic of Moldova, Ataki (Otaci today) is about 150 km or 95 miles as the crow flies due east from Czernowitz.

disappeared with it. It was gone, the money, the luggage, everything. So we came with very little luggage to the Nister, which is a river which divides Bessarabia from Transnistria, from-- which is, by the way, a name which you won't find it in history, you won't find it in geography either.[31]

[00:00:29.73] It was a name created by the Romanian[s] in order to annex this part of the Ukraine or the Romanian autonomous Republic, as it's called. And this is a place between the River Nister and the River Nieper [sic: Bug River] on the Ukrainian side. And it was created special-- especially by the Romanians so they can have a-- they annexed this as their territory.[32]

[00:00:55.71] And this was-- the Nister at that time was half swollen. A big chunk of ice was flowing down the river and it was very cold. The bridge was blown up over the Nister. And we got into a ferry. So on this ferry, they would accept only that many people, regardless.

[00:01:15.61] Here they divide all the family. If the family is together, fine. If the family is not together, too bad. And here you lost, I would say, whatever luggage was left. You lost it here because it was first people and then luggage, but the luggage didn't get on, so very little luggage. And we came over to the other side of the Dnieper [Nister] to a town called Moghilev-- Moghilev-Podolski.

[00:01:46.11] Moghilev-Podolski was a nice town. It served as outpost of customs at that time. I would say before the German came in, there were probably-- half of the population was Jewish.[33] Part of the town had been destroyed. And before we came over there, there had been already a transport of Jews from Bessarabia, from Edinet, from Belz, from Soroca, for Hotin, small towns, Jewish towns in Bessarabia.[34]

---

[31] Transnistria literally means "beyond the Nister [River]" and was a territory between the Dnister and Bug rivers ceded by the Germans to Romania in summer of 1941. Previously it was part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. See also Vladamir Solonari, *A Satellite Empire: Romanian Rule in Southwestern Ukraine, 1941–1944* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2019). The territory had previously not existed as such: "This territory had no political history as a united region and was a completely arbitrary creation." Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 187.

[32] The Jewish population in the region of Transnistria before the war was approx. 300,000, with 180,000 of those in the only major city, Odessa. Veidlinger, *Shadow / Shtetl*, 187.

[33] In 1939, the Jewish population was 8,703, or 40% of the total population. Slutsky, Yehuda, and Shmuel Spector. "Mogilev-Podolski." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 418. Vol. 14. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. Gale eBooks (accessed September 18, 2021). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587514071/GVRL?u=43wien&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=af59c050.

[34] The Romanians had begun the deportations from the Bessarabian towns mentioned in the summer of 1941, often shuttling hundreds of people back and forth between the Pruth and Dniester rivers. Many thousands died of starvation, exposure, disease. Those that survived were eventually brought to Moghilev for further transport east. Some remained.

[00:02:24.96] We come over there. In the meantime, it become dark and it's evening. We didn't have where to go. And we saw some ruins. So we went into this ruins.[35] It was an old factory. I do not know what kind of factory. We found one room. And in this room there were already some fifteen people. So we went in, another ten. We were laying out.

[00:02:47.07] And next morning, we get a visitor, the first thing in the morning. A Ukrainian Jew told us what happened in the town, how many of the people from Bessarabia-- none have been killed, been shot. They've been driven back and forth, back and forth, and they have died of starvation, of disease, of hunger in the thousands.[36] And he was telling us if you cannot make any kinds of arrangements this is going to happen to you.

[00:03:18.41] DEBORAH CARDON: Now is this the first time you had heard of things like that?

[00:03:21.20] NORBERT N: This was the first time. The first time. And we didn't believe it. Because in the same time, this Jew was trying to get out of it, was looking for somebody to help him with the Romanian authorities. He didn't want to appear. Because the Jews have just right [a]way been divided. The Jews from the occupied territory, from-- from Moghilev, they were the worst. The Jews from Bessarabia, they were the second worst. And we, from the Bukovina, which came in, we were considered a little bit better.[37]

---

[35] Moghilev-Podolski had seen battle and part of the city was destroyed. Memoirists frequently mention the ruins, in which many found temporary or even long-term shelter, as well as the damage to the buildings caused by recent flooding. Dorothea Wenkert recalled "Moghilev had been through a large flood. The houses were all wet, many were without windows and doors." Coldewey et al, *Zwischen*, 57.

[36] See footnote 34 above. The town of Moghilev was originally designated as a transit point for the Jewish deportees, but due to poor organization and sheer number of deportees, it came to itself harbor one of the largest ghettos in Transnistria. An estimated 50,000-60,000 deportees passed through or remained here between October 1941 and February 1942. Between 15,000-20,000 Jews were housed here at various points; during a 1943 census 12,588 Jews were registered. Due to continual deaths, new arrivals, and regular deportations further east, population numbers were in constant flux. See Geoffrey P. Megargee et al (eds.), *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos* vol. III, Bloomington Indiana University press 2018, entry by Jean Ancel and Ovidiu Creangă, "Camps and Ghettos in Transnistria," 577-578 and Ovidiu Creangă, "Moghilev-Podolsk," 715-717. Of the pre-war Jewish population of almost 9,000, Coldewey et al. state that 3,000 were still living there in late summer 1941. Coldewey, *Zwischen Pruth und Jordan*, 56-57.

[37] Gali Mir-Tibon discusses this hierarchy at length in her article "'Am I my Brother's Keeper?': Jewish committees in the Ghettos of the Moghilev district and the Romanian Authorities in Transnistria, 1941-1944" in *The Ghetto in Global History. 1500 to the Present*, eds. Wendy Z. Goldman and Joe William Trotter (London: Routledge, 2017), 127-146, esp. 137. The divisions fell primarily along the lines of national borders. Thus, those Jews who were living in the Soviet Union at the time of the Romanian occupation (i.e.. those from Moghilev) were considered lowest, above these were those from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, who had lived for one year under the Soviet regime, and at the top were those Jews from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi, who had always lived within the Romanian state. Those who had had more affiliation with the Soviets were suspected of espionage, while those from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi were considered the "most" Romanian. I posit that socioeconomic status – which

[00:03:53.42] DAVID TERMAN: Why were the Jews the worst? Why were the Jews in Moghilev--

[00:03:56.02] NORBERT N: This was a-- the authorities have decided.

[00:03:58.21] DAVID TERMAN: I see.

[00:03:58.63] NORBERT N: It wasn't it-- it wasn't for us to decide. And it was already known-- because before us, we came in transports to Moghilev-- that you have to go further. And the further you go was [death?]. So you have to know how to bribe the Romanian authority to be able to stay in this Moghilev. And he tried to get in touch with me and with my brother-in-law at that time, that we should bribe for him the authorities that he can stay. [38]

[00:04:29.68] So in this case, we didn't really believe if this what he tried to tell us is true or he's trying only to tell us things in order that we should try to put him in our group and to save him, to get him in a higher standard, so to say. What happened to this man I really don't know. But the first cup of warm tea, we got from him. And then he disappeared somehow.[39]

[00:04:57.91] We were staying in this place. And this place was called afterwards a *Lager*.[40]

---

both resulted from and mirrored these shifting national boundaries – also played a role. Those who had never experienced life under communism arrived better off financially. With both valuables and hard cash, they were in a position to offer attractive bribes. Those from Moghilev, who had survived battle, occupation, and Einsatztruppen had nothing left with which to barter. Most likely they possessed little to entice the occupying Romanians in the first place, having been part of the Soviet State for twenty years. Those from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina also arrived with few possessions, having already been dispossessed and made frail through marches by foot over the summer and early fall. Czernowitzers, in contrast, though from northern Bukovina, generally arrived by train and with certain possessions intact. A significant portion was, moreover, of the educated middle class, and brought with them small valuables such as jewelry.

[38] Similar to the experience with the deportations from Czernowitz, the deportees were – at first – unsure whether it was better to stay or to go. Several interviewees describe leaving Moghilev deliberately in order to better survive. Others describe worse conditions further east and escaping back to Moghilev. See some examples in Coldewey, *Zwischen*, 57-58. Miriam Korber records that, remarkably, her family paid Germans to transport them on trucks farther east, see Mirjam Korber, *Deportiert. Jüdische Überlebensschicksale aus Rumänien 1941-1944. Ein Tagebuch*, (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1993), 58-59. In contrast, Yosef Govrin describes simply stepping out of the convoy line, together with his mother and aunts, and slipping into a nearby carpentry shop, in order to remain. Govrin, *In the Shadow of Destruction,* 40. One woman, a girl at the time, escaped from multiple Transnistrian death camps further east and returned each time to Moghilev. Initially she went to her aunt, then to a Ukrainian woman outside the ghetto who cared for her. Leah K., HVT 4166.

[39] For an account of the fate of those Jews who were the original residents of the region of Transnistria see Veidlinger, "Life beyond the River. Transnistria" in *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 186-231. Some of their fates overlapped with the deportees from Bukovina.

[40] *Lager*: German for "camp." Mir-Tibon writes that the deported generally referred to the areas in which they lived as "lager, quarter, or neighborhood." She does not provide the words in respective languages. Mir-Tibon, "Brother's

[00:05:01.53] DEBORAH CARDON: A what?

[00:05:02.35] NORBERT N: A *Lager*. It was cold. But we had to go out. We saw [INAUDIBLE]. We had to go out of here. So in the next few days, my brother-in-law was trying to contact Romanian authorities and to try to get some kind of papers if we can stay here. And bribing them with a few dollars we had, because every Jew had a few dollars at that time, with the little jewelry we had, we got papers to stay in Moghilev. And really we stayed all the time in Moghilev.

[00:05:35.97] Now, we went out of the *Lager*, we have to try [to find] where to stay. And we went to a place which was a home for elderly.[41] But because the town was mostly Jewish, there was a lot of empty spaces over there, because as Jews are being killed. We went on with this and in such a place there was a supervisor, an old woman. I never knew if she was Jewish or not. And we gave her some money. She let us in. And we stayed for a while.

[00:06:10.05] And here it started really, because the ghettos they did. And this was in the town. You could say [the Jews were] all over the town at the beginning, there was no limitation.[42] And then one day, they came out, we need workers. We need people to work.[43]

[00:06:31.94] So my brother-in-law had the first idea, say, OK, I can do any work you want. So there was a tool and die factory. [He] said, yeah, I worked always in tool and die. So he went over there. Start[ed] working in tool and die, start[ed] learning. The factory was-- was managed by Jews, Jewish engineers from Romania, already which was over there.[44] And they were trying

---

Keeper," 129. Author Edgar Hilsenrath, who survived the Moghilev ghetto and wrote the novel *Nacht* about the experience, chronicles his main character, Ranek's central, all-encompassing obsession (besides food) with a *Schlafquartier* (sleeping quarters or place to sleep). Edgar Hilsenrath, *Nacht* (Zurich: Kinder Verlag, 1964).

[41] Miriam Korber also mentions this home for the elderly, where her family left her grandparents, who later died. Korber, *Deportiert*, 58.

[42] Initially the deportees could reside wherever they found shelter, which meant anything from the structural ruins of buildings to outside to rooms or floors provided by Moghilev residents. Only in summer of 1942 were the Jewish deportees forced to live in an established and restricted areas, cordoned off with barbed wire. For more on the establishment of official ghettos see Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 129-131.

[43] The Jewish leadership of Moghilev understood that survival depended on the deportees being made useful, even indispensable. Mir-Tibon designates this "rescue-through-work, which essentially meant providing a flexible Jewish workforce, appropriately trained, with almost no demands in terms of remuneration, thereby presenting itself as valuable to the Romanian authorities and worth maintaining." Mir-Tibon argues persuasively that the Jewish leadership of Moghilev "acted out of the conviction that they understood the Romanian authorities' mindset, motives, and concerns, and therefore knew how to deal with them." Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 133-134.

[44] Probably Nadler's brother-in-law worked at what was known as Jägendorf's Foundry (*turnatoria* in Romanian). Siegfried Jägendorf was an engineer originally from the southern Bukovina town of Radautz. He was a leader of the community in the ghetto with connections to the Romanian authorities. He immediately set to work convincing the authorities of the need for the foundry to be repaired and secured workers for the undertaking. Jägendorf was not viewed positively by everyone and remains a controversial figure, some seeing in him a dandy who worked to save

to teach you. You get at least a meal a day. And the meal was so big that you can take a little bit home for-- to have another half meal at home. And he has the authority [authorization] to stay because he was working.

[00:07:13.80] I decided I'm going to work too, because I still saw that if you're going to work for them, they will let you alone, because that's what they need. That['s] why we are here, to work. They were asking for bricklayers. So I said, I'm a bricklayer. I said what can be difficult to lay bricks? So, I start being a bricklayer.

[00:07:38.88] As a bricklayer-- I was working for a bricklayer a while. I had my ups, I had my downs, I had my beating, but I had my food. I was a laborer. And I had my papers. I was working at that time. I was a bricklayer for the Romanian army. And I remember there were-- to lift bricks, heavy bricks, you have to know over there, they don't-- they use stones for buildings. And some stones were really heavy. You cannot lift them.

[00:08:13.28] And when I had to lift such a stone. I just couldn't make it. And to the great amazement of the soldier, which was, what do you mean you cannot lift it? It's nothing [compared] to writ[ing].[45] To write and to read was something difficult for him. To lift a stone was nothing.

[00:08:28.49] So I was working in this and then they declared a ghetto.[46] We had to get out of the apartment-- apartment-- we had one room practically. We had to get out of this room. We went into the ghetto, very close to the *lager* where we first came. But we found another small hut, which has a kitchen and a small-- and a small room. And we were in this, four families-- four families.

[00:09:02.67] And I had a-- I had a authorization to get out, out of the ghetto because I was working every day. My brother-in-law had an authorization to get out of the ghetto every day because he was working every day. And my father went out to work without any authorization. If he would have been caught, I don't know what would have happened. He was never caught.

---

first and foremost those closest to him and ensure material comforts for himself, while others see a man working to save as many as possible under harrowing conditions. See his memoirs with commentary, Siegfried Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry: A Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust, 1941-1944,* ed. by Aron Hirt-Manheimer (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1991). See also the collection at Yad Vashem: Archive of Siegfried Jaegendorf, Yad Vashem Archive, item id. 4019674. Edgar Hilsenrath also found work in Jägendorf's foundry, see Edgar H., HVT 3726; Fortunoff Archive. Hilsenrath's name also appears on the lists in Yad Vashem.

[45] This seems to be what Mr. Nadler was communicating.

[46] The Jews were restricted to living in certain areas in summer of 1942. See footnote 42 above and Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 129-131.

[00:09:28.26] So we had what to eat, practically. Simple food, but we had what to eat. Now the first winter you got the typhus.

[00:09:37.28] DEBORAH CARDON: Hm.

[00:09:38.64] NORBERT N: Yeah.

[00:09:39.36] DAVID TERMAN: This is winter of 19--

[00:09:41.01] NORBERT N: '41, '42.

[00:09:41.91] DAVID TERMAN: '41, '42.

[00:09:42.81] NORBERT N: '42, get typhus.[47] And I would say between the hunger and the typhus, probably half of the population was exterminated. You were going out in the morning. It was cold. It was bitter cold. We didn't have anything to heat. We were seeing dead people on the street, in sitting position, in lying position, in closed position. And people were going, taking them out on the-- getting them to the cemeteries. They couldn't even dig graves at that time, so they just covered them up with snow.

[00:10:19.62] And at that time, the Jews start organizing. When we start organizing, we had a committee formed.[48] The head of this committee was a Dr. Danilov.[49] He was a, uh, lawyer. And he had some connections with the Romanian authorities. And it was this "Bureau of Evidence" called. This "Bureau of Evidence," you came in, you put in your name.[50]

---

[47] Epidemic typhus (*Flecktyphus* in German) was rampant during the first winter of 1941-1942, killing thousands. Epidemic typhus is spread by lice and thus outbreaks generally occur under squalid living conditions, such as were unavoidable among the deportees of Transnistria. The disease runs its course in approximately two weeks, but many in the ghettos did not survive what was referred to as the "crisis," occurring around day twelve or thirteen. Hilsenrath describes various stages of the disease and those succumbing – or surviving unexpectedly – throughout his novel, *Nacht*. Hirt-Manheimer writes that approx. 7,000 Jews were infected in Moghilev, of which half survived (source not cited). Aron Hirt-Manheimer, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 57.

[48] The committee was formed by order of the vice prefect of the Moghilev district on November 18th, 1941. Most members were Jewish, and the membership changed often. See Coldewey et al, *Zwischen*, 71-72. For a detailed analysis of the actions of the leadership of the ghetto, see Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper."

[49] Mihail Danilov was the leader of deportees from Dorohoi. He was the head of the Jewish committee for a short while.

[50] This is a direct translation from the Romanian, *birou de evidența*, a sort of generic registration office which kept track of place of residence and dealt with identity cards or papers. Mr. Nadler suggests it may also have functioned, or was considered to be, a civil registration office, where births, deaths, and marriages would also be recorded. Nadler's skepticism (suggested subsequently in the interview) is probably justified and the office served primarily to keep track of ghetto residents. Interestingly, the works about or by former leaders of the ghetto describe the committee as arranging for work for thousands of deportees. Nadler's account suggests a more nuanced reality, in which great responsibility lay on the individual to procure work.

[00:10:45.63] But what happened to you later on, nobody knows. Because nobody had an evidence if somebody-- I don't think very few births had been in this ghetto, but very few deaths had been-- I don't think they've ever been registered.

[00:11:01.74] We organized an orphanage, because there were a lot of orphans. And there are these terrible pictures of those orphans.[51] We organized a hospital. It was a hospital-- you would call it here probably-- I wouldn't know what to-- a place to die, because you didn't have what to do at that time.[52] And there weren't antibiotics. There weren't antibiotics. We didn't get any barracks for them.

[00:11:31.53] We had a kitchen. And we got-- I think every day who was working was getting his soup. And we had our own police. And they were terrible. Because they were just executing orders which nobody liked.[53] But they have a-- they have a standard. They had a better apartment. They had food. They had even a salary, which nobody else had.

[00:11:57.34] So, and life in the ghetto was going on. So the first winter was this typhus. In summer we were hit with hepatitis. Hepatitis struck us and here-- now this was summer of '42.

[00:12:13.06] Mm-hmm.

[00:12:14.06] That's a nice movie.[54] I don't think that's appropriate. And then in fall of '42, the German got into trouble at Stalingrad.[55] So-- so, they were trying to-- to repair roads. They need more supplies on the front. Bridges were damaged. Partisan activity was starting. So, at this time they start even deporting from the *Lager*, from Moghilev, for work.[56] And was the bridge

---

[51] Emil Wenkert describes the horrific conditions of the orphanage, asserting that the administrators stole food and goods intended for the children. Emil Wenkert, *Czernowitzer Schicksale. Vom Ghetto nach Transnistrien deportiert. Jüdische Schicksale 1941-1944*, Erhard Roy Wiehn ed., (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 2001), 20.

[52] One character in Hilsenthath's *Nacht*, ill with typhus, explains his reluctance to go to the hospital because "Aus dem Spital ist noch niemand lebendig zurückgekommen." [No one has ever returned from the hospital alive.] Hilsenrath, *Nacht*, 28.

[53] They are remembered by most survivors for their terrifying nightly raids or roundups of anyone found on the streets (sometimes they also entered homes). Those seized, often the most destitute, were sent east, to the Germans for forced labor. See for example, Wenkert, *Czernowitzer Schicksale*, 24 and Coldewey et al, *Zwischen*, 72-73. Evading the *Razzien* (raids) is another existential theme that pervades Hilsenrath's novel.

[54] Nadler is referencing the 1971 coming-of-age movie "Summer of '42." The war plays only a sideline role in the film.

[55] The Soviets launched their massive and successful counteroffensive in November of 1942.

[56] Two different sorts of deportations from Moghilev took place in 1942. First, the Romanian authorities were worried that the typhus epidemic would spread to populations outside the ghettos, especially to the soldiers. To curb the overcrowding and unhygienic living conditions contributing to the epidemic, in summer of 1942 a command was issued to send 4,000 Jews from Moghilev to Scazineti and 3,000 to Pechora. These sites were 'starvation' camps, where the population was essentially cordoned off and left to die. See Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 134 and

over the Nieper [sic: Bug] and-- I've forgotten the localities. We have to look in the book. I would find them probably.

[00:12:56.78] And this Bureau of Evidence was supposed to give the lists. So they weren't coming to take you out. It was the dirty work of the Jews who have to bring up the people to be transported to-- to the places. So I had this friend at the Bureau of Evidence. And he knew a day or two before when such an action is going to come. And he knew more or less which places are going to be involved. So this was the reason how we survived this fall of '42.

[00:13:32.95] Then-- this was Romanian occupied territory. As I tell you, I don't remember anybody had been shot, anybody has been killed, or hanged, or so on. It wasn't necessary.

[00:13:45.53] DEBORAH CARDON: Had they sort of left you alone more or less? I mean, it doesn't sound as if there was a lot of being-- overseeing or anything.

[00:13:50.99] NORBERT N: They left us-- yeah, the ghetto was closed.

[00:13:53.93] DEBORAH CARDON: Mm-hmm. I see.

[00:13:54.95] NORBERT N: As a-- so we were standing in the ghetto and they're not letting you out, but not letting in anything in the ghetto-- no food, no clothing, nothing. So people-- it was not-- it was not an extermination camp. It was a starvation camp.[57]

[00:14:09.02] DAVID TERMAN: Were the people over you Romanians rather than SS? Or--

[00:14:12.76] NORBERT N: They were Romanians up to fall of '42.

[00:14:15.85] DAVID TERMAN: Oh.

[00:14:16.56] NORBERT N: Now come fall of '42, the Germans start pulling back. And they have-- and they needed a hospital to organize in Moghilev. So the other Romanian authorities gave me work to organize this hospital. So they had to put some buildings up over there. Needs a bricklayer. Went over from the Romanian to the Germans. And soon enough, they didn't need bricklayers, they need painters. So I become a painter over there. Shortly thereafter, they-- they needed a translator. So I was there; they used me as their translator.

Coldewey et al, *Zwischen,* 65-58. Secondly, Jews were sent as forced laborers to the German-run "Organisation Todt," which used slave labors to construct roads and bridges. The bridge Nadler refers to was probably the one built at Trykhaty (Ukraine) over the Bug River. See Coldewey et al, *Zwischen*, 78-79.

[57] The primary concern of the main character and most secondary characters in Hilsenrath's *Nacht* is the securing of food. In one scene early on, the main character, Ranek, steals and eats a Kohlrabi, cut so as to be used as a pacifier, from a crying baby. Hilsenrath, *Nacht*, 75-77.

[00:15:00.78] They didn't mistreat mistreatment, the German. They were—they were so: there were the German-- the German doctors, the German orderlies, and uh, there were no nurses, and naturally, the German wounded soldiers who came in. Then were a group of Ukrainians, or Russians, or Latvians, collaborators with the Germans. They were called the Hiwis, *Hilfswilliger* in German-- Hiwis.[58] And then we were Jews, a few of us, not many. But we-- but we from-- from Czernowitz, we spoke German.

[00:15:35.53] DAVID TERMAN: I see.

[00:15:36.88] NORBERT N: So we were treated better, I would say, as the Hiwis were treated. I remember vividly I had a toothache. Didn't know what to do. I told to somebody. Ah, come into the doctor. He pulled my tooth. He gave me even anesthetic. Yeah. And, we were working.

[00:15:55.12] DAVID TERMAN: Were these non SS-Germans?

[00:15:56.10] NORBERT N: This was non-SS Germans. This was non SS-Germans. And then started the battle is at-- at Stalingrad and in North Africa. And I was working for the Romanians over there. And some of them knew me already. And there was a German. One afternoon, over there in this hospital, is coming over a captain, a Romanian captain. And told me-- we didn't have any papers. I don't remember who he called me-- a dirty Jew or whatever he told.

[00:16:32.06] But he came over and tell me, look, we have lost the war. I have a lot of this-- there were occupation money over there. I had a lot of this occupation money. I want you to buy for me dollars and jewelry in the ghetto. I don't need this money. Now here, you're put in a very bad situation. You don't know, is he trying to-- to see if you're going to do this? Is he going--

[00:17:03.12] So I tell him I don't have connections, so-- and he's like don't be-- don't be foolish. Look, the war is lost. You're going to have what to eat and I am going to get rid of this junk. And I tried it once. And it worked. And before short, the German-- a German officer, a major came in to me, and called me, told me the same story. But he told me something else.

[00:17:31.52] Look, he tells me, the Americans are bombing Germany. There's nothing what to eat. I have to send food over there. I cannot send my ration because they're not going to let it through. I want you-- I take you out of the ghetto, buy for me oil, and butter, and things which I

---

[58] *Hilfswilliger*: literally "one willing to help," referred to auxiliary volunteers from territories occupied by Nazi Germany.

can send over there, and get me a good-- a good man who can close it into cans so I can send it to-- to Germany.

[00:18:01.10] And at that time, I started to have it a little bit better. Because he was the first-- at first they wanted food. And then they wanted dollars.[59] And then they wanted jewelry. And then the German was the same as the Romanian. They thought the war was-- the war was lost. They want to get rid of their marks. And maybe they want to have a Jew who's going to testify for them. I-- and-- see, I could-- from this time on, I could have taken home—

Part 3

[00:00:00.18] NORBERT N: The gate of the ghetto. Because they were standing-- the Romanian soldier, and seeing what you bring, what you take in, what you take out. You have to arrange with them too, somehow. And I would say from 1943, it was still bad-- very bad I would say, but we had what to eat.

[00:00:21.33] DAVID TERMAN: Mm-hmm.

[00:00:22.03] NORBERT N: I was able to-- I was getting enough food over there. I was getting more to take home. And then start coming the SS, the wounded SS. And we was-- naturally, we were wearing the-- the star. And occasionally when they beat us up, occasionally spit in our face. Occasionally kicked us. We were not once -- not once telling I'm getting so, I'm going to kill you.

[00:00:54.03] Another episode I must tell you, that in 1943, I remember once working. And here's coming another Jew to me. He's telling me that he has just met somebody who ran away from Poland and that he's coming and telling that in Poland they're gassing the Jews, putting them in gas ovens and gassing the Jews, killing them by the thousands. And I said, you must be crazy. But it spread in the ghetto somehow.

[00:01:22.73] DAVID TERMAN: Mm-hmm.

[00:01:23.55] NORBERT N: So I remember that the authorities-- it didn't came out openly to say. But it was a rumor coming then, don't listen to-- to rumors. Things are exaggerated, don't

---

[59] Wenkert writes: "At the Moghilev market you could buy and sell almost anything. Peasants from the area came once a week to the "Talczok," the market. For a jug of cornmeal or rotten peas they bought a good suit, a new dress, a coat, a pair of shoes. Goods for goods – cornmeal for a good piece of clothing. The Jews sold their last belongings in order to hold out. They hoped liberation would come soon, and so they sold their winter things in the summer and their summer clothes in autumn or winter. Romanian officers and soldiers also came to the market. Everyone tried to get something good for the worthless German mark." Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 19. In Hilsenrath's novel, those that knew how to work the Black Market were particularly envied by the more destitute.

believe what you hear, and so on. But things were starting, coming more and more. It was not only coming in from occasionally Jew which was running away, it was coming in mostly from German, from the working Organization Todt. [It] was an organization, Todt, a German, which was making roads, and airports, and bridges. And these Jews had been working for them over there in Poland. And they were starting to tell us all the stories. But see, we didn't believe it.

[00:02:06.93] DAVID TERMAN: Mm-hmm.

[00:02:07.96] NORBERT N: We couldn't believe it. And then, naturally, it start retreating. And, uh, this was essentially a Romanian concentration camp. And there was a lot of Jews left in Romania. There was especially a Dr. Filderman, which was the president of the Jewish community in Romania.[60] And this Dr. Filderman had connections.

[00:02:34.80] Now the Romanians thought, the same way this officer thought that the war was lost, so the Romanian government thought the war was lost. So they started-- they started, probably dealing with the Americans-- I would say it couldn't be anybody else. And they start rumors that we're going to be sent back to our places. Repatriation it was called.

[00:03:01.67] And really, it started on a very slow base. First, the orphanages. The kids from the orphanages, the dying skeletons they were, were sent back to Romania. This Dr. Filderman came over to visit us over there. Dr. Filderman came over to visit us over there, made a few remarks, and he was kept over there. But still he has a connection. He was kept a different way as we were kept. And he was working for the people to send back.

[00:03:35.07] And I would say at the end of '43 they start sending back. First the-- the kids from the orphanages. And they put them straight-- they came to Romania. They fed them a little bit. And sent them straight to Palestine at that time, some of them, yes.

[00:03:52.79] DAVID TERMAN: [INAUDIBLE]

[00:03:53.09] NORBERT N: It was everything paid.

[00:03:54.66] DAVID TERMAN: hm

[00:03:55.46] NORBERT N: Yes. I mean, 4,000 or 5,000, maybe 3,000. And then they start sending back special group of people: a number of lawyers, people who have connections, people who had families who bought them out. It started a way back. People didn't come anymore. They were going back. The very weak have already died out. The selection was done.

---

[60] As Nadler notes subsequently, Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, spent some time in Moghilev himself in summer 1943.

[00:04:25.39] And in '44, there was a rumor that everybody's going to get home. There were coming about two or three transports, going home. And then the Russian came close. The Russian came close. And this was the Romanian to turn, run away. And this was the end of it.

[00:04:49.59] Now it was-- when the Russian came there were two SS divisions east of Moghilev. And we were very much afraid. These SS divisions are coming in. They're going to kill us all. So I remember we were staying at the edge of the town and looking at the German soldiers retreating. And trying to get in soldiers from the Wehrmacht. They were looking where to sleep so they would protect us from the SS. At the end, the SS didn't make it. They're being surrendered and didn't make it to town.

[00:05:23.44] But we were looking to get the German protection. They were-- they were looking for a place where to-- where to sleep. They were demoralized. They were dirty. It wasn't the same German fighting man as you saw going East when he came back, when he was going back West.

[00:05:42.76] And then the Russian came in, for the partisans.

[00:05:46.27] DAVID TERMAN: When was that?

[00:05:47.19] NORBERT N: It was in May of '44. In May of '44, the Russian came back. I remember vividly, they come-- it was March, raining. Mud-- Ukrainian mud, once up to the knees. And there were a few soldiers on the truck. And the stuck gets stuck in the mud right in front of our place that we were living.

[00:06:10.12] Here is coming in a Russian soldier. Asked my brother-in-law and myself to push out the truck out of the mud. And we went over there. The moment the truck was out of the mud, turns the gun on us. Get up on the truck and we were drafted. We were drafted in the Russian army.[61]

[00:06:29.23] But this was nothing, nothing special. Because the other ones had been drafted two days later, in a different way.

[00:06:36.30] DEBORAH CARDON: [INAUDIBLE]

[00:06:37.15] NORBERT N: Yeah. And didn't give us any uniforms, but give us outdated rifles. In three, four days, we were-- all the young people from this town were in the Russian army. Dressed in civilian clothes with these rifles. And they want to send us to the front. And we

---

[61] The Soviets drafted almost any men they encountered in the liberated Ukrainian zones. Many memoirs and oral histories speak of various attempts, often unsuccessful, to evade being drafted by the Red Army in 1944, see Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 99-100.

were saying, what are you doing? In civilian clothes, sent to the front. We are Jews. They are going to find. We're not going to even have the right to be a prisoner of war. They're going to shoot us right away. No matter.

[00:07:08.53] So suddenly we saw a Russian general. This is a story because you were talking about the liberation. We saw a Russian general. And he was-- and he was Jewish. And he was-- and he saw us over there. And asked us, what's a Jew doing here? And we said, oh, we are so happy that we got out of this-- of this country. Oh, said, yes, you can be happy you get out of it, but you don't know what you're getting into.

[00:07:35.42] And-- and, uh, about 10 days later, after many, many letters and asking for uniforms, they took us out of the front line. Sent us back. And I was for 14 months in a working battalion in-- in the White Russia.[62] And the working battalion was, you did the work from about 6:00 in the morning till 9:00 in the evening.

[00:08:10.33] To work, they were taking you in trucks. Back from work, you have to walk. You're getting a, uh, a soup. Breakfast, you got a soup for breakfast. And there we get a second soup at noon. And this was it.[63] Was an entire day. Naturally, the production was this way too. This is a completely different story, who you-- how you work over there, but then I was 14 months in--

[00:08:38.80] DAVID TERMAN: Was there a lot of starvation?

[00:08:42.01] NORBERT N: Oh, look, we were free people.[64] We didn't have [INAUDIBLE]. But we did steal right and left. Russia was at that time one big factory. Everything changed to vodka or to food. Boots, and coats, and gasoline from the car, and spare parts from the cars, or whatever, you changed it, you stole it, you--

[00:09:05.73] DAVID TERMAN: I see.

[00:09:06.70] NORBERT N: And so, we really didn't get too much eat from the government, but we were able to-- to survive somehow.

---

[62] Emil Wenkert believed that the Russians did not trust the Bukoviners and that for this reason they were not sent to the front. Wenkert was also drafted and sent to Belarus, however he described his work as much more dangerous: combing landing fields for explosives left behind by the German army. Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 29.

[63] Wenkert's outfit's daily rations were 600 grams of bread and a pea soup. Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 30.

[64] As opposed to the time in Transnistria, they were allowed to move about freely and were more successful at seeking additional provisions. Wenkert wrote of smuggling potatoes from trucks they were unloading and, on another occasion, of an old man offering to share his potatoes with him. Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 30.

[00:09:14.89] DAVID TERMAN: I see.

[00:09:15.62] NORBERT N: And this is-- I think the secret was entire Russian economy survived somehow.

[00:09:25.66] DAVID TERMAN: Was this an exclusively Jewish group or was it a mixed Romanian?

[00:09:29.20] NORBERT N: Ok, no, this was, at the beginning, was exclusive Jewish. And I remember, they took us-- we were surviving from a concentration camp. And they took us on the train. It was in a military train, back to Russia. And I remember the third of the four days we were in Smolensk. And the German came back. And threw bombs on Smolensk station, just when were in there. And we were about-- from about 200 Jews, there were-- there were about 60 have been killed at that time by the German bombs still over there. We were still only Jews.[65]

[00:10:09.31] Then they formed battalions. And we were only Jews in the battalions. But we were together with other battalions which were not Jewish. I can tell you how-- how high we were in the Russian esteem that they put us together with the battalions taken -- battalions of Russians taken out all the jails. Yeah.

[00:10:28.93] I remember especially was about 40 people from a jail of Rostov. They were the worst. They weren't antisemites. They were just asocial. Asocial-- you shouldn't cross their paths. They were-- they were taking off your coat. They were taking off your boots. They changed everything. Their boots and my boots, they changed it for vodka. So.

[00:10:51.46] DEBORAH CARDON: What about your family? How? Do you--

[00:10:53.37] NORBERT N: OK, my family-- when I was-- my brother-in-law and myself went East to Russia, into the army. My family went home. They went home to Czernowitz. And over there start another thing, forced labor with the Russian.

[00:11:09.76] And they want to send them back to Donbas.[66] Donbas was at that time the richest industrial and mining center in the Ukraine. And they needed people over there to work. So they want to take my mother, and my sister, who she was pregnant, six months at that time. They to take her back to Donbas. They somehow survived.

---

[65] Wenkert described a similar experience with much higher casualties. His transport train was attacked by German aircraft in Briansk; he believed that of 2,000 Jews, only 300 survived the attack. Wenkert, *Schicksale*, 29.

[66] Deportations to Donbas or assignments there are mentioned by several memoirists. It is not entirely clear from Nadler's interview whether his mother and sister were indeed taken, it seems so; though they must have returned relatively quickly.

[00:11:33.59] And then my late father was born in a part of Romania which was not occupied by the Russian, in the southern part of Bukovina.[67] So he considered himself at that time a Romanian. And the family left everything in, uh, in Czernowitz. And went to a small town in Southern-- in Southern Bukovina, which was Romania. So they left Russia.[68]

[00:11:57.13] DEBORAH CARDON: Mm-hmm. Do you want to say something about-- this may be a hard question to answer, but how the impact on your family, or how people dealt with all this, or?

[00:12:12.62] NORBERT N: OK, I tell you, we-- we were naive people. And I was mostly naive. We didn't believe that their intention is to kill us.

[00:12:20.87] DAVID TERMAN: Mm-hmm.

[00:12:21.74] NORBERT N: We-- we were believing that their intention was to make us work for them. And therefore, I-- and this was the reason why I start working. This was our salvation. Because we believed in this.[69] The other people, the pessimists, were saying we are here to be killed. They didn't [INAUDIBLE] it. And they were killed. They did die.

[00:12:41.99] We-- we, somehow, all of us, this was [why we] survived. I would say from the Jews in Transnistria, probably 80% of them died.

[00:12:51.02] DAVID TERMAN: 80%.

[00:12:51.79] NORBERT N: 80-- I would say it's hard to find another family where everybody survived.

[00:12:57.20] DAVID TERMAN: Why do you think you survived and the others did not?

---

[67] Norbert Nadler's father, Baruch Yitzhak (Itzik) Nadler, was born in Campulung Moldovenesc, November 24th, 1889. Personal communication with Judith Nadler, July 17th, 2021.

[68] Many thousands of Bukovina Jews crossed the border to Romania in 1945-1946, even if they did not have roots in southern Bukovina. It seems that sometimes they were "assigned" a new town while others moved where they liked. Paul Celan and many other writers and artists moved to Bucharest, where a lively Bukovina diaspora scene thrived for a few years. See Solomon Petre's memoir *Paul Celan: The Romanian Dimension,* trans. Emanuela Tegla (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019). See also Gaëlle Fisher, "'A Remarkable Branch of the Jewish People': Survivors from Bukovina between Romania and Israel after the Second World War" in Gaëlle Fisher, *Resettlers and Survivors: Bukovina and The Politics of Belonging in West Germany and Israel, 1945-1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020).

[69] This sentiment was perceived by the leadership as well, Mir-Tibon concludes "The Jewish committees assumed that the Romanian authorities in the Moghilev district did not seek the total annihilation of its Jewish population. Rather, they thought, the governorate sought to take maximum advantage of the Jews as a work force with total disregard to the fate of the population." Mir-Tibon, "Brother's Keeper," 139.

[00:12:59.48] NORBERT N: Because we were working. We were working. And not only we were working, we were working in the right places. And we survived the typhus, first of all. Uh, the hepatitis, my mother, I remember, had hepatitis. And my younger sister had hepatitis. Typhus we practically all had. And we survived the typhus. I don't know how it come we survived it. We didn't go to the hospital. We survived it at home.

[00:13:30.61] And, uh, then as soon as we were able to get out, I would say great-- greatly that my late father do. He went out of the ghetto. He was a tailor. He was energetic. He went to work for peasants. He didn't ask for money. He asked only for food. And he came back every evening with some food. So we had at least one meal a day.

[00:13:55.08] DAVID TERMAN: So he took [INAUDIBLE].

[00:13:55.93] NORBERT N: At least one meal a day. And this was very much. This was very much. And I remember, I didn't touch a meal at home because I ate outside. My brother-in-law didn't touch a meal at home because he-- my late father didn't touch a meal at home because he ate with the peasants. So whatever came in home was for the rest of the family.

[00:14:15.07] DAVID TERMAN: And so that's--

[00:14:15.97] NORBERT N: And we survived somehow.

[00:14:17.27] DAVID TERMAN: --that's how you were able to survive.

[00:14:18.01] NORBERT N: Yeah.

[00:14:19.36] DAVID TERMAN: And did-- did you hold on to the feeling all through the war that you were there to work and that you were not there to be exterminated?

[00:14:26.44] NORBERT N: Yeah.

[00:14:26.65] DAVID TERMAN: Yeah, you did.

[00:14:27.25] NORBERT N: Yeah. I tell you, nobody was killed over there by purpose.

[00:14:30.57] DAVID TERMAN: Nobody was exterminated, right.

[00:14:30.79] NORBERT N: Nobody was exterminated. People were dying out of starvation, period. But really, starvation-- people-- people died because they hadn't been eating for-- for weeks, nothing.

[00:14:42.60] DEBORAH CARDON: Mm-hmm.

[00:14:44.26] DAVID TERMAN: It was essentially a starvation camp--

[00:14:45.55] NORBERT N: Yeah.

[00:14:45.88] DAVID TERMAN: --more than an extermination camp.

[00:14:46.98] NORBERT N: It was a starvation camp.[70] And all of-- all of the Transnistria was starvation camp with exception of the transports, which I tell you, which were in the second part of '42, when they start transporting people out of [Czernowitz and into] the German-occupied territory.[71]

[00:15:01.19] DAVID TERMAN: Of Czernowitz.

[00:15:01.75] NORBERT N: Yeah. And these never came back.

[00:15:03.64] DAVID TERMAN: Where did those people go?

[00:15:05.55] NORBERT N: They did go Nikolaev.[72] This is a port down on the Red Sea with the Dnieper to build bridges, to build munition factories. Nobody came back from there. And I don't remember any more where they did-- you didn't know. If somebody did run away and came back, he was telling. Otherwise, you didn't know. You could find out occasionally from a-- from a German-- from a German soldier where they were. But we survived.

[00:15:43.93] The worst time was-- because in 1943, there was coming to-- starting to come in medicines from Romania [from] the Jewish community. I think through the Joint.[73] The Joint must have had. Because the money was there to send us medicines, to send us, uh, some clothing, to send food for the orphanage, to send food for the hospital. It did come from

---

[70] The Czernowitzer poet Alfred Kittner makes the distinction based on the administration of the camps. He calls the German-run camps "*Konzentrationslager,"* with an official administration regulating daily life, and the Romanian-camps "*Vernichtungslager*" (extermination camps), characterized by a more or less absent administration and the deportees dying simply from lack of food, shelter, and medicine. Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 58.

[71] There is some confusion between the interviewers here. Nadler means that most of those who were deported in the transports of 1942 (often called the "second wave" of transportations) from Czernowitz, ended up at the Bug River and were often sent over the Bug River, into the territory under the control of the Nazi army. These people were almost immediately and certainly shot by the Germans. Thus, those who were in these later transports were more likely to have been killed immediately and deliberately rather than succumb to starvation, exposure, and disease, like the victims of the earlier transports. For the experience of one of these later deportees who survived, see Kittner, *Erinnerungen*, 64-94.

[72] Today Mykolaiv, Ukraine, a city on the Bug River.

[73] The Joint Distribution Committee, often referred to simply as the "Joint" or the "JDC," is a US-American Jewish humanitarian organization founded in the early 20th century. They were extremely active in delivering medical and other supplies during and after the war to the Romanian Jewish community.

Romania lately. In the-- in the last-- I would say in the last year. They realized they've lost the war and they were trying to accommodate.[74]

[00:16:24.43] DAVID TERMAN: And since then, what has your life been like in America? What have you done?

[00:16:29.32] NORBERT N: OK, I was in the army. I deserted the army in Warsaw. Came back home to Romania. Went to medical school. It was very easy at that time for a Jew to get into medical school. There was the guilt feeling in the entire Romanian population.[75] So-- so there were huge classes. And I would say the majority were Jewish at that time in the classes.

[00:16:59.80] It took the Romanian about three, four years to realize that they are still the masters in the home. And then start being anti-Semite. But in the first few years, you could have gotten into the medical school. The moment I finished medical school, my parents and my sister left for Israel. They wouldn't let me go for another 12 years.

[00:17:24.55] I got married at the same time. My wife is from the same town, from where I am, from Czernowitz. But she didn't go. Her father was a pharmacist. He was able to get out of this transport from Czernowitz. He survived.[76]

[00:17:39.27] DAVID TERMAN: So did she stay in Czernowitz all through war?

[00:17:41.05] NORBERT N: She stayed in Czernowitz throughout-- throughout the war, yeah. And then I was in Israel, in Jerusalem for six years. And came over here for a-- to specialize myself. And I stayed here by mistake. On my way back, I found out that the place which I had in the Jerusalem hospital was taken by an English man. And I really didn't have where to come

---

[74] That is, the Romanians realized that they lost the war and were trying to accommodate the surviving Jewish population so as to exit the war with as little global criticism as possible. In fact, they switched sides in 1944.

[75] This sentiment is also expressed in the unpublished memoirs of another Czernowitzer, Gerhard Schreiber, who notes that in the immediate postwar years there was "great optimism all around" and regarding his Romanian teachers that "they were really sorry for what had happened to us, and in some way were trying to repair the terrible injustice that had befallen us." Gerhard Bobby Schreiber, *A Tale of Survival (Or If Stalin Could Have Swallowed Hitler and Choked on It)*, (unpublished, no date), 36. http://czernowitz.ehpes.com/stories/schreiber/schreiber_memoirs2.pdf. Accessed August 26th 2021.

[76] Norbert met his wife, Judith Pitsch, a fellow Czernowitzer, during a trip after the war to the southern Transylvanian fortress town of Braşov. Judith and her family survived the war in Czernowitz. Her father, a pharmacist, had received one of the authorizations to remain. They married in 1954 and lived in Câmpulung until 1960, when, after years of petitions, they received an exit visa and made Aliyah to Israel. Nadler went on to work in medicine in Israel and the United States. Judith eventually became the director of the University of Chicago library, building a Judaica collection rich in material on Bukovina. These biographical details were provided by Judith Nadler, personal communications from July 17th and July 24th, 2021.

back. And I was too old at that time to start once more from the beginning. So I decided to come back [here]. My family's in Israel.

[00:18:20.10] DAVID TERMAN: Your family is all in Israel?

[00:18:21.61] NORBERT N: Yeah, yeah.

[00:18:23.23] DAVID TERMAN: OK.

[00:18:26.08] DEBORAH CARDON: Is there anything else you would like to say? Or do you feel that you've [INAUDIBLE].

[00:18:29.77] NORBERT N: No, I don't know. Maybe you have something to ask me. I tell you, you cannot-- you cannot explain in words this winter of '41, '42, especially, where we were going. Frozen dead bodies on the street, lying around like litter.

[00:18:50.52] DAVID TERMAN: Do you still have dreams about it?

[00:18:53.23] NORBERT N: No. No. I tell you something. I had my revenge.

[00:18:59.92] DAVID TERMAN: How's that?

[00:19:01.27] NORBERT N: I survived. Yeah. And I made it. No, I'm preoccupied. I read all-- all kinds of literature. And right now, I read *Abandonment of the Jews*.[77] Have you seen the book?

[00:19:16.93] DAVID TERMAN: I've heard about it.

[00:19:17.32] NORBERT N: I read it right now. And I-- I read a lot of the Holocaust. I try to understand it. And I'm rejected by many of my friends if I have a-- a different opinion about the Holocaust than they have. Because I really don't think it was a German-Jewish affair.

[00:19:35.29] DAVID TERMAN: How's that?

[00:19:36.31] NORBERT N: I think it was a bankruptcy of the human race. The German they did it. [INAUDIBLE]. But how can civilized countries have had any dealing with such a-- with such a, uh, a dictator as Hitler were or the Nazis? I think they're guilty. They are-- everybody's guilty.

[00:20:02.41] I think everybody's guilty with the genocide that was in Cambodia. I think everybody's guilty with the genocide, what's going on in-- in Ethiopia right now. I feel you

---

[77] David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984).

shouldn't deal with governments like this. Nobody should. And if you deal with them, you're as much guilty. This is the way I see it.

[00:20:23.11] DEBORAH CARDON: Mm-hmm.

[00:20:25.04] DAVID TERMAN: OK, thank you.

[00:20:27.15] DEBORAH CARDON: Thank you.

[00:20:30.91] NORBERT N: Are we off?