Very recently, Russian research scholars became interested in the history of the Holocaust as one of the main components of the Second World War. Thanks to the declassification of documents and other sources (such as declassified orders, reports of the German and Soviet command, and personal documents), scholars were able to raise new research questions and try to break the silence surrounding war episodes.

During the Soviet period, the official state image of the so-called “Great Patriotic War” (the part of the Second World War encompassing only the Soviet-Nazi front) showed the Soviet people as a nation of winners. The Soviet nation proclaimed itself to be unified, without any ethnic divisions. That’s why it was not immediately obvious that “peaceful Soviet citizens” suffered during the war. The cases of mass extermination of Soviet Jews were not discussed in mass media and at scientific conferences. The first official information about the killing of Jews appeared in the late Soviet Union during the Gorbachev’s Glasnost’. After the collapse of the Soviet system, new research centres that

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1 The majority of books and articles about the Holocaust in Russia are published by the Russian research and educational Holocaust Center. They established conferences and round tables devoted to special cases of the Holocaust history. The bibliography of the Center can
dealt with the history of Holocaust appeared in the newly-independent post-Soviet states. However, today’s Russian official patriotic conception is still based on the idea of a Great Victory in the Second World War and, while the history of Holocaust is accepted, it is not well studied.

**Historical Framework: Geographical Borders and the History of the Holocaust in the Region**

*Geography*

Focusing geographically in the South of Russia and in the North Caucasus, my study analyzes the memories of Soviet Jewish children who survived the Holocaust. To showcase why I chose to study this region, I explain relevant terminology and background history.

Like its name suggests, the North Caucasus is the northern part of the Caucasus region between the Black and Caspian Seas within European Russia. As part of the Russian Federation, the Northern Caucasus region consists of Krasnodar krai, Stavropol Krai, and the constituent republics, which, approximately from west to east, consist of the Republic of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia – Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Republic of Dagestan. Most of these territories became part of Russian Empire in the late 18th century.

Stavropol was founded on October 22, 1777 following the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 as a military encampment and was later designated as a city in 1785.

In April of 1783, by decree of Catherine II, right-bank Kuban and Taman Peninsula were annexed to the Russian Empire. From 1792 to 1793, Cossacks moved there from Zaporozhie, now located in Ukraine, and formed the Black

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Sea Area troops. As a result, a solid cordon line for the Kuban River was created, as was the marginalization of the neighbouring Circassia’s.

During the campaign for control of the North Caucasus (Caucasian war 1763-1864) Russia, in 1829, pushed the Ottoman Empire and the 1830s borders were marked on the Black Sea coast\(^4\).

The Caucasian War of 1817–1864 was an invasion of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire, which ended with the annexation of the North Caucasus to Russia and the ethnic cleansing of Circassians. It consisted of a series of military actions waged by Russia against territories and tribal groups in Caucasia including Chechnya, Dagestan and the Circassians (Adyghe, Kabarday), Abkhaz, Abazins and Ubykh as Russia sought to expand southward\(^5\).

Before The Second World War, the political administrative borders in the North Caucasus were delineated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the territory</th>
<th>Date of established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krasnodar krai</td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherkess (Adyghe) Autonomous Oblast</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavropol Krai (1937-1943 was called Ordzhonikidze region)</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachaevsk Autonomous Oblast</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circassia Autonomous Oblast</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechen–Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historically, the North Caucasus had many political, economical and social connections with Rostov oblast, and shares a border with the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions in the South. Now, Rostov-on-Don is the main city of the

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Southern Federal District, to which Krasnodar krai and Republic of Adygheya belongs. During the Soviet pre-war period, there was a North Caucasus Krai consisting of three Russian regions: Stavropol, Krasnodar and Rostov.

All these national republics and regions are the Southern part of contemporary Russian Federation or the former Russian Soviet Socialistic Republic. I will call this region ‘South of Russia’ or the North Caucasus.

South of Russia is represented by the most diverse national, religious and confessional structure of the population. Historically, this territory was out of the Pale of the Jewish settlement that was established during the Tsar period after the second division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18th century. Nevertheless, a small number of Jewish specialists (intelligentsia and merchants) were represented in this area since 19th century. For example, so-called European Jews lived mostly in the main cities of the North Caucasus region and so-called Mountain Jews lived in the special rural settlements in the mountain region.

Features of the war and Holocaust in the region

Soviet Union became involved in the Second World War on June 22, 1941. Following the invasion of most of the Western Soviet Union, whole regions fell under Nazi occupation. Twenty-three regions of what nowadays constitutes Russia were completely or partially captured by summer’s end in 1942; almost 80 million people of all nationalities lived in the occupied Soviet territory. With its access to the Black Sea coast to the West and large oil reserves to the East, Nazi commanders considered the North Caucasus to be a strategically important region. Battles for the Caucasus took place between river Don and the foothills of the North Caucasus from July 1942 to October 1943.

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6 The Pale of Settlement included much of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine and parts of western Russia. See: http://jewishfamilysearch.com/pale-of-settlement/.
German troops occupied much of the Kuban and North Caucasus regions by the autumn of 1942.

The “new order” did not last very long. There was a military administration in the occupied towns and villages, along with a frontline that was close to the occupied zones. The Wehrmacht established local commands in the city centres throughout the Caucasus. The officers of the Third Reich headed regional and municipal commands. The “New Order” regime in the North Caucasus differed from the aggressive policy of the Wehrmacht in other regions of the Soviet Union. The fact that occupied territories were close to the front line, the late beginning of the occupation, its relatively short duration and dependence on inciting national hatreds affected the nature of the interaction between Nazi occupiers and the local populations.

The Holocaust, in the occupied territory of Southern Russia, had several distinct features. A Russian historian and leader of the Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Center lists these features as follows:

First, all of the occupied territory of the North Caucasus was both under the control of the military administration and close in proximity to the front line. Here, various Nazi troops (Einsatzgruppen D, the Feldgendarmerie and SS troops) acted together with the local police, affecting the methods of the treatment and further extermination of Holocaust victims.

Second, civilians were informed about the extermination of Soviet Jews. So the Jews, locals and earlier evacuated to these territories, had, at first glance, enough time for further evacuation. However, a sudden attack of the enemy and the limited transportation options for organization of individual flight in this region did not allow for many Jews to leave in time.

Third, thousands of Jewish refugees from Central- and North-western Russia (including Leningrad), as well as Ukraine and Moldova had tried to hide

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in this region. The mass evacuation in the Soviet Union was held in the second half of 1941, immediately after the beginning of the war. The evacuees were mostly women with children and elderly people. A substantial group of the evacuees were elderly scientists, doctors, professionals and intelligentsia. The concentration of Jewish intellectuals was the highest in the South of Russia among all the Russian victims of the Holocaust.

Fourth, the Nazis didn’t create any ghettos here. The tactics they established were for the quickest extermination of Jews. In the central cities and places of mass Jewish residence, Jews were exterminated en masse during the first weeks of the occupation, gathered together and shot nearby the big cities.

Fifth, it was in the North Caucasus, where specially equipped cars, so-called gas vans (Gaswagen), were reequipped as mobile gas chambers and widely used to kill the civilians.

Sixth, Nazis used often the Jewish intelligentsia authority for quicker registration and collection Jewish population for further extermination.

Seventh, the Nazis were interested in the, even if not loyal, but at least neutral attitude of the civilians of South of Russia to their regime. The main thrust of Nazi policy in the North Caucasus was implementation of the national struggle and ran counter to the Soviet concept of the unified Soviet nation. Therefore, the mass extermination of Jews and other civilians was carefully concealed.

The total number of murdered Soviet Jews and other civilians is the theme of discussions and a subject of controversy among regional historians, public figures and Jewish authorities even nowadays. The main source for counting the victims of the Holocaust is the materials of the “Extraordinary State Commission on the atrocities of fascist aggressors and their accomplices,

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and the damage caused to citizens, collective farms, public organizations, state enterprises and institutions of the USSR”9, which was established in November 1942 in the USSR. It worked in the North Caucasus from 1943 till 1944. Here are the data of the numbers of the Holocaust victims in the North Caucasus10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Number of victims</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krasnodar Krai (including Adyghe AO)</td>
<td>20500</td>
<td>22000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavropol Krai (including Karachaevsk and Circassia AO)</td>
<td>19700</td>
<td>25000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardino-Balkar ASSR</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ossetian ASSR</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>3300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rostov Oblast</td>
<td>22000</td>
<td>26800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65230</td>
<td>77150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the light of this data: the whole number of victims in the Russian Soviet Republic was estimated between 119,210 and 140,350 Jews11. So more than a half of all victims were exterminated in the South of Russia (about 55%), mostly in Krasnodar, Rostov and Stavropol regions.

**Studied Sources: The General Characteristics of Oral History Testimonies. The Peculiarities of Remembered Past in the Narrations of the Holocaust Survivors in the Region**

An oral history redresses the difficulties in representing the Holocaust through the contemporary, public and military narratives. An oral history of The Second World War allows one to build a model of civilian behaviour towards the Jews during the war, and the militarization of everyday life. It also helps to trace the channels by which an image of the Holocaust was formed in the post-

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10 Al'tman, Il'ja. Zhertvy nenavisti… P. 286.
11 Al'tman, Il'ja. Zhertvy nenavisti… P. 286.
war period, and to understand how individual and collective levels of memory interact in the war testimonies.

Using the method of oral history indicates, first of all, increases historical knowledge through the personal testimonies of witnesses and participants in ordinary events. Russian sociologists Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina use the method of “analysis of categorization” when studying biographical interviews. The goal of such a technique is to explore the way that people construct descriptions of everyday life in interviews. In their stories, people usually use categories that have inter-subjective meaning and, therefore, allow for the understanding of history in the frame of existing culture. The interview, therefore, is a narrative that contains the categories through which the interviewee describes social interactions in the specific field of study.

I started my project in 2013 as part of my then-future PhD thesis. There are two main groups of interviews about the Holocaust in the region that I analysed.

First is the collection of video interviews with Holocaust survivors contained in the Shoah Visual History Foundation (known as S. Spielberg Foundation). The Foundation was founded in 1994 and has collected more than 54,000 interviews about the Holocaust, collected from all over the world in different languages. So far I have looked through about 200 interviews, conducted in Russian language, dealing with the memory about Jewish survival in the South of Russia. I transcribed 22 interviews, which were made in 1997-1998, in Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, USA and Israel. I chose to transcribe these interviews out of the 200, which I have listened to, because they are about the

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life of Jewish survivors in the region, the interviewees told very clear stories about their past, the questions of interviewers help the listener to capture a picture of what had happened during the war and post war period as the storyteller experienced it. I believe that up to 70% of the success of an interview depends upon the professional skills and psychological sensitivity of the interviewer.

Second, there are my own interviews that I conducted in the region. So far I collected 26 interviews in the cities Krasnodar, Maikop, Taganrog, Rostov-on-Don. 3 interviews were made in Moscow. People, who survived the Holocaust in the South of Russia, could be divided into 2 main groups. There are individuals who were born in the region, survived there, and lived all their life in the region. The other group includes Jews who were born and lived in the different parts of the former Soviet Union, but evacuated and hid in the South of Russia. Because of the goals of my project, I’m not interested in stories about the evacuation of local Jews to the other regions outside of the North Caucasus, but I collected interviews with people, who evacuated through the South of Russia. That is why the geography of residence of Jewish survivors varies in my sample.

The local Jewish communities and local Jewish Welfare Center, Hesed, helped me a lot in finding the survivors who could give an interview. Usually these organizations have the data of Jews living in the concrete territory. Each time I asked for help, I received it. It is very important for a stranger to find the first contacts with the potential storyteller, and the Jewish communities were a reliable link between the Holocaust survivors and myself, the interviewer.

Here is the table of gender and age characteristics of interviewees of the collected interviews:

**Gender**
As the chart shows, the number of male and female narratives is quite the same. The most representative group of informants were born in the late 1930-ies. During the war most of them were children and teenagers of age 4-18. I won’t analyse in this work the 3 interviews with individuals who were more than 20 years old during the war or the one interview with wartime born child. In the first case, the narratives of adults could provide us a more detailed picture of the war and Holocaust than one narrated by a child’s memory. In the second case, the narrative of the man, who was born during the war, could be considered as post-story of what he has been told but not experienced by himself. The studied group of the informants I will name “children of war”.

During the taking interviews all “children of war” were already retired persons. Almost all of the interviewees had undergone higher education and gone on to have relatively successful careers. This success depended strongly upon the way the post war Soviet society accepted the Jewish nationality of the
interviewees. Some of them had needed to struggle a lot against the system, most of them had to hide their Jewish identity. After the fall of the Soviet system very few of them decided to leave their Motherland. They considered themselves old people who don’t have enough energy to start a new life elsewhere, even in place with better conditions and quality of life. Nevertheless, the children and grandchildren of almost all the storytellers immigrated to the USA or Israel in 1990-ies.

My own interviews have been conducted in a semi-structured way, which allowed the interviewee to respond to the main question about his or her memories of wartime in a free and narrative way. This method allowed the storyteller to create their personal narrative and to speak about the moments of their life which they personally found to be significant. Follow-up questions were asked in the second part of the interview to specify and clarify any parts of the narrative that were not fully understood by the interviewer.

The interviews in the Shoah Foundation were made according to the strong questionnaire, which seems to have been uniform for all informants. This rule proved to be a disservice to the narrative because sometimes interviewees couldn’t answer the questions, and in other cases they didn’t describe the significant parts of their life because they weren’t asked about them.

Although subjective, partial, and frequently fragmentary, the memories of “children of war” are an excellent historical resource for social history and anthropology, shedding light on everyday life, and permitting psychological and gendered readings of the history of The Second World War. Even many years later, those who survived the Holocaust as children or teenagers can talk about aspects of wartime life, psychological climate among the wetness, and even about the suffering of permanent hiding that cannot be found in archival official documents. According to the German sociologist Harald Welzer, the wartime stories of children are more emotional in their descriptions of what the storyteller saw or experienced than those of adults. Furthermore, […]
neurological studies have shown that the old men have a more stable and clear memory of their distant past than of recent events in their life. The memory of the distant past is more static; it is beyond change or reflection\textsuperscript{14}.

Welzer’s position is strongly confirmed by the narratives of the Holocaust survivors, to whom their wartime pasts appear to be the most significant and traumatic of their whole lives. Children's impressions of the war are quite complicated and usually consist of several fragmented stories. This can be explained predominantly by the age of informants at the time; they were too young to gain a holistic conception of the war they were experiencing.

The impression of the war and knowledge about the extermination of Jews, formed directly in childhood, will differ greatly from the impression formed in the mind of the older generation. This difference comes from the influence of state propaganda and existence of the state ideology about the war and the Holocaust upon the ordinary people consciousness. Nevertheless, the events fixed in children’s memories significantly influenced both the fate of the Holocaust survivors themselves and the mechanism by which an image of the war is formed in the collective representations of members of the social group. The official soviet propaganda about the extermination of “the peaceful soviet citizens during the war” and the absence of official places of memory for the murdered Jews exerted a strong influenced upon individuals’ images of what had happened during the war. The Holocaust survivors often kept silent even in their own post-war families about their wartime experience. The first testimonies about the Holocaust appeared in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, when special foundations and independent Jewish organizations and Jewish communities were established. Nowadays the memory of Jewish survivors became part of academic interests as well as a significant part of

Jewish education, but only among those people who have a Jewish identity. For the other members of Russian society, the memory of Holocaust is still a little-known part of the history of the Second World War.

**Gender and Thematic Analysis of “Children of War” Narrations About The Holocaust**

Coming back to our sources, it is important to identify the main topic of children’s narration. Children are highly dependent upon other people, mostly upon their families.

Most of the narratives are similar in the transmission of the tragedy they had to face and to overcome. The Holocaust survivors lived most of their lives in a state of grief for the dead relatives or with a feeling of inexplicable guilt and gladness at their own survival. The historical features of the Holocaust in the South of Russia, which were mentioned above, allow us to speak about the special group of narratives from the Holocaust survivors. This subgroup of survivors had not been captured by the Nazis and had not been sent to the concentrations camps. Those rare people who avoided the mass exterminations of Jews immediately after the beginning of the occupation by the Nazis needed to find ways to stay alive. To survive, Jewish people had to hide their nationality, live in hidden places or depend upon the local non-Jews to help them. The most common narrative lines were the stories about the constant persecution and wandering, the fear of being betrayed and captured by the occupation authorities, the everyday humiliation and pain. This subgroup of Soviet Jews would survive, but even now there is not any kind of statistics about the number of Jews who lived through the massive Jewish extermination. While they survived, they still considered themselves victims of the Holocaust. Nowadays they can openly talk about it while accepting the financial compensation of various foundations. Unfortunately, no amount of money will
ever bring back their murdered relatives or replace their tragic wartime childhood.

So, the following themes of the narration about the Holocaust in the South of Russia are as follows:

1. Stories about witnessing one or both parents’ or close relatives’ death.

To one storyteller the story about her father’s death became the main part of all her life. She was young enough to remember the events of the capture of her father, but, of course, she wasn’t present at the time of his murder. She remembered this story through her mother’s account and the stories of other witnesses. During the post-war period she tried her best to find any official proof of her father’s murder. In time her own memory about this event stratified with other testimonies and findings. The memory of extermination of the mother of another storyteller among other Jews in Zmievskaya Balka, Rostov-on-Don also became the main narrative line of her testimony. But opposite the first storyteller, this woman preferred to keep silent about what happened during the war. The loss of her mother had been her own personal tragedy and for more than 60 years she wasn’t able to speak about it, even among the family members. She still didn’t visit the memorial complex at the place of mass extermination during the war. There is no portrait of her mother on the wall in family portrait gallery, which visitors can find in the living room in her apartment. The loss of her mother in the childhood was a trauma for her and she prefers to keep the memory of her mother a private one, it’s a way to her to feel as though she is keeping her mother alive. I didn’t find any relevant testimony of the male interviewee about the loss of his parents, but I believe the

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differences in the memory of traumatic pasts do not depend on the gender of the storyteller, but on the psychological features of their personality.

2. Stories about the evacuation of Jews and surviving the Holocaust together with family members. The evacuation process could take evacuees into far regions of the South of Russia or throughout the territory. The final place of surviving peoples could be also varied: from the Far East, Siberia region and Central Asia to the mountain regions of North Caucasus. In these testimonies I’m interested in descriptions of moving through South of Russia as well as hiding in the North Caucasian regions, which were not occupied by Nazis. Unfortunately there was no organized evacuation in 1942 and only few families could evacuate by themselves. These testimonies are filled with the descriptions of the life conditions during the evacuation. Descriptions of suffering during the evacuation and hiding always came along with mentions of the local Soviet population, who would provide Jews with food and hiding places. These good Soviet people came mostly from the rural regions, such as farmers with a basic educational background, who were always described in great detail, based on their congeniality.  

I found only one testimony with totally negative image of the Soviet citizens. This story is full of descriptions of the suffering of the Jews during their evacuation through the South of Russia with no water and food. Their whole trip was more than 2 months and it seems unbelievable that they would stay alive without water or food during that time. This very critical characterization of the Soviet non-Jewish population was likely a result of the experience of anti-Semitism during the whole post-war period of his life under


the Soviet system. The more present hateful memory from his oppressive treatment after the war likely displaced his wartime experience as a young boy.

3. Stories about the lives of Jews in the occupied regions of North Caucasus. The survival of Jews in the occupied zones can be divided into two groups. First, Jews of mixed ethnic marriages. For example, the father of the male storyteller was Jewish and his mother was Russian. Before the war the father left the family, leaving the mother to raise her son alone. When the occupation began, his mother changed their family name on all documents. But her neighbours knew the boy’s real parentage and intimidated her, threatening to betray her to the occupational authorities and have them take her son. Since she worked at a cigarette factory, she provided her neighbours with cigarettes to keep her son’s identity hidden. Saving him. Another storyteller was also a half-Jew. Her mother also changed the names in the documents. In her case, a Nazi soldier lived in their flat but he didn’t realise the Jewish origin of the young girl. These stories are more positive because the tragedy of Holocaust didn’t affect the storytellers or close relatives. The portrayal of Nazis is not always negative in such testimonies. These storytellers share the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust as far as identifying as Jews, but this kind of suffering only came to them as they were able to reflect on their wartime childhood in the post wartime and in their adulthood.

Secondly, the Soviet non-Jewish population could help the survival of Jewish children in the region. There are testimonies about people who hid Jews in their houses. There was an episode where Jewish children from the

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evacuated orphanages survived because Adyghes’ or Karachaevs’ families took Jewish children in and raised them as their own. In the post-war period, these children identified as non-Jews, accepting all the traditions of their new families and generally preferred not to speak about their traumatic past. They became competent members of the Islamic community and they don’t let their children know about their past.

4. Stories about the life in the concentration camps of the South of Russia. There were no camps here like in Western part of Soviet Union or in Poland. But there were still a few of them\textsuperscript{22}. These camps were established late in 1942 but not everywhere in the region. Their status as concentration camp should be further studied. Usually, Jews were gathered together in small house for several weeks in the last period of Nazi’s occupation. Sometimes Jews were kept with the POWs. According to one testimony, Jews were guarded, twice a day they were given a food and they had a 15 minutes everyday walk in the fresh air. Survivors described the people and everyday life in the camp, also their happiness of been released by the Soviet Army\textsuperscript{23}.

Each of these groups of testimonies should be elaborated upon, establishing new research questions. The common feature of all the oral history of a special subgroup of Jews survivors in the South of Russia could become the narrative language of trauma. I found that the children's narratives about the trauma are less marked by gender than the narratives of older generation. This can be explained by the following:

1. All the storytellers survived the Holocaust as children. They remember the most impressive moments of their past, and they convey their experience often without any reflection. They could reflect a lot upon the post

\textsuperscript{22} For example one of the latest ghetto was established in August, 1942 in Essentuki, Stavropol region, where 2000 Jews were held. See Al'tman, Il'ja. Zhertvy nenavisti… P. 97.

war period and give their assessment to the whole Holocaust history, but this part of narration doesn’t deal with their own individual experiences. In this case, we could speak about the later influence of mass media and state ideology upon the interviewees’ image of the war.

2. There was lack of relations between the survivors and Nazi soldiers, likely because the Jews needed to hide. The testimonies of half-Jews are more alike with the testimonies of non-Jewish children. They talked about candies and other sweets that the Nazis gave them, but not the pressures and humiliations they faced as women; there were no testimonies about sexual violence in this subgroup of survivors.

3. Gender differences are not clearly represented in the featured survivor stories, making it difficult to delineated whether one gender was impacted more than the other. Thus, gender as a category of analysing Jewish children of war’s testimonies could hardly be useful in the understanding of the peculiarities of this kind of source. It would be more reasonable to think about the psychological characteristics of the storytellers and to investigate how the traumatic experience of war influenced the rest of their post-war lives.