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Nationalist Utopianism, Orientalist Imagination, and Economic Exploitation: Romanian Aims and Policies in Transnistria, 1941–1944

Vladimir Solonari

The territorial-administrative unit of Transnistria existed from August 1941 through March 1944, when it was occupied and administered by Romania. Located in southwestern Ukraine, Transnistria stretched between the Dniester River in the west and the southern Buh River in the east and north. It occupied a territory of about 40,000 square kilometers, and in 1942 its population was approximately 2.5 million. Its administrative center was in the port city of Odessa. “Transnistria,” a name the Romanians invented, means “the territory beyond the Dniester River.” Together with Eastern Karelia, Transnistria was one of the only two prewar Soviet territories occupied by powers other than Germany.¹ The study of the occupation of Transnistria, Romanian aims and policies there, and the responses of the local population to the occupation, is important not only in and of itself but also as a foil against which to test and refine various interpretations of developments in the rest of the occupied Soviet Union. Because Romanian policy both followed the German example and was shaped by Romanian political, military, and administrative culture, it is informative to compare Romania’s occupation and its impact on the local population with the corresponding phenomena in the German zone.

It is thus not surprising that Transnistrian occupation came under scrutiny from western scholars shortly after the end of the war. As early as 1957, the doyen of scholars of the social history of World War II in the Soviet Union, Alexander Dallin, published the first scholarly monograph on this subject.² Based almost exclusively on interviews with refugees from the region who lived at the time in the West, some of whom might have been perpetrators of crimes against humanity, *Odessa* paints a picture of an occupation regime that was at once incompetent, deeply corrupt, and rather benign. It appears substantially milder than the regime the Germans established in the rest of the Soviet Union. Dallin deemphasized Romanian crimes, especially against Jews and Roma, and depicted collaboration and accommodation as a predominant and viable strategy of the locals.³

For several decades after the publication of *Odessa*, Transnistria disappeared from the research agenda of western scholars, probably due to the

1. In 1941–1944, Finland occupied Eastern Karelia, which before 1939 was part of the Soviet Union. Its population at the time of occupation was estimated at around 85,000, mostly women, the elderly, and small children. See Olli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: Between Germany and Russia*, trans. Gerard McAlester (Basingstoke, 2002), 105. I thank Łukasz Sommer for bringing this information to my attention.

2. Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941–1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* (Santa Monica, 1957).

3. Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (New York, 1957).

inaccessibility of archives in the Soviet Union and communist Romania. The situation started to change after the downfall of communism. In 1996, a slim volume by renowned German historian Ekkehard Völkl was the first western scholarship based on the newly opened Soviet-era state regional archive in Odessa that houses the Romanian provincial administration's documents.⁴ German historian Herwig Baum, who recently published an important study of Transnistria, treats main topics, such as the institutional setup of the administration, the Romanians' economic exploitation of the province, resistance, and war crimes, in a comparative perspective with developments in German zones of occupation.⁵

There seems to be a consensus among scholars who study Transnistrian wartime history that the Romanian occupation policy was somewhat less radical and brutal than that of the Germans in their zone of occupation. Because of this, the argument goes, the Romanians were to some extent more successful as occupiers, especially with regard to creating a more workable *modus operandi* with the local population and fighting Soviet partisans at a lower human and material cost. As will become clear below, this view can be accepted only with some important qualifications.

The study of Transnistria under occupation must be seen in the context of a recent upsurge in regional studies of the Nazi and Axis occupations of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.⁶ Many have been written by German historians and depend heavily on German archival material, although increasingly scholars are relying on materials in multiple languages. The proliferation of regional studies stems from the realization that the German

4. Ekkehard Völkl, *Transnistrien und Odessa (1941–1944)* (Kallmünz, 1996).

5. Herwig Baum, *Varianten des Terrors: Ein Vergleich zwischen der deutschen und rumänischen Besatzungsverwaltung in der Sowjetunion, 1941–1944* (Berlin, 2011).

6. Dieter Pohl, *Von der "Judenpolitik" zum "Judenmord." Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements, 1939–1944* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich, 1996); Knut Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord: Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996); Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf, 1998); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, 1999); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Manfred Oldenburg, *Ideologie und militärisches Kalkül: Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion, 1942* (Cologne, 2004); Norbert Kunz, *Die Krim unter deutscher Herrschaft (1941–1944): Germanisierungstheorie und Besatzungsrealität* (Darmstadt, 2005); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in the Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, 2005); Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion, 1941–1944* (Munich, 2008); Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, 2009); Sven Jüngerkes, *Deutsche Besatzungsverwaltung in Lettland 1941–1945: Eine Kommunikations- und Kulturgeschichte nationalsozialistischer Organisationen* (Konstanz, 2010); Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York, 2011); Laurie R. Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis: Everyday Life in Occupied Russia* (Rochester, 2013). On the Italian policy in the occupied western Balkans, see Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge, Eng., 2006).

occupation policy, and local reactions to it, varied greatly from one territorial-administrative unit of a country to another. This was partly because of conditions on the ground and partly because of perceptions of cultural proximity or remoteness of a particular ethnic group from the German Volk. However, to some extent this was also a matter of sheer chance, since much depended on the personality of a local Nazi leader and the relative weight of that person within the Nazi hierarchy.

In what follows, I argue that Romanian policy was conceived according to the two predominant discourses of European modernity: ethnic nationalism as the “natural” paradigm of state-building and orientalism as the ideology of European rule over “backward” peoples. Ultimately, however, perceived “military necessity” of economic exploitation overwhelmed all other considerations. My understanding of nationalism follows the definition offered by Ernest Gellner, according to which nationalism postulates “culture” as the basic social bond and holds that the only “natural” social form is the one in which all members of the group belong to and are ruled over by persons of the same culture. In its extreme version, Gellner’s argument goes, nationalism requires that “*only* members of the appropriate culture . . . join the unit in question, and *all of them* . . . do so.”⁷ What Gellner calls “culture,” should be more appropriately called “ethnicity” in the case of wartime Romania, since official Romanian ideology of that era merged culture and “blood” or “biology” in a supposedly “organic” whole.⁸

It may appear as somewhat counterintuitive that I resort to the notion of “orientalism” to conceptualize Romanian policy. After all, Edward W. Said spoke of Orientalism as pertaining almost exclusively to western European—in particular British, French, and American—ways of understanding, discoursing, and ruling over the Middle (or Near) East, not any other “east.”⁹ Nevertheless, a number of first-rate recent studies have shown how western European and German views of eastern Europe were in many ways akin to Orientalism, as Said analyzed it.¹⁰ As Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius has cogently argued, Orientalism was just one of the ways to elaborate the supposedly “intrinsic opposition” between “the East” and “the West.” Just as Orientalist discourses presented “the Orient” as a realm of passion and indolence to be mastered by western rationalism, Germans tended to conceptualize Europe’s east, in particular the Slavs, as the “natural” sphere for the application of their *Ordnung* and *Kultur*.¹¹ Russian empire builders also widely employed Orientalist tropes

7. Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London, 1997), 3–4, Gellner’s italics.

8. I more fully developed my understanding of the evolution the Romanian official definition of the nation from one based more on citizenship to one based more on ethnicity in the 1930s–early 1940s in Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington, DC, 2010), part 1, 7–114.

9. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), esp. 16–19. Said defined Orientalism as “a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3).

10. See in particular Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994).

11. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford, 2009), 1–10.

while talking about their “mission in the East.”¹² Modern Romanian culture exhibited some of the fundamental assumptions of orientalist thinking, in particular in reference to Eastern Slavs.¹³

To some extent, orientalist and nationalist governmentalities were at loggerheads: while the former presupposed domination over the benighted “orientals,” the latter called for separation from others. However, orientalism as a discursive practice was largely an ideology of empire and colonialism. The practices of European colonialism, on the other hand, could be far from subtle, ranging from “indirect rule” that relied on local elites to the eviction and dispossession of native populations and even genocide.¹⁴ Systematic denigration of the worth of local cultures, a defining characteristic of orientalist discourse, coupled with increasingly influential racism, could serve as justification for the latter type of practices. Extreme versions of ethnic nationalist and orientalist imagining thus had similar practical-political implications as soon as a national state embarked on a policy of expansion into the territory of supposed “east.” This was the case with Nazi policy in occupied eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which was informed both by *völkisch* nationalism and by what Liulevicius called “the German myth of the East,” a particular type of orientalist thinking hardened by a strong dose of “scientific” racism.¹⁵ I contend that Romanian policy in occupied Transnistria was conceived within similar framework of assumptions and prejudices, although the weight, place, and role of each of them in this unstable mix was unique.

One major plank of Transnistrian wartime history is the Romanian authorities’ persecution of Jews and Roma.¹⁶ These tragedies constitute a topic of academic research in its own right that has an increasingly rich historiog-

12. One of the important recent books on Russian orientalism is David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, 2010).

13. This issue has only recently become the object of scholarly attention. Andrei Cușco discusses it with great sensitivity in his (for now) unpublished book manuscript “Between Nation and Empire: Russian and Romanian Competing Visions of Bessarabia in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century,” esp. chapters 3 and 5.

14. For a comparative analysis of different methods of colonial rule, see David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980* (New Haven, 2000), 277–99. On genocidal “excesses” during European colonialism, see Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 70–140.

15. A number of recent books emphasize these major themes in the Nazi occupation policy in eastern Europe. See Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*; Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York, 2008); Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford, 2010). Hannah Arendt was the first to insist on this connection in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).

16. In 1941, the Romanians deported around 150,000 Jews and 20,000 Roma into Transnistria, where they were interned with local Jews in ghettos and concentration camps. As a result of inhumane treatment, hunger, epidemics, and mass executions, between 105,000 and 120,000 deported Romanian Jews, 115,000 to 180,000 indigenous Jews, and approximately 10,000 Roma had perished by early spring 1944, when the Red Army liberated this area. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report* (Iași, 2005), 382.

raphy.¹⁷ This subject is outside the purview of this article, which concentrates on the relations between Romanian authorities and the majority Christian (or Gentile, if one adopts a Jewish perspective) population.

The Initial Aims of Romanian Occupation

The aims of the Romanians' occupation of Transnistria were first explained by Mihai Antonescu, vice-chair of the Council of Ministers and a distant relative and the most trusted lieutenant of the dictator (conducător) Ion Antonescu, in a meeting of the council on August 20, 1941.¹⁸ According to his declaration, Romania was not formally annexing the territory. Aside from using the territory as a base for pursuing the enemy, the Romanians intended to use it as a pawn in the peace negotiations at the end of the war. This, however, did not mean that the government ruled out the possibility of annexation. Mihai Antonescu connected this issue to the problem of northern Transylvania, which Hitler and Mussolini had transferred from Romania to Hungary in the so-called Second Vienna Award on August 30, 1940. Mihai Antonescu, who was also the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, explained that his major worry was that both Hungarians and their friends in Germany (whom he believed were many and influential) would interpret Romania's annexation of Transnistria as Bucharest receiving compensation for the permanent loss of northern Transylvania. In reality, he claimed, the return of northern Transylvania constituted an absolute priority for the Romanian government.¹⁹ As Mihai Antonescu would later state, as long as Transylvania remained in Hungarians' hands, he wanted to be free to pretend he was ready to renounce Transnistria in exchange for getting Transylvania back.²⁰

Having said this, Mihai Antonescu, paradoxically, proceeded to explain why annexing Transnistria constituted both a right and an obligation for

17. On Romanian persecution of Jews and Roma in Transnistria, see Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941–1942: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, vol. 1, *History and Document Summaries*, trans. Rachel Garfinkel and Karen Gold (Tel Aviv, 2003). Vols. 2 and 3 of this title contain primary documents. A summary of Ancel's argument is available in Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, ed. Leon Volovici and Miriam Caloianu, trans. Yaffah Murciano (Lincoln, 2011), 315–429. Armin Heinen offered a substantially different interpretation of anti-Jewish violence in Romania in *Rumänien, Der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt* (Munich, 2007), esp. 127–162. Ancel's reading of this tragic history can be designated as largely following an intentionalist paradigm while Heinen's is consistently functionalist/structuralist. The Romanians' persecution of Roma in Transnistria is little known. Although Viorel Achim's book on the history of Romanian Roma has a chapter on the deportation of part of them into Transnistria in 1942, it has virtually nothing on their fate there. See Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest, 2004), 170–79.

18. Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă and Maria Ignat, eds., *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 4 (Bucharest, 2000), 343. Mihai Antonescu presided over this meeting of the council of ministers as he presided over all others when Ion Antonescu was absent, as in this case.

19. On the centrality of the Transylvanian issue to the foreign policy of Ion Antonescu's government, see Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford, 2009).

20. Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 5:717–18.

Romania. For one, the existence in Transnistria of a “numerous [ethnic] Romanian population” gave the Romanian government the right to lay claim to this region “at the moment when the situation calls for it.”²¹ Furthermore, Transnistria had to belong to Romania for a still grander reason, namely to help “break the unity of the Slavic mass.” According to him, it was that same “Slavic unity” that had “threatened Europe’s history with a Slavic flood (*val*) so many times” and once again was threatening “all institutions and norms of civilization.” That is why, he continued, the war was not only between “nationalities and states” but also between races. The Axis powers’ task was to “reduce the power and biological potential [of the] Slavic world.”²² This implied not only the eventual annexation of Transnistria but also its ethnic cleansing with the aim of reducing the living space of “the Slavic masses” and thus their “biological potential.”

The dictator Ion Antonescu was less interested in diplomatic niceties. This is how he explained Romania’s long-term goals in Transnistria in the meeting of the Council of Ministers on February 26, 1942: “It is no secret that I am not disposed to let go anything I have already grasped by my hand. Transnistria will become a Romanian province, we will make it Romanian and will get all foreigners [non-ethnic Romanians] out of there. . . . We have to open space for Romanians because Romanians cannot support themselves. . . . I will take these people, will bring them into Transnistria, and there they will get land to till.”²³ Thus, from the very beginning, Romanians intended to annex Transnistria and to make it “truly Romanian” by repopulating it with ethnic Romanians.

Transnistria as the Bastion of Romanianism in the East

Despite Mihai Antonescu’s order to eschew clear indications of Romania’s intentions to annex Transnistria in public pronouncements, the tenor of the Romanian-controlled press in the region made it clear to everybody who wanted to know what Bucharest’s true aims were. Its pages were filled with articles that spoke of the authentic ethnic Romanian character of Moldovans (an ethnic minority who spoke a dialect of Romanian) in the region, the antiquity of their presence there, and, in general, the historic right of Romania over Transnistria.

For example, on May 10, 1942 (the national holiday of Romania), at a public meeting of the Romanian Scientific Institute of Transnistria in Tiraspol, Constantin C. Giurescu, a professor of history at the University of Bucharest, delivered a keynote address titled “The Frontiers of Romanian lands.” He began: “A frontier can be understood in two ways, as a political frontier or as an ethnic frontier. The frontier of our land extends as far as the Romanian language is heard.” He then went on to claim that the ancestors of ethnic Romanians, Gets and Dacians, were the most ancient population in the region. “What we see now is our return to the same places which our ploughmen

21. Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 4: 342–43.

22. *Ibid.*, 344–45.

23. Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 6:205.

and shepherds populated one thousand years ago.” From this it followed that Transnistria was a truly Romanian land and that one day it would be incorporated into the Romanian state.²⁴

Constantin C. Giurescu was a prominent member of the Romanian intellectual and political elite, a former government minister and the head of the recently created Institute of National History in Bucharest. Both his name and the occasion were such that nobody could have any doubt about the official character of his pronouncements. Editorials in the government-controlled press in Transnistria regularly aired such views. This is, for example, how the newspaper *Odesskaia gazeta*, a mouthpiece of the governor’s office (the Guvernământ), summarized messages that the planned exhibition “Transnistria” in Bucharest intended to convey to its visitors:

Contrasting the Slavic world and communist ideology, on the one hand, with vital interests of the Romanian people and European civilization, on the other, the exhibition will show [the] political and historical importance of Transnistria as the advanced position of Romanianism. . . . It will show the resilience of [the] Romanian village, especially the lives of Moldovans who inherited their traditions from [the] Gets and [the] Dacians themselves and whose life is based on faith, habits, and customs that have been preserved over centuries and are deeply rooted in the soul of the Romanian people.²⁵

The policy of the Romanianization of Transnistria had two major aspects. The first consisted of elevating the material well-being and social status of local Moldovans above those of their Slavic neighbors. Accordingly, the authorities distributed to Moldovans, but not to their Slavic neighbors, agricultural implements from collective farms (*kolkhozes*), significantly reduced their taxation burden, and systematically preferred Moldovan vendors whenever public procurements were made. Moldovan farmers were allowed to own twice as many animals as farmers of other ethnicities (except Germans) and were allotted a monthly allowance of 50 Reichskreditkassenscheine (RKKS, a quasi-currency Germany created for use in the occupied countries that was the only legal tender in Transnistria) “for the protection of [the] autochthonous Romanian element.” Ethnic Romanian applicants were admitted to Odessa University *hors concours* and were granted stipends and guaranteed places in student hostels, and a limited number of Moldovan youth were enrolled in Romanian universities.²⁶ Local Moldovans were promoted into administrative and managerial positions. One of two subprefects in every *județ*, or county, in Transnistria was ethnic Moldovan (all prefects were Romanian army officers). As a rule, Romanians appointed Transnistrian Moldovans as mayors of not only ethnic Moldovan but also mixed villages and towns and made them heads of local police units. Members of other nationalities were appointed in these positions only where ethnic Moldovans were not available.²⁷

24. *Transnistria*, May 28, 1942.

25. *Odesskaia gazeta*, February 12, 1942.

26. Derzhavnyi arkhiv Odes’koi oblasti (henceforth DAOO), Fond 2242, opys’ 1, sprava 692/1943, ark. 230–33, USHMM RG-31.004, reel 1 (Governor Gheorghe Alexianu’s report on the policy toward Transnistrian Moldovans, September 1943).

27. Arhiva Ministerului Apărării Naționale (henceforth AMAN), Fond Marele Cartier General, Inventar N 019269 din 1972, dosar 41, f. 397, USHMM RG-25.003M, reel 4; and

Another plank of the policy of making Transnistria permanently Romanian was preparing for cleansing the territory of ethnic non-Romanians and repopulating it with Moldovans from the Soviet territories east of the Dniester River.²⁸ As early as July 1941, Ion Antonescu instructed the director of the Central Statistics Institute, Dr. Sabin Manuilă, to conduct a census of ethnic Romanians living east of the Dniester. The Romanian statisticians and ethnographers who conducted the census in 1941–1942 reported the following data: 200,000 Moldovan residents in Transnistria (from among approximately 2,500,000 residents of the province) and about 120,000 farther east. These numbers were considerably smaller than they had anticipated. They also found that the level of what they called “national consciousness” was much lower than what they expected. Most Moldovans did not see themselves as much different from the local Slavic population and were not particularly interested in their own ethnicity.²⁹

In 1941–1943, many a Romanian government expert promoted the idea of a massive population exchange on Romania’s eastern borders. Various officials acting on their own initiative as well as specially-created, interministerial commissions developed several plans. They mostly focused on Bessarabia and Bukovina. Already cleansed of Jews in the summer and fall of 1941, these provinces had to be cleansed of the rest of their minorities (Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Russians, Gagauz) and repopulated with ethnic Romanians. There were disagreements, however, about who exactly was suited for the purposes of repopulation. The army wanted to reserve this right for war veterans, who had to be allotted bigger-than-usual plots of “freed” land. Others insisted that eastern Moldovans were the more obvious candidates. Ion Antonescu declared in favor of the army but ordered authorities to postpone land distribution until the end of the war, when the final number of veterans entitled to placement would become known. Ethnic Moldovans would be “transferred” into Transnistria, from which all ethnic “foreigners” (more than two million people) had to be “cleansed.”³⁰

Many experts and bureaucrats shared this vision. For example, Agricola Cardaş, a professor of agronomy, delivered a lecture he titled “Romanian Colonization” on December 11, 1941, at a meeting in the Bucharest Academy

report of Ananiev Gendarmerie Legion March 1942, Arhiva Națională a României (henceforth DANIC), Fond Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei (henceforth IGJ), dosar 18/1942, f. 55v., USHMM RG-25.010M, reel 13 (General Constantin Vasiliu, Inspector General of Gendarmerie, to Ion Antonescu, August 12, 1941, relating his instructions on the organization of the Service of Police, which included both gendarmerie and police, in Transnistria).

28. In February 1942, Ion Antonescu, as was demonstrated above, played with the idea of settling farmers from Romania in Transnistria, but almost immediately abandoned this vision and never returned to it.

29. For more about this census, including the methods employed to elicit the participation of ethnic Moldovans and the findings, see Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 314–18. Assessment of the number of citizens of the province comes from the activity report of the Directorate of Health of the Guvernământ for August 19, 1941–August 1, 1943, ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 519, vol. 1, f. 219.

30. Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 307–30. For Ion Antonescu’s ruling with respect to Transnistria, see Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 9:543–45.

of Sciences. The lecture was later published as a brochure that attracted the attention of Ion Antonescu himself, who in November 1942 forwarded his own copy of Cardaș's brochure, with extensive marginalia, to the group of officials entrusted with composing a population exchange plan, thus indicating his agreement with Cardaș's ideas. Cardaș assumed that the *Zeitgeist* demanded that European nations "tailor for themselves new frontiers within which to collect all [members of] their [ethnic] nations [*neam*, the same as *Volk*] and . . . to get rid all foreign infiltrators."³¹ He waxed lyrical about the achievements of Italian Fascists and German Nazis in this regard, whose methods he called "scientific," and insisted that Romanians should follow their example.³² In this brochure, Cardaș dwelled mostly on Bessarabia, but on February 16, 1942, he delivered another public lecture that the Academy of Sciences published under the title "A Page from the Transnistrian Economy."³³ In addition to descriptions of Transnistria's landscape, soil, and economic potential, it decried the devastations inflicted by Stalinist collectivization of agriculture. At the same time, Cardaș implied that collectivization somehow represented the regeneration of the traditional Russian village commune, or *mir*, in a new form that corresponded to the "mentality" of the local population. Thus, he continued, in order to make Transnistria "marvelous as in fairy tales," as it deserved to be, "equally marvelous and persistent energies were required." Ethnic Romanians were particularly well suited for this role: "Transnistria will be able to embrace all Romanians from the east: both those from the left bank of the Buh River, and those from beyond the Dnieper River as well as those from Crimea, from the Don River region and from the Caucasus. . . . Consequently, all foreign peoples who are newcomers [in Transnistria] will have to pass from there into those territories where their [ethnic] brothers live in compact masses."³⁴

While experts were talking, the generals acted. In November 1942, Minister of War General Cristea Pantazi came across the Romanian-speaking village of Moldovanskaia during his visit to the front in the northern Caucasus in November 1942 and ordered that they be transferred to Transnistria. The total number of these "refugees," as they were officially called, was 3,300. In addition, apparently at the initiative of other top brass, about 2,000 ethnic Romanians from the village of Dunaevka from the coast of the Azov Sea and still more from Crimea, about 8,000 altogether, were also ordered to be evacuated into Transnistria.³⁵ In February 1942, Ion Antonescu approved this initiative, albeit with some hesitation. He added that no more transfers of the

31. Agricola Cardaș, *Colonizare românească*. Academia de științe din România. Seria conferințelor de documentare: problemele războiului și știința (N.p., [1941]), 1.

32. *Ibid.*, 3.

33. Agricola Cardaș, "O pagină din economia Transnistriei," *Buletinul al Academiei de Știința din România* 10 (1942): 323–34.

34. *Ibid.*, 334.

35. Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Federal'noi sluzhby bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii (henceforth TSAFSBRF), edenitsa khraneniia H-18767, vol. 1, ff. 116–117, USHMM RG-06.025M, reel 43 (transcripts of Pantazi's interrogation in Moscow in June 1945). See also gendarmerie reports on the transfer in DANIC, Fond IGJ, 78/1943, ff. 30ff; and Anton Golopenția's deposition in Anton Golopenția, *Românii de la est de Bug* (Bucharest, 2006), 1:106–07, 114.

“distant populations” would be permitted without the advance approval of the government.³⁶

By an April 21, 1943 order of Gheorghe Alexianu, Governor of Transnistria, the evacuees had to be “colonized” in the villages along the Dniester River in Râbnița (Rybnytza) and Moghilău (Mohyliv) Județe in order to Romanianize them. Ukrainian residents of those villages had to be “evacuated” to Oceacov (Ochakiv) Județ in the southwestern corner of the province (that is, at its opposite end), where they were to be “placed” in the houses of local Ukrainian residents.³⁷ The villages where Moldovan refugees were to be “placed” were to be allotted additional resources so they could be transformed into showpiece (“model,” in official parlance) farms. The operation was exceedingly poorly planned and executed. Initially the governor ordered that refugees be “placed” in Juguștră Județ and then suddenly and without explanation changed his mind, ordering that they be “placed” in Moghilău Județ. Apparently hearing about this whole business for the first time just a couple of days before the “refugees” arrived, the prefect of Moghilău Județ asked Governor Alexianu to reconsider. The governor flatly refused, which brought the situation to a breaking point. The Moghilău prefect requested as many as 300 gendarmes for the purpose of “securing order both with [ethnic Ukrainian] evacuees and [Moldovan] refugees,” a completely unrealistic number, given the shortage of trained personnel at all levels. The governor turned this request down but relented a little, advising that refugees be “placed” without “evacuating” the owners of the houses in which they were to be sheltered.³⁸ It is not clear if this advice was followed, however, since it was issued after the operation was already well under way. In the meantime, on June 4, 1943, army intelligence (Section II of the General Staff) related to Alexianu that deportations of Ukrainians from Râbnița Județ had been “carried out hastily and produced great dissatisfaction with the evacuated Ukrainians because they were allowed to take with them only a minimum of their belongings. . . . fears are spreading among the locals that deportations will be extended to other regions.”

Governor Alexianu dismissed this information, noting that dissatisfaction of locals was inherent in any evacuation operations, which were in any case necessary if the resettlement of (ethnic) Romanians was to be carried out.³⁹ On June 8, 1943, the Secret Information Service (SSI) informed the government that ethnic Romanians evacuated from Râbnița Județ had arrived at their destination in Oceacov Județ in the most miserable state, “since they were dispossessed of their belongings by abusive officials.” “The first evacuations,” the SSI note said, “resulted in rumors that all locals will follow suit”; such rumors had even “delayed agricultural work.”⁴⁰ Despite Alexianu’s expressed

36. TSAFSBRF, edenitsa khraneniia, H-18767, vol. 1, ff. 116–17, USHMM RG-06.025M, reel 43 (transcripts of Pantazi’s interrogation in Moscow in June 1945).

37. For correspondence between the governor and the prefects of Râbnița and Moghilău *județe*, see DA00, Fond P-2242, Op. 1, Spr. 293. Here and elsewhere I indicate Romanian names for locales, I give Ukrainian names in parentheses.

38. DA00, Fond P-2242, Op. 1, Spr. 293, ark. 10–11, 19.

39. Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova (henceforth ANRM), Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 16, vol. 3, ff. 428–29, 440.

40. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 16, vol. 3, f. 488.

readiness to continue with further “transfers,” regardless of the tensions they generated, no further operations of this kind were ever carried out.

The Romanians’ *Mission Civilisatrice*

Cardaș’s view of Transnistrian Ukrainians as poor and downtrodden, not only because of the devastations of communism but also because of their own supposedly inadequate cultural proclivities as embodied in the decidedly un-European institution of the mir, followed an eerily familiar script of European colonialism. In Cardaș’s brochure *Romanian Colonization*, he profusely praised the civilizing accomplishments of Italian Fascists in Libya, which he had seen himself in 1939, when he visited this colony with other dignitaries from various western countries at the invitation of the Italian government. There, he saw a new highway 2,000 kilometers long, numerous wells and canals, bountiful irrigated fields, and “farms populated by vigorous, healthy, and prolific families with children who would secure the future of the Italian people.” All of this was there in place of “impoverished nomadic tribes with their herds of sheep.” In these achievements, Cardaș rhapsodized, the ancient “colonizing virtues of the Roman people found their new embodiment.”⁴¹ Romanians, the descendants of ancient Romans, Cardaș suggested, also possessed these virtues, although in a dormant state; they had to be reawakened and relearned from Italians and Germans so that Romanians could resettle massive numbers of their co-ethnics within their country’s new and “definitive” borders.⁴² Aurel Talașescu, an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains and another member of the Romanian delegation on that trip to Libya, left a more detailed and equally apologetic account of Italian rule there. In his 1941 brochure, which was filled with images of Roman ruins, straight-line canals and streets, cornucopian fields and orchards, male farmers and their numerous sons, and half-naked “indigenous” girls, Talașescu acknowledged that in order to carry out this best-ever of colonizations, the Italian fascist government had had to apply “somewhat radical measures.” This, however, he immediately hastened to explain, was completely justified, since Italians possessed the ability to “civilize and colonize,” which made miracles as those seen in Libya possible.⁴³ Libya was destined to serve as an example to follow for all countries that had the common sense to carry out their own “national colonization.”⁴⁴

Ion Antonescu showed a considerable affinity for this kind of thinking when he insisted, in mid-November 1941, that Transnistria had to serve as proof that Romania was able “to administer a bigger country.”⁴⁵ The *conducător* suffered from a pronounced inferiority complex, namely from a perception that other European states looked down upon his beloved Romania. He complained to his ministers that even Romania’s allies, the Germans, would sometimes tell him

41. Cardaș, *Colonizarea românească*, 2.

42. *Ibid.*, 3, 8.

43. Aurel Talașescu, *L’agriculture et la colonisation italienne en Libye* (n. p., 1941).

44. *Ibid.*, 39.

45. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 632, vol. 1, f. 68.

to his face that Romanians “were not capable of administering themselves.”⁴⁶ From this perspective, administering Transnistria in an orderly, efficient, and “civilized” manner, as other European powers were supposedly ruling over their Asian and African subjects, would help Romania raise its rank in the pecking order of European states. The declaration Ion Antonescu made in the Council of Ministers on April 17, 1942, when he returned from a several days’ long inspection in Transnistria, is revealing. He was very impressed by what Alexianu had shown him.

The results are more than exhilarating. . . . We have already proven that in Transnistria, as well as everywhere else, we [have] managed to create . . . an order, and an exemplary order at that. And they will have to compare, sooner or later, what they made in liberated or conquered territories [with what we achieved in Transnistria], and to acknowledged that we passed ahead of them. The proof has been made that a Romanian cannot be lower, that he cannot be just an Abyssinian of Europe but that he can also be a German or a French of Europe, if he follows an example.⁴⁷

Governor Alexianu was perfectly in tune with his boss. He, too, saw “order” and “civilization” as major planks of the Romanians’ mission in Transnistria. This is, for example, how he defined the essence of Romanian policy in the region in his order to the prefects on June 20, 1942: “We have to show everywhere that [the] civilization that we bring here is based, first and foremost, on discipline and order.”⁴⁸

Order and discipline and the use violence to enforce them feature widely in the internal correspondence between various bureaucratic, gendarmerie, police, and army in Transnistria.⁴⁹ “Civilization” was a buzzword in official propaganda in the province, too. In his first address to the Transnistrian population, Alexianu defined the Romanian mission in the region: “[The Bolsheviks] first destroyed your soul [meaning religion] . . . and then wanted to take your life [a reference to the scorched-earth policy the Soviets practiced in retreat], but an allied Christian state came just in time to save you and give you the possibility of enjoying light, civilization, and life based on the fear of God and ancestral faith.”⁵⁰ In his speech at Odessa University on August 26, 1942, Mihai Antonescu declared, “Our revenge against Russia is building European civilization on this land.”⁵¹ A little later, in a speech at the opening of the exhibition “Transnistria” in Bucharest, the vice-chair of the Council of Ministers stated, “This exhibition testifies that the war in the East is not only a military campaign, it is also a civilizing constructive action for the defense of basic norms of the continent and our Nation.”⁵²

46. Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 6:297.

47. *Ibid.*, 458.

48. DAOO, Fond 2359, Op. 1, Spr. 9, 1941, ark. 28–31, USHMM RG-31.004M, reel 18.

49. Following French model, gendarmerie in Romania was a militarized police force charged with keeping order in the countryside while police did the same in urban areas. Both were subordinated to the ministry of interior.

50. Quoted from *Molva*, December 25, 1942. *Molva* (Chat) was a Russian-language newspaper that was officially allowed in Odessa.

51. *Odessakaia gazeta*, September 4, 1942.

52. *Odessakaia gazeta*, October 21, 1942.

Another buzz phrase was “European culture.” For example, in its activity report for 1941–1943, the Division of Arts in the Department of Culture stated, “In this war, Axis Powers in general, and Romania in particular, defend [the] values of European culture, [a] moral style of life gained through the historical experience of continuous civilization.”⁵³ In the self-image that Romanian leaders, administrators, and government-controlled press outlets propagated, Romania was a bastion of European civilization on its easternmost endangered border, where it always fulfilled the role of a guardian against barbarians of all sorts. True to its historical mission, Romania now joined Nazi Germany as the main defender of European civilization and culture against “Yids” who had an “Asiatic” spirit that was embodied in Soviet communism, which was inimical to the very essence of “Europe.” Romanians gave “Russians” (understood in this context as all non-Jewish locals) a choice of either joining in the battle against “Yids’ communism” or facing tough consequences.⁵⁴

Romanians’ imagining that they were the carriers of a superior European culture had a paradoxical twist to it: they patronized Odessan institutions of high culture and education and the Russian-language intellectuals employed there. The fact was that, contrary to their claims that they were a “European” people, as opposed to Russians, whose Europeanness was questionable, Romanians were stunned by the distinctly “European” look of the metropolis of Odessa. By the time of Romanian occupation, Odessa’s days of glory were long gone, but even years of Soviet neglect and mismanagement had failed to erase all evidence of its erstwhile wealth and sophisticated cosmopolitan culture.⁵⁵ It flattered them to appear as patrons of a highbrow culture, which, they felt, belonged in the pan-European heritage.

Owing to the massive and enthusiastic support of provincial and municipal administrations, Odessa University and the city’s Opera Theater opened as early as December 7, 1941. As if demonstrating the Romanians’ liberality, the first performance was Peter Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, although the program began with German and Romanian anthems by a choir and orchestra from whom all Jews had been ruthlessly purged.⁵⁶ Through the end of the Romanian occupation, both institutions continued to stage old and new performances, Russian and West European alike, but increasingly also Romanian.⁵⁷ For Romanian and German dignitaries visiting Odessa, attending an opera or a ballet became a matter of course, and some of them noted

53. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 518, f. 194.

54. See “Osvobodhdennaia intelligentsia,” *Odesskaia gazeta*, December 13, 1941; Vasilii K. Dumitresku, “Novyi poriadok v Evrope,” *Odesskaia gazeta*, January 16, 1942; A. K-ku, “Vozrozhhdennaia Rumyniia i novaia Evropa,” *Odesskaia gazeta*, September 1, 1942; “Bol’shoi rumynskii prazdnik: ob otkrytii zhenskogo litseia v Odesse,” *Odesskaia gazeta*, October 29, 1940 (a summary of a speech by Princess Alexandra Contacuzino); and Troian Herseni, “Zavoievateli ili osvoboditeli,” *Odesskaia gazeta*, October 31, 1942.

55. On the social and cultural history of Odessa see Charles King, *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams* (New York, 2011).

56. See “Pervaia godovshchina plodotvornoi i tvorcheskoi raboty Odesskogo teatra Opery i Baleta,” *Molva*, December 10, 1942. page number?

57. *Ibid.*

with surprise the high quality of productions.⁵⁸ In the late fall of 1942, Hermann Binder, a German Lutheran pastor from Transylvania on a mission to Transnistria, attended a performance of Tchaikovskii's *Swan Lake* in Odessa. That day, he wrote in his diary: "Rightly a famous ballet, in which the whole plot, every feeling, is expressed through rhythmic movement. It is really wonderful, the best one can see and hear here, also because the incomprehensible Russian language does not bother you."⁵⁹

Repertory theaters, old and new, also attracted increasing audiences. Some of these companies were formed at the initiative of and with the participation of Russian political émigrés in Romania during the interwar period. The most well-known example is Vasilii Vronskii, a very successful Odessa-born producer and actor who lived and performed in the Russian drama theater in the interwar period in Chişinău, Bessarabia, and then Bucharest.⁶⁰ Under the Romanian occupation, Vronskii founded the Theater of Drama and Comedy and became the most popular and critically acclaimed producer and actor in Odessa and Transnistria.

Romanian army and administration identified "intellectuals," among whom they counted artists, university and college professors, school teachers, and even engineers and managers, as the most reliable and sympathetic social stratum. They attributed two causes to their exceptional loyalty: first, the material privileges accorded them, and second, their "critical discernment," which helped them appreciate the "profoundly humane ideas which animated [Romanians'] attitude towards them." Meanwhile, Romanian observers complained, "the masses" remained under the noxious influence of communist ideology.⁶¹ Those material privileges were indeed considerable, especially those granted to the higher-ranked "intellectuals," such as university professors and famed artists. In addition to substantially higher salaries and larger rations, both in comparison with the incomes of lower classes under Romanians and with their own incomes under the Soviets, "intellectuals" were granted luxurious living quarters, including the former villas of the Russian nobility that lined Odessa's gorgeous boulevards. Under the Soviets, these villas had served as homes of the *nomenklatura*, but under Romanian occupation, Romanian officials moved into the best of them while the rest were allocated to select local intellectuals.⁶² Even if intellectuals resented the need to publicly praise everything Romanian and pretend that the provincial Romanian artists Bucharest bureaucrats had sent to Transnistria could teach

58. On Ion and Mihai Antonescus' attending shows in Odessa Opera with their spouses, see *Molva*, December 10, 1942. On German Minister Pflaumer's attendance, see *Odessakaia gazeta*, February 20, 1942.

59. Hermann Binder, *Aufzeichnungen aus Transnistrien (September–December 1942)*, mit einem Vorwort von Hans Bergel (Munich, 1998), 91.

60. See interview with Vronskii in *Molva*, December 9, 1942.

61. See, for example, information General Staff's note on the "moods" of the population of Transnistria and Governor's Alexianu's comment on it ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 16, vol. 5, ff. 522–25, August–September 1943.

62. One finds echoes of the resentment the lower classes felt towards this new privileged group in the activity reports of some Soviet partisans. See DAOO, Fond 92, Op. 1, spr. 13, ark. 46.

them “European culture,” this was a relatively low price to pay for the benefits that collaboration with Romanians afforded them.⁶³

However, there was a limit to Romanian generosity toward intellectuals: it did not extend to Ukrainians. While Romanians showed respect toward the high culture of Odessa, with its overt “European” tone, they disparaged Ukrainian culture with its association with peasantry and poverty. For example, in December 1941, the gendarmerie inspector of Transnistria, Colonel Emil Broșteanu, attributed the majority Ukrainian rural population’s failure to understand the Romanians’ refusal to disband *kolkhozes* to their supposedly “low cultural level.”⁶⁴ In November 1943, Governor Alexianu referred to ethnic Ukrainians of Bessarabia, whom he proposed to “evacuate” to Transnistria in the expectation of their future transfer to the east, as “an irredentist, lazy, and recalcitrant population.”⁶⁵ In January 1944, an Odessa police prefect noted that “the level of morality and personal discipline among Ukrainians is extremely low, regardless of age and sex.”⁶⁶

What was worse, Romanians were afraid of what they called Ukrainian *irredenta*, by which they meant the Ukrainian nationalist movement that sought to create a Ukrainian national state. Romanians had a long history of confrontation with this movement, beginning with their battles with Ukrainian militia in Bukovina following World War I over control of the former Austrian province.⁶⁷ When Romanian authorities returned to northern Bukovina after the Soviet occupation in 1940–1941, they resumed the policy of repressing Ukrainian community members suspected (correctly) of separatist inclinations. Romanians arrested, harassed, and shot Ukrainian activists and expelled them into German-controlled Ukraine. They moderated the level of their repression only after repeated German interventions on the Ukrainians’ behalf.⁶⁸ Mihai Antonescu decreed that his government was “categorically against” Ukrainian “irredentism,” even if it was supported by the Germans.⁶⁹

It should thus come as no surprise that from the very beginning of the

63. Compare such praise of the Romanian opera *Wedding in the Carpathian Mountains*, staged in Odessa in *Molva*, December 10, 1942, and N. Borsaru’s disparaging reference on July 30, 1942, to the quality of theater troupes from Romania performing in Transnistria. Borsaru was the interim chief of the Guvernământ’s press. DAOO, Fond 2242, Op. 1, spr. 1644, ark. 162–63.

64. AMAN, Inventar N, S/6776, din 1976, dosar 410, USHMM RG-25.003M, reel 17, f. 215.

65. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 648, f. 116.

66. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 540, f. 13.

67. On Romanian suppression of Ukrainian nationalism in Bukovina, see Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Rumänisierung der Bukowina: Die Durchsetzung des nationalstaatlichen Anspruchs Grossrumäniens, 1918–1944* (München, 2001), 156–57, 180, 344.

68. Andrej Angrick, “Im Wechselspiel der Kräfte. Impressionen zur deutschen Einflussnahme bei der Volkstumspolitik in Czernowitz vor ‘Barbarossa’ und nach Beginn des Überfalls auf die Sowjetunion” in Alfred Gottwald, Norbert Kampe und Peter Klein, eds., *NS-Gewaltherrschaft: Beiträge zur historischen Forschung und juristischen Aufarbeitung* (Berlin, 2005), 318–58.

69. See his note in resolution of February 18, 1942, on a report by the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie on the problem of Ukrainian irredentism in DAOO, Fond 2377, Op. 2, spr. 2, ark. 33, USHMM RG-31.004M, reel 20.

Romanians' occupation of Transnistria, they closely monitored all signs of the Ukrainian nationalist movement and blocked attempts to spread its influence. There was no policy of cooperation with Ukrainian nationalists, as there was in the German zone of occupation. Instead, Romanians repressed any and all Ukrainian activity. Situation reports by Romanian gendarmerie, police, army, and Secret Service of Information (SSI) in 1941–1942 invariably identified proponents of Ukrainian nationalism as “intellectuals,” that is to say, teachers, medical personnel, students, priests, and artists in Ukrainian theaters. I will quote just one. In its note on the “mood” of the population of Odessa on September 26, 1942, an SSI official claimed that the Ukrainian irredentist movement was in the phase of “organizing” and added that its leaders “were waging a lively nationalist propaganda campaign among the Ukrainian population . . . Ukrainian intellectuals, the great majority of whom are ardent nationalists, try to promote trusted persons into important public functions in order to conduct activities of public bodies in the interests of their co-nationals and to impart to the province a Ukrainian character, in this way preparing the ground for their claims.”⁷⁰

Romanian officials were sure that “in the soul of every Ukrainian, a feeling of love of an independent Ukrainian state was preserved.”⁷¹ They sometimes felt that every Ukrainian hated them. As intelligence bureau of the Romanian Third Army who was deployed in Transnistria reported, “From the Ukrainians' attitude one detects [the] hatred that they feel toward us.”⁷² The Gendarmerie reported even such apparently innocuous manifestations as wearing Ukrainian “national” shirts (Romanians apparently meant *vyshevanky*) and singing songs in Ukrainian at wedding parties as noteworthy and disturbing developments.⁷³ Perhaps nothing better demonstrates the difference in the Romanians' attitude toward Ukrainian and Russian culture than their decision to close down the Ukrainian Theater in Odessa. A fruit of the Soviet *ukrainizatsiia* campaign, this theater was closed on June 1, 1942, on the pretext that its performances were solely commercial (read “lowbrow”), and thus deserved no support. A National [Romanian] Theater was created on its premises.⁷⁴

And yet the Romanians' view of Ukrainians was more complex. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that it was schizophrenic. While Romanians saw Ukrainians as ardent nationalists and thus dangerous enemies, they were also inclined to perceive them as docile, peaceful, and grateful to Romanians for liberating them from communist oppression. For example, in July 1941, the Romanian General Staff summarized the situation in Ukraine

70. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 8, ff. 318–20.

71. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 124/1942, f. 181, USHMM RG-25.010M, reel 17.

72. Arviva Ministerului Apărării Naționale (AMAN), Fond Armata a 3-a, Inventar N S/6776, din 1976, dosar 410, USHMM RG-25.003M, reel 17, f. 119.

73. On national costumes as “tacit propaganda” of irredentism, see DANIC, Fond Ministerul de Interne, IGJ, dosar 24/1942 II, vol. 1, f. 203, USHMM RG-25.002M, reel 5. On “national songs” as a sign of the same, see DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 18/1942, p. 56v, USHMM RG-25.010M, reel 13.

74. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 518, vol. 1, ff. 198–201.

in this way: “[The] Ukrainian population is very satisfied that at last it has been saved from communist terror. German and Romanian troops have been welcomed at the entry points to the localities with bread and salt. Crowds . . . have eyes full of tears. Although they live in great misery, they put at the troops’ disposal everything they have. This attitude has to persuade every Romanian soldier to have a dignified attitude [and to behave] as a liberator.”⁷⁵ In their report on the mood of the population in September 1942, Gendarmerie Legion in Berezovca Județ opined that “the Ukrainian population accepted with relief the expulsion of the Bolshevik authorities and establishment of Romanian rule because this population is refractory to communist doctrines and reforms and preserves beautiful Christian traditions.”⁷⁶

The belief that virtually no Ukrainians were communists and that the real danger was Ukrainian nationalism framed the Romanians’ understanding of the population’s mood in the region for more than a year. In the fall of 1942, however, this belief began to weaken, and by the end of 1943, it was shattered to the very core. Simply put, Romanians came to realize that communism had regained traction among the province’s Ukrainians and that “irredentism” had lost its appeal. In October 1943, Colonel Mihai Iliescu, head of Gendarmerie Inspectorate in Odessa, concluded that “in general, [the] Ukrainian irredentist current is weak, having been overwhelmed by a communist one.”⁷⁷

Romanians identified two main reasons for the precipitous decline in “irredentism” and the increased appeal of communism. The first was the changed course of the war and the increasingly real perspective that the Soviets would soon be back, which made the project of an independent Ukraine unrealizable in the foreseeable future. The second was their own ruthless exploitation of Transnistria’s population and plunder of the province’s economic assets.

Economic Exploitation

Even though in August 1941 Mihai Antonescu defined Romania’s goals in Transnistria as military and political, and contrary to the nationalistic and Orientalizing fantasies of Romanian experts and administrators, beginning in the fall of that year, the crudely material needs of the Romanian state moved to the top of the list of the occupiers’ priorities in Transnistria. As Mihai Antonescu casually put it on June 30, 1942 in a meeting of the Council of Ministers, “The purpose of the occupation of Transnistria has been defrayal of the expenses and difficulties of the war.”⁷⁸ This radical change of priorities was due to a longer duration of hostilities in the east than was originally expected, and a very bad harvest in 1941. In response to these challenges, the

75. AMAP, Fond Marele Cartier General, Inventar N 019269, din 1972, dosar 3827, f. 247, USHMM RG-25.003M, reel 4.

76. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 147/1942, f. 76, USHMM RG-25.10M, reel 20.

77. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 84/1943, f. 153, USHMM RG-25.010M reel 27. The author’s signature is poorly legible.

78. Ciucă and Ignat, *Stenogramele*, 7:442.

government cut back on its previously agreed-upon deliveries of food supplies to Germany and on rations to the country's citizens.⁷⁹

Fortunately for Romanian leaders, Transnistria offered a seemingly easy way out. First, the harvest in Transnistria was extraordinarily good exactly at the time when it was extraordinarily bad in Romania. Second, by following the German policy of preserving the kolkhozes, Romanians facilitated the purchase of the bulk of locally-produced foods for arbitrarily-imposed low prices. Third, the regime of military occupation gave authorities the freedom to enforce deliveries of agricultural goods by means of violence. Opaque rules of exchange between Transnistria and Romania and the government's arbitrariness in fixing prices on goods imported from Transnistria made it virtually impossible to assess Transnistria's contribution to the Romanian economy. Nevertheless, in a statement at the February 26, 1944, meeting of the Commission for the Investigation of the Activities of the Administration of Transnistria (*guvernământ*), no less a figure than Mihai Antonescu revealed that the food situation in the country in 1941–1942 had been so grave that the prefect of Braşov Judeţ would call him every day to warn him that his supply of flour would last only one day. Without the deliveries of food from Transnistria, the Romanians could not have coped, the vice-chair of the Council of Ministers concluded.⁸⁰

In 1942–1943, although the harvest in Romania was better, a labor shortage and the increasing needs of supplying the troops made deliveries from Transnistria indispensable for the continuous supply of foods and the war effort. Ion Antonescu himself admitted that without 53,000 railway cars of grain brought from Transnistria from September 1942 through June 1943, Romanians “would have had an enormous crisis.” “To this one should add,” he continued, “[that] goods which are kept in [public] warehouses and the revenue [to the budget] resulting from the difference in prices of Transnistrian products that are estimated . . . at 10 billion lei, as well as the fact that [specially created stores were maintained for the sale of Transnistrian products such as tobacco, alcohol, and sugar], kept the market saturated and contributed to lowering, price levels.”⁸¹

Enormous quantities of agricultural goods could be delivered from the war-ravaged province into Romania only by renegeing on the authorities' promises to allocate a higher share of their produce to farmers than the Soviets ever allowed. In the fall of 1941, when the harvesting works began late because of the military actions and uncertainties of war, Romanian authorities promised to divide crops into two equal parts, one for the farmers and one that they

79. Baum, *Variante des Terrors*, 264–65; Sebastian Balta, *Rumänien und die Großmächte in der Ära Antonescu (1940–1944)* (Stuttgart, 2005), 224–25. According to Mihai Antonescu's data, bread rations in Romania in September 1942 were lower than in Germany by 20 grams per person per day. In 1941, they were 700 grams per person per day, but by September 1942, they had decreased to 250 grams daily. See the German transcript of Antonescu's conversation with Hitler on September 26, 1942, in *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945* (ADAP), Serie E, Band 3, ([S.l.], 1974), 541. Please check this to make sure I have it correct.

80. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 58, ff. 213–16.

81. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 52, ff. 106–107.

would purchase at fixed prices. However, as soon as the crops were harvested, the authorities ordered that public warehouses be locked and the distribution of goods stopped. Then, the lion's share of the crops was shipped to Romania, to the outrage of locals. In the spring of 1942, authorities renewed their promises, then they reneged on them again in the fall of the same year. By the end of 1942, their credibility had all but vanished. For example, the commander of the Ananiev Județ Legion described the situation in the report for September 15–October 15, 1942 in the following way:

Many locals have nothing to eat. They worked [because] they were promised a share in the harvest. And now, they see that everything has been harvested and stored in *kolkhoz* warehouses and that [the authorities] issued an order that nothing be given to the population. They treat this measure as dispossessing them of what belongs to them. They say that they have absolutely no incentive [to work] and believe that the work they do is the same as the [forced] labor of a prisoner.⁸²

According to the gendarmerie, a political surveillance agency in Tiraspol, the local population received 30 percent of the harvested crops, but a member of the Berezovca Județ gendarmerie legion reported that locals received only 10 percent.⁸³

Predictably, under such conditions, violent enforcement was the only means left to the authorities to extract the resources they needed. Sometime in 1942, the Romanians introduced a new position of “agrarian gendarmes,” who became notorious for their violent methods of “organizing” agricultural work. For example, in June 1943, a member of the SSI related that one of the reasons for the unsatisfactory situation at the state farm called Mihai Antonescu was that “agrarian gendarmes solve all issues by resorting to beating.”⁸⁴ Not only agrarian gendarmes used beating as a primary method of disciplining the local population; many petty officials also used this method, with impunity and often in public, for enforcing compliance. Romanian geographer Simion Mehedinți, who visited Transnistria in the summer of 1942, was so struck by the widespread use of violence against the “autochthonous population” that he wrote a memorandum to the government protesting this practice. He cited concrete examples, among which was a *pretor* beating a woman with a baby in the presence of a priest and neighbors in the village of Tarnauca in the Tiraspol *raion*.⁸⁵ There is no indication that Mehedinți's protest had any effect.

Besides being deprived of the bulk of their harvest, farmers also suffered from steadily increasing taxes and fees in kind that were extracted as contributions for the war effort. Farmers had to surrender significant quantities of meat, eggs, milk, wool, hides, feathers, hats, mittens, socks, felt boots

82. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 125/1942, f. 168, USHMM RG-25.10M, reel 17.

83. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 125/1942, f. 200, USHMM RG-25.10M, reel 17, and dosar 147/1942 f. 78, USHMM RG-25.10M, reel 20.

84. DANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 16, vol. 3, f. 474.

85. A *pretor* was the head administrator of a *raion*, or district. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 16, vol. 1, f. 43–46, a summary of Mehedinți's paper prepared by clerks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

(*valenki*), and other products to the Romanian state. Restrictions on their right to dispose of their cattle by selling it on the market or slaughtering it for household consumption also gradually became more severe.⁸⁶ However, what ultimately tipped the balance against the Romanians was Operation 1111, which amounted to the transfer of virtually all of the region's productive assets to Romania.

Operation 1111, which officially began in the fall of 1943, had antecedents from the very first days of Romanian occupation. In the initial phase, the plunder of resources was carried out under the pretext that they constituted "trophies." An army commission under the command of Colonel Georghe Cassian defined the term "trophy" so broadly that it permitted Romanian officials to confiscate anything they found in Transnistria. Accordingly, by June 1942 Romanians had shipped from the province "trophies" such as "sanitary material—98.5 railcars; didactic material (books, museum objects, paper)—30 railcars; army commissariat materials (beds, pillows, etc.)—164 railcars; pianos—20 railcars; mobile chairs, tables—11 railcars; machines, technical and automobile materials—22 railcars; sets of big beds—4 railcars," and so forth. This was preliminary and apparently incomplete data. It is, nevertheless, the best available because Romanians were loath to keep too detailed a registry of their "trophies."⁸⁷ "Medical" and "sanitary" materials were shipped from Transnistria at the same time when tens of thousands of Jews were dying of typhus in ghettos and concentration camps in Transnistria and while the local population was suffering from a health care system breakdown.

In September 1942, Minister of Munitions and Production for War Gheorgh Dobre presented a memorandum to Mihai Antonescu in which he suggested that since Odessa was predestined to lose a good part of its economic potential after the war, it was in the interest of both Odessa and Romania to evacuate a substantial share of its factories and workshops into Romania without delay.⁸⁸ It is from that moment when Romanian leaders began to prepare for Operation 1111. While it is impossible to establish the exact amount of the plunder, since Mihai Antonescu ordered the relevant documentation destroyed in February 1944, the following partial list of factories slated for evacuation from Odessa by a commission specially created in April 1943 gives some sense of the nature and scope of the operation: the "Transporter" factory of mechanical equipment; a workshop of craftsmen school # 1; a workshop for repairing surgical tools; a knitwear factory; a set of spinners from three factories; and installations from a cloth factory.⁸⁹ As Ion Antonescu decreed on November

86. See regulations for Transnistria issued by the *Gvernământ* in DA00, Fond 22442, Op. 1, spr. 1, *passim*.

87. Weekly unsigned report, probably of the General Staff second section, June 21, 1941, in ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 18, vol. 1, ff. 31–34.

88. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 19, f. 352–359.

89. See the list in ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 837, ff. 14–16. Mihai Antonescu issued the order to destroy documents related to the "evacuation" of goods from Transnistria because, as he put it, Russians and Hungarians could use them "to discredit Romania after the end of hostilities" at the Commission of Inquiry, which met to inquire into the activities of the Transnistrian *gvernământ* on February 26, 1944. See ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 58, ff. 213–239.

17, 1943, “Future necessities oblige us to bring everything from Transnistria, to stock it, to sell it, and especially to make reserves.”⁹⁰

For Alexianu, “everything” was literal: the products of all factories and workshops, all harvested crops in their entirety, all cattle and agricultural equipment, all seeds, all railway equipment, and all raw materials. Government ministers, the prefects of Romanian *județe*, and the mayors of the cities where these materials were sent soon began to complain. They had insufficient storage facilities and not enough personnel to register, stock, and guard the massive deliveries of Transnistrian goods, and they were afraid that they would be held responsible when the goods inevitably deteriorated. The avalanche of complaints about the unsolicited deliveries from Transnistria reached such a level that Ion Antonescu, whose personal protection Alexianu had enjoyed for so long, finally turned against his protégé. On January 3, 1944, the *conducător* placed a note in a resolution to a summary of reports about the shipments from Transnistria where he stated that these deliveries not only overwhelmed state and local administrators but also created the danger of epizootics due to the poor state in which cattle arrived from Transnistria: “In this way, all fortune collected in Transnistria . . . is squandered. Mr. Alexianu angers me at each step.”⁹¹ On January 29, 1944, Alexianu was replaced by General Gheorghe Potopeanu, under whom the plunder of resources continued until the very end of the Romanian occupation on March 16, 1944.⁹²

The spectacle of purported “liberators” shipping all of Transnistria’s assets out of the territory, leaving behind a devastated province, made a profound impression on the local population, whose attitude toward Romanians changed radically. From then on, instead of supporting or acquiescing to their rule, they wanted out, and the sooner the better. Romanian agencies charged with surveillance of the locals were under no illusion. An information bulletin of the Gendarmerie Inspectorate in Transnistria for November 1943 contained the following assessment of the mood of the Ukrainian population:

They look with hostility at the evacuation of grains, cattle, agricultural implements, industrial installations. . . . The population is composed of two parts. One part awaits gladly and with impatience the return of the Bolsheviks. A lot of others, who were peaceful [under our rule] and even served our regime, now try to commit acts that would prove their devotion to the communist regime in order to protect themselves against future [Soviet] repressions.⁹³

In December 1943, the head of the same inspectorate opined that the majority of the local population was on the side of the Soviets.⁹⁴ On January 21, 1944, commander of the Romanian Third Army reported that in northwest Transnistria, “the majority of the population is hostile towards [the] Romanian

90. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 52, f. 113.

91. ANRM, Fond 706, Inventar 1, dosar 896, f. 72.

92. For Ion Antonescu’s order to replace Alexianu with Potopeanu, see Arhiva Serviciului Român de Informații (ASRI), dosar 40013, vol. 6, f. 440, USHMM RG-25.004M, reel 29. See Potopeanu’s March 15, 1944, order to withdraw from the region and stop Operation 1111 in ASRI, dosar 40013, vol. 6, p. 339, USHMM Rg-25.004M, reel 30.

93. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 84/1943, f. 233, USHMM RG-25.010M, reel 27.

94. DANIC, Fond IGJ, dosar 84/1943, f. 432, USHMM RG-25.010M, reel 27F.

administration and allied armies. It has been proven that they act in the interests of the partisans, supply them with information and help them to carry out their attacks.”⁹⁵ The popularity of partisans grew partly because they were engaging in acts of sabotage to stop Romanian evacuations of assets. Partisans called on locals to do the same, and locals were happy to oblige.⁹⁶ The orgy of destruction of the region’s produce and productive assets slated for “evacuation” to Romania by partisans and farmers might have reminded Transnistrian residents of the mass slaughter of animals during collectivization, only now they were acting in concert with communists, not against them.

This article argues that the goals of the Romanian occupation of Transnistria were from the very beginning unrealistically high and contradictory. Initially euphoric in their expectations of quick victory, Romanian leaders preferred to think of the region as a potentially new and “model” province of an enlarged Romania. In order to secure their rule over Transnistria, they intended to radically change its demographics. The basic assumption of Romanian leaders was that after the annexation, an enlarged Romania would remain a *national* state and annexation would not interfere with their aim of creating an ethnically pure country.

Unfortunately for Romanian leaders, changing the ethnic composition of Transnistria proved more difficult than they imagined. The number of ethnic Romanians (Moldovans) in the east turned out to have been much lower than they anticipated. The transfer and resettlement of tens of thousands of people threatened to overwhelm the logistical capabilities of the state and to antagonize the local population of the province into open rebellion. Despite the individual initiatives of army generals, this Romanian endeavor proved to be of little consequence.

Once the authorities realized that for some time to come they would have to rule over a province whose population was mostly ethnically alien, Orientalizing tropes came to the surface in their propaganda and bureaucratic correspondence. Romanians fancied themselves as bearers of higher, “European” culture and they perceived the majority demographic group—Ukrainian farmers—as backward and lazy simpletons who needed stern paternalistic rule. Simultaneously and paradoxically, they believed that Ukrainians were nationalistically minded and potentially dangerous. Unlike Germans, Romanians did not necessarily see Ukrainians as racially inferior, but they did believe that Ukrainian culture was primitive and parochial and ruthlessly suppressed it. At the same time, highbrow Odessan culture elicited

95. AMAN, Fond Armata a 3-a, Inventar N S/6776, din 1976, dosar 2208, f. 205–205v, USHMM RG-25.003M, reel 20.

96. On the popularity of partisans’ calls to sabotage the Romanian campaign of evacuation of goods and assets from Transnistria and the consequent growth of their ranks see, for example, activity report of the Shargorodskii *raion* underground cell, undated, probably 1944 or 1945, Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromad’skyh ob’iednan’ Ukraïny (TSDAGOU), F. 1 Op. 22, spr. 156, ark. 185; and the report of Iosif Ivanovich Vykhodtsev on the partisan activity in Peschanskii and Savranskii *raion* of Odessakia oblast, undated, probably 1944 or 1945, in *ibid.*, spr. 473, ark. 86–87. (Names of raions are transliterated from their Russian forms used in the archival files).

avored respect. Romanians saw it as “European,” even if based on the Russian language, and they believed that patronizing it would strengthen their social and political capital on the continent. For that reason they bestowed material privileges on the intelligentsia in Odessa.

If privileging the Odessa intelligentsia diverged from the typical orientalist treatment of the local population, it was entirely consistent with practices of European colonial rule, with its tendency to construct ethnic and group hierarchies, pitting some communities against others. The same is true about the Romanian policy of privileging local Moldovans by promoting them to positions of authority, granting them better access to education, and relying on them as the most trustworthy body of collaborators.

In one crucial respect, the trajectory of Romanian rule in Transnistria closely followed developments in the German zones of occupation. As did Germans, Romanian leaders decided quite early in the war that military necessity required putting the extraction of as many resources from the region as possible above all other considerations. The increasingly brutal plunder that followed from this strategic choice not only made a mockery of the idea of transforming Transnistria into a “model” province but also, and more importantly, irrevocably damaged the relationship between the occupiers and the occupied. In just two years, most of the population was transformed from the Romanians’ obedient subjects who were thankful for their liberation from communist oppression into hateful enemies of their occupiers.

Although there is some truth in the received wisdom that Romanian occupation was less brutal than German occupation, one should bear in mind that this is a very low standard indeed. The Romanians managed to alienate local residents in a very short period of time. Nor should one lose sight of the fact that ultimately it was the Allies’ victory in the war that prevented Romanians from annexing Transnistria, “cleansing” it of ethnic foreigners, and repopulating it with their purported ethnic brothers. Had the war ended otherwise, neither economic nor human costs would likely have stopped a regime steeped in Romania’s own tradition of ethnic nationalism and inspired by Nazi and Fascist imperialism from carrying out this brutal vision.