Emocje jako świadectwo

Aspekt psychologiczny składania przez ocalałych relacji przed komisją historyczną tuż po wojnie

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Emotions as Testimony: Documenting the Psychological Aspects of Witnessing in an Early Survivor Historical Commission

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Summary

In 1945–1946, nine Polish former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps (one Jewish and eight non-Jewish) living in Sweden as refugees were employed to record other Jewish and non-Jewish Poles' experiences of persecution for history and justice. Although none of these individuals were psychologists, they believed recording the psychological aspects of witnessing was essential to their documentation work. The written testimonies they recorded, which are preserved in the archive of the Polish Research Institute in Lund, Sweden (PIZ), thus include revealing and often caring comments about the witnesses' emotions and emotional responses during the interviews. I argue that this method made emotions integral to the testimonies and validated emotions as testimony. The significance of this argument is magnified when non-Jewish Poles interviewed Jewish Poles and vice versa since the comments reveal how they were relating to one another on a personal and sensitive level. This article builds on the author's previous and ongoing analyses of these witness testimonies through close readings of the comments that consider the psychological aspects of witnessing. By contextualizing these comments and the testimonies they refer to alongside theories on the value of emotions for knowledge, the author explores what knowledge the method of recording witness testimonies contributed to creating in the early postwar period and what knowledge it creates now.

Keywords: The Polish Research Institute in Lund, Sweden, Polish political prisoners, Holocaust survivors, early survivor testimonies, emotions, knowledge, survivor historical commissions, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Introduction

In May 1946, Luba Melchior and Izrael Wajnberg – both Jewish survivors of the Radom ghetto – sat across from each other at a refugee camp in Trelleborg, Sweden, so that Melchior could document Wajnberg's experiences of Nazi persecution for history and justice. There is no record of how long the interview lasted, but Wajnberg's testimony, handwritten by Melchior in Polish, spread over seven pages and covered his forced involvement as part of the *Ordnungsdienst* (Jewish police service) in two expulsion operations in Radom's so-called small ghetto. The testimony document does not end with Wajnberg's account, however. Over a further two pages, Melchior fulfills part of her responsibility as an interviewer by writing her comments about the credibility of the witness and the accuracy of his testimony. Considering that she was also in the Radom ghetto, she was well-qualified to do the latter, and this is indeed what most of her comments pertain to.[1] Consequently, the full ten-page testimony document is valuable as a multifaceted account of particular episodes that took place in the Radom ghetto during the Holocaust.

With such important source material to examine, a researcher would be forgiven for overlooking the three sentences immediately following Wajnberg's compelling account which begin Melchior's incisive comments:

> The witness provides descriptions of incidents that he experienced at first hand [*sic*]. The moment he saw his father's corpse gives him great pain to recall. His testimony is absolutely trustworthy.[2]

Although these sentences ostensibly say very little about what happened in the Radom ghetto, they provide important insight into how an early initiative to document the Nazi atrocities recorded not only those atrocities but also the emotions of those who experienced and witnessed them. Moreover, as this article argues, by making the witnesses' emotions an integral part of the testimonies, comments like these highlight the devastating effects of the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

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[1] Lund University Library (LUB), The Polish Research Institute in Lund (PIZ) Archive, Record of Witness Testimony 324, dated 26 May 1946. The original pre-printed cover page used by PIZ for the witness testimonies is titled *Protokół przesłuchania świadka*. The official English translation of the document title by the LUB is "Record of Witness Testimony."

[2] LUB, PIZ Record of Witness Testimony 324, dated 26 May 1946, p. 9, official LUB translation from Polish into English.

The witness testimonies examined for this article were collected in the early postwar period by a group known today as The Polish Research Institute in Lund, Sweden (hereafter, PIZ),[3] a transnational initiative that documented the experiences of Jewish and non-Jewish Poles who had been persecuted by the Nazis, primarily in concentration and labor camps, for history and justice, including by recording their witness testimonies in 1945 and 1946. It was one of the few such initiatives undertaken by victims of the Nazis who were refugees in a country not directly involved in the Second World War. It was also one of the few historical commissions operated by victims of Nazi persecution during the early postwar period that involved and documented the persecution experienced by both Jewish and non-Jewish Poles.[4] Nine Polish former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, one Jewish and eight non-Jewish, living in Sweden as repatriates – temporary refugees expected to leave within six months or as soon as they were able – were employed with PIZ through a Swedish government program to provide work to educated foreigners. Their job was to interview other Jewish and non-Jewish Poles in Sweden and record their experiences of persecution in written witness testimonies. Ultimately, they collected hundreds of witness testimonies, most handwritten in Polish.[5] Today, the collection includes 512 testimonies cataloged as 'complete' and another 76 cataloged as 'incomplete.'[6] The originals of all the complete testimonies have been digitized and are

[3] "The Polish Research Institute in Lund (PIZ)" is the English usage utilized by Lund University Library, which holds the material in its archives, and thus the usage chosen for this article. Throughout its history, the institute was known by several names, including, in Polish, *Polski Instytut Źródłowy* (PIŹ).

[4] In the early postwar period, the preponderance of survivor historical commissions was in countries formerly under Nazi control where many survivors were collected, often in displaced persons camps, such as Poland, Germany, and France. See Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. To the best of my knowledge, among the early survivor historical commissions, few interviewed victim-witnesses across the Jewish/non-Jewish divide. See Victoria Van Orden Martínez, "Witnessing against a divide? An analysis of early Holocaust testimonies constructed in interviews between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles," *Holocaust Studies* 28/4, pp. 483–505.

[5] e.g., Izabela A. Dahl, "Witnessing the Holocaust: Jewish Experiences and the Collection of the Polish Source Institute in Lund," Chapter 3 in *Early Holocaust Memory in Sweden: Archives, Testimonies and Reflections*, eds. Johannes Heuman and Pontus Rudberg, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 67–91; Eugeniusz Stanisław Kruszewski, *Polski Instytut Źródłowy w Lund (1939-1972): Zarys historii i dorobek,* Londyn & Kopenhaga: Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie, Instytut Polsko-Skandynawski, 2001; Victoria Van Orden Martínez, *Afterlives: Jewish and Non-Jewish Polish Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Sweden Documenting Nazi Atrocities, 1945–1946*, Ph.D. diss., Linköping University, 2023; Paul Rudny, "Zygmunt Lakocinski och polska källinstitutets arkiv i Lund 1939–87," in *Skandinavien och Polen. Möten, relationer och ömsesidig påverkan,* ed. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Lund: Lund University Press, 2007, pp. 177–201.

[6] The reasons for the distinction are not explicitly given; however, it may have been only partly due to testimonies being unfinished as such. There is evidence, for instance, that the 'incomplete' testimonies were also those that were deemed "works of purely literary nature." See LUB, PIZ 44:6 b, Minutes from 16 February 1946 PIZ meeting, recorded in Polish and Swedish, p. 3. See also, Martínez, *Afterlives*, pp. 184–188.

available online, and most of these have been transcribed (in Polish) and translated into English, with these versions available online alongside the originals.[7]

As seen above, part of the formal methodology involved the PIZ interviewers writing comments about the witnesses they interviewed and the credibility of their statements. This directive is commonly manifested in brief assessments of the individual being interviewed – his or her mental state, memory, credibility, etc. – or longer assessments of her or his statements, including correcting inaccuracies and supplying additional context. Nonetheless, some of the comments also reveal a familiarity and understanding of the witness giving the testimony which demonstrates that the PIZ workgroup members took the time to listen, comprehend, and validate more than just the facts of the testimony. As this article will show, although none of the PIZ interviewers were psychologists, they believed that recording the psychological aspects of witnessing was an essential part of their documentation work. The written testimonies they recorded include revealing and often caring comments about the witnesses' emotions and emotional responses during the interviews. Moreover, when non-Jewish Poles interviewed Jewish Poles and vice versa, the comments indicate that they generally related to one another with empathy and understanding.[8]

This article builds on the author's previous and ongoing analyses of the PIZ witness testimonies through close readings of the comments that consider the psychological aspects of witnessing. By contextualizing the comments made to the complete testimonies and the accounts they refer to alongside theories on the value of emotions for knowledge,[9] the article explores what knowledge the method of recording witness testimonies contributed to creating in the early postwar period and what knowledge it creates now. A key argument is that by making emotions an integral part of the testimonies, the interviewers validated emotions – not just facts – as testimony and gave attention to what is now understood as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Psychological Aspects of Witnessing

The importance of the psychological aspects of witnessing is a recurring theme in the official minutes of the PIZ meetings during the period it was funded by the Swedish government, from October 1945 to November 1946. The witness testimonies were conceived of as useful

[7] The English translations are contemporary. In this article, the version cited is noted. LUB, "Witnessing Genocide" portal, https://www.ub.lu.se/hitta/digitala-samlingar/witnessing-genocide/witness-testimonies, last accessed 6 January 2024.
[8] Martínez, *Afterlives*; Victoria Van Orden Martínez, "Survivor-Refugee Humanitarianism: A New Perspective of Second World War Humanitarianism in Sweden," *Women and humanitarian aid - a historicizing perspective Conference*, Örebro University, 2021; Martínez, "Witnessing against a divide?".
[9] Laura Candiotto, ed. *The Value of Emotions for Knowledge*, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

psychological material at least as early as November 1945, as demonstrated by the minutes of the institute's first formal meeting, which was about the methodology to be used when conducting the interviews and recording the testimonies.[10] This document indicates that the PIZ interviewers should observe and record the psychological aspects of the interview process. The importance of preserving the witnesses' "language and manner of expression" in relating their testimonies is emphasized. In addition, the testimonies were to be recorded as much as possible in the witness's own words without the interviewer's interference. A set of "orientation questions" was available to the interviewers but were to be used only after the witness had given his or her testimony to help remind them of certain facts. The minutes noted, "In this way, without the witnesses being affected in any way, their immediate and unadulterated impressions and observations are achieved, which also leaves valuable material for psychological examinations."[11]

As the work of collecting the testimonies progressed, these aspects of the work were reiterated and expanded. In a PIZ workgroup meeting held on February 16, 1946, for example, it was noted that: "Interesting psychological observations made through contact with the witness during the protocol interview, as well as motivations for the refusal to return to the memories from the concentration camps, constitute a rich material for psychologists."[12] In August 1946, the previous discussions were continued and expanded on. The minutes from that meeting read in part:

> Taking into account that the testimony is to be both historical and psychological material, the opinion of the assistant [the PIZ interviewer] must give a picture of the internal state of the witness, i.e., whether the witness experiences the memories calmly, whether he testifies factually, whether he is nervous or fantasizing, etc. Very important are also observations about the nature of the witness, temperament, education, etc.[13]

Also reflected in the meeting minutes is how the PIZ workgroup members perceived of themselves as "companions of misery" who were capable of understanding and contextualizing the material in a way that individuals who had not suffered under the Nazis could not. They felt that, as interviewers who had experienced similar suffering, the witnesses were more likely to

[10] LUB, PIZ 44:6 a, Minutes from 22 November 1945 PIZ meeting, in Polish and Swedish.
[11] LUB, PIZ 44:6 a, p. 1. Translated by author. Unless noted otherwise, translations are by author.
[12] LUB, PIZ 44:6 b, p. 2–3.
[13] LUB, PIZ 44:6 d, p. 3. Minutes from 2 August 1946 PIZ meeting, in Polish and Swedish.

risk revealing their deepest emotions and feelings to them without fear of being misunderstood.[14] Shared suffering, they believed, also gave them the ability to ask the right questions and make sense of the answers. As Luba Melchior later wrote in a letter to non-Jewish PIZ employee Krystyna Karier: "We suffered and can understand and orient the material."[15] Significantly, they construed that a "danger" of documentation initiatives led by individuals with no firsthand experience of the Nazi atrocities was that the testimonies would be incomplete or inaccurate because the witnesses would fear being misunderstood.[16]

Not all the 512 complete testimonies in the PIZ collection include comments made by the interviewer and/or other institute members. When comments are made to the testimony documents, they are often concise statements that validate the accuracy of the facts and/or the trustworthiness of the witness. Further narrowing the testimonies examined for this analysis is that, despite the oft-repeated importance of recording the psychological aspects of the interviews, only a relatively small proportion of testimonies – perhaps no more than one-fifth – reflect this practice. The reasons for this included limited time during visits to refugee camps and other sites spread around southern Sweden and witnesses becoming emotionally exhausted and unable to continue the interviews.[17] This analysis has involved identifying the testimonies among the 512 complete witness testimonies in the PIZ collection that include comments made by the PIZ interviewer and/or other institute members and then conducting close readings of those with comments that mention the emotional or psychological state of the witness (roughly 80 testimonies). The official English translations of the testimonies have been consulted first, as the author is a native English speaker. However, the transcribed versions of the original testimonies have also been consulted in certain cases to examine the original terminology used with support and advice from a native Polish speaker.[18]

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[14] e.g., LUB, PIZ 44:6 g, p.1. Minutes (in Polish) from 2 October 1946 PIZ meeting. The term translated here to "companions of misery" was written in the memorandum in Polish as „*współtowarzyszem niedoli*."

[15] LUB, PIZ 49, Letter (in Polish) written by Luba Melchior to Krystyna Karier, dated 27 February 1948. Translated by Roman Wroblewski.

[16] e.g., LUB, PIZ 44:6 g, p.1. For a further discussion, see Martínez, "Afterlives," 153-175. Similar sentiments were expressed by survivors involved in other commissions. See, e.g., Boaz Cohen, "Rachel Auerbach, Yad Vashem, and Israeli Holocaust Memory." Translated by Erica Nadelhaft. In *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Volume 20: Making Holocaust Memory*, edited by Gabriel N. Finder, Natalia Aleksiun and Antony Polonsky. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, 201; Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, "Właściwym autorem tej książki jest..." Introduction in *Żyd z Klimontowa opowiada...* edited by Lejb Zylberberg and Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im Emanuela Ringelbluma. Wydanie Krytyczne Prac Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej. Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2021, 18; Victoria Van Orden Martínez and Christine Schmidt, "Survivor-Interviewers as Companions of Misery: A Comparative View from Post-war Sweden and England." Presented at *Survivors' Toil: The First Decade of Documenting and Studying the Holocaust*, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), Vienna, Austria, November 2, 2022.

[17] e.g., LUB, PIZ 44:6 f, p.1, Minutes (in Polish) of 26 September 1946 PIZ meeting.

[18] My thanks to Dr. Sylwia Szymańska-Smolkin for her assistance and advice.

Documenting the Witnesses' Emotions

In the witness testimonies analyzed for this study, the comments name the witnesses' emotions or describe their emotional states and range from succinct and direct to descriptive and elaborative. In this section, patterns and themes in the comments are drawn out and illustrated with characteristic examples.

Emotions and their effects

Many comments made to testimonies describe the overall emotional state or the specific responses of the witnesses during the interview. Although this often involves noting that the witnesses cried, wept, or even "sobbed" during at least part of the interview[19] or were in states like agitation, anxiousness, nervousness, or hysteria,[20] there are also descriptions of witnesses as calm, composed, nonchalant, and even cheerful.[21] Non-Jewish interviewer Halina Strzelecka, for instance, writes of a witness, "The witness is a young Jewish girl who, by fleeing, succeeded in eluding the certain death that befell her family. Despite her harsh ordeal, she has a bright, cheerful outlook on life and people."[22] Not surprisingly, several witnesses are described as numb or apathetic.[23] Melchior describes one such witness, a Jewish survivor of the Będzin ghetto and several concentration camps, as "being near suicide" and writes:

> The witness gives her testimony reluctantly. She states that everyone already knows the history of the camps anyway, and that *her memories cause her nothing but suffering*. She gives the impression of being numb, apathetic, and not greatly interested in life.[24]

In this example, we see how Melchior is not only recording the emotional state of the witness as she relates her testimony. She is also recording how the events the witness experienced have affected her by emphasizing the enormous emotional suffering caused by her *memories* of what she experienced. Thus, while Melchior is technically following the official methodology, she is doing so as a "companion of misery" who recognizes that the emotions of the witness are important not only in terms of the facts of the testimony – i.e., what happened in the camps – but also because they show the *ongoing effects* of what happened in the camps on the witness as a human being.

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[19] e.g., LUB, PIZ Records of Witness Testimony (hereafter cited as "PIZ RWT") 1, 12, 27, 143, 224, 255, 352, 360, 422.
[20] e.g., PIZ RWT 12, 63, 69, 76, 252, 303, 319, 447.
[21] e.g., PIZ RWT 17, 19, 54, 56, 124, 125, 188, 200, 334, 412, 494.
[22] e.g., PIZ RWT 438, dated 12 August 1946, p. 12, LUB translation.
[23] e.g., PIZ RWT 468, 491, 500.
[24] PIZ RWT 491, dated 17 October 1946, p. 5, LUB translation. Emphasis added.

Occasionally, witnesses are described as expressing more than one strong, identifiable emotion. For instance, the comments made to a testimony given by a non-Jewish female former prisoner of Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen read in part: "At times, she has tears in her eyes; other times, her lips are graced with a smile of joy at having survived these events and being on her way home to family."[25] Again, the emotional responses of this witness are connected not just to how she has related her testimony but also to her current circumstances and the fact that she managed to survive the traumatic events she discussed in the interview.

Witnesses are also described as guarded, reticent, and fearful while giving testimony.[26] The reasons for this are not always given, perhaps because the witness did not always express that or why he or she was nervous. But the comments occasionally include suggestions as to why, including an imminent return to Poland, hesitance to revisit the past, and poor physical or emotional/psychological health.[27] Another reason given is fear of repercussions, such as when non-Jewish interviewer Józef Nowaczyk writes of an anonymous Jewish witness from Łódź who was returning that day to Poland:

> […] it was perfectly clear whilst speaking with Name Unknown [illegible crossing-out] that the reason for his refusal to provide personal details was a fear of potential consequences that might arise for him sometime in the future. While he has provided some brief testimony, he has played it safe, so to speak, by neither providing his name nor signing the record.[28]

This comment is similar to the previous examples in the sense that Nowaczyk refers to the witness's emotional state of fear not as it concerns his past persecution and suffering but in terms of the *future*. It reflects the fear and uncertainty many Jewish as well as some non-Jewish Poles felt about the postwar political and social situation in Poland – such as antisemitic pogroms for Jews and political persecution for non-Jews – and how their statements about their own and others' past activities and experiences could create serious issues for them.[29]

I argue that comments like those which refer to the witnesses' emotions regarding the present and future reflect how the PIZ interviewers were attempting – consciously or otherwise

[25] PIZ RWT 352, dated 13 June 1946, p. 5, LUB translation.
[26] e.g., PIZ RWT 55, 119, 292, 411, 463, 468, 487, 488, 489.
[27] e.g., PIZ RWT, respectively, 487, 489, 499; 488, 411; and 491.
[28] PIZ RWT 468, dated 19 September 1946, p. 4, LUB translation. Brackets in original.
[29] See, e.g., Andrzej Nils Uggla, *I nordlig hamn: polacker i Sverige under andra världskriget*, trans. Lennart Ilke, Uppsala: Centrum för multietnisk forskning, Uppsala Universitet, 1997, pp. 202–204. Another key example among the testimonies examined is PIZ RWT 463, dated 2 September 1946.

– to make sense of the *effects* of the Nazi atrocities on the victims and Poland. As an epistemic community with a sense of shared suffering and firsthand knowledge of that suffering, the interviewers and witnesses communicated not just through facts but also through emotions. In doing so, they were engaged in participatory sense-making both of their suffering during the Second World War and the Holocaust and of the precarity and uncertainty of the aftermath and what these meant to their ongoing survival.[30]

Another way this can be seen is how the comments rarely if ever indicate that the witnesses' emotions threaten the credibility of the testimony.[31] The following example, written by non-Jewish interviewer Ludwika Broel-Plater about the testimony of a non-Jewish former political prisoner, highlights how the opposite was true: "This testimony is credible, although [the witness], under the influence of emotions, forgets dates, loses her train of thought and loses herself in the details […]."[32] Broel-Plater is similarly understanding of the effect another witness's emotions had on her testimony:

> Her mind is completely lucid and her testimony is completely trustworthy. The recollection of her experiences caused her great distress and required an enormous exertion of willpower, which is why the record has been written in a fragmentary fashion.[33]

Not only do the comments indicate that the witnesses' emotions are rarely a reason to call into question the facts of the testimony, but they also reveal that emotions were considered part of what made the testimony *valid*. The testimony of an "embittered" witness is described as "trustworthy" by Melchior.[34] Likewise, despite the "frequent sobbing" of another witness, her testimony is deemed "absolutely trustworthy" by Strzelecka.[35] On the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, the "calm and composure" of a 16-year-old former political prisoner could potentially have been a disadvantage, judging by the comments of non-Jewish interviewer Helena Miklaszewska, who wrote, "She is not fully capable of describing her inner experiences; thus, her testimony concerning the death of her parents and sister, being no more than the

[30] Laura Candiotto, "Emotions In-Between: The Affective Dimension of Participatory Sense-Making," Chapter 11 in *The Value of Emotions for Knowledge*, pp. 235–260.
[31] There are examples where problems with the witness and/or his/her statements are noted. However, in these cases, the reason is attributed to what is invariably characterized as a mental issue instead of an emotional one. See, e.g., PIZ RWT 122, where the witness is described as "mentally stunted" (p. 3).
[32] PIZ RWT 296, dated 9 May 1946, p. 7, LUB translation. Brackets added to redact the witness's name.
[33] PIZ RWT 482, dated 10 June 1946, pp. 12–13, LUB translation.
[34] PIZ RWT 411, dated 18 July 1946, p. 6, LUB translation.
[35] PIZ RWT 255, dated 7 April 1946, p. 6, LUB translation.

relating of dry facts, is devoid of any element of tragedy."[36] Instead, this is not considered to denigrate the testimony, which is deemed "trustworthy."[37]

These findings suggest that the witnesses' emotions were valued at least in part because they imparted the *tragedy* of what were otherwise "dry facts." In this way, the emotions of the witness served as "vehicles of knowledge" because they "carry information that can be known."[38] In other words, the emotions felt and expressed by the witnesses as they were being interviewed not only helped to convey the facts of the Nazi atrocities but also transmitted the knowledge that these individuals *suffered* because of these atrocities and their effects in the aftermath. So, by documenting the emotions in addition to the persecution, the consequences of the Nazi atrocities on living people could be known. One of the most straightforward examples of this appears in the comments made by Strzelecka to the testimony of a young non-Jewish witness:

> Events are described and seen from the personal perspective of a young girl who was arrested along with her brother and father. It is this very subjectivity and directness of feeling that gives this testimony its particular value, despite the relative paucity of facts.[39]

Like Broel-Plater's comments cited earlier, other interviewers' comments refer to the witnesses' emotions more generally; for example, by describing a witness as being "emotional," expressing "great feeling," or having "strong reactions"[40] but do not record the exact emotions, feelings, or reactions. In some cases, the comments indicate that the witness has effectively relayed their emotions or the psychological impact of their experiences in the testimony, implying that the interviewer does not need to do so.[41]

Some historians have dismissed survivor testimonies because, they argue, the strong emotions of the witnesses make objectivity impossible, with some claiming that testimonies are only good for studying emotions.[42] The findings of this study demonstrate that the PIZ

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[36] PIZ RWT 371, dated 19 June 1946, p. 12, LUB translation.
[37] ibid
[38] Cecilea Mun, "How Emotions Know: Naturalizing Epistemology via Emotions," Chapter 11 in *The Value of Emotions for Knowledge*, p. 41.
[39] PIZ RWT 297, dated 28 November 1946, p. 5, LUB translation.
[40] e.g., PIZ RWT, respectively, 92, 97, 321.
[41] e.g., PIZ RWT 379, 490.
[42] See, respectively, Tony Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication* 27, no. 2 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2005-004, and Natalia Aleksiun, "Survivor Testimonies and Historical

interviewers believed almost the opposite. This does not suggest that they perceived that a lack of emotions made testimonies *less* valuable. Rather, they acknowledged the significance of the interplay between the facts communicated and the emotions expressed by the witnesses. Their comments about the witnesses' emotions (or the lack thereof) demonstrate that while objective witnessing might produce dry facts, subjective witnessing revealed the psychological harm caused by their experiences of Nazi persecution. Significantly, it took decades for psychologists – among them survivors – to introduce similar approaches to the study of testimonies.[43]

Affective Retellings

In closely reading the comments made to the testimonies in the official English translations, it became clear that the words "affected" and "moved" are used repeatedly to describe how a witness gave his or her testimony.[44] An adjective usually precedes these words; for example, "visibly affected,"[45] "deeply affected,"[46] "clearly affected,"[47] and "deeply moved."[48] In the transcriptions of the original Polish testimonies, however, words that would directly translate into "affect" (as in causing strong emotions) – *poruszać* and *wzruszać* – are not used. Instead, in these testimonies, the Polish word *przeżywa* is generally used, which translates to "is experiencing" or "is going through." Moreover, when used in the context of the comments made to the witness testimonies, the word takes on the more emotionally descriptive meaning of living through or surviving something – a meaning lost in the translation.[49]

For instance, the official English translation of the comments made to one testimony read in part: "The witness […] is *visibly affected* by what she says yet remains in control of herself."[50] However, taking into consideration the original term used in context, an alternative translation of the original transcription of the same passage could read: "The witness […] *visibly relives* what she says, nevertheless she has control over herself [...]."[51] Likewise, the official

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Objectivity: Polish Historiography since Neighbors." *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 20, no. 1-2 (2015): 160.

[43] e.g., Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992; Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History.* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998; Rita Horváth and Katalin Zana, "'Both valuable and difficult': A meeting point between historical and psychological interviews." Chap. 4 in *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, edited by Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Eva Fogelman and Dalia Ofer, 81-96. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017.

[44] See, e.g., PIZ RWT 2, 17, 27, 62, 97, 145, 258, 407, 422, 438.

[45] PIZ RWT 2.

[46] PIZ RWT 27, 62.

[47] PIZ RWT 145.

[48] PIZ RWT 258, 407.

[49] A conclusion made in discussion with Dr. Szymańska-Smolkin.

[50] PIZ RWT 2, dated 26 November 1945, p. 5, LUB translation. Emphasis added.

[51] PIZ RWT 2, p. 5, LUB transcription of original testimony in Polish, translated to English by the author. Original (in full, with translated portion in italics): „*Świadek* [dopisek nad tekstem] jest osoba wiarygodna –

English translation of the comments made to another testimony read: "The witness is deeply moved by her vivid retelling of events."[52] But the Polish original of this passage can also be translated as: "The witness relives the facts very vividly."[53] So, whereas the official translations imply that the witnesses demonstrated strong feelings and emotions while recounting their experiences, the alternative translations can be interpreted as meaning that the witnesses appeared to the interviewers to be describing their experiences as if they were happening again before their very eyes.

This can be understood more explicitly in the comments made to testimonies given by witnesses who recounted certain experiences with notable clarity. In one of these, in which Nowaczyk comments on a female former political prisoner's testimony, the original Polish usage is more closely followed in the official English translation, which reads: "The most significant point in the testimony is the cannibalism she observed committed by male prisoners on the dead bodies of other prisoners. While she was giving testimony, it was clear that the testifier was *reliving* that moment."[54] In the Polish original, the word "reliving" in the translation is "*przeżywała*"[55] – another form of *przeżywa* that can also translate to "experienced."

These examples demonstrate that the interviewers were emphasizing that some witnesses were not merely telling what they saw but rather living through it again – 're-witnessing,' if you will – and even, perhaps, experiencing the same or similar emotions they had when they witnessed the actual events. By describing the emotions and emotional states experienced by the witnesses as they recounted their experiences, the interviewers again demonstrate the epistemic value of emotions by highlighting how negative emotions focus attention on the events that caused the suffering. This attention has a bearing on how clearly the memories of the events are retrieved and thus in forming more accurate representations of the events.[56] In other words, the witnesses' emotions while re-witnessing the events facilitate more accurate testimonies. For example, commenting on the testimony of a 16-year-old female

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[/dopisek] *w sposób widoczny przeżywa to co mówi, niemniej panuje nad sobą*, zeznaje szczerze, chciałaby wszystko powiedzieć, czas jednak na to nie pozwala." Emphasis added.

[52] PIZ RWT 258, dated 7 April 1946, p. 13, LUB translation.

[53] PIZ RWT 258, p. 13, LUB Polish transcription, translated by the author. Original (in full): „Świadek przeżywa bardzo żywo podane fakty." The translations in this and subsequent paragraphs were made in consultation with Dr. Szymańska-Smolkin.

[54] PIZ RWT 34, dated 7 December 1945, p. 5, LUB translation. Emphasis added.

[55] PIZ RWT 34, p. 5, LUB Polish transcription, translated by the author. Original (in full): „Najważniejszym punktem zeznań jest zaobserwowany przez nią fakt kanibalizmu popełnionego przez więźniów mężczyzn, na zmarłych więźniach. W czasie zeznawania była widocznym, że zeznająca moment ten ponownie przeżywała."

[56] Michael S. Brady, "Learning from Adversity: Suffering and Wisdom," Chapter 9 in *The Value of Emotions for Knowledge*, pp. 202–208.

former political prisoner, who also recounted witnessing cannibalism as well as other traumatizing scenes, non-Jewish interviewer Helena Dziedzicka writes, in part:

> One senses that the German crimes and atrocities that she witnessed are a nightmare that is replayed in vivid detail before her eyes while she recounts them; for instance, she gives a precise description of how the hanged SS man looked – how his arms and legs, hacked off by the Russian women, dangled by pieces of skin.[57]

In this case, the terminology used in both the official English translation and the transcription of the Polish original differs from the previous examples, but the meaning remains similar. In the original Polish, Dziedzicka uses the Polish word *powracającym*, which means "recurring" or "returning." More fully, an alternative translation could read: "One senses that the images of German crimes and atrocities that she witnessed are a nightmare, recurring vividly before her eyes during the story […]."[58] Significantly, Dziedzicka summarizes the severe psychological toll of the witness's experiences, which have "left a very deep mark on her, one which may be to some extent indelible; it halted her mental development and warped her psyche." And, although Dziedzicka writes that "In conversation with her, one can detect a sort of stupor and lack of awareness,"[59] she also observed emotional cues that lead her to conclude:

> She gives the impression that hidden beneath the facade of someone inured to the people and conditions present in the camps, there remains the tragedy of a hurt and lonely child who has been through the depths of evil and deprivation in terms of both her physical and moral needs. Just how much it has cost her to give her testimony is obvious from the reaction it triggered in her. She said that she felt more tired after the few hours it took to record this than after a full day's work.[60]

Another example, written by Strzelecka about the testimony of a non-Jewish witness, departs from the terminology used in the previous comments but keeps the same tone that indicates a 're-witnessing' while also elaborating on the specific emotions the witness expressed:

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[57] PIZ RWT 370, dated 19 June 1946, p. 7, LUB translation.
[58] PIZ RWT 370, p. 7, LUB Polish transcription, translated by the author. Original (in full, with translated portion highlighted): „*Wyczuwa się, że obrazy zbrodni i okrucieństw niem. których była świadkiem, są koszmarem, powracającym z całą plastyką przed jej oczy w czasie opowiadania*: n.p. [*sic*] dokładnie opisuje, jak wyglądał powieszony SS man [*sic*] – jak odcięte przez Rosjanki ręce i nogi zwisały na kawałkach skóry."
[59] PIZ RWT 370, p. 7, LUB translation.
[60] ibid, p. 8.

> The witness, an elderly woman, speaks with enormous distress about the moments she found most humiliating: relieving her physiological needs in full view of thuggish soldiers; parading naked before the 'scoundrel' doctor seated with a cigarette dangling from his lips. Moreover, she has tears in her eyes when she speaks of the profanation of the church in Wola. She emphasizes the anguish of living in constant fear: of the commandant at Neustadt, of gassing in Neuwatt, of harassment by the *blokowa* and *sztubowas* in the Ravensbrück *Strafblock*.[61]

In addition to the value of the witnesses' emotions for the knowledge of the Nazi atrocities and their effects, the descriptions of the witnesses and terminological patterns seen in the cited comments to testimonies – reliving, returning, recounting, replaying, etc., summarized in the suggested word 're-witnessing' – are all indicative of the flashbacks experienced by those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association:

> People with PTSD have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares; they may feel sadness, fear or anger; and they may feel detached or estranged from other people.[62]

PTSD was not officially recognized as a psychological condition until 1980, and the symptoms that characterize it were not well understood before that time. Consequently, empathy for the symptoms was often lacking and the treatments, which were generally ineffective and even dangerous, were geared primarily toward treating military veterans rather than civilians in the context of global conflicts like the Second World War.[63] It is thus compelling to recognize in the comments of the PIZ interviewers – none of whom were psychiatrists or psychologists – not only empathy for the emotions experienced by the witnesses during the interviews but also a pattern of awareness and recognition of and even a focus on (conscious or otherwise) some of

[61] PIZ RWT, 303, dated 16 May 1946, p. 8, LUB translation.
[62] American Psychiatric Association, "What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)," https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd, last accessed 8 January 2024.
[63] e.g., Marc-Antoine Crocq & Louis Crocq, "From shell shock and war neurosis to posttraumatic stress disorder: a history of psychotraumatology," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 2/1, pp. 47–55; Murray B. Stein, and Barbara O. Rothbaum, "175 Years of Progress in PTSD Therapeutics: Learning from the Past," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 175/6, pp. 508–516.

the key symptoms of PTSD experienced by the witnesses decades before the condition was widely understood; understanding which occurred in part through belated recognition of the psychological impact the Nazi Holocaust had on its victims.[64]

Conclusion: Emotions as Testimony

In the immediate postwar period, the psychological effects of Nazi persecution were not a primary consideration of aid organizations and documentation efforts, with the focus instead on the crimes committed and their tangible, physical effects. Even when they were apparent the psychological effects tended to be overlooked or ignored. Thus, the emotions felt and expressed by those who suffered Nazi persecution were not necessarily recorded or analyzed.[65] At the same time, however, PIZ was not alone in giving attention to these aspects. One notable effort is psychologist David Boder's interest in how the displaced persons – all of whom had experienced Nazi persecution – he interviewed in 1946 revealed the psychological trauma they endured through their speech and language. Along with most early efforts to document survivors' accounts of Nazi persecution, Boder's efforts went largely overlooked until decades later. Today, however, Boder's "Traumatic Index" – developed in the 1950s – has been called "prophetic" to the acknowledgment of PTSD and trauma studies that began in earnest in the 1980s.[66]

The way the PIZ interviewers carried out the part of the methodology that encouraged them to document the psychological aspects of witnessing can also be understood as advanced and forward-thinking in that it revealed the ongoing effects of the psychological harm inflicted on the Nazis' victims – a key aspect of PTSD.[67] Although the testimonies gathered by PIZ were used as evidence in early war crimes trials, such as the Hamburg Ravensbrück and Gross Rosen trials, there is no evidence that they have ever been used for psychological studies as was envisioned. However, when considered alongside other material, such as the PIZ meeting

[64] e.g., Jerome Rosenberg, "Holocaust Survivors and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders: The Need for Conceptual Reassessment and Development," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 11/4, pp. 930–938.
[65] e.g., Beth B. Cohen, "The Helping Process: Mental Health Professionals' Postwar Response to Survivors," Chapter 7 in *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America*, Rutgers University Press, 2007, pp. 133–54; Boaz Cohen, 'The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21/1, p. 86; Paul Friedman, "The Road Back for the DPs: Healing the Psychological Scars of Nazism," *Commentary*, December 1948.
[66] Alan Rosen and Neal Lipsitz, "Oral Memoirs: The Testimony of Holocaust Survivors," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 27 Aug. 2020.
[67] American Psychiatric Association

minutes, it becomes evident that the comments made by the interviewers to the witness testimonies were not merely objective observations made for scientific study.[68]

As has been shown, the PIZ interviewers believed that shared suffering was essential to the process of gathering knowledge about what exactly the Nazis did to their many victims during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Having lived through these events themselves gave them specific forms of knowledge that they believed made them uniquely qualified to gather complete and accurate testimonies. Accordingly, the comments reflect an informed and empathic recognition of the suffering individuals behind the facts of the testimonies. Moreover, the comments indicate that, for the PIZ interviewers, the emotions felt by the witnesses reflected enduring psychological effects that pertained not only to the past but also to the present and future. This can be seen especially clearly when the validity of the facts of the testimonies is tied affirmatively to the witnesses' emotions.

In this way, whether they were conscious of it or not, the PIZ interviewers were effectively positioning the witnesses' emotions as testimony to the atrocities committed by the Nazis. As "vehicles of knowledge," the emotions felt and expressed by the witnesses as they were being interviewed helped to convey not only the facts of the Nazi atrocities – perhaps more accurately than if they had been emotionally constrained – but also transmitted the knowledge that these individuals *suffered* because of these atrocities. So, by documenting the emotions in addition to the persecution, the consequences of the Nazi atrocities on the psyches of those who were persecuted could be known.

This analysis has demonstrated that in the mid-1940s when the PIZ witness testimonies were documented, Jewish and non-Jewish Poles persecuted by the Nazis – as both interviewers and witnesses – were contributing to creating knowledge about the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Second World War and the Holocaust *and* the psychological effects of those crimes on surviving victims. They did this by recording not only the facts of the witnesses' experiences as testimony but also, whenever possible, the emotions and emotional states of the witnesses while relating those experiences, also as testimony. Today, by analyzing the comments made to the testimonies that record this additional information beyond the facts, it is possible to contribute new knowledge to the historical record about how victims of the Nazis engaged with each other on a personal and not merely scientific level about

[68] cf. Cohen, "The Children's Voice,"; Jockusch; Katrin Stoll, "Transcending the divide between history and memory: Szymon Datner's practical Holocaust historiography in the early post-war period." *Holocaust Studies* 21, no. 1-2 (2015): 4-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2015.1062270.

their suffering under the Nazis, long before these aspects of Holocaust experience were being widely considered and analyzed.

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