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Testimony in the Pursuit of Justice Summer Institute 27–30 August 2024, Wrocław, Poland

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In response to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, several partner institutions launched the Summer Institute for Witnessing the War in Ukraine in July 2022, followed by a second Institute in June 2023.[1] During these two years, the circumstances of the war led to a rapid growth of grassroots activism and the emergence of new research communities both in Ukraine and abroad. A broad and growing community of practitioners, both academic and activist, working in a variety of local settings still needs a forum for the exchange of experiences and opportunities to listen to high-level experts.

The third Summer Institute (WWSI 2024) focused on testimony research in the pursuit of justice. The organisers' aim was to mark out new paths of interdisciplinary approaches to oral history, memory studies, and culture anthropology, while affording victims of the war a space of trust, empowerment, and dignity.[2] The event took place in Wrocław at Centrum Historii Zajezdnia/Ośrodek "Pamięć i Przyszłość", 27–30 August 2024.[3]

Testimonies provided by eyewitnesses play a pivotal role in uncovering crimes, establishing the culpability of war criminals, and securing redress for victims. Firsthand testimonies serve not only as crucial components in legal proceedings but also as a solid basis for upholding human rights and international law during armed conflicts. Moreover, such paralegal work with witnesses lays the groundwork for restoring trust in the legal system and fostering peace in post-conflict societies.

The concept of genocide was of particular interest to WWSI 2024. Since 2014, the rhetoric of genocide has been tested to ensure the legal qualification of the crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Existing academic approaches are discussed, and the possibility of qualifying attacks on life, group identity, cultural heritage, and the environment as crimes of genocide in a comparative perspective is assessed. Another theme of WWSI 2024 was the experience of occupation and the pursuit of justice in former occupied territories. These themes were considered

1 See: A. Doboszewska, *Witnessing the War in Ukraine. Oral History and Interview-based Research Summer Institute, 16–19 July 2022 and Vectors of Reflection, Practices of Documentation Summer Institute, 12–16 June 2023, Kraków, Poland*, "Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej", vol. 13 (2023), pp. 352–355.

2 Concept and organisational team: Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, Gelinada Grinchenko, Eleonora Narvselius, Alina Doboszewska, Anna Olenenko.

3 Organisers and partners: Alberta Society for the Advancement of Ukrainian Studies; Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta; Ośrodek "Pamięć i Przyszłość"/ Centrum Historii Zajezdnia; Dobra Wola Foundation; Kule Folklore Centre, University of Alberta; Kule Institute for Advanced Study, University of Alberta; Ukrainian–German Historical Commission; Ukrainian Oral History Association; Polish Oral History Association; Lund University; National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy; Society of Friends of the Ukrainian Folklore Centre.

broadly, taking into account both the global experience of genocide research and references to it in artistic creation: film and literature.

Over the course of four days, the institute offered a series of presentations, workshops, discussions, and mentorship opportunities led by high-level experts and examining current trends in scholarly and creative reflections on witnessing the war in Ukraine. The classes of the Summer Institute were preceded by a two-day workshop *(Not) far from the war: the Russo-Ukrainian war in refugees' testimonies, oral histories, and diaries*, organised by the German–Ukrainian Historical Commission. The activities of the workshop were led by Felix Ackermann, Gelinada Grinchenko, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, and Eleonora Narvselius.

Keynote lecturer at the Summer Institute was Dirk Moses, Professor of International Relations at the City College of New York, a specialist in genocide and memory studies. In his lecture *Genocide and armed conflict: a complex relationship*, he analysed the concept of genocide in its various aspects, with reference to current conflicts and legal cases underway in international courts in order to better delineate the issues confronting Ukraine today.

In this context, there was an interesting positioning of the dialogue panel *From rage and resilience to memory and museumification: testimony in search for justice*. The interlocutors were Claudia Seymour, Geneva Graduate Institute, applied social researcher with more than 20 years of experience, working primarily in conflict-affected environments, and Hasan Hasanović from the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre, Srebrenica, a genocide survivor. Their dialogue concerned a wide range of problems facing activists, aid workers, and researchers who are engaged in work on the frontlines of conflict and then commemorating it. Investigating attacks, violations, and abuse is crucial work that contributes to a more just, equal, and peaceful world. However, the collateral costs of this courage and commitment, and often sacrifice, are insufficiently acknowledged in practice. A concrete example was the development of the Srebrenica Oral History Project, including the challenges the team has been facing.

In turn, the methodological approach in biographical research on life stories of survivors of collective violence was presented by sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal, University of Göttingen. In her presentation, entitled *Experiencing – remembering – speaking about the past: on the signs of traumatization in biographical interviews and texts*, she did not refer to a diagnostic key, but rather illustrated on a descriptive level the conspicuous features of autobiographical narratives or self-presentations for which it is appropriate to pursue assumptions about traumatising experiences or phases. What is the potential offered by using the method of biographical narrative interviews when directing a conversation for activating the initial processes of healing, and what are the risks and dangers involved?

Important aspects of the Polish wartime experience in the context of the pursuit of justice, not only in the legal sense, but also in the social and personal sense,

were included in the speeches by Jakub Gałęziowski, University of Warsaw, and Józef Markiewicz, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. From the talk *Historic recurrence in wartime rapes, children born of war, and kidnapping children: from world war two to the Russian war against Ukraine*, based on the recently published book by Jakub Gałęziowski, it appeared that the mechanisms of violence against women and children during war and occupation, and their social and personal consequences, repeat with tragic regularity regardless of the time and nationality of the victims. It remains the same method and idea of defeating the enemy nation. Józef Markiewicz, in his presentation *Oral history and the Holocaust*, showed that oral history has played a key role in trials against Holocaust perpetrators. Many trials, such as the Nuremberg trials, have relied on the testimony of eyewitnesses. The details and immediacy of the testimonies given not only made it possible to comprehend the human dimension of the Holocaust but also helped to undermine any attempts to relativise or deny the Holocaust.

The presentation *How testimonies and interviews help reveal war crimes: a journalist's view* by journalist, documentarian, writer, and scholar Yevheniia Podobna explored the crucial role of the work of Ukrainian journalists in investigating Russian war crimes in Ukraine. In turn, Oksana Dovgopolova, I.I. Mechnikov National University in Odessa, talked about *Witnessing the war in Ukraine: artistic calls for justice*. Ukrainian art provides a powerful response to the Russian invasion, documenting the experiences and emotional states of Ukrainian society, creating the instruments of social therapy, and directly witnessing the war crimes. As in case of journalistic or oral history activities, the art practices of witnessing create space for very specific ethical questioning. The message emanating from the freedom of art is limited to the position of the artist, his/her understanding of the dignity of other people. An excellent illustration of this statement was the screening of the film *Intercepted*. Intercepted phone calls between Russian soldiers and their families, captured by Ukrainian intelligence, reveal the soldiers' experiences and emotions. The juxtaposition of these voices with images of destruction and Ukrainian resilience highlights the dehumanising power and cruelty of war. After the screening, the Summer Institute participants had a unique opportunity to discuss the film with its director Oksana Karpovych.

Another aspect of Russian war crimes was revealed by Nataliya Zubar, Maidan Monitoring Information Centre: *Crimes of ecocide in Ukraine: visualizing and (re) sounding the war*. The actions of the Russian military have caused ecological catastrophes in Ukraine, which affect not only humans but also flora and fauna, water, and soil. The investigation of crimes of ecocide is a new field, the scale of its impact is huge, both in time and territory; there is a lack of experts and a lack of the forensic methodology. The ongoing war restricts the possibility of evidence collection; therefore, crime scene investigation with the drones is becoming increasingly important.

The proceedings of the Summer Institute concluded with a presentation by Kristina Hook, Kennesaw State University's School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding, and Development: *Pursuing justice and a just peace for Ukraine: the role of testimony in judicial accountability and broader social healing*. Her talk addressed Ukrainian articulations of justice and a sustainable just peace in the context of Russia's ongoing near decade of war, and how Ukrainian and other testimonies of the war and its atrocities are a necessary precondition to securing peace and the recovery of global human rights norms. Drawing from trauma healing, conflict transformation, and transitional justice literature, Hook discussed the role of testimonies in pursuing judicial accountability and broader social recovery, the latter of which is often beyond the purview of even robust court systems.

There was also a special space for participants during the Summer Institute proceedings. In two sessions of project presentations' participants had the opportunity to present their research projects with subsequent discussions. All the lectures given at the Summer Institute were streamed live on YouTube. Once compiled and edited, the recordings will be made available.