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***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***

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The *Witnessing the War in Ukraine* project was established as early as March 2022 as a reaction of the international oral history community to the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Within a few months, the Organising Committee had managed to organise the first Summer Institute under the title *Oral History and Interview-based Research*.¹ The event took place on 16–19 July 2022 in the welcoming space of the Institute of Sociology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

In response to the unfolding trauma of this humanitarian crisis, researchers in oral history, ethnography, and cultural anthropology stepped forward and engaged in the active collection of evidence. The main objective of the Summer Institute was to reflect on the following issues: What are the ethical implications of this ‘rapid response’ to the war? How should researchers approach fieldwork in times of continually unfolding trauma? How can interview-based research be conducted in times of war without harming those with whom we work in the field? The organisers of the Institute offered an academic platform for a respectful and focused discussion of research needs and fieldwork challenges faced by interview-based research in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The event was attended by thirty participants selected from over a hundred applications. These were people who had already started their own documentation projects related to the war in Ukraine and came from academia, NGOs, and other institutions. Most of them were from Ukraine, but there were also researchers from other countries working on Ukrainian or war-related issues in general.

The Institute’s programme consisted of both lectures by invited speakers (three of whom appeared online for various reasons) and seminars, as well as short presentations of participants’ projects. Most of the sessions were streamed online.

The first three days were opened with lectures by keynote speakers. The first of these was Alessandro Portelli who gave a lecture entitled *The killing of innocents and the roots of the West: Memories of war in my hometown*, in which he combined personal reminiscences and oral history. The next day began with Andreas Hamburger and his presentation *Social Trauma and Reflective Witnessing*. He situated oral history and qualitative interviews within the framework of an interpersonal concept of trauma. The third keynote speaker, Selma Leydesdorff, related a story about her interview with a survivor of Sobibor, made in Kyiv in 2010.

1 The Organising Committee members were: Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, Gelinada Grinchenko, Eleonora Narvselius, Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Marcin Jarząbek, Alina Doboszewska and Nataliya Bezborodova. Institutional Partners: University of Alberta, Jagiellonian University, Lund University, Ukrainian Oral History Association, Polish Oral History Association and Dobra Wola Foundation.

Very important topics were discussed during roundtable led by Gelinada Grinchenko and Natalia Kahanenko-Friesen with Hasan Hasanović, a survivor of the massacre in the Bosnian village of Srebrenica (1995), and a curator and interpreter at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre. His experience is comparable to that of towns such as Bucha, Irpen, Mariupol, and other communities in Ukraine where Russian troops continue to commit atrocities.

The main part of the Summer Institute involved seven seminars, discussing a variety of topics:

Autoethnography as a methodological experiment: suturing personal and collective experiences (Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko), *Duties of Care? The Ethics of Documenting Atrocities* juxtaposes the current tragedy of Ukraine with the presenter's experience as a human rights investigator in Democratic Republic of the Congo (Claudia Seymour), *An oral history of wars – an (oral) historical retrospective* (Piotr Filipkowski), *Designing research, formulating objectives, asking research questions* (Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, Marcin Jarzabek), *Oral History of the Revolution(s)*, *War and Volunteering: How to Work with the (Un)Finished Past* (Halyna Bodnar), *Facing new challenges in the field after February 24, 2022: Ethical dilemmas and possible solutions* (Natalia Otrishchenko), *What to do with collected oral history testimonies? Archiving – analysis – documentary film – exhibition – performance* (Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Alina Doboszewska).

A short documentary film was shot (by Alina Doboszewska), demonstrating the subject matter and atmosphere of the Summer Institute: <https://youtu.be/f8fR-8Q15UZU>.

The second Summer Institute, *Vectors of Reflection, Practices of Documentation* was organised a year later, on 12–16 June 2023, in the historic interiors of the Renaissance Villa Decius in Kraków.² It also involved 30 participants, some of whom had participated in the first meeting, and now they had the opportunity to discuss the follow-up of the projects they had started then. Others were also running projects that were well advanced. The sessions of the second Summer Institute were also streamed in real time, and it is possible to view the recordings on YouTube.

The war against Ukraine seems to be the most well-documented modern military conflict, which poses a range of questions and challenges. The goal of the second Summer Institute was to formulate key conceptual issues concerning the praxis and ethics of wartime research, as well as create a new transnational research network connecting researchers, activists, and creative individuals involved in the collection of testimonies of the war. The following issues were added to the subject

2 There was one small change in the Organising Committee: Natalia Bezborodova was replaced by Anna Olenenko, also from the University of Alberta. Institutional Partners were completed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Sweden, and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Warsaw, Poland.

matter of the previous Summer Institute, which is still relevant: How do researchers conceive of and partake in fieldwork in these times? What does witnessing imply under current circumstances? How has witnessing been facilitated, framed, instrumentalised, and reflected upon on various scales and in different contexts?

This time, in addition to oral history researchers and practitioners, documentary filmmakers, writers, and artists were also invited to discuss witnessing the war and reflecting on its impact via various media, scholarly and creative practices, including film, theatre, journalism, ethnography and autoethnography, oral history, and storytelling.

The programme included screenings of art films and documentaries, each followed by a conversation between the filmmakers and the audience. The following films were presented: *Earth Blue As an Orange* (Iryna Tsilyk), *Bad Roads* (Natalia Vorozhbyt), *And the War Came to Us* (Alina Doboszewska and Krzysztof Krzyżanowski), and *On Kharkiv and Ourselves: the City's Fates and Experiences in Oral Histories of Its Inhabitants* – a series of films about the Nazi occupation of Kharkiv in 1941–1943, based on the oral histories of the city's residents (Gelinada Grinchenko). The theoretical basis on the issue of oral history-based documentaries was supplied by Grażyna Kubica-Heller in her lecture *Oral history films as ethnographic films*.

There were also meetings with writers. Andrii Bondarenko read from his plays *Peace and tranquillity* and *Squirrel Man*. Tamara Duda, known as Tamara Horikha Zernya, author of the famous book *Daughter*, delivered a speech *Living in, writing out: is it possible to write about the war while living in the midst of the war? Fictional aspects of actual lives against the background of the Russo-Ukrainian war*. There was also a discussion led by Johanna Lindbladh, Mikael Nydahl and Ielizaveta Oliinyk entitled *Testimony and trauma in Ukrainian theatre and literature after Euromaidan 2014. Ethical and aesthetic Challenges*.

A few sessions dealt with documentation projects based on oral history (but not exclusively): Natalia Otrishchenko, *Documentations' possible futures: On long-lasting outcomes of rapid responses*, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen and Eleonora Narvselius *Home-making in displacement among Ukrainians in Poland and Canada after February 2022: collective memories, historical narratives, transnational heritage (a tentative research agenda)*, Anna Wylegała and Marcin Jarzabek *Recording testimonies from the war – methodological, ethical, and legal solutions*, Yevhenia Podobna *Documenting the genocide: The experience of investigating war crimes in Bucha, Irpin, and Okhtyrka*, Józef Markiewicz *To have a pulse and a heartbeat – a project to document the experience of Jewish refugees from Ukraine as a part of the oral history programme of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*.

Very interesting and substantively relevant was the speech given by Andriy Kohut, Director of the Sectoral State Archive of the Ukrainian Security Service: *From War Testimony to Archives: Reflection on Documentation, Preservation, and Interpretation*.

The outcome of both Summer Institutes will be a publication including texts by participants and speakers, not only scholarly, but also artistic and essayistic.