From Individual Survival to Social Networks of Survivors: Rethinking the Digital Archive of the Greek Holocaust

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Abstract. Digital audiovisual archives of Holocaust survivor testimonies follow a common classifying practice organizing the material at the unit of the individual. They thus prioritize the uniqueness of each survivor's story and approach survival as a personal ordeal. The online meta-database of Greek Jewish Holocaust survivors' testimonies (http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/en/) exemplifies this logic of archiving the historical experience and its mnemonic narrativization. The current project "Bonds of Survival" critically rethinks these methodological premises of the digital Holocaust archive. It complements current emphasis on the Holocaust survivor and her experience by shifting attention from the individual to her social relations. Taking the relationship as the organizing unit of the archiving order, it uses social network visualization tools to collect, categorize, and display the social interactions of survivors. Researchers can thus more accurately determine the weight and ontology of social relations in the camps and systematically explore the linkages between survival strategies, identity formation, and modes of social interaction.

Gli archivi audiovisivi digitali delle testimonianze dei sopravvissuti della Shoah seguono un metodo di classificazione comune che prevede l'organizzazione dei documenti a livello di unità individuale. In questo modo viene esaltata e messa in evidenza l'unicità della storia di ogni sopravvissuto e la sopravvivenza come una vicenda del tutto personale. Il meta-database online delle testimonianze degli ebrei greci sopravvissuti alla Shoah (http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/en/) esemplifica questa logica di archiviazione, dell'esperienza storica come della sua narrativizzazione mnemonica. Il progetto "Bonds of Survival" ripensa in modo critico queste premesse metodologiche dell'archivio digitale sulla Shoah. Integra l'enfasi sul singolo sopravvissuto dell'attuale sistema organizzativo spostando l'attenzione sulle sue relazioni sociali Partendo dalla relazione come unità dell'organizzazione archivistica, utilizza gli strumenti di visualizzazione delle reti sociali per raccogliere, catalogare e visualizzare le interazioni sociali dei sopravvissuti. In questo modo i ricercatori sono in grado di determinare con maggiore precisione il peso e la natura delle relazioni sociali nei campi e indagare in maniera sistematica i collegamenti tra strategie di sopravvivenza, formazione dell'identità e modalità di interazione sociale.

Introduction

When recounting his days in Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor Jack Azous, a Sephardic Jew from the Greek city of Salonica/Thessaloniki, often alluded to a number of people while talking about himself: 'All inmates were Greeks when I first came in,' said at the beginning of his testimony. 'I used to have a friend, another Greek guy who was a barber. … [and] the lageraltester was a Jew, a Greek also', he continued. And further on he mentioned: 'I was singing in the nights for the Germans. We used to be three-four Jewish guys from Salonica. We got a guitar. One used to play it, and we sang Greek and Italian songs. The guys were Itzhak Saltiel and Alberto Giledi. They both died in Auschwitz.'[1].

Azous' narrative is in no ways unique. Every Holocaust survivor's testimony is full of references to relatives and friends, fellow prisoners and guards, Jewish kapos and German officers, people who perished and people who survived. The collective experience of the camp is refracted through the personal narrative[2]. But the survivor's trajectory is also deeply ingrained within a web of relations he or she has spanned. Historians, however, have so far been reluctant to explore such webs as a means of making sense of life in the camps. Broadly speaking, Holocaust historiography has approached the camp world from two diverging perspectives. On the one hand, it has employed a top-down approach paying attention to the camp as a mechanism of extermination and focusing on its emergence, development, and functions. In the rare cases prisoners entered into the picture, it was either as numbers or as dehumanized entities, to document the extent and innermost workings of Nazi genocidal policies[3].

On the other hand, in the past three decades, historians have increasingly if hesitantly concentrated on the prisoners themselves using written and oral testimonies to shed light on their individual and group experiences. In this case, it was not extermination but survival that constituted the fundamental research question, the primary analytical tool, and no less the dominant narrative trope. How prisoners managed to remain alive and in doing so reclaim

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1   J. Azous, Interview 36740. Visual History Archive. USC Shoah Foundation Institute (hereafter VHA USC SFI). Accessed online at Northwestern University on 12 January 2015.

2   On Holocaust testimony as a healing narrative of a traumatic memory and as a means of reconstructing a fragmented self through narration, see the seminal work of Lawrence Langer and the perceptive thoughts of Alessandro Portelli. Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). Alessandro Portelli, "Oral memoir and the Shoah," in *Literature of the Holocaust*, ed. Alan Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193-210.

3   Indicatively, Omer Bartov, "Ordering Horror: Conceptualizations of the Concentrationary Universe", in Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 99-121. Paul R. Bartrop, "Degradation in the concentration camp: the Nazi assault on the human condition during the Holocaust," *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, 6, 1 (1992): 103-130. *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany. The New Histories*, eds. Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (London: Routledge, 2009). Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). Nikolaus Wachsmann, "Looking into the Abyss. Historians and the Nazi Concentration Camps," *European History Quarterly*, 36, 2 (April 2006): 247-278.

their humanity has been the primary focus of historical study[4]. Thus, when it comes to the history of the concentration camps, existing literature either focuses on the dehumanizing effects of camp life or approaches survivors primarily as individuals and considers survival as the incidental result of extraordinary circumstances upon which survivors themselves had no control.

The emphasis on survival and the survivor has also determined the architecture of the testimonial archive, the classification schemes of audiovisual collections worldwide, and, no less, of Linked Open Data (LOD) initiatives[5]. This paper will discuss the possibilities and limitations of testimony-based digital archives through a close analysis of the Database of the

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4   Judith T. Baumel, "Women's Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22, 3 (May-June 1999): 329-347. Murray Baumgarten, "Primo Levi's Periodic Art: Survival in Auschwitz and the Meaningfulness of Everyday Life," in *Resisting the Holocaust*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 115-132. Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival. Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, (New York, NY: Norton & Co, 2010). Nathan Cohen, "Diaries of the 'Sonderkommandos' in Auschwitz. Coping with Fate and Reality," *Yad Vashem Studies*, 20 (1990): 273-312. Shamai Davidson, "Human Reciprocity Among the Jewish Prisoners in the Nazi Concentration Camps," in *The Nazi Concentration Camps. Structure and Aims, the Image of the Prisoner, the Jews in the Camps: Proceedings of the Fourth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*, eds. Yisrael Gutman and A. Saf, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984), 555-572. Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976). Tuvia Friling, *A Jewish Kapo in Auschwitz. History, Memory, and the Politics of Survival*, (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016). Henry Greenspan, Sarah Horowitz, Eva Kovacs, Berel Lang, Dori Laub, Kenneth Waltzer and Annette Wieviorka, "Engaging Survivors. Assessing 'Testimony' and 'Trauma' as Foundational Concepts," *Dapim. Studies on the Holocaust*, 28, 3 (2015): 190-226. Gideon Greif, "Between Sanity and Insanity: Sphere of Everyday Life in the Auschwitz-Birkenau 'Sonderkommando,'" in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, eds. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2005), 37-60. Bella Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2008). Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations*, ed. Jurgen Matthäus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Falk Pingel, "Social Life in an Unsocial Environment. The Inmates' Struggle for Survival," in *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany. The New Histories*, eds. Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (London: Routledge, 2009), 58-81. Falk Pingel, "The Destruction of Human Identity in Concentration Camps: The Contribution of the Social Sciences to an Analysis of Behavior under Extreme Conditions," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 6, 2 (Feb. 1991): 167-184.

5   See for example, the Digital Library of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, Milan (http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/, accessed September 14, 2017). Digital approaches to Holocaust Studies are quickly establishing themselves as a growing and much promising field of research. However, little has been written so far on the organizational and taxonomic logic of digital Holocaust testimony archives compared to the emphasis on the visual aspects of witness testimonies, their 'realist' effects, and the accompanying problems of commodification. Geoffrey Hartman, "Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era", in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), 111-124. Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Noah Shenker,

Greek Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies. This meta-database, it is argued, might break new ground by integrating and analyzing data culled from diverse Holocaust testimonial collections, yet, in doing so, it unconsciously, but diligently, solidifies the linear logic of the Holocaust archive as a series of individualized testimonies[6]. As a way forward, in the second part, we propose a new digitally-informed approach to testimonies that moves beyond the individual witness and makes instead her social relations its primary unit of analysis. Using classificatory schemes and digital graph visualizations to reconstruct social networks at a mass scale we argue, not only does it not efface the witness, but, on the contrary, contributes to a better historicization of her experiences.

The 'Witness Archive": the Database of Greek Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies

Completed in March 2012, the Database of Greek Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies creates an integrated 'virtual archive' of the survivors' historical experience, and, no less, mnemonic narrative, by assembling and streamlining data mined from 1,548 testimonies scattered in various audiovisual archives around the world[7]. These testimonies were conducted

Reframing Holocaust Testimony, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015). Todd Presner, "The Ethics of the Algorithm: Close and Distant Listening to the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, in *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, eds. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Todd Presner, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 175-202. Dan Stone, "The memory of the Archive. The International Tracing Service and the Construction of the Past as History," in *Dapim. Studies on the Holocaust*, 31, 2 (2017), 69-88.

6   See the theoretical ruminations regarding the design of the database in Rika Benveniste, and Pothiti Hantzaroula, Guide to a Virtual Archive, 2011. Retrieved July 20, 2017 from http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/en/database.php. The Database was developed in 2010-2011 by a research team of five historians (Giorgos Antoniou, Rika Benveniste, Pothiti Hantzaroula, Anthony Molho and Paris Papamichos Chronakis). It was funded by the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation and the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe.

7   The testimonies included were primarily culled from six collections: the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive; the Fortunoff Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonies; the Yad Vashem archives; the Jewish Museum of Greece collection of oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors; the archive of oral testimonies of the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly; and the Centropa 'Witness to a Jewish Century' database of life stories. The Database also includes data from the four testimonies of Greek Jews taken by David Boder, as well as from testimonies deposited in lesser known archives, or floating as short videos on the internet. A note on semantics. The database defines as 'Greek Jews' all those living in Greece immediately before the war irrespective of their nationality. Hence, it does not include information on all those Jews of Greek citizenship residing abroad. However, the database does include testimonies from Rhodes and Kos, although the Dodecanese islands were under Italian rule both before and during the war. This historical inaccuracy was deemed necessary since leaving the Dodecanese Jews out of the database would incur an even greater historical injustice. In a world still defined by national borders and their anachronistic projections in the past, an omission of the now by default 'Greek' Dodecanese Jews would inevitably silence their voices once more and write their historical experiences out of any historical narrative. On the Holocaust of the Dodecanese Jews, see

in diverse spatiotemporal settings and according to different research protocols and narrative
formats. Some are heavily structured, whereas others are loose reminiscences; some focus
exclusively on the Holocaust, while others are primarily life stories. Additionally, these
testimonies were tagged in different ways while the reliability of the cataloged data was not
unquestionable. Basic information, such as dates or place names, were sometimes mistaken or
incorrectly transcribed. Similarly, different testimonies of the same witness were often
inconsistent giving conflicting data about birth dates or camp names. Consequently, far from
being ideal, the data processing and design of the database reflected both the project team's
methodological premises as well as the limitations of the available material.

Following a classifying practice common in Holocaust audiovisual archives, the database
organizes the material at the level of the individual to counter-balance the predominantly
quantifying trends in digital humanities, salvage the uniqueness of each survivor's past and
eventually facilitate research as much at the micro as at the macro level. In the eloquent but
tellingly self-contradicting words of a project member, the aim of the database is to furnish
each survivor with an 'identity card,' that is, to provide a core set of data for every available
testimony. The user gets a short but rounded view of the survivor's individual experience, as
well as all essential information regarding the 'source,' the testimony itself. Consequently, the
search page is constructed along two axes and is composed of three interconnecting areas.

The first area comprises all 'biographical' search fields and allows for different search
combinations –from specific names and surnames, (using the Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching
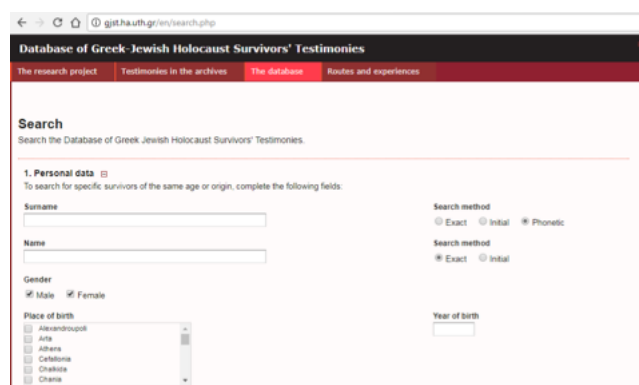Algorithm to cope with name variations), to groups defined by gender, age, and/or birthplace.

Figure 1: The personal data section of the search page.

The second area focuses on the witness' war- and immediate postwar experiences mainly
following the codification of USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive. Finally,
the third, more self-reflexive area, concerns not the witness and its past, but the testimony and
its historicity. It facilitates searches according to genre, location and archival collection thus

Nathan Shachar, *The Lost Worlds of Rhodes: Greeks, Italians, Jews and Turks between Tradition and
Modernity*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

encouraging much-needed research on the history, archival politics, stylistic differences, and regional variations of Holocaust testimonies.
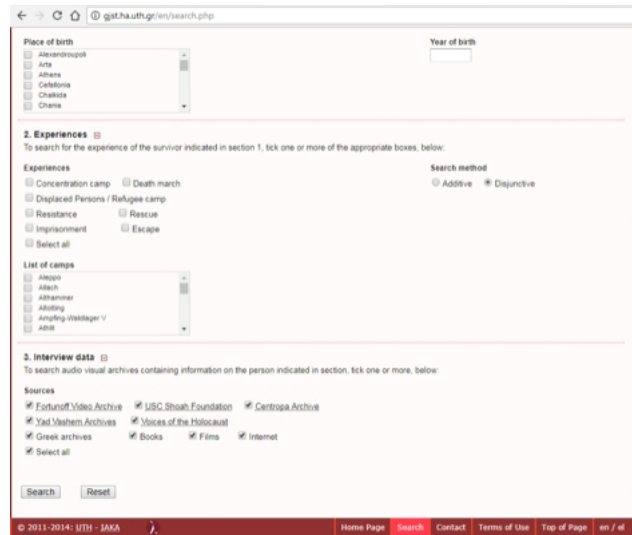

Figure 2: The experiences and interview data section.

Search results are similarly conforming to the theoretico-moral imperative of giving a face to the survivor.

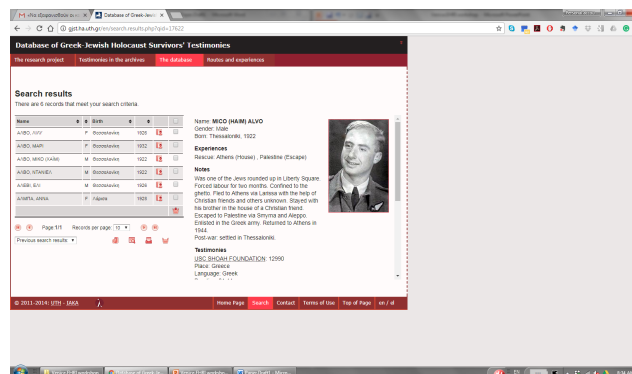Figure 3: The results page

The initial results list on the left contains key biographical data of every relevant witness, whereas a second, more extensive data sheet on the right includes detailed biographical information and a full list of the survivor's principal wartime experiences referencing such key events in a survivor's war history as: imprisonment (in all concentration or labor camps);

participation (in a death march); involvement (in a resistance group); detention (in a prison); escape (from a prison, a ghetto, or a concentration camp); rescue (by hiding or fleeing Greece); post-liberation internment (in a displaced persons or a refugee camp); and, finally, post-war resettlement. Several other data have been included as free-text 'notes' due to their highly anecdotal or non-quantifiable nature. The 'notes' section makes a clear theoretical statement as it aptly demonstrates the plurality, even incompatibility, of Holocaust experiences and relativizes the inbuilt tendency of online databases to group and categorize evidence. Finally, this detailed data sheet contains standardized information about all the testimonies the survivor has given thus alerting the user to the long and complicated process through which the act of testifying transforms a 'survivor' into a 'witness.'

The Database of Greek Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Testimonies is a perfect example of how the two otherwise opposite historiographical trends in Holocaust research discussed earlier, together with the linear, serialized logic of the Holocaust testimonial archive, might expand and diversify the spectrum of our knowledge on individual experiences and their specific memorialization, at the expense of reducing our attention to the kinds of relations Jewish prisoners established in the camps. Such knowledge remains still sketchy and impressionistic. In public and scholarly imagination, extermination camps, (and Auschwitz-Birkenau in particular), are frequently talked about as laboratories of death, mass graveyards in the making. Still, Auschwitz was a densely populated place, inhabited at any given moment by a transient population of hundreds of thousands of people[8]. A complex social world, Auschwitz is often viewed as composed of isolated individuals. Consequently, what the place of certain Jewish groups was within it and how it changed over time remains a largely uncharted territory. Relatively little is known about the size and nature, reach and overlap of the social networks prisoners forged, the factors that facilitated communication, imposed boundaries, or promoted social trust. Much is also unknown about their gender dimension, whether different patterns of social interaction existed among men and women and whether the vocabularies of gender and sexuality informed the cultural meanings of relatedness[9]. To reconstruct such networks and pin down their cultural significations are nevertheless necessary if we are to understand interpersonal relations and power dynamics in the concentration camps from the point of view of their victims and eventually rethink the relationship between individual survival, collective belonging and a liminal sense of selfhood[10].

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8 For a highly incisive history of Auschwitz-Birkenau that highlights its constitutive place at the crossroads of human mobility and border making, see Annette Wieviorka, *Auschwitz, 60 ans après*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2005).

9 However, see the incisive analysis of Lawrence Langer on how gender shapes memory. L. Langer, "Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies," in *Women in the Holocaust*, eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman,(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 351–363.

10 Despite their rich insights, the following studies share a fundamentally sociological approach to social relations, rarely consider specific networks and their cultural signification, and, finally, fail to take into account changes in time and space during the period of internment. Judith D. Baumel, "Social Interaction Among Jewish Women in Crisis During the Holocaust: A Case Study," *Gender and History*, 7, 1 (April 1995): 64-84. Anna Bravo, "Italian Women in the Nazi Camps. Aspects of Identity in Their Accounts," *Oral History*, 13, 1 (April 1985), 20-27. Judith Buber Agassi, "'Camp

The project 'Bonds of Survival,' currently at its pilot stage, proposes one way to reconstruct such social networks through the employment of digital visualization tools. It builds upon, yet radically problematizes, the existing database and rests on a new use of Holocaust testimonies and a methodological emphasis on the ontology of social relations in the camps. The project's end product will be a publicly available online database complete with social network visualizations to help Holocaust historians systematically explore life in the camps and the linkages between group identity formation, survival, and modes of social interaction.

Case Study, Methodology and Mechanics of Research

Among the different groups of prisoners, the project focuses on a liminal case, the Jews from the Greek city of Salonica/Thessaloniki, whose cultural outlook and historical experience nevertheless facilitates research on the extent and nature of social networks in the concentration camps[11]. In the spring and summer of 1943, nearly all 46,000 Salonican Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where their distinctiveness left an indelible memory to no other than Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi[12]. Not belonging to the dominant Ashkenazi ethnocultural group, those Ladino-speaking 'Greeks,' as the other prisoners dubbed them, were treated as a misfit. Henry Levy recalled how "we, the Greeks, were more vulnerable than anybody else … because we were a minority, we were from a Mediterranean country. … We could not speak Yiddish, Polish, or German. Even our Hebrew was different than the others. We were treated differently by the Germans and by our inmates, our brothers from Eastern Europe. Until the very end of the war, they thought we were not Jewish because we could not speak Yiddish. There was

families' in Ravensbrück and the social organization of Jewish women prisoners in a concentration camp," in *Life, Death and Sacrifice: Women and Family in the Holocaust*, ed. Esther Hertzog, (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2008), 107-119. Shamai Davidson, "Group formation and its significance in the Nazi concentration camps," *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*, 22 (1985): 41-50. Mary Esperanza, "Españoles y judíos en el campo de concentración de Gurs (Bearn)," *El Olivo*, 31 (1990), 73-97. Felicja Karay, "The Social and Cultural Life of the Prisoners in the Jewish Forced Labor Camp at Skarzysko-Kamienna," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 8, 1 (March 1994): 1-27. Anna Reading, "Scarlet lips in Belsen. Culture, gender and ethnicity in the policies of the Holocaust," *Media, Culture, Society*, 21, 4 (July 1999):481-501. Maja Sunderland, *Inside Concentration Camps. Social Life at the Extremes*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009). *Interpreting in Nazi Concentration Camps,* ed. Michaela Wolf (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016).

11 On the history of multiethnic Salonica and its Jewish population, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts. Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950*, (London: Harper Collins, 2004).

12 Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardim and the Holocaust*, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 2004. Retrieved June 30, 2016 from https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050803-rodrigue.pdf. There is no definitive work dealing specifically with the fate of Greek Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau. For aspects of their experience, see Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Steven B. Bowman, *The Agony of Greek Jews, 1940-1945*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). On the stereotypical construction of the exotic 'Greek Jew' in Auschwitz-Birkenau, see Katherine E. Fleming, "The Stereotyped 'Greek Jew' from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Israeli Pop Culture," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 25, 1 (May 2007): 17-40.

discrimination"[13]. By turning into a symbolic marker of Jewishness, language differentiation led
to a double segregation of Salonican Jews dramatically reducing their chances of relating to
other inmates. Their multi-layered alienation thus allows us to assess whether distinct cultural
traits resulted in the formation of 'close,' inward-looking networks and fragmented the
superficially homogenous social world of the camps into a set of disjoint micro-societies.

However, the exceptionally cosmopolitan pre-war Salonican Jewish identity also facilitates
checking the extent and nature of 'open,' outbound social networks between Jews of different
cultural and national backgrounds. Salonican Jews were multilingual, speaking French and
occasionally Italian next to Ladino and Modern Greek. They were also culturally extrovert,
having been exposed to French culture from a very early age[14]. Once in Auschwitz-Birkenau,
they utilized this rich cultural capital to communicate, even bond with Jews from other,
particularly French-speaking, countries. The assistance of a French doctor, 'friend of a
Salonican friend,' saved Alfred Haguel's life[15]. Bonding with 'strangers' could, in fact, be as
efficient a survival strategy as was sticking with one's own.

Thus, the multi-referentiality of Salonican Jewish cultural identity helps us better understand
the poetics of similarity – how familiarity was established between strangers in the first place
and how a liminal culture of relatedness was sustained in the camps[16]. Moreover, the case of
Salonican Jews makes evident the operation of more complex networks than anticipated,
networks expanding beyond the limits of locality, kinship and nationality on which existing
historiography largely insists[17]. The perceived 'exoticism' of Salonican Jews renders them an
exemplary case-study and turns their testimonies into an unusually rich set of context-specific
data to evaluate the broader importance of several key identity markers (namely, language,
culture and locality) in the shaping of social relations and survival strategies among Jewish
prisoners in the camps.

Testimonies constitute an inherently partial and skewed body of evidence for correlating
survival with participation in a social network. It is impossible to retrieve the experiences of
those who either perished or did not testify and estimate their degree of inclusion or exclusion
from social networks. Nor do audiovisual testimonies, conducted according to very different
research protocols, follow the same format let alone record the survivor's social relations in their
entirety. The project 'Bonds of Survival' works through these archival limitations by taking a

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13 H. Levy, Interview 26580. VHA USC SFI. Accessed online at Northwestern University on January
    17, 2015.

14 On the multiple layers of late Ottoman Sephardic identities, see Sarah A. Stein, "The Permeable
    Boundaries of Ottoman Jewry," in *Boundaries and Belongings. States and Societies in the Struggle to
    Shape Identities and Local Practices*, ed. Joel S. Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
    2004), 49-70.

15 A. Hagouel, Interview 1489. VHA USC SFI. Accessed online at Northwestern University on 21
    February 2015.

16 On the importance of studying the cultural meanings of sociability and how they determine action,
    affect, and relatedness, see *Conceptualizing Society*, ed. Adam Kuper, (London: Routledge, 1992).

17 Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival. Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, (New York, NY:
    Norton & Co., 2010). See also note 4 above.

qualitative rather than quantitative approach to social interaction. The primary objective is not to comprehensively measure, (let alone 'prove'), the overall importance of social networks as effective survival strategies. Given our near-total lack of information about the camp experience and social interaction of those who were eventually murdered, correlating social networks to survival rates is downright impossible. Rather, the project's objective is to offer a digital tool for determining the kinds of social trust sustaining these networks. The project moves beyond the largely quantitative approach in data collection and follows an ethnographically-prone methodology in order to offer Holocaust historians ways to assess the nature and extent of interpersonal relations at the concentration camps from the point of view of the victims, and, to rethink the relation between individual identity and group belonging under extreme circumstances.

Initially, project members utilized data drawn from twenty audiovisual testimonies to document the existence of social networks in the camps involving at least three persons and operating in specific places and periods of time. Three main taxonomic categories, (of 'work,' 'internment,' and 'transportation'), were applied to reconstruct circles of acquaintances emanating from shared, spatiotemporal experiences. A subsequent preliminary analysis of these classifications showed a sizeable concentration of Salonican Jews in the Sonderkommando unit, and an even larger number in the satellite camp of Warsaw established after the ghetto uprising and tasked with clearing the demolished area. Concentration camps are often treated as a homogeneous space, but these specific spatial categories will help researchers nuance their analysis of camp spatialities as well as spatialize the very process of network formation and operation.[18]

A second set of categories concerned the nature of social networks per se.

Close relations were classified according to the two primary cultural systems of relatedness, namely, kinship and friendship, whereas the variables of 'workmate', 'inmate', 'colleague', 'acquaintance', and 'neighbor' were used to define less intimate ones. Additionally, interaction among Salonican Jews and between them and other prisoners was linked to two

Figure 4: Types of relationships recorded

interrelated factors: common language (the variables being Ladino, Greek, French, Italian, and

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18 Our attention to the spatial aspects of social networks draws from the recent spatial turn in digital Holocaust studies. *Geographies of the Holocaust*, eds. Anne K. Knowles, Tim Cole, and Andrea Giordano, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014). Claudio Fogu and Todd Presner, "Interview with Anne Knowles, Tim Cole, Alberto Giordano, and Paul B. Jaskot, Contributing Authors of *Geographies of the Holocaust*,'" in *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, eds. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Todd Presner, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 240-256.

'hand gestures'), and common origin (Salonican or Greek). Organizing data according to these categories can lead to a better understanding of the camp world by determining at a mass scale how 'open' or 'close,' isolated or interconnected, social networks were, and if they brought together Jews from different cultural and national backgrounds or separated, even pitted them against each other.

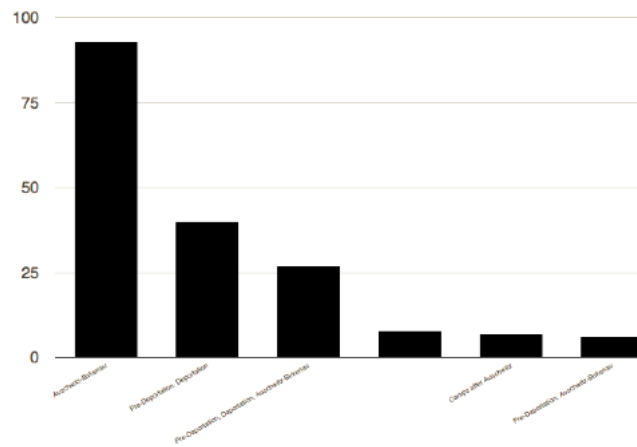Connected to this typology is the periodization of relationships into pre-, war-, and post-war.

Figure 5: Periods of relationships

To our surprise, the number of pre-war relations carrying on in Auschwitz-Birkenau was more than one quarter of the total number recorded, challenging the notion of the camp as a radical break. Identifying the duration of a given relation thus helps reinsert the Holocaust into the broader temporal framework of Jewish social life and facilitates a more accurate, quantitative study of the relation between pre-war and wartime sociability, of resilient continuities but also abrupt breaks. Moreover, accounting for the relationships maintained after the war was over provides a retrospective, yet reliable, marker of their strength. As our first findings showed, while kinship-based relations in the camps were already well established before deportation, chance encounters at the workplace and barracks could also lead to strong and enduring bonding.

Arguably, the degree of intimacy constitutes a critical variable when estimating the significance of a given relationship. We thus tentatively attempted to measure the strength of each recorded relationship by correlating it to its duration using a 1 to 5 scale. Long-lasting pre-war or post-war connections were treated as safe indicators of proximity and heightened intimacy between prisoners and graded the highest. Conversely, short-lived or extremely hierarchical relations received the lowest grade. At first glance negligible, these fleeting encounters nevertheless showcase in their totality the multiple and imaginative ways prisoners interacted with each other and thus merit to be recorded and classified.

Project members tagged the imaginary as much as the physical relations mentioned. In their testimonies, survivors often allude to celebrated individuals whom they were not personally acquainted with but only had heard of. Doctor Coenka, for example, a physician and member of the Auschwitz orchestra, is often positively mentioned as head of a network that saved the lives of several Salonican Jews[19]. Even in abject circumstances, relations, our research reaffirmed, are as much symbolic as they are physical and a sense of community can be built through affinities both 'real' and imagined[20]. Moreover, such mentions offer a solid tool for measuring an individual's fame. They allow us to understand how status was attained and maintained among prisoners, who were the group leaders and how they emerged, and therefore uncover a different set of power relations, other than that between persecutors and persecuted, shaping social life in the camps[21].

The dataset currently includes 229 relationships based on an analysis of twenty survivor testimonies. To create social data connectors and comprehensively map the social networks of these Salonican Jews we used a graph visualization platform, Gephi. We expected to see at least some overlapping networks emerging since we mainly data mined testimonies of interrelated survivors (by kinship or location). Contrary to our expectations, the following graph revealed instead a fractured social world, composed of numerous, albeit isolated, relationships and dominated by ego-networks (although more data feeding is needed to determine whether this is not, in fact, due to the small number of testimonies examined).
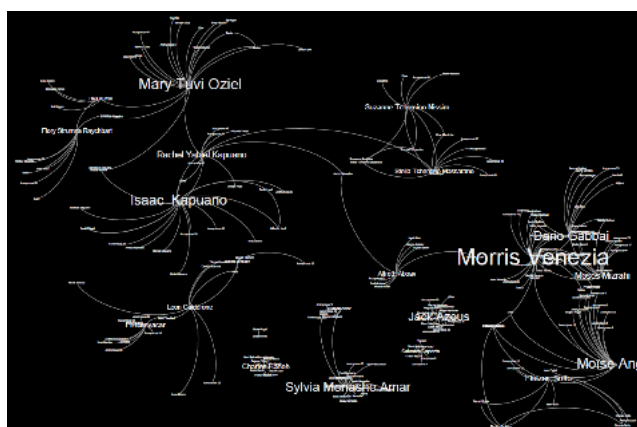

Figure 6: Relationships of twenty Salonican Jewish survivors

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19 Yakobos Handali, *Apo ton Leuko Pyrgo stis pyles tou Auschwitz* [From the White Tower to the Gates of Auschwitz], (Thessaloniki: Ets Ahaim Foundation, 1995),107.

20 The seminal work on the symbolic dimensions of social groupings remains Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, (London: Routledge, 1985).

21 This is an aspect of social relations in the camp world that has so far received little scholarly attention as status is frequently (and erroneously) attributed solely to a close relationship with the perpetrators. For some first insights, see Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival. Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, (New York: Norton & Co., 2010).

However, one network stands apart sustained by strong bonds of kinship and friendship.

Figure 7: The network of the Venezia and Gabbai brothers

It consists of the brothers Morris and Shlomo Venezia, their distant cousins (but mainly 'good
friends'), Dario, Victor and Jack Gabbai, an old friend from Salonica, Daniel Benahmias, and
their fellow inmates and eventual friends, Marcel Nadjari and Moses Mizrahi. The Venezia and
Gabbai brothers, together with Marcel Nadjari, had entangled pre-deportation trajectories. Of
Italian citizenship, born and raised in Salonica, they were part of its last multi-lingual Jewish
generation, fluent in Italian, French, Greek, and Ladino. Once the war erupted, they all fled to
Athens, joined the Greek leftist resistance, were subsequently arrested, and, after a period of
imprisonment, finally deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, they were all employed in the
Sonderkommando unit, eventually managing to stay close and help each other. In January
1945, during the evacuation of Auschwitz, Dario Gabbai, the Venezia brothers, and Daniel
Benahmias once again stuck together. Transferred to Mauthausen, they all survived and
liberation found them all alive[22]. The graph thus powerfully illustrates the existence of a
complex 'close-type network' built around language, kinship, locality, nationality, and
friendship, animated by a combination of pre- and wartime experiences, and eventually
solidified through the common ordeal of the Sonderkommando.

As we continue to explore the features of Gephi, a color differentiation of the nodes based on
attributes such as "friendship" or "kinship" will offer a comprehensive, deep mapping of the
nature of social networks and the semantics of trust in Auschwitz-Birkenau. When combined
with a length differentiation of nodes according to a given relationship's strength, such visuals

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22 M. Venezia, Interview 20405. VHA USC SFI. Accessed online at Northwestern University on 2
February 2015. D. Gabbai, Interview 142. VHA USC SFI. Accessed online at Northwestern
University on 12 February 2015. Shlomo Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers: Eight Months in the
Sonderkommando (*London: Polity Press, 2011). Marcel Nadjari, *Chronico, 1941-1945* [Chronicle,
1941-1945], (Thessaloniki: Ets Ahaim Foundation, 1991).

will additionally reveal the determinants of intimacy. Given Gephi's potential, we consider our project to be open-ended. The methodology and software developed can be applied to the study of social interaction within and between other groups of camp prisoners, or, to other areas of Holocaust research, such as hiding and escape. In fact, our ongoing project will be expanding its scope and resort to a digital social network analysis of Holocaust testimonial material in order to map the webs of relations that made hiding or escape from Nazi-occupied Greece possible for Salonican Jews. Reconstructing the composition, nature, size, and mutability of these networks will make possible a systematic assessment of the importance of financial, social, and cultural resources in sustaining networks of hiding, escape and rescue and thus offer fresh insights into the old but persistent question of how social trust was maintained during the Holocaust.

Conclusions

The use of digital network visualizations can be construed as a corrective to the emphasis on the individual another kind of technology of representation puts –that of the written, audio, and nowadays audiovisual, even hologram, testimony[23]. The audiovisual testimony becomes the organizing unit of the digital Holocaust archive and thus determines its serial logic and its politics of representation. What might be labeled the 'testimony format' represents the survivor as a witness, a single voice documenting the unfathomable. As she recollects her suffering, the witness becomes the sole author of her biography of extinction. The testimony format puts the survivor back at center stage, reinstates her as a human being, reconstructs a selfhood, and makes evident the importance of the myriad individual accounts over the singular, totalizing narrative of the perpetrator's archive or the historian's monologic text[24]. However, spotlighting the survivor does also have some disturbing methodological implications. At best, it downplays the individual's social milieu, no matter how fragmentary that might have been. At worst, it 'sacralizes' the witness and rewrites the survivor as a solitary hero in the viewer's mind[25]. The specifically linear organization of most Holocaust audiovisual archives implicitly informs a distinct logic of individual-centered representation of the survivor and by default, of survival as well.

Yet, a methodological focus on social relations and the use of digital technologies as a means to

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23 On the 'New Dimensions in Testimony' project currently pursued by the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, see New Dimensions in Testimony. Retrieved July 19, 2017 from https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/holocaust/ndt. Stephen Smith, "Oral History Turns Holographic", *Blog: Through Testimony* (March 28, 2014). Retrieved July 19, 2017 from https://sfi.usc.edu/blog/stephen-smith/oral-history-turns-holographic.

24 Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9, 2 (Oct. 1995): 192-207.

25 Susanne Hillman, 'Not living, but going': unheroic survival, trauma performance, and video testimony, in *Holocaust Studies*, 21, 4 (2015): 1-21. For an innovative study of the multiple receptions of Holocaust testimonies by scholars and artists, (though not 'ordinary' viewers), see Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing. On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013).

visually represent them can redress this imbalance. Attention to the forms and structures of relatedness can lead to a better understanding of how prisoners attempted to reconstruct a social universe in the camps and navigate within it under extremely adverse circumstances. Social network visualizations provide a flexible-enough tool for analyzing the multiple relations between prisoners themselves, move beyond the perpetrator's gaze and tackle the impasses of top-bottom studies of Nazi genocidal ideology and its implementation in the camps. They offer a glimpse to some of the organizing principles shaping incarceration and prisoners' society. Hence, they allow us to understand better how identities were not only forcefully imposed by the perpetrators but also liminally crafted by the prisoners themselves, as fragmentary senses of the self, produced through the discourses and practices of relatedness. Complementing the technology of audiovisual testimonies with that of social networks helps us not just restore the 'humanity' of the survivor-witness but also contextualize it and thus historicize it. Data connectors may be dots and lines in a blank screen, but they eventually let us understand what it meant to be human in Auschwitz.

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