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# Women's Work, Women's Networks: Correspondence and Knowledge Circulation Between the Polish Research Institute in Lund and Survivor Historical Commissions in the Early Postwar Period

**Abstract:** Research on early postwar documentation efforts related to the Second World War and the Holocaust conducted by survivors of Nazi persecution has expanded over the past two decades. Yet, research on how knowledge circulated between these efforts – especially across various “borders” – is still nascent. This chapter seeks to gain a better understanding of the role of women’s informal networks during the early postwar period, activated through correspondence, in the circulation of knowledge – with regard to both the Nazi atrocities and the efforts themselves (methods, materials, etc.) – between the Polish Research Institute in Lund, Sweden (PIZ) and other similar initiatives, especially the ones conducted by survivors of Nazi persecution. In addition to gender, religion and other differences are also important analytical tools used in this study to understand if and how communications were carried out across these categories. The findings provide new insights into the roles of women in early efforts to document the Nazi atrocities, the interplay of gender dynamics in the organizational structure and hierarchy of one of these efforts, and their impact on the circulation of knowledge between similar initiatives.

**Keywords:** survivors of Nazi persecution, survivor historical commissions, Polish Research Institute in Lund (Sweden), correspondence

## Introduction

In late 1949, Germaine Tillion, a former member of the French resistance who had been imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, wrote an urgent letter to Ludwika Broel-Plater, a former member of the Polish resistance who had also been imprisoned in Ravensbrück. Tillion was a witness at the French Military Tribunal trial of SS officer Fritz Suhren, commandant of Ravensbrück from September 1942. She was also involved in efforts to document the experiences of individuals persecuted by the Nazis. Broel-Plater, a stateless resident of Sweden, was responsible for

the objects and documentation gathered from former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps by the Polish Research Institute (Polski Instytut Źródłowy) in Lund, Sweden (hereafter PIZ). Among this material was a certified copy of the “Mittwerda List” of 480 prisoners who supposedly had been sent to the fictional “Mittwerda rest camp” but who were, in fact, executed in the gas chamber. This list was signed by Suhren and dated April 6, 1945.<sup>1</sup>

“The Mittwerda list is of great importance because it is an irrefutable document proving SUHREN’s responsibility for the extermination of the camp,” Tillion wrote to Broel-Plater in French. However, she explained, the French Examining Magistrate feared that if the document was requested through “the hierarchical channel” it would arrive too late for the trial, so asked Tillion to use her personal connections to obtain it in a timelier fashion. Tillion had originally written to former PIZ employee Helena Dziedzicka, whom she had known in the camp, before ultimately writing to Broel-Plater. Tillion closed the letter by writing that she had fond memories of Broel-Plater in Ravensbrück.<sup>2</sup> Broel-Plater fulfilled Tillion’s request in time for the list to be used as evidence in Suhren’s trial, which ended with a guilty verdict.<sup>3</sup>

This letter, held in the PIZ archive, is an example of knowledge pertaining to the Nazi atrocities being shared between similar initiatives in the early postwar period by means of informal networks crossing geographical, linguistic, national, and other borders. These networks, as the letter demonstrates, were often based on shared wartime experiences in, for example, concentration camps and resistance groups. Because men and women were separated as prisoners in camps and other settings, these networks frequently developed along gender lines, with some scholars arguing that women developed more extensive and enduring networks than men.<sup>4</sup> Following liberation and the dispersal of survivors, the networks could be maintained and activated through correspondence. For example, other letters and documents in the PIZ archive reveal that the formation of PIZ as a survivor historical commission in the early postwar period as well as many of the internal operations of the institute – including gathering witness testimonies –

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1 The Polish Research Institute in Lund (PIZ) archive (Lund University Library, Sweden), volume 30: 5. “Mittwerda.”

2 Zygmunt Łakociński’s arkiv (ZL) (Lund University Library, Sweden), volume 41, letter from Germaine Tillion to Ludwika Broel-Plater, in French, datelined Paris, December 31, 1949. Capitalizations in original. Translated from French by me. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

3 Tillion writes about Mittwerda and mentions Dziedzicka and Broel-Plater in Germaine Tillion, *Ravensbrück*, trans. Gerald Satterwhite (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 147–152.

4 For instance, Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, “Women’s Agency and Survival Strategies during the Holocaust,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 22, no. 3 (1999): 329–347, 338.

were supported by and/or conducted through former concentration camp prisoners' networks of support and resistance, particularly those of women. These internal operations at PIZ were focused on gathering knowledge about the German occupation of Poland and the experiences of Poles in ghettos, concentration and labor camps, in hiding, and so forth. This was done through face-to-face interviews as well as by means of correspondence, which was often carried out through informal networks. In addition, important knowledge was circulated "from below" through these networks that informed the ways in which the institute members conducted their work, such as by adapting collection methods and deviating from the established methodology.<sup>5</sup>

The letter regarding the Mittwerda List constitutes tantalizing potential evidence that women's informal networks also served as an important conduit for disseminating this knowledge and sharing knowledge about how these efforts were being carried out through correspondence with other organizations and initiatives concerned with documenting the Nazi atrocities. Throughout much of history, women's participation in public debates, politics, business, philosophy, and other arenas was restricted by social norms. Correspondence conducted in the "feminine" domestic sphere was one of the few ways women could participate in these arenas, which were otherwise reserved for men in the "masculine" public sphere. Through letters, women were also able to build and maintain informal networks of support and resistance. Correspondence is thus a fruitful source of material right up to the modern period, especially when seeking to understand the role of women in historical events and the interplay between gender and other differences in various contexts, such as transnational and diaspora knowledge networks.<sup>6</sup>

While research on early postwar documentation efforts, especially those conducted by survivors of Nazi persecution, has expanded over the past two decades, research on how knowledge was circulated between these efforts – especially across various "borders" – is still nascent.<sup>7</sup> Understandably, most research has fo-

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5 Victoria Van Orden Martínez, "Afterlives: Jewish and Non-Jewish Polish Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Sweden Documenting Nazi Atrocities, 1945–1946" (PhD diss., Linköping University, 2023).

6 Relevant studies address both historical and contemporary actors. See, for instance, Susan Dalton, *Engendering the Republic of Letters: Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Sami Mahroum, ed., "Transnational Knowledge Through Diaspora Networks," *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 8, no. 1 (2006), accessed February 26, 2025, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000149086.locale=en>

7 This is in line with the previous lack of studies on migrant knowledge. See, for instance, Simone Lässig, "The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda,"

cused on knowledge *about* the atrocities and how this knowledge was collected rather than on how both forms of knowledge were circulated between documentation commissions and other initiatives concerned with the Nazi atrocities. Similarly, research on gender and religious dynamics within and across these efforts is still in its infancy. In her foundational book on Jewish documentation efforts in early postwar Europe, historian Laura Jockusch observes that the high level of involvement of women in these efforts “undermined established gender roles.” At the same time, only a few women held leading roles, as most of them worked as collectors, interviewers, archivists, and secretaries.<sup>8</sup> Scholars are just now beginning to investigate the “behind-the-scenes” work carried out by these women.<sup>9</sup>

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*Bulletin of the GHI Washington* 59 (2016), 29–58, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.ghi-dc.org/publication/bulletin-59-fall-2016>; Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, “Knowledge on the Move: New Approaches toward a History of Migrant Knowledge,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 3 (2017): 313–346. Previous research exploring the topic of correspondence across these types of boundaries includes Ari Joskowitz, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023); Nicolas Berg, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians*, trans. and ed. Joel Golb (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015). An exception here is historian Laura Jockusch’s foundational book *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

8 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 186. Some women did play lead roles. See, for instance, Boaz Cohen, “Rachel Auerbach, Yad Vashem, and Israeli Holocaust Memory,” in Polin: *Studies in Polish Jewry*, ed. Gabriel N. Finder, Natalia Aleksion, and Antony Polonsky, Volume 20 of *Making Holocaust Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 197–221; Sharon Geva, “To collect the tears of the Jewish people’: The story of Miriam Novitch,” *Holocaust Studies* 21, no. 1–2 (2015): 73–92, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2015.1062276>; Christine Schmidt, “‘We Are All Witnesses’: Eva Reichmann and the Wiener Library’s Eyewitness Accounts Collection,” in *Agency and the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Debórah Dwork*, ed. Thomas Kühne and Mary Jane Rein (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 123–140; Johannes Heuman, “In Search of Documentation: Nella Rost and the Jewish Historical Commission,” in *Early Holocaust Memory in Sweden: Archives, Testimonies and Reflections*, ed. Johannes Heuman and Pontus Rudberg (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 33–65.

9 For instance, Leora Bilsky, “Rachel Auerbach and the Eichmann Trial: A New Conception of Victims’ Testimonies,” *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 36, no. 4 (2022): 327–345; Sharon Geva, “Documenters, Researchers and Commemorators: The Life Stories and Work of Miriam Novitch and Rachel Auerbach in Comparative Perspective,” *MORESHET Journal for the Study of the Holocaust and Antisemitism* 16 (2019): 56–91; Christine Schmidt, “‘Historical Meaning Beyond the Personal’: Survivor Agency and Mediation in the Wiener Library’s Early Testimonies Collection,” *EHRI Document Blog*, April 17, 2019, accessed February 6, 2025, <https://blog.ehri-project.eu/2019/04/17/historical-meaning-beyond-the-personal/>; Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlik, “Właściwym autorem tej książki jest . . .,” in *Żyd z Klimontowa opowiada . . .* (Wydanie Krytyczne Prac Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej, ed. Lejb Zylberberg and Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2021), 9–30; Victoria Van Orden Martínez and Christine Schmidt, “Survivor-Interviewers as Companions of

Likewise, they are increasingly turning to the personal correspondence by victims of Nazi persecution to gain insight into the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the early postwar period.<sup>10</sup> This study brings together these complementary threads of research to gain a better understanding of the role of women's informal networks during the early postwar period, activated through correspondence, in the circulation of knowledge – both regarding the Nazi atrocities and these efforts themselves (methods, materials, etc.) – between PIZ and other similar initiatives, especially the ones conducted by survivors of Nazi persecution. In addition to gender, religion and other differences – such as nationality and language – are also important analytical tools that are used in this study to understand if and how communications occurred across these categories. By examining the PIZ correspondence in relation to organizational structures and hierarchies as well as the role of gender and other differences within these, this chapter offers new and important insight not only into postwar efforts to document the Second World War and the Holocaust but also into how power dynamics associated with the gender and religion of those involved in these efforts helped or hindered the circulation of knowledge between similar initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

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Misery: A Comparative View from Post-War England and Sweden,” in *Survivors' Toil*, ed. Éva Kovacs and Natalia Aleksion (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming 2026); Victoria Van Orden Martínez, “Documenting the Documenter: Piecing together the history of Polish Holocaust survivor-historian Luba Melchior,” *EHRI Document Blog*, December 12, 2022, accessed February 6, 2025, <https://blog.ehri-project.eu/2022/12/12/luba-melchior/>

**10** In addition to the contributions in this thematic section, see also, for instance, Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlik, “List należy do życia . . . Listy prywatne jako źródło badań nad Zagładą” [A Letter is Part of Life . . . Personal Letters as Source Materials for the Study of the Holocaust], *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów/Jewish History Quarterly* 250, no. 2 (2014): 321–340; Christine Schmidt and Dan Stone, “What was Known? Holocaust-Era Letters, Archives, and Knowledge,” in *Holocaust Letters*, ed. Christine Schmidt and Sandra Lipner (London: The Wiener Holocaust Library, 2023), 10–11; Daniela Ozacky Stern, “Out of Africa: Letters of Jewish detainees in the British internment camps, 1944–1948,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 23, no. 2 (2023): 444–469, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2023.2292800>; Clara Dijkstra, Charlie Knight, Sandra Lipner, and Christine Schmidt, eds., *Holocaust Letters: Methodologies, Cases and Reflections* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2026).

**11** In addition to the works already cited, this body of research includes Pieter Lagrou, “Historiographie de guerre et historiographie du temps présent: cadres institutionnels en Europe occidentale, 1945–2000,” in *Bulletin du Comité international d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* 30–31 (1999–2000): 191–215; Pieter Lagrou, “L'histoire du temps présent en Europe depuis 1945, ou comment se constitue et se développe un nouveau champ disciplinaire,” *La Revue pour l'histoire du CNRS* 9 (2003): 4–15.

## Documenting the Second World War and the Holocaust

PIZ was a historical commission collecting material on the German occupation of Poland and atrocities committed against Poles starting in late 1939. In the spring and summer of 1945, some 30,000 Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution were brought to Sweden for medical care and recovery, including around 13,000 Poles. Some of these Polish “repatriates,” as they were termed by the Swedish government, became involved with PIZ in a new effort to collect evidence and written testimonies from other Polish survivors regarding the Nazi atrocities. In 1945 and 1946, nine Polish repatriates – seven women and two men who were all former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps – were employed by the Swedish Labor Market Commission to conduct this work in a formal capacity. They were led by PIZ co-founder Dr. Zygmunt Łakociński, a Polish art historian who came to Sweden in 1934 and worked at Lund University.<sup>12</sup> Today, the PIZ collection assembled by these individuals consists of an impressive array of material artifacts from the concentration camps, art and poetry about life during and after the Second World War and the Holocaust, and hundreds of witness testimonies.<sup>13</sup>

PIZ was one of many documentation efforts established during and after the Second World War and the Holocaust by individuals directly affected by the Nazi atrocities. What is now known as The Wiener Holocaust Library in London originated in 1933 when Dr. Alfred Wiener, a German Jew fleeing Nazi persecution, established the Jewish Central Information Office in Amsterdam to collect material about the Nazis and their actions against Jews.<sup>14</sup> Following the invasion of Poland by Soviet and Nazi forces in 1939, the Polish government-in-exile began gathering material and evidence related to the Nazi occupation of Poland with the assistance of the Polish underground resistance movement.<sup>15</sup> Starting in 1940, clandestine archives were created in several Polish ghettos, most notably the

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12 On Łakociński, see, for instance, Izabela A. Dahl, “Witnessing the Holocaust: Jewish Experiences and the Collection of the Polish Source Institute in Lund,” in *Early Holocaust Memory in Sweden: Archives, Testimonies and Reflections*, ed. Johannes Heuman and Pontus Rudberg (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 67–91.

13 Lund University Library, “Witnessing Genocide,” accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.ub.lu.se/hitta/digitala-samlingar/witnessing-genocide>

14 Ben Barkow, *Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997).

15 For instance, Michael Fleming, “Geographies of obligation and the dissemination of news of the Holocaust,” *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 1–2 (2017): 59–75, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2016.1209834>

*OyNEG Shabes* (Oneg Shabbat) archive in the Warsaw Ghetto, which was founded by Polish-Jewish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum to “capture the experiences of Polish Jews under German occupation.”<sup>16</sup> In France, the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center, CDJC) was established in 1943, “to collect evidence on the persecution of the Jews in order to bear witness and demand justice after the war.”<sup>17</sup> As these examples demonstrate, many of the documentation efforts initiated during the war were grassroots initiatives undertaken by Jewish organizations and individuals. Laura Jockusch in her comprehensive account of Holocaust documentation efforts notes that “German persecution and extermination policies elicited widespread and multifaceted individual and collective Jewish documentation efforts across Europe.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the wartime efforts by both the Polish government-in-exile and PIZ were concerned with documenting the Nazi occupation of Poland and the persecution of Polish citizens in general, which they understood as *including* Polish Jews.<sup>19</sup> However, PIZ operated independently of the Polish government-in-exile during the war and was, like the Jewish documentation commissions, a grassroots effort.

The end of the war led to a flood of new initiatives to document the Nazi atrocities led by both Jewish and non-Jewish survivors, as well as non-survivors, living in Europe. Just as during the war, many of these were or began as grassroots efforts, while others were founded with the support of existing institutions. Some of the most well-known survivor historical commissions include the Central Jewish Historical Commission, founded following the liberation of Lublin, Poland in August 1944,<sup>20</sup> and the Central Historical Commission in Munich founded in November 1945, which – although founded in Germany – was established by two Jewish survivors, one originating from Poland and one from Lithuania.<sup>21</sup> In 1946, Polish-Jewish survivor Dr. Nella Rost, who had previously worked with the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, established a historical commission in Sweden as part of the Swedish section of the World Jewish Congress.<sup>22</sup>

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16 For instance, Samuel D. Kassow, *Who will write our history? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the OyNEG Shabes Archive* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018).

17 “The history of the CDJC,” Mémorial de la Shoah, accessed February 6, 2025, <https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/archives-and-documentation/the-documentation-center/the-history-of-the-cdj.html>

18 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 33.

19 Fleming, “Geographies of obligation.”

20 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 89; Natalia Aleksion, “The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944–1947,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20, ed. Natalia Aleksion et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 74–97.

21 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 128.

22 Heuman, “In Search of Documentation.”

Within the realm of postwar survivor historical commissions, PIZ was unusual in the sense that its focus on Germany's crimes against Poland and all Poles meant that it was concerned with documenting both Jewish and non-Jewish suffering, rather than just one or the other. Accordingly, the volunteers and employees of PIZ included both Jewish and non-Jewish Poles – something that apparently rarely occurred among survivor historical commissions in the postwar period.<sup>23</sup> These unusual dynamics meant that suffering under the German occupation and in ghettos and concentration camps was mediated across religious boundaries in the internal work of the institute, albeit to a limited extent due to the involvement of fewer Jews than non-Jews.<sup>24</sup> These dynamics mean that the religion of those involved with PIZ represents an important analytical category for this analysis. A key consideration when examining the correspondence is thus to what extent religious boundaries were crossed – and, hence, knowledge circulated – via external correspondence between, for instance, PIZ and the many Jewish survivor historical commissions.

Similarly, because more female than male repatriates were employees of PIZ, gender is also an important factor to consider in terms of institutional dynamics, not least because I have argued in previous research that much of the day-to-day internal operations were conducted through women's existing and reconstructed networks of resistance and support – the kind of informal networks that facilitated the use of the Mittwerda List at Suhren's trial.<sup>25</sup> Hence, another key consideration when examining the correspondence concerns the role of gender in how external correspondence was conducted and the impact of this on the circulation of knowledge.

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23 For instance, Lagrou, "Historiographie de guerre," Lagrou, "L'histoire du temps." Another example of a survivor historical commission established by non-Jewish survivors is Die Vergessenen (The Forgotten). It was founded by Gentile concentration camp survivors Karl Jochheim-Armin and Georg Tauber, who gathered the testimonies of Roma survivors. See, for example, Ari Joskowicz, "Separate Suffering, Shared Archives: Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution," *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past* 28, no. 1 (2016): 110–40, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.28.1.110>

24 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, no. 4 (2021): 483–505, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2021.1981627>

25 Martínez, "Afterlives."



## Material and Method

Historians engaged in research on and through correspondence are increasingly using technology to facilitate the digital mapping of letters and the production of useful metadata.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, although parts of the PIZ archive have been digitized, this material does not include the correspondence. Nothing in the related personal archive of the institute's founder, Zygmunt Łakociński, has been digitized. However, the inventory lists of both archives are comprehensive and well-organized, thus lending themselves to an analog analysis that is sufficient for the kind of understanding needed to ground this study. In this chapter, I utilize these lists not only as guides to the primary sources in the archives but also as primary sources in their own right. The correspondence analyzed in this chapter is located in two archives held in the Special Collections of the Lund University Library in Lund, Sweden: The Polish Research Institute in Lund archive (here referred to as the PIZ archive) and Zygmunt Łakociński's archive (here referred to as the ZL archive).

The postwar collection and documentation work undertaken by PIZ was the most intense in the first three years after the war. At the end of 1946, Swedish government funding for the initiative ended and little additional funding was subsequently obtained. In 1947 and 1948, most of the repatriates who had been involved with PIZ left Sweden and/or found paid work elsewhere. After that, Ludwika Broel-Plater and Łakociński continued the work of PIZ in a limited manner until Broel-Plater's death in 1972 prompted Łakociński to terminate the work of the institute. The focus of this analysis is primarily on the early correspondence, which was sent and received during the first five years after the war. The details of the contents of this correspondence are beyond the scope of this article but were generally bureaucratic in nature (requests for funding and other kinds of support, sharing methods and materials, etc.).

Many Polish repatriates were involved with PIZ in various ways, particularly during the period analyzed here. As a result, the PIZ and ZL archives contain voluminous correspondence between Łakociński and Polish repatriates in Sweden,

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Javier Ureña-Carrion et al., "Communication now and then: Analyzing the Republic of Letters as a communication network," *Applied Network Science* 7, no. 26 (2022): 1–16, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41109-022-00463-1>; Dan Edelstein et al., "Historical Research in a Digital Age: Reflections from the Mapping the Republic of Letters Project," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 2 (2017): 400–424, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/122.2.400>; Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), *First-Hand Accounts of War: War letters (1935–1950) from NIOD digitized*, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.niod.nl/en/projects/first-hand-accounts-war>

as well as personal correspondence between Łakociński and private individuals in Sweden. I have examined this larger body of correspondence in previous research, which has offered me useful knowledge for this analysis while providing context and depth to the findings. However, since this chapter is concerned with how PIZ communicated with other organizations, institutes, and historical commissions, this correspondence falls outside of the scope of the present analysis. Instead, this analysis primarily focuses on what I consider external communications – correspondence sent and received by Łakociński, as founder and head of the institute, and the nine Polish repatriates employed by the Swedish Labor Market Commission to work for PIZ in 1945 and 1946 – Ludwika Broel-Plater, Krystyna Karier, Luba Melchior, Helena Dziedzicka, Bożysław Kurowski, Józef Nowaczyk, Halina Strzelecka, Helena Miklaszewska, and Irena Jaworowicz (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Group photo taken by Maria Helena Kurowska, 1946 (public domain image). According to the caption associated with the image: Back row (left to right) Bożysław Kurowski, Ludwika Broel-Plater, Carola von Gegerfelt (Zygmunt Łakociński's wife), Józef Nowaczyk, unidentified in original caption but almost certainly Krystyna Karier, Zygmunt Łakociński. Front row (left to right): Helena Dziedzicka, Luba Melchior, Halina Strzelecka. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

As in all organizations, each PIZ employee was assigned specific responsibilities based in part on their experience and skills during the period the institute was funded by the Swedish government. This work was carried out in addition to the overall interviewing and collection activities that all employees to some extent participated in. Krystyna Karier, who had studied mathematics, was responsible for accounting, oversaw general correspondence, and served as secretary in

charge of meetings and conferences. Luba Melchior, who had a business degree, was responsible for the Jewish and literary departments of PIZ as well as for archiving and organizing the institute's documents. Ludwika Broel-Plater, a qualified teacher and linguist, was responsible for creating a list of vocabulary used in the concentration camps and for documenting the history of PIZ. Helena Dziedzicka, who had studied languages, was responsible for translations and correspondence in English and French. Bożysław Kurowski, a lawyer, was responsible for legal issues. Józef Nowaczyk, a diplomat with a background in economics, was responsible for a geographical dictionary of the concentration camps and related locations. Halina Strzelecka, who had a master's degree in literature, was responsible for maintaining the PIZ files. Helena Miklaszewska, a historian, was responsible for maintaining a list of deceased former prisoners, while Irena Jaworowicz, a librarian, was responsible for typing all PIZ documents.<sup>27</sup> By nature of their responsibilities, some of these individuals were more engaged in correspondence than others. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on those who were active correspondents.

Gender and feminist studies scholar Maria Tamboukou views archives “as an assemblage of documents, institutional practices, power/knowledge relations as well as space/time/matter rhythms.”<sup>28</sup> The word assemblage denotes that these are not merely qualities of the archives and the material within them but rather a *process* that involves researchers. Encountering and engaging with an archive in various ways, at different times, through distinct lenses, and by asking diverse questions, researchers not only analyze the documents of life within it, but they also become part of the life of the archive, creating new assemblages in the process. Each encounter with an archive is a new beginning, the start of a new assemblage with the potential for unexpected outcomes that the researcher must be open to. Tamboukou argues that:

Although we always go to the archive with some questions in mind, we should also let its documents surprise us, allow them to interrogate our a-priori judgements, understandings and prejudices and let them redirect our analytical paths and routes of interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

Methodologically, this means adopting an open and flexible approach to research that is informed by the rhythms of the archive and the individual researcher's

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<sup>27</sup> PIZ 44.5g, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Tamboukou, “Archival Rhythms: Narrativity in the Archive,” in *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences*, ed. Niamh Moore, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley, and Maria Tamboukou (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Tamboukou, “Reassembling Documents of Life in the Archive,” *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017): 1–19, 4, accessed October 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.6.215>

engagement with the material within it. Tamboukou also stresses the importance of embracing the multi-modality of archival research by considering archival material in different formats. Through my past encounters with the PIZ and ZL archives, I have developed a sense of some of the rhythms – for instance, the assemblages of institutional practices and power/knowledge relations – of the lives of and in archives. “Mapping” these rhythms has served both as a method for analyzing this material and been a result of my research and continues to be so in this analysis. In this chapter, I continue this mapping of the PIZ and ZL archives by asking them different research questions to gain a better understanding of how knowledge of the Nazi atrocities was circulated during the early postwar period between PIZ and other organizations, including other survivor historical commissions.

The analysis is divided into two main parts. The first part identifies rhythms in the correspondence that begin to reveal institutional practices and hierarchies that had a bearing on which knowledge was circulated in the context of PIZ and how. It considers the correspondence both from a bird’s eye view and through close readings of select correspondence to gain an understanding of how the material breaks down into various categories linked to recipient and sender, such as gender, religion, nationality, and language. These findings are extrapolated in the second part of the analysis, which adopts an actor-centered approach to elucidate how knowledge was communicated at PIZ and by whom, thereby enabling me to address the specific research questions.<sup>30</sup>

## Mapping the PIZ and ZL Archives

The PIZ and ZL archives are thoroughly cataloged in extensive archive lists.<sup>31</sup> This means that these lists are already maps that can be used to navigate their respective archives. But just like road maps, archival maps are traversed differently by various users. Through specific research questions, researchers do not merely follow an existing map, they also contribute to the mapping of the archives.<sup>32</sup> Since my research questions involve gaining an understanding of gender and other differences in the context of institutional, social, and knowledge hierarchies, it is

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<sup>30</sup> Lässig, “The History of Knowledge,” 43–44.

<sup>31</sup> “[Archival description for] Zygmunt Łakocińskis arkiv,” (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Library), accessed October 31, 2024, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-64405>; “Archival description: The Polish Research Institute in Lund (Polski Instytut Zrodlowy [sic] w Lund, PIZ)” (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Library), accessed October 31, 2024, [https://www.ub.lu.se/sites/ub.lu.se/files/2020-11/PIZ\\_archival\\_description.pdf](https://www.ub.lu.se/sites/ub.lu.se/files/2020-11/PIZ_archival_description.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Tamboukou, “Archival Rhythms.”

through these categories that I map the PIZ and ZL archives in this part of the analysis.

In the PIZ archive, most of the correspondence is organized into clear categories across five volumes, 46 to 50, and dispersed in three others, 43 to 45.<sup>33</sup> For example, the overarching category for volumes 46 to 47 reads “Letters and documents exchanged between PIZ and authorities, institutions and organizations.” The sub-categories include, for example, volume 46 “Letters and documents: Sweden,” under which several additional sub-categories can be found, such as volume 46:8 “Letters/documents to/from World Jewish Congress: Historical Commission, Stockholm 1946” and volume 46:11 “Letters/documents to/from Rada Uchodźstwa Polskiego w Szwecji [sic] (Polish Council for Refugees in Sweden), Stockholm, 1945–1973.”<sup>34</sup> More general correspondence is found in volumes 48 to 50 “Correspondence between PIZ and private individuals.” This analysis does not use these latter volumes extensively, instead focusing on examining the correspondence in volumes 43 to 47, as this involves exchanges between the repatriates associated with PIZ and/or Łakociński and external actors and organizations. The correspondence in the ZL archive naturally includes a large amount of Łakociński’s personal correspondence, as well as correspondence submitted to the editorial team of the Polish-language publication *Polak*, which was founded by Łakociński.<sup>35</sup> This material, however, is outside the present scope. From the ZL archive, this analysis only considers Ludwika Broel-Plater’s early postwar correspondence.<sup>36</sup>

On the PIZ side of the correspondence, all individuals were Polish. Accordingly, many letters written in Polish passed between PIZ and Polish individuals and organizations. Correspondence with Polish governmental and other organizations in Sweden, such as the Interim Treasury Committee for Polish Questions in Stockholm, the Polish Aid Committee in Sweden (Polski Komitet Pomocy w Szwecji), and the Polish Council for Refugees in Sweden (Rada Uchodźstwa Polskiego w Szwecji), was primarily handled by Łakociński in his capacity as head of PIZ.<sup>37</sup> He was also the primary correspondent with Polish organizations and indi-

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<sup>33</sup> PIZ archival description, 32–80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 38–39, 45, 47. Should read: *Rada Uchodźstwa Polskiego w Szwecji*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 71–80.

<sup>36</sup> This material – Broel-Plater’s personal archive – is contained in five volumes (41–45) in the Łakociński archive. In addition to her material, one of the volumes (41) also includes material related to her death, including tributes written by Zygmunt Łakociński. See Victoria Van Orden Martínez, “An Eternally Grateful Refugee? Silences in Swedish Public Discourse and the (De)Historicization of Polish-Swedish Activist Ludwika Broel-Plater,” in *Forced Migrants in Nordic Histories* ed. Johanna Leinonen et al. (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2025), 203–223.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, PIZ 46:9, 46:10, 46:11, 46:12.

viduals in Poland and around the world.<sup>38</sup> However, there are exceptions to this pattern. For example, Bożysław Kurowski and Krystyna Karier – responsible for legal matters and general correspondence, respectively – corresponded with Polish organizations in countries such as Germany and Belgium, and they both wrote letters to the Polish Red Cross.<sup>39</sup> Karier also corresponded with the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN) in Warsaw, as did Łakociński.<sup>40</sup> Broel-Plater, who was responsible for camp vocabulary and the history of PIZ, and Karier also engaged in limited communications with Polish publications and organizations in Sweden, Britain, and Uruguay.<sup>41</sup> The bulk of the PIZ associates' written communication in Polish with Polish individuals and organizations is of a less formal nature compared to that of Łakociński; that is, in correspondence between Łakociński, other Polish repatriates in Sweden, and Poles in the diaspora.<sup>42</sup> An exception to this is Melchior's official correspondence – in her role as head of the Jewish section of PIZ – with fellow Pole Nella Rost, who was the head of the Jewish Historical Commission in Stockholm.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, PIZ engaged in extensive correspondence with organizations and individuals of various nationalities and in different languages. Łakociński was responsible for correspondence with Swedish individuals and organizations, both as the head of PIZ and as the only person who could correspond in Swedish.<sup>44</sup> Correspondence between Łakociński and the Norwegian Association of Political Prisoners in Oslo was carried out in Swedish on his part and Norwegian on theirs, mainly focusing on the two organizations' activities and collection procedures.<sup>45</sup> He corresponded in English with individuals and organizations in the United States, such as the Hoover Institute and Library at Stanford University (where the PIZ testimonies were sent for safekeeping between 1949 and 1972), and in Swedish, English, and German with the Dutch Legation in Stockholm regarding Dutch citizens interned in Ravensbrück.<sup>46</sup> In addition to Łakociński, PIZ employees Broel-Plater, Karier, and Helena Dziedzicka (who was responsible for correspondence in English and French) also communicated to a relatively limited extent across national and language barriers. Karier and Dziedzicka both corresponded

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, PIZ 47:6, 47:7, 47:8, 47:9, 47:10, 47:12.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, PIZ 47:11b, 47:11d, 47:5.

<sup>40</sup> PIZ 47:4.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, PIZ 46:13b, 47:12a, 47:11 b.

<sup>42</sup> PIZ 44:3, 48–50; ZL 41.

<sup>43</sup> PIZ 46:8.

<sup>44</sup> PIZ 46:1 to 46:6.

<sup>45</sup> PIZ 47:2.

<sup>46</sup> PIZ 47:14, 46:7.

in English with Major A.K. Mant at the War Crimes Investigation Unit in Germany regarding the Hamburg Ravensbrück Trial.<sup>47</sup> Broel-Plater also corresponded in French, as seen in her communications with Germaine Tillion.

Except for Luba Melchior, all repatriates employed as part of PIZ were Catholic, while Łakociński was a Protestant. Melchior was placed in charge of “Jewish matters” for PIZ, which meant that the correspondence involving Jewish organizations should have been handled by her. However, Łakociński was also involved with this correspondence. Together with Melchior, he signed or co-signed several letters to Nella Rost at the Jewish Historical Commission in Stockholm.<sup>48</sup> He also sent a letter, without Melchior’s involvement, to the Jewish Historical Commission in Munich, although no response is to be found in the archives.<sup>49</sup> Finally, he corresponded with Dr. Jacob Robinson at the Institute of Jewish Affairs (IJA) in New York (again, without Melchior’s involvement) to request financial support for the “Jewish Section” of PIZ headed by Melchior.<sup>50</sup> Beyond this communication, there is no other external correspondence between Łakociński or the non-Jewish PIZ employees, on the one hand, and Jewish individuals or organizations, on the other. Moreover, Melchior’s extant correspondence with Jewish organizations is limited to the Jewish Historical Commission in Stockholm. In short, the primary actors corresponding with PIZ were non-Jewish individuals and organizations. It has already been shown that Łakociński corresponded with many Polish organizations in Sweden, Poland, and elsewhere. Ludwika Broel-Plater’s personal correspondence also contains letters between herself and Polish organizations and individuals. Some of these pertain to religious or spiritual matters that she was concerned with as a Catholic.<sup>51</sup>

As revealed thus far in the analysis, only four of the seven women – Luba Melchior, Krystyna Karier, Ludwika Broel-Plater, and Helena Dziedzicka – and two of the three men – Zygmunt Łakociński and Bożysław Kurowski – were engaged in external correspondence to any notable degree. Of these, Kurowski has the least amount of extant correspondence in the archives, followed by Dziedzicka. On the other hand, as we have already seen, Łakociński – in his role as head of PIZ and as the only person with roots in Sweden – was the most prolific correspondent, as the sender and receiver of most of the letters to and from Polish and Swedish organizations. Given the conditions at the time, the individuals he corresponded with were primarily men in positions comparable to his own,

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<sup>47</sup> PIZ 47:1.

<sup>48</sup> PIZ 46:8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> PIZ 47:13.

<sup>51</sup> ZL 41.

such as academics, heads of institutes, etc. In the few cases where a woman was his equal, he usually shared the responsibility for correspondence with the female repatriates at PIZ. As we have seen, this was true in the case of Nella Rost, whom he continued to correspond with even though it dealt with “Jewish matters,” which were technically the responsibility of Melchior. Similarly, he did not fully delegate correspondence with Major Mant to Karier and Dziedzicka but continued to engage in active correspondence. Likewise, he and Karier shared responsibility for corresponding with Polish historian Wanda Kiedrzyńska at the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in Warsaw.

By mapping the correspondence, patterns have emerged related to the institutional dynamics and hierarchies within PIZ. Even though more women than men were involved in the PIZ correspondence, Łakociński held the dominant position in terms of volume. He was also heavily involved with the women’s correspondence, at least between 1945 and 1947, when most of the correspondence analyzed was written. Although Karier, Melchior, and Dziedzicka had all been made responsible for some type of correspondence – general correspondence, correspondence with Jewish organizations, and correspondence in English and French, respectively – the archives reveal that these responsibilities were, in fact, shared with Łakociński.

In late 1946, PIZ lost the funding from the Swedish Labor Market Commission that enabled it to employ the repatriates. Although some of the repatriates continued to work without remuneration for various lengths of time, most of them eventually left Sweden and/or PIZ behind. By 1949, Ludwika Broel-Plater was the only remaining repatriate involved with PIZ. Łakociński also became less involved with PIZ, in part because his work took him away from Lund. The result was that Broel-Plater was primarily responsible for carrying on the work of PIZ – albeit in a limited way and without compensation – until her death in 1972.<sup>52</sup> Her correspondence from the late 1940s and early 1950s reflects this shift for PIZ with regard to responsibility as it occurred.<sup>53</sup> However, the archives demonstrate that Łakociński through his continued correspondence with Polish organizations around the world never fully relinquished his position as head of PIZ.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Martínez, “An Eternally Grateful Refugee?”

<sup>53</sup> ZL 41.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, PIZ 47:4 (1949–1969), 47:9, 47:10c, 47:11f, 47:12.



## Knowledge Actors and Institutional Hierarchies

The findings of the archival mapping provide important insight into how the formal institutional hierarchy of PIZ, which officially divided the responsibility for external correspondence between Łakociński and five of the nine PIZ workgroup employees, did not necessarily bear out in practice. This, however, did not entail departing from hierarchical networks. Rather, rigid hierarchies were the norm in the official, external correspondence of PIZ. Historian Lorraine Daston argues that epistemological hierarchies are often intertwined with social hierarchies (and, I would add, institutional hierarchies) that “rank knowers and the epistemic virtues they are expected to display.”<sup>55</sup> Within institutional hierarchies, individuals play certain “roles” as defined by the organization, both through specific responsibilities and through knowledge cultures embedded in a particular context.<sup>56</sup> The result is that individuals act as specific types of knowledge actors – individuals involved in the production and circulation of knowledge – depending on the dynamics of the situation in which they find themselves.<sup>57</sup>

The first part of the analysis reveals that Łakociński was heavily involved in PIZ correspondence with external individuals and entities, including when such correspondence was supposed to be the domain of the repatriates working for PIZ. He acted as a knowledge gatekeeper – a knowledge actor who controls the circulation of knowledge in a particular context.<sup>58</sup> In this case, Łakociński shaped the institutional hierarchy through which knowledge was circulated, affecting what, how, and to whom knowledge was exchanged through formal PIZ correspondence. This is especially evident in the case of Luba Melchior. Although she was ostensibly responsible for Jewish matters – including correspondence with

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55 Lorraine Daston, “Comment,” in *Debating New Approaches to History*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 176.

56 Martin Mulsow, “History of Knowledge,” in *Debating New Approaches*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 162–163.

57 Johan Östling et al., “Introduction: Revisiting agency in the history of knowledge,” in *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*, ed. Johan Östling et al. (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2023), 12. See also, for instance, Marian Füssel, *Wissen: Konzepte, Praktiken, Prozesse, Historische Einführungen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2021); Philipp Sarasin, “Was ist Wissensgeschichte?” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36, no. 1 (2011): 159–172, accessed February 26, 2025, [https://www.zgw.ethz.ch/fileadmin/ZGW/PDF/sarasin\\_wissensgeschichte\\_2011.pdf](https://www.zgw.ethz.ch/fileadmin/ZGW/PDF/sarasin_wissensgeschichte_2011.pdf); Stephanie Zloch, “Migrationswissen: Das Beispiel der Bundesrepublik Deutschland aus zeithistorischer Sicht,” in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 71, no. 3–4 (2021), accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/wissen-2021/325611/migrationswissen/>

58 Simone Lässig, “The History of Knowledge,” 44.

other Jewish organizations – Łakociński participated in the correspondence with Nella Rost at the Stockholm Jewish Historical Commission and wrote directly (and without Melchior's involvement) to other Jewish organizations and individuals. In previous research, I have argued that Łakociński was interested in the efforts of the Jewish historical commissions and wanted to have more contact with them to compare methodologies and share material.<sup>59</sup> This is the reason why he initiated contact with Nella Rost and sent the letter to the Central Historical Commission in Munich in June 1946.<sup>60</sup> He was also, as already shown, interested in developing and expanding the "Jewish section" of PIZ, and this is why he appealed directly to Jacob Robinson at the IJA in New York for potential funding.

While knowledge gatekeepers can be individuals seeking power over the circulation of knowledge for negative reasons, they can also be benevolent figures. Łakociński almost certainly belonged to the latter category of knowledge gatekeepers. There is no indication that his direct involvement in the bulk of external correspondence was anything other than well-intended, as he appears to have respected all institute employees, regardless of gender or religion. Yet, good intentions are not incompatible with maintaining power and authority, as demonstrated by the concept of benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism differs from hostile sexism in the sense that it "does not require that individual men consciously intend to control or dominate women. Gender inequality becomes routinized through the widespread diffusion and acceptance of sexist ideology."<sup>61</sup> In workplaces, benevolent sexism "subtly [filters] women into low status, low power positions."<sup>62</sup> As in most institutional structures at the time, few women held top positions in the organizations that PIZ communicated with. Thus, official correspondence between organizations often took place between men in positions of authority, who acted as figureheads and decision-makers even though women did much of the behind-the-scenes work.<sup>63</sup>

The findings of this analysis demonstrate that the institutional hierarchy at PIZ reflects the gendered social and institutional structures of the period because

<sup>59</sup> Martínez, "Afterlives," 144–147.

<sup>60</sup> PIZ 46:8, letter to the Central Historical Commission in Munich, in Polish, signed by Łakociński, and dated June 10, 1946.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, Rachel A. Connor, Peter Glick P, and Susan T. Fiske, "Ambivalent Sexism in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*, ed. Chris G. Sibley and Fiona Kate Barlow, Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 295–320, 299.

<sup>62</sup> Kristen Jones et al., "Negative consequence of benevolent sexism on efficacy and performance," *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 29 (2014): 171–189, 172, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2013-0086>

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 186. See also Cohen, "Rachel Auerbach," 220.

this is how Łakociński arranged and administered it. Although Melchior, Karier, and Dziedzicka had all been assigned “responsibility” for some aspect of correspondence, they were essentially secretaries for Łakociński and PIZ with little power to take direct initiative on behalf of the institute. This helps explain why the informal networks, especially of the female PIZ employees, having been utilized with such positive results in the internal communications – such as the establishment of the postwar collection and documentation efforts and the gathering of witness testimonies – were not utilized to the same extent in the external correspondence. The example of the Mittwerda List is obviously a notable exception. However, that was an *incoming* request made and received at a time when Broel-Plater, rather than Łakociński, was primarily responsible for the operations of PIZ. By that time, he had at least partly relinquished his role as knowledge gatekeeper, which he then shared with Broel-Plater. Moreover, Tillion in her letter indicates that the French Examining Magistrate *asked her* to use her personal connections to obtain the list, supporting the idea that these types of initiatives came from above in this context.

Łakociński's gatekeeping may have prevented better communication and knowledge circulation with and among Jewish survivor historical commissions and other Jewish institutions and individuals. Apart from Nella Rost, whom Melchior met with in person and shared PIZ testimonies, Łakociński's personal outreach to Jewish organizations was unsuccessful.<sup>64</sup> For instance, he received no response from the Jewish Historical Commission in Munich. He did receive a response from Robinson at the IJA but no assistance. The only other contact with a Jewish organization was facilitated by Luba Melchior's link to the Council of Jewish Associations of Belgium in Brussels (Conseil des Associations Juives de Belgique), which was affiliated with the World Jewish Congress. Melchior took a temporary leave of absence from PIZ to work with this organization, which resulted

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<sup>64</sup> As shown by historian Johannes Heuman, after Nella Rost's departure in 1951, the Stockholm commission ceased to exist and its archive was dispersed, parts of it presumed lost or destroyed. In her continued capacity with the World Jewish Congress, Rost took some of the commissions' documents with her when she left Sweden. See Heuman, “In Search of Documentation.” Among these were several testimonies that originated with PIZ, including at least five that Luba Melchior had been responsible for. These were among the ones that Nella Rost sent to Joseph Wulf in the 1970s, which is why they are now part of the Joseph Wulf papers at the Central Archives for Research on the History of the Jews in Germany (Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland).

in one testimony in the PIZ collection given by a Polish survivor living in Belgium.<sup>65</sup> The result was that, in contrast to the religious crossover that occurred in the internal efforts to collect witness testimonies, there was very limited circulation of knowledge between PIZ and the large number of Jewish survivor historical commissions. Moreover, the minimal communication with other Jewish organizations came to very little. The reason may at least in part be found in the sense of distrust found in some Jewish efforts with regard to non-Jewish actors, whom, Jockusch writes, they feared “might have an interest in denying the historical truth, distorting the facts, or barring Jewish historians from access to the evidence.”<sup>66</sup> Had Łakociński fully handed “responsibility” for Jewish matters to Melchior, it is possible that trust could have been established between PIZ and similar Jewish initiatives and organizations, leading to the circulation of knowledge between them.

While the repatriates employed by PIZ took a backseat to Łakociński in terms of corresponding with other organizations, this does not mean that they were not also knowledge actors in the circulation of knowledge through PIZ’s external correspondence. To begin with, whether they corresponded with various individuals on their own or as co-signers with Łakociński, they were involved in the transnational circulation of knowledge concerning the Nazi atrocities and how this knowledge was being collected and used in various contexts. I suggest that they were what might be called behind-the-scenes knowledge actors, and that they were recognized as such by Łakociński. We can look at this in at least two ways. First, Łakociński acknowledged to his male correspondents how essential the women repatriates working for PIZ were to the Institute and its operations.<sup>67</sup> In his correspondence with Jacob Robinson at the IJA, for example, Łakociński in his appeals for funding repeatedly mentions Melchior and the importance of her work with PIZ.<sup>68</sup> Second, there is evidence that the limited amount of correspondence that occurred between the female repatriates of PIZ and other institutions benefited knowledge circulation in the longer term. One example is the five PIZ

65 PIZ Record of Witness Testimony 492, datelined Brussels, September 4, 1946, attributable to Luba Melchior, accessed October 31, 2024, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-103889>. For more, see Martínez, “Documenting the Documenter.”

66 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 131.

67 One example of this pertains to a woman not mentioned in this study, Helena Salska, whom Łakociński told a Swedish correspondent was “the soul of the whole company.” See PIZ 46:4, Letter from Łakociński to Sven Dahl, in Swedish, dated September 1, 1945.

68 PIZ 47:13, Letter from Zygmunt Łakociński to Dr. Robinson of the World Jewish Congress Historical Commission, in Polish, dated November 12, 1946, p. 1; PIZ 47:13, Letter from Zygmunt Łakociński to Dr. Robinson of the World Jewish Congress Historical Commission, in Polish, dated November 12, 1946, p. 2.

testimonies gathered that are now in the Joseph Wulf papers at the Central Archives for Research on the History of the Jews in Germany (Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland). Melchior shared these with Nella Rost, who later shared them with Wulf.<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, however, as important as the repatriates' knowledge may have been and as much as it may have influenced PIZ, its operations, and even Łakociński's correspondence, the circulation of this knowledge among other institutes and historical commissions was left largely in the hands of Łakociński in the first years following the Second World War and the Holocaust.

This analysis demonstrates that PIZ adhered to standard social and institutional norms in its external communications. That said, women were in other ways actively involved with postwar collection and documentation initiatives, among them many survivors, such as Rachel Auerbach, Miriam Novitch, and Eva Reichmann.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, during Germaine Tillion's time as a repatriate in Sweden immediately after the war, she conducted her own initiative to collect "detailed depositions" from other former prisoners of Ravensbrück.<sup>71</sup> Yet, at least in the PIZ archive, there is no evidence of any correspondence between these women and anyone at PIZ, with the exception of the 1949 correspondence between Germaine Tillion and Broel-Plater. Acknowledging the possibility that not all correspondence remained in the PIZ and ZL archives, this suggests that the networks of the PIZ workgroup – male and female alike – were primarily Polish, as the correspondence in the PIZ archive actually points to. It is possible that the narrow, national focus of PIZ was at least part of the reason why women's networks were not deployed in external correspondence, which had been the case internally. As Polish women, few if any of the members of these networks had any institutional power or authority, particularly since most of them were refugees themselves.

## Conclusion: Unexpected Results

This chapter has sought to gain a better understanding of the role of women's informal networks, activated through correspondence during the early postwar

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<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, Heidelberg, Nachlaß Joseph Wulf, B2-1, Serie C, 390, 393, 394, 498.

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Cohen, "Rachel Auerbach"; Geva, "Documenters, Researchers and Commemorators"; Schmidt "We Are All Witnesses."

<sup>71</sup> Emma Kuby, *Political Survivors: The Resistance, the Cold War, and the Fight against Concentration Camps after 1945* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2019), 26.

period, in the circulation of knowledge – both about the Nazi atrocities and the efforts themselves (methods, materials, etc.) – between PIZ and other similar initiatives, especially those conducted by survivors of Nazi persecution. Analyzing the PIZ correspondence while considering the interplay of gender, religion, and other differences, the chapter also looks at to what extent external communications were conducted across these categories. The findings indicate that unlike the internal PIZ operations, the external operations were not to any notable extent carried out across religious (e.g., Jewish and non-Jewish) or even cultural boundaries. Likewise, while the women repatriates associated with PIZ utilized networks of resistance and support in the establishment and internal operations of PIZ as a survivor historical commission, these networks were only used to a limited degree in external correspondence. Rather, external correspondence at PIZ was conducted through a hierarchical institutional structure in which the role of women was to support the role of Łakociński as head of the institute. The example presented at the beginning of this chapter, in which hierarchical networks were intentionally bypassed in order to expedite knowledge circulation – was the exception, at least where PIZ was concerned. The kind of cultural and identity boundary crossings I observed with regard to the gathering of testimonies and the internal work of PIZ are not to any significant degree repeated in the external correspondence. This lack of crossover contributed to inhibiting knowledge circulation between, for example, Jewish and non-Jewish initiatives.

The results of this analysis are unexpected. My previous findings on the important role of networks of resistance and support in the internal operations of PIZ, and thus also regarding the circulation of knowledge about the Nazi atrocities in the postwar period, were partly what encouraged me to ask the questions considered in this chapter. To me, the correspondence between Tillion and Broel-Plater seemed like an early indicator that non-hierarchical networks might also have played an important role in how various forms of knowledge circulated between other institutions dealing with similar issues in the early years following the Second World War and the Holocaust. It was thus essential for this analysis that I keep in mind that each encounter with an archive is a new beginning – a chance to ask new questions that requires an openness to the rhythms of the archive, not least to discontinuities, ruptures, and breaks.<sup>72</sup> As suggested by Tamboukou, “the events that erupt in the process of doing archival research often radically change our practices, our prior knowledges, as well as the objects of our inquiry.”<sup>73</sup> The methodological mapping of the PIZ correspondence with other in-

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<sup>72</sup> Tamboukou, “Archival Rhythms.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

stitutions did indeed reveal unexpected results, not least that women's informal networks of support and resistance were rarely deployed in the correspondence between PIZ and other organizations.

These findings provide better insight into the complex institutional dynamics at PIZ and the ways in which knowledge of the Nazi atrocities and the documentation of these was circulated between PIZ and similar initiatives, including other survivor historical commissions. They also provide important insight into the limits of the women's informal networks in the organizational structure of PIZ. Moreover, the findings create a clearer picture of how the national nature of the PIZ initiative to some extent inhibited the circulation of knowledge across national and religious lines. Ultimately, at least as far as PIZ was concerned, exchanges such as that between Ludwika Broel-Plater and Germaine Tillion, which helped convict Fritz Suhren, were the exception rather than the norm. Further studies of the PIZ correspondence are clearly needed to gain a more complete picture of the institutional dynamics and the role of women and others who worked behind the scenes with the essential day-to-day work of the institute. Similar studies of the institutional dynamics in other documentation efforts and a closer analysis of communications between these initiatives would also broaden the fields of Holocaust Aftermath studies, migrant knowledge, and gender history, as well as the intersections between these.

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