

Shira Klein – interviewer

Q: What are your thoughts on the topic area of antisemitism in Poland?

A: It breaks down into several problems. There is an over reliance on Polish sources which most people can't read, so people tend to take it at good faith that said sources are good when I suspect they're not.

A large number of the "Polish" camp are very old Wikipedians. They've been around since the very beginning of Wikipedia, and their concept of reliable sources dates from then, and not so much what people would nowadays consider reliable sources.

There's some pushing of ideology. I'm not Polish or Jewish, my ancestors have been in the US for a very long time. So I don't have a dog in European fights. I trained as a medievalist so I have a historian's background. I've always been interested in the Holocaust but know it better than a layman, not like a full scholar. Started editing Holocaust article, which led to other work, which sucked me in. Part of the issue is that Poland has always had a chip on their shoulder. To some degree I can sympathize – they got screwed over in WWII – but the solution isn't what they're trying to do. There's a big right-wing movement in Poland to equate the Holocaust, but it's not just that. A lot of the people who are editing that way never learned any better. What they learned when they were kids, they can't let go of that stuff as adults. They don't understand why this narrow Polish ideal doesn't fit with the rest of the universe.

There is also EEMML – most of the Polish camp is still around. Poeticbent's sourcing standards sucked. He kept using a book about Treblinka from the 1960s. It was being use in the concentration camp articles and it was very fictionalized. I had to pull it out of that article. He used the Google search method, meaning you search for something on google and pull the first thing you see that seems ok. Poeticbent was also trying to push the narrative that Poles had saved all these Jews. There definitely were some, but still.

Right now the whole camp is trying to chase Icewhiz.

Q: Why?

A: Icewhiz had some issues. He went and doxed some of the other side. Did some things he shouldn't have. They claim he sent threatening things but I didn't see it. I can believe that Icewhiz stepped over some lines. I doubt he sent real threats. Piotrus is highly incensed that Icewhiz went to Haaretz. The whole camp is trying to discredit the Ben Jakob article.

I have to keep an eye on the 6 extermination camps bc they get a lot of vandalism.

Right now there is an RFC on the Warsaw Concentration Camp theory. It's an attempt to remove mention of Warsaw from the Wiki reliability page, where the Warsaw hoax was mentioned.

Q: Is this going to depend on votes? Or on the strongest argument?

A: It depends on who does the closing. In theory, the decision depends on strength of arguments. But usually, it's the votes. Most of the time, strength of argument is equated to who has the numbers on their side as long as they at least put the effort in to make an argument. The admin who closes it, that's their decision. This particular case will probably close either as "no consensus to change" or "keep it but pare it down." The consensus ideal is that 99% of people agree and all put forward valid points. Here, they want to put it in and it's not a long section. If I were closing this as an uninvolved admin, I would shoot down the first argument because our policies don't care where a reliable source got data from as long as it's a reliable source. Piotrus is the master of not using a reliable source when it's something he likes. He only opposes non-reliable sources when they don't suit him.

It'll probably be kept if they don't bring in more remove votes.

Q: Who will rule on this case?

A: It doesn't have to be an admin. Most of our non admin closers will probably look at this and go "no frikin' way, I'm not touching this with a ten foot pole" and just go away. Admins don't *have* to get involved. I wouldn't touch this bc I'm not uninvolved.

This case just shows how desperate the group is to get this viewpoint completely erased from Wikipedia. It's that particular article because Icewhiz did it, and they want him gone. That's why I think there's a mailing list going on, because this is what they did with the EEML. They worked together then too.

Q: Are they not allowed to work together?

A: You can work together legitimately. You can follow people's edits. When I want to follow what someone is doing, I have their talk page watched, so I can go to their page and pull up their contributions. There's usually someone complaining on one of the admin noticeboards or the edit warring noticeboards. You CAN collaborate but you need to do it in a visible manner so people know you're doing it. If you're coordinating to hound other editors off Wiki, that verges close to harassment, which is what they're so upset about with Icewhiz. It's amazing how quickly they all turn up together in the same articles. Occasionally they'll slip up and say "you've got mail" to one of the other people, which tells us they're coordinating behind the scenes. A bit of that is not a big deal, and it can be legitimate too. KE Coffman and I have exchanged emails where we give one another sources.

Icewhiz had a bit of contact with me before he was banned. Icewhiz was just as bad on pushing his side as the others were. Icewhiz was in the camp of "every Pole is a terrible human being." He definitely doxed, edit warred, he had no problems with being as bad or worse than everything that is going on now. So I didn't fight for him not to be banned.

Getting back to the main issue, we're dealing with a misuse of sources. That makes many admins say, well, that's a content dispute, so they need to fight it out. Admins don't get that one side is trying to use academic viewpoints and sources while the other side is trying to use, I hesitate to call it, the right-wing press in Poland. The Polish camp probably sees it as "nobody is looking at our side and how bad things were for the Poles" but that's been emphasized too much, to a

chauvinistic degree. Piotrus uses his academic status as a sociologist to pull wool over people's eyes, to make them think he knows what he does historically. Partly the problem is Wikipedia, who wants experts but also doesn't want them. It's really hard for people to harness their authority and say, I've studied x for 30 years so I know what I'm saying. That doesn't cut any water in Wikipedia.

There's also this feeling in the U.S. that anyone can do history. You need to be trained in math or engineering but anyone can do history and write it. I've been trained as a medievalist but that doesn't mean that I have the breadth to know what is going on. I've tried to keep up with at least the broad bases of the field. I still work as a historian in a totally unrelated field. I know what historical sourcing standards are, and Piotrus does not. He doesn't know how to use the secondary literature either. He's closer to it than large chunks of that side. I'm not sure Icewhiz had a clue how to use it either. Koffman probably does, but is very much there to grind an axe: to push back against the "Wehrmacht didn't do anything bad" argument. There's an Arbcom on the German war effort. I had some mild criticism for her, while at the same time there's a very narrow focus of military-history type of focus that sees Nazi generals as being clean. That is a problem.

Q: What would you tell to new people who want to edit this TA?

A: I would tell them to run away in the other direction. Wikipedia has hierarchy among editors. The longer you've been there, the more editors you know, the more social capital you have. Unfortunately, there's a lot of social capital riding over on the other side. Piotrus, Volunteer Marek, GizzyCatBella, they have a lot of social capital, especially Volunteer Marek who gets a lot of points for his progressive edits on the United States. Because of that, he gets more of a pass when he edit-wars, when he's nasty. No new editor is going to be able to come into this topic area and not be instantly accused of being an Icewhiz sock. If they don't know what they're doing and don't get some help, they won't be able to figure out what they're doing without ending up banned. I'm pretty sure that some of the accounts banned have not been Icewhiz's socks. If you have a viewpoint opposite from the prevailing group, you're going to get a nasty experience on Wikipedia. I would not recommend to a single one of your students to touch any one of the Polish Jewish articles with a ten foot pole. You're going to need at least a couple of years of editing to get the social capital behind you that will enable you to push back.

Q: Do you still edit in the topic area?

A: I don't have much time. So I have to decide whether it's really worth it to me to fight tooth and nail on all the little itty bitty articles, when I could be doing other stuff.

Q: How does Wikipedia's dispute resolution system handle this conflict?

A: Our system for solving disputes, Arb Com, has utterly failed at solving this one. And it's not surprising. They suck at solving source issues where a chunk of them instantly go "but this is a content dispute so we can't rule on that."

And there's a limit on how much evidence you can give. In the ArbCom in 2019, I struggled to

get my submission down to 500 words

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Antisemitism_in_Poland/Evidence).

Q: Can you tell me more about that ArbCom case?

A: Icewhiz brought a case forward; Icewhiz and VM got topic-banned; my paragraph was showing that Volunteer Marek and Poeticbent were misrepresenting sources, and also that someone, either MyMoloboAccount or MyVeryBestWishes, was copying information between Wiki articles without attribution and without bothering to pull up the info. That's not supposed to be done. How do you explain the sourcing issues in under 500 words? You can't. You can't show a long-standing pattern of sourcing misrepresentation in that sort of space. To get someone sanctioned for source misrepresentation on Wiki is one of the single hardest things you can do. I tried to do it in the Polish Jewish case. In another case (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_arbitration/Franco-Mongol_alliance), I did this, and it took two years and a lot of effort and that was just one person. This just shows how difficult it is to get source misrepresentation eliminated. Nobody believed that France and Mongolia had an alliance, yet for two years we had to deal with that. I've been working more behind the scenes and trying to get better people involved in arbitration committees, people who will actually do something.

Incorporate interview starting here. Up to here I've put in essay.

Q: How can ArbCom weigh in if the problem is a content issue?

A: In theory, ArbCom only deals with behavioral issues. They don't decide content issues. Wiki has idealistic blinders on as far as content disputes. Admins should not make decisions on content, only judge consensus on RFCs based on the strength of policy-based arguments. This is a problem that goes back to the whole initial concept of Wikipedia, which is highly anarchic and libertarian and thinks that if only everyone gets together and talks it through, they will see the light and agree with one another. The decision admins make on RFCs is supposed to be based on strength of policy-based arguments, but often actually ends up being basically a vote. While everyone says, "everyone is equal", we're such a small group of really active people, and that sways stuff, unfortunately. The more numbers are involved, the better things go for Wikipedia. If people can be brought to read the information and take it on. Generally, when an RFC is actually gotten to on the topics, such as KL Warsaw, once it becomes visible to a large number of editors, they generally have the right idea and they generally take out the worst of the nationalistic bullshit. It may not be perfect, but better.

Q: What leads to many people coming to an RFC or not?

A: It depends how well you manipulate the behind the scenes. SarahSV and I discussed this topic area a lot and shared views. She had an incredible amount of social capital on Wikipedia, much more than I did. Between the two of us, if we weighed in, we and some other people had enough sway. The subtle behind-the-scenes shifting of things that let people know what's going on.

Right now, if Levivich and Procrastinating Reader get involved, they're able to make it publicized so that enough people get the idea that something is going on.

Q: How do they publicize it?

A: You go to a Wiki project and advertise an RFC on relevant Wiki projects who have edited Wiki before. Wiki project pages are often a good way for people in the know to spread knowledge about things going on. There are also savvy Wikipedians who are into the behind-the-scenes stuff. Me, for example, I watch four pages that are behind-the-scenes project pages. Then there's the Administrators Noticeboard: Incidents, there's the Edit Warring Noticeboard, there's the Reliable Sources Noticeboard, and Fringe Noticeboard. These will show you where the latest flashpoints are for troubles in Wikipedia. Everything eventually shows up in one of those places. For example, some conflict areas are Pakistan-India, Indian caste, Horn of Africa, Turkey and the Armenian genocide, Azerbaijan Armenian, Chinese nationalism. There can be weird flashpoints too. Sometimes the things that turn into big disputes on Wikipedia are just weird, like Gibraltar.

Q: How big is the conflict on Polish antisemitism compared to other conflicts?

A: Compared to really nasty disputes like Israel-Palestine, the Polish topic area is not up there yet. But we're going to have another ArbCom case about it because the editing behavior is toxic. There's edit warring, constant hunts for socks. Constant biting of new editors who dare to set their foot in the topic area. Volunteer Marek is going to get his butt in trouble eventually. He doesn't have the ability to reign himself in with newbies and he's going to bite one too many and get in trouble. He's reasonably rational when you can talk him off the ledge, but it takes so much effort that I don't have the time for it, and he only really listens to well established Wikipedia editors. He listened to SarahSV, and to me when I put in the effort. He's not as active and bad as the other people. He's nastier. But he's mainly a supporting person, he's the attack dog that they unleash when they hit resistance on something. But people who follow disputes know it's there, know it's happening, know it's going to be nasty. The ArbCom members know it's nasty. See this -

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration_Committee_Elections_December_2021/Candidates/Opabinia_regalis/Questions#Questions_from_Moneytrees – this is a question for a new ArbCom candidate to screen them.

Q: What do you think the solution to this is?

A: I would like to have everyone who is fighting this out banned from this topic area. That's not going to happen. I could see a source restriction that would eliminate the use of any newspaper and any Polish sources that have not been translated into English. Including Hebrew sources. Because the people who are going to make decisions on the RFCs are almost only monolingual and cannot read these sources. And the source misuse is subtle. Google translate will not solve the problem because it's a rough tool. You can Google translate something and not get the gist. That would not happen though because of the belief that we should not be ruling on content. It all ties back into that problem. You can't use experts because there is no way to rule who is an

expert. And experts wouldn't be a big deal either. Do you really want Jan Gross editing the Polish articles? Goldhagen? They'd be pushing a viewpoint that is too extreme. We don't need that either. There are scholars you should not let loose on Wikipedia. Often an academic will put out a theory as a reaction to too much complacency among scholars. That doesn't necessarily mean that their theory is 100% true, just that they're trying to push back and get to more normalcy. There's never been a precedent where you can use only English language sources. So it probably wouldn't happen here either.

The closest you'll get to control over content is medical articles. They push through a specialized guideline for medicine-related articles that say you have to use reviews of articles, secondary reviews. Regarding newspapers, that would also be unprecedented except for the medicine area. I would push for that though because so many right-wing newspapers in Poland push that viewpoint that makes it difficult for people to know it's an agenda.