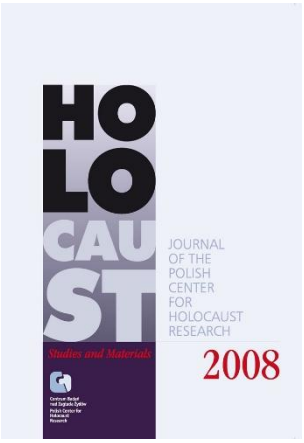


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The Holocaust and Polish-Jewish Relations in Sociological Studies

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I wish to begin by making certain fundamental points on the object and character of sociological studies regarding the past. What is the sociological approach to the study of past social reality and description of historical events? What is the difference between the object of historical research and sociological research, between their approach to sources; what is their description based upon?

"History as science deals with *res gestae* – human activity in the past",[1] whereas sociology is generally considered to deal with the *contemporary* life of individuals, groups and societies. But according to the author, it is difficult to precisely delineate "between perfectly past events, completed processes, and the present moment"[2] or contemporary time, which is an extensive research area, primarily for the sociologist. Both the more and the less distant past events of given societies can influence the lives and attitudes of contemporary people, those who took part in the events, as well as those born later. Similarly, past personal experiences of individuals, in their younger days, particularly in the time of historical and collective trial of the "days of contempt", inevitably influenced their future lives. We can be interested in past events of given societies or past experiences of individuals from two different points of view. The first, call it *historical*, turns our attention toward an attempt to answer the question: *how did it happen?* In this case, the *description* of past events is important: their chronology, reconstruction of facts and details that are corroborated by sources, in the documents of that time. From this point of view, in order to find out what it actually was and what it consisted of, the experience of individuals who took part in those historical events can be reconstructed mainly on the basis of notes and testimonies from the period when such experience took place (or materials produced shortly afterwards). For the sociologist, it could also be interesting how certain historical events that are of interest to him or her are remembered *today* by their participants and witnesses (and not only by them): how they are described, how they assess their role in these events and what significance they assign to them from the perspective of years gone by. Similarly, the sociologist can also be interested in the past in the individual dimension, i.e. in the past as it appears in the ex-

[1] K. Kersten, "Relacje jako typ źródła historycznego", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, vol. XIV, 3 (1970), 129

[2] Ibid.

periences of individuals, related on the spot or immediately afterwards, but also in recollections even after many years. In such cases, however, the sociologist usually analyses them from the contemporary perspective of these people, from the point of view of their consciousness today and current views on their own past.

These two points of view or two research perspectives – historical and sociological – do not exhaust all the possible approaches to the study of the past. When researchers (both the historian and the sociologist) try to reconstruct past reality from the historical perspective, they can refer also to sociological categories of analysis and description of that past reality, such as: social structure, social relations between individual groups, local communities, power structure, social institutions, processes of cultural, civilizational and social changes, and, finally, attitudes of people living in past reality, their motivations, norms, values, ways of thinking and evaluation of both oneself and others. After all, many historians use these types of categories to describe the past they study, particularly in the sphere of so-called social history.[3] Therefore, the same past reality can be described in different ways by historians and sociologists. They can differ not only in the approach to sources they base their studies upon, but also in research preferences that direct their analysis toward given aspects of the past. But in this text I shall deal with sociological studies of the Holocaust and issues of Polish-Jewish relations (before, during and shortly after World War II). Here I shall consider, first, sociological perspectives as understood above, in the description of Polish-Jewish relations and/or the Holocaust; second, studies not only and not exclusively carried out by sociologists (and by historians): those scholars who in their analysis and description employ categories of sociological analysis.

Historical perspective in sociological studies

The authors of studies I put in this category are sociologists. Their descriptions and interpretations of the past (and in those parts of their analyses of contemporary phenomena related to Polish-Jewish relations, before the war, during the occupation and in the early post-war years, in which they refer to the past in order to outline the historical background and the causes of the current situation), are based on materials and sources painstakingly collected and analysed by historians, use historians' findings regarding facts and their past descriptions. They generally do not seek new sources themselves. Thus they make use of historical studies as if analysing them again in terms of sociological problems and categories. They try to find there a picture of past social relations, examine the processes and mechanisms

[3] To quote but a few examples of historical studies that can be classified as sociological in their approach. Among the classical works are Ringelblum's texts (*Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Uwagi i spostrzeżenia,* ed. A. Eisenbach (Warsaw: 1988) and Szarota's (*Okupowanej Warszawy dzień Powszedni. Studium historyczne* (Warsaw: 1973)). Marcin Kula's collection of studies, recently published (*Uparta sprawa. Żydowska? Polska? Ludzka?* (Cracow: 2004)), falls within this category, not only because their author is not only a historian, but also a sociologist.

of social changes, interpret the related phenomena, in this case to the Holocaust and/or Polish-Jewish relations, as well as broader phenomena of the contemporary world seen through their prism.

Let me refer here only to those sociological studies which, in my opinion, are particularly important to understand our area of research: the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. Some theses and conclusions of sociological studies referred to here have the value of pioneering work and cannot be found in strictly historical sources.

One of the sociological works on the Holocaust that enjoys a special status is Zygmunt Bauman's Modernity and the Holocaust,[4] in which the author, as he said in an interview,[5] tries to explain not so much the Holocaust as the modernity of the Holocaust. The starting point of these considerations was the belief that "the Holocaust was a characteristically modern phenomenon that cannot be understood out of the context of cultural tendencies and technical achievements of modernity."[6] Bauman is thus interested in what, on the basis of an analysis of the Holocaust, we can learn about the character of the society we live in. That is why he proposes to "treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society" (ibid., 12). He is one of those sociologists who want to assimilate "the lessons of the Holocaust in the mainstream of our theory of modernity and of the civilizing process and its effects" (xiv). He believes that the Holocaust plays a fundamental and very central role in the understanding of the logic of modern civilization.[7]

Bauman argues convincingly that "modern civilization was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition" (35). The author carries out a sociological analysis of historical facts (and historical studies which describe and interpret them from the perspective of their own discipline) concerning the origin and dissemination of racist ideology and the realization of the "Final Solution" of the Jewish question. He draws a picture of relationships between modernity, racism and xenophobia. He shows how racism, as a form of a social engineering, is "inevitably associated with the strategy of estrangement" (65), and how racism, by rejection, can lead to extermination. Bauman lays particular emphasis on the analysis of the phenomenon of bureaucracy. He describes two parallel processes, in his opinion central to "the bureaucratic model of action. The first is the *meticulous division of labour* . . . ; the second is the *substitution of technical for a moral responsibility*" (98). He lists conditions that are conducive to genocide or a certain "recipe for genocide": "the carriers of the grand design at the helm of modern state bureaucracy, emancipated from the constraints of non-political (economic, social, cultural powers) . . . Genocide arrives as an integral part of the process through

[4] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), xiii.

[5] H. Welzer, "On the Rationality of Evil: An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman", *Thesis Eleven*, Wo 70, London 2002, 110–112

[6] Z. Bauman, *Modernity,* xiii.

[7] H. Welzer, *On the Rationality…*, *op. cit*, 104.

which the grand design is implemented. *The design gives it the legitimation; state bureaucracy gives it the vehicle; and the paralysis of society gives it the 'road clear' sign*" (114). In his polemic with Hannah Arendts's thesis of the banality of evil, Bauman uses the formula of the "rationality of evil",[8] demonstrating how the individual rationality of the victims was harnessed to serve collective extermination. He argues that "the rationality of the ruled is always the weapon of the rulers" (142). Bauman focused his analyses on the mechanisms of transformation of group members into murderers, and the objects of their action into victims. He also demonstrates that inhuman action stems from social distance. He describes the mechanism of responsibility transfer revealed, among others, thanks to Milgram's experiments. In the final parts of his book, Bauman postulates considerations on the dependence between society and moral behaviour, treating this as a key issue in the carrying out of the Holocaust. His search for a sociological theory of morality leads him to establish indissoluble and necessary relationships between social proximity and moral responsibility: "Responsibility is silenced once proximity is eroded; it may eventually be replaced with resentment once the fellow human subject is transformed into the Other. The process of transformation is one of social separation. It was such a separation which made it possible for thousands to kill, and for millions to watch the murder without protesting. It was the technological and bureaucratic achievement of modern rational society which made such a separation possible" (184).

For Bauman, the significance of the Holocaust extends far beyond its historical experience: "If repayment of crimes and account-settling exhausted the historical significance, one could well let this horrifying episode stay where it ostensibly was – in the past – and leave it to the care of professional historians" (206). Bauman analyses the past of the Holocaust with the future in mind, as, in his opinion: "the present-day significance of the Holocaust is the lesson it contains for the whole of humanity" (206).

Aleksander Hertz's sociological works[9] should be basic reading for those willing to learn and understand the extremely complex Polish-Jewish relations, particularly, but not only, in the pre-war period. In sketches written (and published) in the 1930s, Hertz thoroughly analysed phenomena and processes that took place before his eyes (one should mention here primarily the pioneering character of his studies on totalitarianism, and his innovative analyses of the growing anti-Semitism in pre-war Poland. From the point of view of this presentation, one should mention three of Hertz's texts, written in 1934: *Swojskość* i *obcość*, *Swoi przeciwko obcym* and *Sprawa antysemityzmu*.[10] The first two were devoted to considerations on "certain principal problems of contemporary culture" (*ibid.*, 130). Hertz thus analysed the phenomenon of division into "friend" or "foe", so common in many milieus, reflected in "fear of strangeness and the emphasised aspiration to defend homeliness" (130). He tried to take a closer look at social antagonisms and the role they used to play in the life

[8] *Ibid.*, 107

[9] A. Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* (Warsaw: 1988); *idem*, *Socjologia nieprzedawniona. Wybór publicystyki*, selected, compiled and with a foreword by J. Garewicz (Warsaw: 1992).

[10] *Socjologia nieprzedawniona*, *ibid.*.

of the community. Hertz inquires into the essence of these very general social and cultural phenomena, which although they do not necessarily refer directly to the situation of the Jews in a given system of social relations, if explained could significantly contribute to our understanding of the origin and growth of aversion to Jews in the particular conditions of inter-war Polish reality. Hertz argues convincingly that it is "strangeness that determines conviction regarding differences" (155), and not the other way around. By referring to the concept of antagonism toward strangers, developed by Znaniecki, he defines the essence of "strangeness" by means of an ostensibly terse, but extremely profound formula: "a stranger is one who is experienced as a stranger" (155). Then he continues: "the division into friends and foes is relative, subjective, irrational, with a decisive role of purely emotional moments. These moments are variable, and transform over time. The entire sequence of past antagonisms toward strangers seems to us today incomprehensible and absurd." He believes that the popularity of nationalist ideologies and the growth of xenophobia as symptoms of cultural crisis in Poland – and more broadly in 1930s Europe – are rooted in the fact that "in the consciousness of the masses, the actual common value systems have been eradicated and replaced by fictitious or exaggerated discrepancies" (164). Hertz's concise text, *Sprawa antysemityzmu* (also published in 1934), is of particular interest to us as an example of Polish sociological journalism of the early 1930s, which he treated as an indicator "that shows disintegration processes […] taking place in social life. The déclassé middle classes make up their own myth, which, for them, becomes psychological compensation for the situation they have found themselves in. Therefore," he argues, "the issue of anti-Semitism is one of the time we currently experience" (410). If the author's sociological analysis of broader phenomena and social processes, presented in previously discussed texts, was to shed some light on a more detailed matter, i.e. on the situation of Jews and the majority's attitude toward them, then in his text on anti-Semitism, an analysis of a fragmentary problem is supposed to help us understand broader phenomena in a given society. Hertz refers to facts. One undisputed fact is, for this analyst of social processes, the "evident intensification of anti-Semitic sentiments" (390) in the Poland of the 1930s. How can this fact be explained? In his search for an answer, Hertz begins by specifying what, in the light of the sociological conception of social antagonism, his definition of anti-Semitism is. He then claims that "anti-Semitism is a case of an antagonistic attitude toward strangers. Thus an anti-Semite is one who feels that Jews are strange and hostile and for this reason assumes a negative attitude towards them. Of course this attitude is usually given some rational form, expressed in a negative assessment of Jewish characteristics and justifying, through them, the need to oppose Jews by isolating oneself from them on the one hand, and fighting against them on the other" (396). Hertz believes that, "in practice, one should speak of anti-Semitisms rather than anti-Semitism" (396). The author examines anti-Semitic doctrines, but does not argue with them. He analyses everything that seems to determine one's attitude to Jews as strangers. Religious, customary, cultural or linguistic considerations do not, in his opinion, cause this antagonism. They turn out to be important precisely because an antagonistic attitude towards the Jews is already the case. Hertz points to the role of myth-making and to the fact that

"anti-Semitism deflects the attention of the masses from the true causes of social misery" (406). He then arrives at the conclusion that the "antagonistic attitude is born only when there is a disproportion between an assessment of a given group as pariahs and the socio-economic role this group achieves" (408). Then he argues: "In the Poland of nobles there was virtually no anti-Semitism. The Jews were the only merchant class, and in the eyes of the nobility, the assessment of trade and that of the Jews overlapped. Anti-Semitism could only appear when alongside the change of the entire structure of socio-economic life there arose a distance between the assessment of trade functions, and the still existing, traditional assessment of Jews as pariahs" (409). This, according to Hertz, has two consequences. First, "we deal here with competition for a positively valued social function. Another consequence is an increase in anti-Semitic sentiments in disastrous situations . . . . Then myth-making begins, which is used by the purposeful actions of political camps fighting for power. Of course, if there were no Jews, others would have been found" (410).

According to Jan Garewicz, the author of the introduction to *Socjologia nieprzedawniona*, Aleksander Hertz had an extraordinary scholarly intuition, manifested, among other things, in the selection of topics for his sociological investigation such as phenomena and issues which only in the near future were to prove important. The author was also "able to discuss sensitive issues without emotion and without stirring emotion. This is particularly visible in Hertz's works on nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism."[11]

His work, written over 40 years ago, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej*, perhaps still is the most extensive and penetrating study on the situation of Polish Jews throughout the ages. Hertz himself considered this work his *magnum opus*,[12] although in the afterword he said that it was "neither an obituary of Polish Jewry nor an attempt at a comprehensive study on its role in Polish culture."[13]

One of the principal theses of this work was a depiction of Polish Jewry as a caste community. Just as in Gunnar Myrdal's work on American Negroes, which was a great scholarly inspiration for the author "to understand the situation of Polish Jews in long time sequences" (12), Hertz proposes the notion of caste. "A caste is a closed group. Every member is born in a caste and dies in it. Leaving a caste is very difficult, and usually impossible. Sometimes it takes the form of escape from the caste and is combined with attempts – not always successful – to cover the traces of one's caste past. Membership in a caste requires absolute acceptance of a number of rules, which determine the very existence of a given caste. These rules are religious, legal, linguistic, customary, professional, or, generally, cultural. A caste member must adapt all his or her life, thinking and feelings to the caste's rules. These rules are accepted both by the caste itself and by the broader environment in which the caste and its members live. Both the caste and its broader environment expect each member to follow its rules of behaviour. This imposes the obligation to follow a given etiquette, which often pedantically defines all aspects of a given lifestyle"

[11] J. Garewicz, *Socjolog z intuicją*, in: A. Hertz, *Socjologia nieprzedawniona*, *op. cit*., 6.
[12] A. Hertz, *Socjologia nieprzedawniona*, *op. cit.*, 121.
[13] A. Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* (Warsaw: 1988), 299.

(84). The organization of a given caste and its place in the society at large do not need to be defined by laws and regulations. According to Hertz, "the caste system can exist and develop also when it is not sanctioned by law. In the Poland of the 1920s and the 1930s, such a system existed, even though it was not imposed by law and there was no legislation, which, formally speaking, would safeguard it. . . . Nowadays, the caste system is usually restricted to customs, and is a product of certain valorisations which dominate in and are accepted by a given society" (85). Hertz describes the varied and stratified Jewish community by means of the nation of "caste". He thoroughly analyses the caste system "in which Polish Jews had lived for centuries" (88). In his summary of his consideration on the place of Jews in Polish society throughout the ages, Hertz writes: "the Jews in the Poland of the nobles formed a caste. The caste organization emerged in the Middle Ages, stayed and developed throughout the years of the Republic of the nobles, and it survived its collapse. In fact, the caste character of Polish Jewry existed, in an increasingly anachronistic form, until 1939. Then came the Holocaust. This caste organization of Polish Jewry fell within the framework of a broader social organisation, characteristic of the historical development of the Polish nation" (114). Hertz emphasises that the Jews as a caste were not isolated from the entirety of collective life, but were part of it. In order to fully understand the history and role of Polish Jews, one needs to see them against the background of more general processes and facts, which significantly extend beyond this community. One consequence of the fact that Jews performed definite and important economic functions was the "constant, strong and multilateral contacts between Jews and non-Jews in Poland. They continued for an entire millennium of the history of the Polish Jewry. They also had far-reaching cultural consequences for both parties. The Jews, whether by becoming Poles or by maintaining their separate identity, both contributed to Polish culture and took something back" (115). In his work, Hertz shows the "changes that took place in the caste and the symptoms of its gradual decomposition," and, at the same time, analyses the process of mutual penetration of the Jewish and Polish worlds. He closely examines the neophytism of Polish Jews, seen from the socio-cultural perspective, as well as the broader issue of Jewish assimilation as a given programme and as a historical process. "In pre-war Poland," he writes, "the most difficult and most fundamental problems arose alongside the assimilation of the upper strata, which was a policy aimed at a full unification with Polishness. Socially speaking, the aim was to leave the caste completely, free oneself from the mark it left" (176). The meaning of this type of Jewish emancipation efforts is seen in the "transformation of the caste into a nation" (193). He discusses at length the richness and the multifaceted character of this mutual penetration of Polish and Jewish culture, which, according to the author, also left a mark on the character and form of nearly all Jewish emancipation movements (Zionism, socialism, Bund, assimilation). Hertz is "inclined to believe that Polish political romanticism had a profound influence on emancipation tendencies among Polish Jews" (192). To wit, as Hertz says, "the Jewish national revival could not have happened without acceptance by the Jewish masses of the principal values of extra-caste values" (190). This, in turn, was made possible, among others, by educated individuals who in their pursuit of advance-

ment and escape from the caste became assimilated and frequently distinguished themselves in science, culture or economy. On the other hand, those "Jews who led mass national and emancipation movements and formulated their ideologies were members of the intelligentsia. They had their roots in Polish culture, or, more precisely, in the culture of the Polish nobility" (191). Hertz repeats pointedly: "one cannot understand Jewish emancipation tendencies in Poland if one separates them from the Polish background and the entirety of Polish culture" (204).

Hertz treated the inter-war period as one of the greatest turning points in history. It was a time of unprecedented nationalist excitement. "This period of general upheaval delineated historical limits in which Polish statehood emerged and formed. It also had a key influence on the history of the Polish Jewry" (207). As for the growing anti-Semitism at that time, Hertz formulates and justifies the thesis that "antagonism towards the Jews grew both in Poland and elsewhere, as the objective differences between Jews and non-Jews were disappearing" (225).

Hertz, as a sociologist, is also interested in the issue of mutual stereotypes and how "the picture of one group and of each of its members is reflected in the consciousness of the members of the other" (238). He believes that an analysis of this picture, mechanisms of its emergence and functions has a fundamental significance for an understanding of inter-group and interpersonal relations" (238). Therefore, in his work, he presents an elaborate picture of the Jew in Polish folk tradition (including Polish proverbs), literary texts (both the pessimistic and optimistic picture), particularly in belles-lettres (in poetry and prose). He proposes to treat some novels and novellas as sociological material *par excellence*. In the summary to these considerations he writes: "The picture of the Jew that used to appear in Polish literature was markedly stereotypical, fragmentary, inadequate. As a rule, it was formed in isolation from the entirety of the issues, life and aspirations of the Jewish community in Poland, as a fragment of purely Polish affairs and in reference to them. Yet, there was a striking discrepancy between literature and journalism" (269), particularly from the early 20th century on, when "journalism was becoming increasingly anti-Jewish, which reached its climax in pre-war anti-Semitism" (269). According to Hertz, "the actual . . . Jewish reality in Poland found no reflection either in journalistic or in literary texts. . . . Polish society knew astonishingly little about the Jewish world, and this knowledge was fragmentary, and most often distorted" (270). In his work, he pointedly demanded recognition of the achievement of Polish Jews and their contribution to Polish culture. He outlined solid foundations, including theoretical ones, for a more detailed and comprehensive description of the mutual relations between Polish and Jewish cultures. In his analysis of the history and situation of the Jews in Polish society in the long-term perspective, he refers to a number of sociological categories: caste character, social marginality, social movements (including emancipation movements), participation in culture, social contact, divisions into "friends" and "aliens", social difference and social distance, social structure, stratification and many others. One should take them into consideration in all attempts (including by historians) to describe the Jewish community, be it on a local scale (a given town, city or region) or on the macro scale, as an element of the entire social system and the entirety of Polish society.

In the conclusion of his work, Hertz shares a reflection with the reader, on the remembrance and the common past of Poles and Jews, their memory of common experiences they keep about one another, living already outside Poland, as emigrants: "After 1945, only a few Jews were left in Poland. A great majority of the former Jewish community departed through gas chambers and crematoria. Most of the survivors left Poland. A thousand years of history could not be erased. They took fundamental values of Polish culture, the traditions and attachments. They did not cease to be Polish Jews. . . . But among their memories there were also those of the wave of anti-Semitism in Poland before the great catastrophe. These are very painful memories, which cast a shadow on Polish-Jewish relations . . . over the great expanses of the world where Poles and Jews are still in contact" (237).

One of the most distinguished Polish sociologists, Stanisław Ossowski, in his works of Jews in Polish society, did not ignore the issue of Polish-Jewish relations or the situation. Volume III of his *Dzieła* (Works), entitled *Z zagadnień psychologii społecznej*,[14] contains a number of references and examples, particularly from the World War II period, which concern the then situation of the Jews and the various attitudes towards them on the part of the Poles. In his work *Więź społeczna i dziedzictwo krwi*,[15] written before the war, under the influence of growing importance of racist ideologies and anti-Semitic tendencies in Europe and Poland, Ossowski analysed the issue of "certain types of social communication" and the impact of theory and myths, including beliefs on blood ties and on the social reality these theories, myths and opinions concern. But the most direct and comprehensive reference to the Jewish question and Polish-Jewish relations can be found in a brief text by Ossowski,[16] inspired by the event that took place in Kielce on 4 July 1946, written as the reaction of a sociologist and citizen, trying to understand (but not justify) the pogrom on the Jews. This article analyses Polish-Jewish relations in the immediate post-war period against the background of the pre-war situation and during the German occupation. Ossowski begins by outlining the basis of pre-war anti-Semitism and claims that "given the demographic, economic and political conditions in Poland, pre-war Polish anti-Semitism could be easily deduced. But these conditions, he continues, changed radically during the war. What would such a deduction look like in the case of the post-war situation?"[17] He quotes arguments both to support the conclusion that "in post-war Poland, anti-Semitism as a social phenomenon is impossible" (51), and reasons to the contrary. His analysis of the motives of post-war anti-Semitism is correct. The Kielce event turns Ossowski's attention toward three kinds of facts: the presence of those who are deliberately "trying to incite murder", "the case of finding the perpetrators" and "weak reactions of society at large; indifference or ambivalence based on aversion to the Jews" (52). The latter was related to

[14] S. Ossowski, *Dzieła*, vol. III: *Z zagadnień psychologii społecznej* (Warsaw: 1967).

[15] S. Ossowski, *Dzieła*, vol. II: *Więź społeczna i dziedzictwo krwi* (Warsaw: 1966).

[16] Stanisław Ossowski's article "Na tle wydarzeń kieleckich", originally published in *Kuźnica,* No. 38 [56], (1946).

[17] J. T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948,* (Cracow: 1998).

educational activities, which, according to Ossowski, should be initiated given the impact of the war "on the human disposition and ways of thinking. The attitude of Polish society towards the Jews demonstrates that the liberation [from the German occupation – M. M.] had not been a sufficiently strong shock" (57). Ossowski warns us against threats to post-war social life, but also to Polish-Jewish relations, which stem from nationalist slogans (thus being conducive to nationalist tendencies), and from "criteria of power" (in lieu of humanitarian values). At the end of this article he reveals his civil stance: "Protests against the Kielce crimes, signed by culture functionaries, do oblige one to do something. . . . One should bear in mind that there are no isolated phenomena in social life, which, in turn, precisely broadens the range of our responsibility."

Jan Tomasz Gross's[18] booklet *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939 – 1948* presents the reflections of the author, who is a historian and a sociologist, on the Jews and the attitudes towards them, particularly the characteristics of Polish-Jewish relations over a decade, comprising the war and the early post-war years. In the first essay, Gross analyses the stereotypical picture of Polish-Jewish relations under the German occupation and tries to explain the causes of the isolation of the Jews at that time. "Our knowledge regarding help given to the Jews during World War II can be presented schematically in three points: we are aware of the situational context created by the Germans – any help offered to the Jews was punished by death, and collective responsibility threatened entire families; we are aware of Polish attitudes – generally, we are aware of Polish behaviour – a relatively small minority of the Poles helped the Jews. To wit, in the commonly accepted model of Polish-Jewish relations during the war conclusions on the behaviour of the Poles were drawn from the situational context, ignoring completely the issue of attitudes. I propose that they be combined in one scheme, i.e. attitudes, behaviour and the situational context" (51–52). The author says pointedly: "the fate of the Jewish fellow citizens lies at the core of the occupation experience of Polish inhabitants of every locality" (59). In his second essay Gross analyses the commonly held opinion that "the Jews enthusiastically greeted the Red Army marching into Poland in September 1939, and later served in the communist administration on Soviet-occupied territories" (61). He gives facts and reasons for dismissal of this belief, and adds that "the stories of Jewish privileges under the Soviet regime ought to be discarded" (91). The third essay combines the war years and the immediate post-war years, and demonstrates the relationships between the barbarity of the Nazi occupation and acts of violence against the Jews after the liberation. According to Gross, the essence of Jewish fate in post-war Poland lies in the then experience of mass emigration of Jews from Poland, and not in the "alleged conclusions of Jews and communists. . . . After all, the emigration of nearly a quarter of a million people (that many Jews left Poland by the end of 1948), not forced by any state decree or administrative pressure, is a real challenge, an intellectual provocation, not yet confronted by Polish journalists or historiographers"

[18] J. T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948* (Cracow: 1998).

(112–113). At the end of his "Afterword", the author once again formulates this challenge: "The Poles, because of the Holocaust, need to tell themselves the history of persecution of the Jews in Poland. Otherwise they will never be square with their own identity" (119).

Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation and attitudes of Polish society to the Holocaust were also discussed in an article by a distinguished Polish sociologist, Antonina Kłoskowska.[19] She makes an interesting attempt to outline a hypothetical, in principle, picture of Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust. In order to do this, she proposes a typological model of these attitudes, in which the individual types of Polish attitudes towards the Jews during the occupation have the character of Weber's ideal types, i.e. construction types based on concrete data. The first type discussed by Kłoskowska is the *active hostile attitude*, characteristic of blackmailers, informers and the *szmalcownicy*, i.e. "those who took part in the persecution and extermination of the Jews in whatever form that rules out direct coercion on the part of the occupier. Such activity, regardless of motive, was tantamount to complicity in the crime" (113). Kłoskowska argues that "ideological anti-Semitism was not a necessary or sufficient condition for such behaviour" (113), and analyses the cultural social determinants of this type of active attitude. Thus she outlines the reality of pre-war Polish-Jewish relations and presents a sociological analysis of them. The second type of attitude discussed by Kłoskowska was that of reluctant inertia, which "on a greater scale was related only to the cognitive and emotional aspects; it did not manifest itself under occupation in hostile behaviour" (116). In the context of this type of attitude, the author points to the situation of the entire Polish society under the occupation. Other categories in this typology are *perfect indifference* and *compassionate inertia*. As Kłoskowska points out, "reluctant inertia and compassionate inertia are among the most frequently encountered attitudes in the Polish community. To assess these two attitudes quantitatively is not," according to her, "possible" (117). Similarly, it is not possible to determine "how many Poles took part in saving Jews and Poles of Jewish origin" (120). The author refers to Nechama Tec's research,[20] and among those offering help identifies "rescuers" and those who helped for money ("helpers") (121). Attitudes of active help, particularly the altruistic ones, were far less frequent than compassionate inertia. But, as Kłoskowska points out, "the borders of these attitudes are not obviously clear-cut" (124), or are perfectly unambiguous, as sometimes "compassionate inertia or even aversion could change into active help, depending on the situation. Still, such help did have its limits. . . . Passive reluctance or indifference, on the other hand, turned into treason," and under the influence of various factors, not necessarily anti-Semitism, but due to fear, conflict or other elements of a particular situation such people found themselves in. Kłoskowska quotes a number of interesting examples to illustrate individual types of Polish attitudes towards the Jews under the occupation as well as cases of individual changes of such attitudes. From the viewpoint of the cur-

[19] A. Kłoskowska, "Polacy wobec zagłady Żydów. Próba typologii postaw", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo,* No. 4, (1998).

[20] N. Tec's work will be discussed further on.

rent state of knowledge and research regarding the present phase of the discussion on Polish attitudes to the Holocaust, Kłoskowska's claim is particularly significant: "One of the moral problems in Poland is . . . indifferent inertia, specially if reluctant or hostile" (126).

From this point of view, one should at least mention Michael Steinlauf's *Pamięć nieprzyswojona*,[21] in which the author analyses (including by means of sociological categories) how the experience of being Holocaust witnesses left a mark on the Polish consciousness, and what Polish-Jewish relations looked like from the earliest times to the mid-1990s. The only "obstacle" that prevents inclusion of this work in this overview is the fact that Steinlauf is a historian, not a sociologist.[22]

The sociological perspective – two research approaches

I shall now move on to discuss a few selected sociological studies of the second type, i.e. those which, while reflecting the sociological point of view in studies on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations, are based on empirical research. They make use of both materials produced by the sociologist by way of research (questionnaires, interviews, etc.) and those collected in archives (testimonies, memoirs, documents), but subjected to sociological analysis.

This type of studies might represent two research approaches: they might be based on quantitative research or, on the other hand, upon qualitative analyses. What seems to be characteristic here is the combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This overview is selective and by no means aspires to be exhaustive.

A purely qualitative, sociological approach to Holocaust issues is greatly problematic. The difficulties and doubts involved in such research and restriction on the conclusions will be presented in the next part of this text, but I shall concentrate here on a discussion of issues which refer to the category of representativeness that determines the quantitative approach in sociology. To wit, one of the most important works of Nechama Tec, a sociologist from Connecticut University and a Holocaust scholar: *When Light Pierced the Darkness. Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland*.[23]

This book is a sociological study of help and rescue of the Jews by Poles under German occupation, in which the author, in the first place, took into consideration altruistic help. On the basis of an analysis of numerous testimonies (of 308 Jewish survivors and 189 Polish rescuers), memoirs and 65 first-hand, in-depth interviews

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[21] M. Steinlauf, *Pamięć nieprzyswojona. Polska pamięć Zagłady*,transl.. A. Tomaszewska, Warsaw 2001. As there is not enough space here to summarise the main themes of this important work by M. Steinlauf let me refer those interested to my review (*Przegląd Socjologiczny*, vol. XLIX/2 (2000), 232–235), but, in the first place, to the book itself.

[22]Since there is not enough space to summarise the main points of M. Steinlauf's work, those interested might wish to read my review of the publication in: *Przegląd Socjologiczny,* vol. XLIX/2, (2000), 232–235, but primarily the book itself.

[23] N. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness. Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland*. (New York–Oxford: 1986).

with Jewish survivors and Poles who helped rescue them, carried out by Tec herself, she described the relation between the rescuer and rescued. But, primarily, the author tried to answer the following question: who were those that consciously and risking their lives rescued actual people – the Jews; what characterised them and set them apart from others?

All the materials from various sources collected by the author were subjected not only to quantitative statistical analysis. All the cases were appropriately codified, calculated and presented in tables or breakdowns of figures (or percentages) that show the profile of "rescuers", circumstances in which help was offered, its forms and profile of survivors (or, more precisely, a sample of survivors), as well as types of relations between the rescuer and the rescued.[24] Thus, only 5 percent said that they had not used any conscious help. The category of paid helpers accounted for 16 percent of the sample in question. According to survivors, some of the rescuers (*rescuers*, not *helpers*) received some amounts of money, but they were not the reason or motive for help. On the other hand, 52 percent of rescuer cases covered by the survey were those who, certainly, not only took no money, but also paid for the upkeep of those they were hiding. 34 percent in Tec's sample, one could say, received no compensation for their help, but the issue of upkeep has not been completely explained. One entire chapter of this work is devoted to the issue of money, because it involved a number of problems concerning the everyday existence of the survivors, their relations with the rescuers and the way they were treated by them, etc. Also interesting are the findings to do with the profile of rescuers in the sample. "Those offering paid help were largely poor or very poor (85%) and poorly educated (90%). What is characteristic, however, according to Kłoskowska, is the fact that among the altruistic rescuers were 47 percent poor, while the majority were defined as undereducated."[25] Tec's statistical data are not obviously, strictly representative, because the author could not take into account the entire community of the survivors or make a random selection for her sample. But one can assume that the population in question is not entirely atypical. Certainly, Tec's figures pertain to the analysed pool of cases, but are not exaggerated, as they could be with respect to the entire population of the survivors, and the more so with respect to those who had been offered help but did not survive the war. 62 percent of the survivors in Tec's survey said it was they who asked for help, 20 per cent that they had been referred to helpers by someone else, and only 15 percent said it was the Poles who initiated the relation with the rescued person and offered help. Nechama Tec was interested in those who were considered rescuers; who offered material help, offered care and undertook concrete and conscious action aimed at hiding and rescuing Jews. The author indicates the *asymmetry* of the significance of the act of help for the rescued person and for the rescuer and the asymmetry of consequences of help on the one hand, and of refraining from help on the other. She points out that erroneous identification of Poles able and ready to help by "Aryan" Jews could destroy any chance

[24] If appears characteristic that the breakdown of figures in the form of tables was put in notes at the end of N. Tec's book.

[25] A. Kłoskowska, *op. cit.*, 121.

of survival. In the case of those Poles who became (or could become) helpers in the Jewish individual struggle for existence, there was for the Jew a higher risk of losing one's life, while for the Pole who refused there was instead avoidance of exposure to a serious threat to his or her life.

The author's conclusions, based on her research, concern a new theory of offering help, according to which rescuers were called "autonomous altruists". Those Poles who were covered by Tec's survey "do not fit their own group" (*ibid.*, 188). They are characterised by the following traits and circumstances of offered help: 1) individuality or a sense of autonomy, to the point of marginality; 2) independence or self-reliance, acting in accordance with one's convictions, regardless of perception; 3) lasting and complete involvement in helping those who are in need or helpless; 4) perceiving help offered to Jews as something obvious, and denying that it is something extraordinary or heroic; 5) unplanned beginning of help; and 6) a universalistic perception of Jews – as defenceless human beings, totally dependent on the help of others. As a consequence, people who demonstrated such manifestations of independence and individuality were not subject to communal control, but were relatively free from external pressure and were perceived as such by others (189). They were capable of acting in accordance with their own moral imperatives, which could have different sources. Tec writes in the conclusions of her survey: "Unlike paid helpers, those who altruistically risked their lives for others were independent individuals, who treated their help to others as ordinary duty. . . . Those rescuers acted naturally, as they were capable of putting up spontaneous resistance against the atrocities of their time. Their very existence should give us hope" (193).

Another important example of empirical sociological research (this time into the transformation which took place after the war in the consciousness of Polish Jews) is described in Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska's work *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950). Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej*,[26] published years after it was written. "The author conducted her research during 1947–1950 in the Department of Sociology, Warsaw University, headed by Stanisław Ossowski. She collected her data by means of a few methods. The most important was survey: the author sent several thousand questionnaires to Jews from Warsaw, Łódź and Dzierżoniów and received 817 replies, some of them very extensive, which she subjected to qualitative analysis."[27] Furthermore, the author made use of statistics from the Central Committee of Polish Jews, and she also carried out participative observation herself of Jewish milieus and institutions and conducted a number of casual interviews. Hurwic-Nowakowska analyses the collected material so as to set apart and describe the individual components of the war. At the same time, she tries to identify social factors that influence the formation of the group's social bond as well as those that contribute to its disruption. The book's key chapters deal with the issue of national self-identification of Polish Jews after the war, the dominant tendencies and attitudes (emigration, Zionism, assimilation, national indifference). In one chapter Hurwic-Nowakowska

[26] I. Hurwic-Nowakowska's work: *Żydzi polscy (1947 – 1950). Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej* (Warsaw: 1996).

[27] A. Sułek. "Z socjologii Żydów polskich", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* No. 4 (1988), 249.

discusses anti-Semitism as a determinant of specific attitudes of assimilated Jews. After all, according to the author, anti-Semitism is a "central issue present in the questionnaires" (139), but Jewish conceptions of anti-Semitism are treated primarily as a subjective picture in Jewish eyes, not as an objective description of this phenomenon. The author notes that in certain milieus of Polish Jews, one can observe a marked attitude, which consists of escaping from the group, escape from Jewry, which was a result of wartime experiences, but also as a result of post-war anti-Semitism. But, "on the other hand, anti-Semitism caused a reverse reaction among assimilated Jews. It formed a sense of special bond with Jewry among people of Polish cultural profile, those who, before the war, regarded themselves as Poles" (144). On the basis of her research, Hurwic-Nowakowska formulated the following conclusion: "Inasmuch as anti-Semitism consolidates the sense of community and solidarity in the Jewish cultural milieu, and inasmuch as anti-Semitism is [here] an element of the social bond, then, among the assimilated Jews, it is a key element of this bond" (145–146). This research also captures the issue of complex, double identification: "the sense of community among assimilated Jews whether with the Polish or the Jewish group, or the sense of double community is, according to the author, a complex phenomenon" (157). One characteristic of the Jewish group studied at that time was its "fragmentariness", while the profound processes that were taking place in the post-war Jewish community were "a function of three chief factors: 1) biological annihilation of the large Jewish community under the occupation; 2) socio-economic transformation in Poland; 3) the establishment of the Jewish state. These factors, says the author, are composed of the elements that make up the former bond of the Jewish group" (161). The study (in the Appendix) contains a statistical breakdown of characteristics and profiles of the studied community and the individual elements of attitudes of those covered by the study. This quantitative aspect of the study presented here, as in the case of previously discussed research by Nechama Tec, does not determine their principal value. It is rather that the combination of certain statistics with the description and analysis of experiences and beliefs of individuals covered by the research (i.e. the combination of quantitative and qualitative approach) allows the processes in question to be comprehensively presented and the regularities of their various conditions captured.

The two already discussed studies are pioneering works, one in the field of Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust, the other in the field of the early post-war years. All the other sociological works that deal with these issues and published later broaden our knowledge and understanding of these phenomena, but do not cover such a wide range of issues or are of equal importance. Even Nechama Tec's recently published work *Resilience and Courage. Women, Men and the Holocaust*,[28] although certainly extensive and abundantly documented, is, in a way, a continuation of her earlier studies of rescuers and survivors. One should also mention a few sociological studies which open a number of new issues and ask questions about problems that have not been dealt with, particularly Holocaust experiences and

[28] Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage. Women, Men and the Holocaust* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2003).

the post-war fate of the survivors. Among them are Michał Borwicz's[29] and Natan Gross's[30] works, which describe the experiences of those in hiding on "Aryan papers". Subsequent studies on this subject centre round the complex issue of identity of those survivors under a false, non-Jewish identity,[31] or focus on the actual experience of those hiding on the "Aryan side" in Warsaw, as they cannot omit them.[32] A relatively new theme was raised by Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak[33] in her research covering those Jews who wanted to stay in Poland immediately after the war. Different paths led to their being able to feel at home again in Poland. The author discusses four possible habituation strategies of Jewish survivors in post-war Poland: "assimilation to Polishness, mixed marriages, 'entering' Poland through communism, and reconstruction of the Jewish community" (133–134). There are also studies whose authors deal with issues to do with a selected aspect of the Holocaust experience (e.g. the category of time or remembrance in Barbara Engelking's works[34]). The above-mentioned general sociological studies represent the qualitative approach: they are based on content analysis of individual testimonies (memoirs, testimonies, interviews, diaries, and other personal documents), but just as with quantitative studies they are not free from methodological problems; therefore, at the end of this brief and selective overview of sociological studies, I shall discuss some of these problems.

Methodological problems of Holocaust studies

On the basis of Nechama Tec's work (mainly, but not exclusively), I intend to examine more closely the methodological problems of sociological Holocaust studies. Such studies should, no doubt, make use of methodological rules, typical of any scientific research. Like Nechama Tec, we believe that methodological rules should be applied to any Holocaust study, regardless of the sources used. But the researcher should always be aware of the limitations of empirical material and of the particular compromises that need to be made.[35]

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[29] Michał Borwicz, *Arisze papirn*, vol. 1-3 (Buenos Aires: 1955); *Vies Interdites* (Paris: 1969).

[30] Natan Gross, "Days and Nights in the Aryan Quarters, the Daily Worries of a Jew Carrying 'Aryan Papers'", *Yad Vashem Bulletin* No. 5 (1959).

[31] M. Melchior, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni na aryjskich papierach. Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* (Warsaw: 2004).

[32] N. Nalewajko-Kulikov, *Strategie przetrwania. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy* (Warsaw: 2004).

[33] E. Koźmińska-Frejlak, "Polska jako ojczyzna Żydów – żydowskie strategie zadomowienia się w powojennej Polsce (1944–1949). Zarys problematyki." *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, No 1 (XLIII) (1990).

[34] Barbabra Engelking, "Czas przestał dla mnie istnieć... Analiza doświadczenia czasu w sytuacji ostatecznej" (Warsaw: 1996); *Zagłada i pamięć. Doświadczenia Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych*, 2nd edition (Warsaw: 2001).

[35] Nechama Tec, "Diaries and Oral History, Reflections on Methodological Issues in Holocaust Research", in: R. Shapiro, ed., *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts* (New York: 1999), 268.

Biographical approach to Holocaust studies

The biographical approach in sociology involves the assumption of social creation of reality.[36] Hence the need to penetrate the *subjective reality* of the members of society and participants in social life. Thomas and Znaniecki, who pioneered the "personal document" method, analysed empirical material that reconstructs the past in order to, on the one hand, describe a defined (and experienced) stage in the biography of those covered by research (e.g. authors of memoirs), and, on the other, to obtain insight into their personal experience of the historical process.[37]

For a humanist sociologist, studied phenomena or cultural facts, the studied field of past human experience (but also of the present) remain real and objective, as they were (or are) given to "the same historical subjects" when they were (or are) "objects of their experience and action".[38] That is how Florian Znaniecki understood the characteristics of social facts studied by the sociologist and called them the humanist coefficient. According to this conception, "the world, where . . . [an individual] lives is not a world as seen by the community or researcher, but as the individual sees it."[39]

In the aforementioned *Zagłada a tożsamość*, that is how I tried to treat the studied reality. I analysed not so much the war-time or post-war experiences of survivors "on Aryan papers", as their subsequent awareness of those experiences. What I found important was the significance these people assigned to these experiences and the reality both at that time and many years later. Such an approach stemmed from the conviction that in order to understand human behaviour and attitudes, one needs not only to get acquainted with the reality at hand and the actual situation they found themselves in, but one should also find out how they understood that reality, about the meanings they assigned (and assign) to individual elements of the world around them. Therefore, individual experience and biography, the more so experience shared by a given category of individuals, can become an object of interest for sociologists, but also for anthropologists and social psychologists.

Through the prism of biographical experience of individual survivors, one can see a given social or historical reality or certain of its aspects (e.g. the situation of Jews hiding on the "Aryan side", Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation, the scope of help offered, and, to some extent, the phenomenon of denunciation or blackmail (*szmalcownictwo*), or certain general issues (e.g. the issue of identity and identity change, remembrance and commemoration emergence and consolidation of stereotypes and prejudice, or, to the contrary, altruistic attitudes). In order to do that, one should penetrate and reconstruct meanings assigned to the then reality by its participants, meanings assigned to their experiences by those who describe them

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[36] P. L. Berger, Th. Luckmann, *Społeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: 1983).

[37] J. J. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: 1976).

[38] F. Znaniecki, Humanistyczny współczynnik faktów kulturowych, in: J. Szacki, F. Znaciecki, *Myśli i ludzie* series (Warsaw: 1986), 239.

[39] J. J. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski*, *op. cit.*, 23.

even years later. What may turn out to be interesting in this approach are not only, for example, war-time experiences of Holocaust survivors as they seem to them then, but also after some time, from the point of view of the subsequent years of their lives and the later stages of their biographers.

The problem of representativeness

The problem of representativeness and sample selection concerns any Holocaust research based on personal documents. Obviously, when carrying out research into personal Holocaust experiences, a random sample is out of the question, as to obtain a random sample would mean that "in each given universe, everyone has the same chance to become part of the sample."[40] This is impossible because, after all, most people who experienced the Holocaust were exterminated, and did not live to see the end of the war. Even if one wanted to construct a random sample of survivors, this does not seem possible. These constraints, and the illusory character of representativeness of materials on which Holocaust survivors research is based, stem from a number of reasons. Only a relative minority of survivors wrote memoirs or produced any testimonies. The survivors, even if still alive at the onset of research, many years after the war, are scattered all over the world, and are difficult to get to. Some refuse to take part. Many do not want to be identified as survivors. And, as Nechama Tec says, "for a number of reasons, we cannot obtain access to many others [i.e. survivors]."[41]

This is how Nechama Tec describes the problem of representativeness in research into the Holocaust experience: "The fact that it is impossible to select a representative sample, and that there are gaps in our knowledge, limits our possibilities to make generalisations. But, this impossibility to generalise," suggests Tec, "can be reduced by differentiating those we want to include in our research. By including different categories of people [in our research sample], we make them more representative, even if we still cannot meet the requirement of representativeness."[42]

The postulate to differentiate cases selected for the sample can be understood and met in two ways: first, the differentiation of cases can be performed on certain categories of people who were not included in a given sample (thus it does not seem to be representative). For example, the majority of survivors who wrote their memoirs have a university degree. Therefore, if we want our sample to include people of different social or demographic background, we try to supplement our sample with other important cases, as seen from this point of view (e.g. people with poorer education). That is what Nechama Tec did in her research. But, secondly, differentiation of cases can involve theoretical categories obtained (or expected) during research. If the cases included in research do not seem to represent all the relevant categories, issues, situation variants or types of understanding of individual experi-

[40] Nechama Tec, *Diaries…*, *op. cit*., 271.
[41] *Ibid.*, 271.
[42] I*bid.*, 272.

ence, then such a sample ought to be supplemented with cases to reflect these other categories and issues, so far not included. In lieu of statistical representativeness, which cannot be achieved in Holocaust research, we introduce theoretical (or phenomenological) representativeness and try to adjust to its requirements. Thus we are able to solve (or at least reduce) the problem of inadequate representativeness of our research.

The problem of credibility

In the qualitative approach to Holocaust research and Polish-Jewish relations, we make use of various types of personal documents such as: testimonies, memoirs, interviews, letters, diaries and texts classified as literature of the personal document. This type of material is usually ignored or underestimated by historians. This type of source usually raises the question of their *credibility*. For the historian, individual memoirs, particularly if written many years after the events they refer to, are usually of little value as sources. They may sometimes have certain documentary value, if given requirements are met. What counts, first and foremost, is whether information given by the author corresponds with facts and events that actually took place at a given place. Sometimes this is fairly easy to establish: it is enough to compare related facts with other sources more credible for the historian. On the other hand, for the sociologist, memoirs written after many years can be valuable because they reflect consciousness or individual representations. They are treated not only as testimonies of personal experiences of given people, but also as presentation of individual modes of explanation, perceptions of one's life and one's past, precisely in retrospect, after years of past, tragic experiences. Individual testimonies contain more or less elaborate elements of their biographies. According to Znaniecki, the father of the biographical method, "every relatively extensive and detailed biography allows one to obtain valuable and durable research results regarding at least certain fragments of this vast field of research, i.e. social life."[43] Znaniecki's sociological approach does not differentiate biographical material from various sources. What determines the significance of personal documents is their cognitive value, i.e. using them to reach the sphere of subjective reality, which is unavailable by means of other methods with different sources.

Collecting oral testimonies of the past is sometimes included in a separate area of research as "individual modes of experience of historical events and macrosocial phenomena",[44] known as *oral history*. This is research regarding the past, conducted precisely by means of collecting individual testimonies, memoirs and testimonies, by recollecting and recalling remembered events and one's personal stories. In one qualitative method textbook, we read the following about oral history: "individuals tell the researcher about their experiences, way of life, attitudes and values. . . . Oral history concerns particularly what people say about their own past, how they expe-

[43] I*bid.*, 272.

[44] A. Rokuszeska-Pawełek, *Chaos i przymus. Trajektorie wojenne Polaków – analiza biograficzna* (Łódź: 2002), 7.

rience and perceive it. . . . The oral history interview the researcher wishes to obtain takes the form of a face-to-face meeting with an actual human being."[45]

Lawrence L. Langer,[46] author of an important work on testimonies of Holocaust Survivors, compares oral and written narratives of those who experienced the threat of extermination and managed to survive. According to the author, in the case of written testimonies we deal with a "consciously presented reality". He indicates that "while survivors' memoirs written by such authors as Primo Levi and Charlotte Delbo,[47] transform reality through style, imagination, chronology or a consistent moral vision, oral testimonies resist these organising impulses, and allow unguarded truth to reveal itself ..." (quoted from the blurb).[48] Langer shows an important difference between written memoirs and oral testimony, which is supposed to consist in the fact that the "imagination of narrators is tied to memories that have little to do with chronology or sequence of events."[49] On the other hand, most written memoirs preserve chronology and the actual sequence of events and facts.

When we deal with events and experience from many years ago, what can be a problem is *time*, which separates us from reported reality.[50] One might wonder how credible oral testimonies are if given many decades after the events they concern. Nechama Tec, in her considerations of different aspects of survivors' experiences and in her Holocaust research, in which she primarily makes use of personal testimonies and interviews, raises precisely the issue of time: how much does a given individual remember many years after those events and experiences? The author's reply appears convincing: "Those events [from the Holocaust era] were the most dramatic and painful in the individual's life, and, as such, are hard to forget. Time," according to Tec, "dims our memory of rather ordinary events, but to a lesser extent erases our memories of extraordinary experiences."[51] Holocaust and survival were also the author's personal experience. "Those of us who survived the Holocaust still keep our memories alive and live with the knowledge that they cannot be erased. Therefore, I have reasons to claim that those experiences are permanently present in [impressed on] our memories."[52] Many authors of testimonies and memoirs share this belief (including the people I interviewed). They often fail to remember all the dates, the sequence of events or certain details from the days of the occupation. But, on the other hand, some situations from the past, particularly the dramatic ones they experienced themselves, they remember vividly, to the smallest detail. One can

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[45] G. Hitchcock, D. Hughes, *Research and the Teacher. A Qualitative Introduction to School-Based Research* (London: 1989), 128–129.

[46] Lawrence J. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven–London: 1991).

[47] Ch. Delbo, *La mémoire et les jours* (Paris: 1985); P. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: 1986), *La Tŕève* (Paris: 1998).

[48] Lawrence J. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies...*, *op. cit*.

[49] Lawrence J. Langer, "Interpreting Survivor Testimony", in: B. Lang, ed., *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York–London: 1988), 32.

[50] Nechama Tec, *When Light...*, *op. cit*., 196.

[51] *Ibid.*, 204, cf. also N. Tec, *When Light...*, *op. cit*., 273.

[52] *Ibid.*, 204–205.

assume that the filter of time operates in the direction described by Tec. The less important elements (from the point of view of the individual and the intensity of his or her experiences) from one's own experience and details from the past may eventually become blurred or erased. But the elements of that experience that were (and remain) important for the individual, from the perspective of his or her feelings and perception, and also from the viewpoint of what turned out to be important (then and now), might eventually become more important in the recollections (testimonies). Some past experiences and episodes might even become intensified and more salient. In his considerations on remembrance and testimonies regarding personal experiences at that time Langer says: "witnesses do not seek the truth of the experience ... They are less concerned about their past, and more about the significance of the past in the present."[53] Therefore, the picture of past events we obtain many years later on the basis of an oral interview or testimony of a given person reflects, in the first place, the person's current mode of experience of those events. If the researcher is aware of the above as well as of what he/she can and wants to achieve through interviews and testimonies, then the problem of credibility and reliability of this type of materials becomes less important.

Also, according to Helling, "the categories of truth and falsehood are not very useful for biographical research. As the construction of meaning depends on time, interest and situation . . . the same person may offer a number of different biographies at different moments in time and to different audiences. These different reconstructions pertain to one and the same object, to wit the life of the person included in research."[54] Helling believes that "the concept of 'truth' should be replaced by the concept of 'authenticity'"(34).

The problem of credibility can be understood in a different sense than only with respect to the sources and empirical material we base our material on. One can thus ask about the credibility of research conclusions, their plausibility and validity when the data used in their formulation are not (and cannot be) fully representative of a given phenomenon. Thus, even though the researcher herself (Nechama Tec in this case) sees fundamental limitations of sample representativeness, even though the statistics or the frequency of certain behaviours should be considered mainly on the basis of cases included in a given sample, but not on the basis of the entire researched phenomenon, the conclusions drawn from them can be regarded as credible. In her research into help offered by Poles to Jews under the German occupation, Nechama Tec established that 76 percent of the survivors (in the analysed sample) left the ghetto without any guarantee of help on the other side of the wall, while only 29 percent upon departure from the ghetto and crossing to the "Aryan side" had some financial means secured.[55] This could mean that among those who survived the war, a substantial majority decided to leave the ghetto rather spontaneously, on the spur of the moment, generally without sufficient means to survive

[53] Lawrence. J. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies…*, *op. cit*., 40.

[54] L. K., Helling, "Metoda badań biograficznych", in: J. Włodarek and M. Ziółkowski, ed. *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii* (Warsaw–Poznan: 1990).

[55] Nechama Tec, *When Light…*, *op. cit*., 33–34.

outside the ghetto. Such a conclusion appears fairly credible, despite the reservations as to the figures quoted in her research. In her other studies, Nechama Tec tries to answer whether the chances of survival on the "Aryan side" depended on the gender of the Jews.[56] She analysed a number of circumstances which differentiated the situation of women and men Jews on the "Aryan side" in occupied Poland. In all cases (be it suspicion, blackmail, or arrest), a woman was in a position to deny that she was a Jewess; unlike in the case of men, it was impossible to prove otherwise. For this reason, claims Nechama Tec, Jewish women, as less threatened than men, were more often involved in the underground as couriers, messengers, etc. Furthermore, she points out that German regulations in the occupied territories resulted in a situation where the presence of young men (not only Jews) in the streets was invariably considered suspicious, while the presence of women tended to be ignored. Therefore, men were more frequently apprehended in the streets.[57] Helling considered all those circumstances, and the author formulated the following conclusion: "In different eras and during different wars being a man or a woman made a difference. But this difference was not [then] so central as being Jewish or Aryan."[58] It is impossible to disagree with this conclusion.

And yet another example from Nechama Tec's research. It is obvious that those Jews who managed to survive on the "Aryan side" frequently found themselves in a situation where someone helped them, gave support or facilitated something. But, at the same time, the same people might frequently have been *refused* help. This might be one conclusion from Nechama Tec's sociological research. Thus 56 percent of Jewish survivors in Poland covered by this research[59] claimed that at one point in their life on the "Aryan side" they met with refusal of help from the Poles. Refusal of help reduced, at a given moment, their chances for survival, but did not necessarily have to lead to disaster (because these people did survive). There were different reasons behind refusals: fear for one's family, fear of the occupier, lack of sufficient compassion for the Jewish fate or individual Jews seeking help. Certainly, it is possible that failure to act humanely or refusal of any help whatsoever was motivated by sheer aversion or hostility towards the doomed. But such negative attitudes did not always translate into action aimed at hunting given people just because they were Jews.[60]

By looking at these examples from the point of view of credibility, I intended to indicate the validity and aptness of the author's conclusions, despite, it seems, the

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[56] Nechama Tec, Resilience and Courage…, *op. cit.*; N. Tec, "Sex Distinction and Passing as Christians During the Holocaust", *East European Quarterly* No.1 (XVIII) (1984); Nechama Tec, "Reflections on Resistance and Gender", in: J. K. Roth, E. Maxwell, ed., *Remembering for the Future. The Holocaust in the Age of Genocide*, vol. I "History" (New York: 2001).

[57] Nechama Tec says that the arrest rate (in Germany and in the occupied countries) was lower among women than men. (cf. *ibidem*).

[58] *Ibidem*, 565.

[59] Nechama Tec, *When Light…*, *op. cit*., 34.

[60] On different types of indifference of the Poles towards the Jews see: B. Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć*, *op. cit.*

too inadequate representativeness of empirical material at her disposal to establish the frequency of given behaviours at that time.

When analysing the credibility of sociological studies (not only on the Holocaust or Polish-Jewish relations), we should therefore distinguish between the credibility of source material or empirical data used and analysed and the validity and credibility of conclusions drawn.