Christian-Jewish relations

The case study of the former Polish shtetl of Przysucha

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

To the Department of History and Cultural Studies

of Freie Universität Berlin

by

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Berlin, 2019

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Date of defense: 06.06.2019

Acknowledgements

"All you need in life is one person who will believe in you."

(Hassidic saying)

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Giulio Busi, who was the first to believe in me and took my dreams seriously.

From all of my heart I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Silvana Greco for her priceless guidelines and encouragement, without which it would have been impossible for me to complete the thesis.

I am grateful to all the Respondents who opened their doors and hearts to me.

I dedicate my work to Mom and Dad,

my Husband Błażej and our Children - Ala and Franek

for their unfailing love and support.

Contents

1. Introduction

"...There were Jews in Poland,
in the 15th century there were 40 thousand,
in the 17th century - 400 thousand,
in the 19th century - 2 million,
in the first half of the 20th century - 3 million,
in the second half of the 20th century - 20 thousand." (Krall 1989:66)

I have decided to open my dissertation with the above quotation by Hanna Krall, a famous Polish reporter, known for her interest in Christian-Jewish relations. Not only does Krall seem to touch upon the tragic history of Polish Jews, but she also encourages reflection on the daily life they led on Polish land. The citation, although short and seemingly monotonous, appears to shed light on Christian-Jewish history. It tells us that the Jewish history of settlement in Poland dates back hundreds of years and suggests that the Jewish Diaspora in Poland was especially imposing. It also implies that Christian-Jewish co-existence has virtually ended or, at least, has dramatically changed its character. However, that is not all. If we read between the lines we can learn about the rights and privileges that made Poland a substitute homeland for Jewish pilgrims and turned the country into the largest, most vibrant part of the Jewish world. Taking into consideration the fact that Christian and Jewish Poles significantly differ as far as their culture, customs, language and religion are concerned, we can assume that ordinary days could have initiated numerous conflicts between Christian and Jewish neighbors, with a lack of trust on one hand, and yet a positive exchange of opinions, visions and experiences on the other. The quotation may motivate the reader to face difficult issues as well, such as the attitude of Christian Poles when Jewish Poles were being slaughtered… How did Christians feel and react when Polish Jewry was being exterminated? How did they feel and act when Polish Jews suddenly vanished, when 3 million turned into 20 thousand? Admittedly, it brings forth issues of emptiness, individual and collective identity, but also of the future. Reading this quotation one can easily imagine how interesting common relationships may have been, how many values both communities might have shared with each other, as well as how unbelievable some moments of history were. One can also hope for a brighter future.

At this point an explanation is needed as to what is actually meant when the words "Jews", "Poles" or "Christians" are used. It is no mistake to assume that the question: "Who is

a Jew?" has been interwoven into Jewish history since time immemorial. The answer to this depends if one takes into account the rules of Orthodox Judaism, trends dominant in the period of Enlightenment or modifications resulting from the emancipation. Obviously, it is unreasonable to perceive *all* Poles as Christians (especially with regards to the analysis of present-day relations) and it is equally awkward to juxtapose Poles with Jews when both of these groups, although practicing different religions and being faithful to different rites, were in reality Polish citizens. Therefore, although (as will be mentioned in the section of findings included in chapter 4), Christian respondents continued to make a distinction between "Poles" and "Jews" as if Polish citizenship granted to the Jewish population with the regaining of Poland's independence did not take place, I have decided to acknowledge the fact that after World War I Jews were also officially Poles and use the terms "Christian Poles", "Jewish Poles" or "Polish Jews" so as to express the historical truth as well as emphasize the instrumental contribution that Jews undoubtedly made to the development of Poland. As for the expressions "Christians", "Jews" and "Christian-Jewish relations", they have proven to be universal. When employed to discuss the times after Poland became an independent country they refer solely to religious (not national) differences. They also serve their functions as far as the analysis of relations between incoming Jewish pilgrims and current Christian residents of Przysucha are concerned.

In the present dissertation I will deal solely with Przysucha (Yiddish: Pshishke), a town located today in central Poland, 114 km. southwest of the capital city of Warsaw and 34 km. west of Radom - the nearest city, a town where three communities of Christians, Jews and Germans lived together as neighbors. Not only is the setting attention-grabbing because it was multicultural and the Jewish community comprised the majority of its population for almost two centuries, but also because it has served as a worldwide recognized Hassidic center where prominent religious leaders such as Abraham of Przysucha, Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz (known as the Holy Jew) and Simcha Bunem lived, established their school, preached and are buried. What is more, Przysucha has never been forgotten by Hassidic Jews, who still regularly visit in order to pray and leave their personal requests on the tombs of their Masters.

Interestingly, at first sight it is quite striking that despite the town's relevance as a Hassidic seat, in Przysucha there are no streets dedicated to Jews, no commemorative plaques, monuments, museum exhibitions, or even road signs leading to the sacred Jewish sites - nothing that would remind one of Jews in general or, at least, of the great Rabbis thanks to whom Przysucha has gained worldwide recognition. Among the famous people commonly

associated with the town no Jews are included. However, there are two Jewish sites. The first is the once remarkable, brightly colored and lavishly decorated synagogue, described as "great" by its contemporaries (Penkalla 1990:9) and one of the largest objects of this type in Poland. There is also a Jewish cemetery, but today it appears abandoned, forgotten and deprived of due attention, as there are currently no Jewish residents to care for their necropolis. The cemetery continues to serve as a meeting place for young people and its immediate surroundings as an area for Physical Education classes where school children are asked to run and exercise directly in front of the bordering fence. Furthermore, Jewish tombstones (matzevot) may be found scattered about in different spots in Przysucha. They had been used to constitute the walls of warehouses erected by Nazis, they served as material for pathways in households owned by ordinary residents and finally, they may be found on the territory belonging to the local Fire Station.

Being born and raised in Przysucha, I was accustomed to the sight of the devastated synagogue where local children (including myself) played hide and seek. Residents from the margins of society used it as a place to drink and at times as a public toilet. I would run around the cemetery during my Physical Education classes and sometimes even took shortcuts across the graveyard. I was used to the sight of Jewish pilgrims who regularly came in droves, and as my family's house was located on the way from the synagogue to the cemetery, I could observe them passing from our window or while playing in the front yard. All these situations constituted my everyday routine and I had never given them a single thought until one day in 2013 I stopped in front of the synagogue and when I tried to connect some basic historical facts, I was unable to do so. I was astonished at my own lack of any general knowledge concerning Christian-Jewish co-habitation in Przysucha. I was unable to provide any essential statistics regarding the Jewish population of Przysucha. For example, it was impossible for me to determine how many Jews had lived in the town, which extermination camp the Jewish residents had been taken to, who is buried at the Jewish cemetery, as well as if there had been any cooperation between two communities before the War. At first I was certain my personal ignorance was to blame, but as I became increasingly interested in the topic I began to speak to local residents of all ages and asked them what information they may have regarding the Jews from Przysucha, as well as what stories they may have heard at home or perhaps learned at school? To my surprise, dismay (and relief) I discovered that I was not the only one lacking in fundamental knowledge. Exactly like myself, my respondents were totally incapable of providing even essential facts. Apart from the awareness that Jews had lived in Przysucha (the

giant synagogue is located near the main square making it virtually impossible to overlook) and some important Jewish figures are buried at the Jewish necropolis ("It is their Jesus"- as one of those I interviewed suggested) those I spoke with found it an insurmountable task to describe life in prewar Przysucha, even superficially. As children, we had not been taught about local history at school or spoken about the Jews from our town with our grandparents.

My original motivation behind this project was the visible discrepancy between the settlement's importance to Hassidic Jews and simultaneous ignorance among the local residents of Przysucha. I set a goal of conducting in-depth interviews with the oldest generation of residents so as to reconstruct a prewar picture of my hometown. I also aspired to grow as close as possible to the contemporary inhabitants of the place to be able to observe mutual relations between them and the regular flow of incoming pilgrims. Although I was unaware of it at the time, it seems that the current dissertation poses another example of a modern-day trend in Poland, studied by Anthony Polonsky. The author noticed that towards the end of the 1970s and on through the 1980s the beginnings of change in thinking about mutual Christian-Jewish relations, common history and heritage could be noticed (2011:12). This new trend, which could be summarized as the revival of interest in issues concerning the Christian-Jewish past, has continued to grow since that time and has become increasingly visible in different parts of the country. In 2007, these phenomena also reached Przysucha. The previously devastated synagogue was taken over by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland and is currently undergoing renovation in order to serve as a Jewish cultural center in the future. Furthermore, in September 2013, for the first time in the town's history, an event was held which aimed at integrating Polish and Jewish youth. Hence, it is important to stress that the present thesis is being written during a dynamically changing socio-political scene in which Polish Jewry is slowly but steadily regaining its rightful position in Polish consciousness.

The combination of these facts and history has made Przysucha an ideal place for conducting scholarly research. The town is still home to three generations. The oldest generation, born after the 1920s, are an invaluable source of information regarding prewar Przysucha and recall the times when Polish Jews were in the majority. Sadly, as this older generation of eye-witnesses is dying out, it was a "now or never" opportunity to hear their voices. Life for the following generation, born after the 1950s, was greatly determined by the dictates of the communist regime. Whereas, the younger generation of those born after the 1980s, encounter a revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history in free and democratic

Poland. Furthermore, given the fact that Hassidic Jews still visit the town and therefore Poles and Jews meet on a regular basis, I hoped to have an opportunity to establish contact with the Jewish community as well. The aim of the present thesis was not to determine the knowledge of these groups and how well-oriented they are as to their common history and heritage, but rather through conducting in-depth interviews and fieldwork I aspired to capture their feelings, memories, reactions, attitudes, willingness or lack thereof to maintain closer contact, get to know each other and work on (re)building harmonious relations. After all, regardless of their factual knowledge, residents of Przysucha and Jewish pilgrims who visit the town, through interactions of many kinds and intensity, continue to instill in each other an image of the other community that is passed down among families and friends, preparing the foundation upon which a greater picture of common relations is formed.

The dissertation will be divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter will provide fundamental knowledge about the project, such as its aim, scope, relevance and the questions it endeavors to answer. It will also include a review of existing literature and inform about the choices regarding the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the research, the choices that result from the topic itself as well as the ontological and epistemological positions advocated by the researcher. Thus, the chapter will outline basic assumptions, central concepts and the theoretical stance of the symbolic interaction theory, as interpreted by Herbert Blumer. It will also introduce the Grounded Theory Methodology understood and applied by Kathy Charmaz. The readers will learn why theorizing *a priori* has been replaced with a flexible procedure of gathering data and their intertwining analysis, why the *process* of establishing mutual relations (rather than only its initiating factors) will be examined, why the historical context plays such a significant role in understanding the findings and why I will attempt to place these relations on a spectrum of possible interactions rather than compress them to one or two forms.

The second chapter will provide the socio-cultural context of the dissertation, which is crucial for understanding its findings. In this chapter, I will touch upon selected, essential historical and contemporary events that have influenced Christian-Jewish relations such as the creation of the extensive Jewish Diaspora in Poland, Polish anti-Semitism, the issue of help (or lack thereof) for Jews during the Holocaust as well as the current revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history. Obviously, the goal of the chapter is not to solve all the controversial problems that have haunted both communities over the years, but just to recognize their existence and role in building steady relations. What is more, I will present the

setting of Przysucha with a special focus on the past and present spheres of interaction between the communities in question. Hence, readers will learn of Przysucha's origin and milestone events which determined its history. I will introduce the three communities that gave the town its multicultural and colorful identity, analyze the demographic shifts which took place along with mechanisms which shaped everyday life before the War. The aim of these efforts is to provide the context within which Christian and Jewish Poles established their relations. Regarding postwar interactions, having presented the stages which the Nazis implemented to exterminate the Jewish population from Przysucha in its entirety, I will move to a description of the present-day milieu of Jewish trips, occasional initiatives as well as the town's Jewish heritage.

The third chapter will be devoted to a detailed description of the methods and techniques of the Grounded Theory Methodology employed in the research. The chapter will start with a presentation of the qualities of the constructivist version of the Grounded Theory that has been selected as a framework for the present research and explain how the constructivist approach differs from other stances in its ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects. Furthermore, subsequent stages of the Grounded Theory procedure such as data collection, initial as well as focused coding, memoing, developing and refining categories, etc. will be analyzed. I will also explain the role of notions that are central to GT, namely: sensitizing concepts, data saturation and simultaneous engagement in data gathering and analysis. Having explained the theoretical foundation of the employed methodology, I will proceed to explain how these stages were applied in the present research. I will describe how the in-depth interview questions were developed, what ethical aspects were taken into account and delineate the process of conducting interviews, their transcription and analysis. Furthermore, I will concentrate on the method of participant observation which enabled me to examine contemporary relations among the town's residents and visitors.

The fourth chapter will be dedicated to a presentation and discussion of findings. Each subsection will focus on relations between Christian and Jewish Poles in Przysucha during the prewar as well as contemporary times. The image of prewar Przysucha will be reconstructed on the basis of in-depth interviews with witnesses. I will provide both the context of Christian-Jewish co-habitation as remembered by Przysucha's elderly generation (living conditions, deployment of the communities, accommodation, occupations, political system, economic situation, etc.) as well as common interactions (at school, in shops, in the streets, in the form of business operations, manifested as friendships, marriages, conflicts, acts of

aggression, etc.). Finally, the emphasis will be placed on present day relations. Thus, I will scrutinize the procedure of Israeli pilgrimages to Przysucha and its consequences, involvement of current residents as well as the role and outcomes of initiatives that have taken place in Przysucha with the hope of bringing Christians and Jews closer.

The fifth, concluding chapter will delineate the limitations of the current study, present implications for potential, future research projects which can be conducted in the town as well as present practical measures which can be taken in order to contribute to the stabilization of the relations under debate.

1.1 Aim and scope of the research

The dissertation aims at answering questions regarding mutual relations between Christian and Jewish communities and attempts to find out how Christians and Jews perceive each other and what social representations[1] and possibly prejudices are shared among members of the two communities. Investigating these issues is important for many reasons. From a more general perspective it goes without saying that the tragedy of the Holocaust should never be forgotten or repeated. The Polish Jews from Przysucha suffered horrifically from the Nazi occupation. First, they were forced to live in a ghetto and were then deported to the death camp located in Treblinka[2], where the vast majority of them were exterminated. By touching upon this unprecedented tragedy I try both to understand it and pay homage to its victims. The Jewish community from Przysucha deserves particular attention because of their well-known, respected and admired religious leaders such as Abraham of Przysucha, Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz (known as the Holy Jew, credited as being the first propagator of

[1] The term “social representation” is understood as the collective elaboration of a social object, “a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication (…) by providing a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their worlds and their individual and group history" (Moscovici 1973:xiii).

[2] Treblinka is a village in the Masovian Voivevodship, where the Nazis first established a forced labor camp (June 1941 - July 1944) and then the extermination camp, in operation between years 1942-1943. Deportations to Treblinka came mainly from the ghettos located in Warsaw and Radom district, as well as Białystok and Lublin. It is estimated that at least 750 thousand people (mainly of Jewish origin) were killed in the camp before it was finally dismantled in the fall 1943 (Cała, Węgrzynek et al. 2000:366).

Hasidism in central Poland) and Simcha Bunem who were all residents of Przysucha. It is the tombs of these men that still regularly attract Jewish pilgrims.

It is impossible to truly emphasize and grasp the magnitude of the tragedy Polish Jews were forced to experience in the hellhole of Nazi camps. Despite the fact that the present research does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, I will mention a few facts concerning Jewish faith in Treblinka, for this may in part help to explain contemporary tensions between Jews and Christians.

It is worth emphasizing that there were two camps in Treblinka (one for labor and one for extermination) which existed for one year collaterally. The first camp hosted mainly Christian Poles (workers, peasants, intellectuals of all ages) who had committed minor violations against the governor-generalship, whereas the second camp was "a slaughterhouse for Jews", as Grossman (1946:375) clearly described. One can assume that in the labor camp prisoners experienced ruthlessness of German regime in the form of starvation rations, murders, daily humiliation, frequent rapes, constant fear and utter helplessness. However, it was Camp number two where "everything was adapted for death" (Grossman 1946:375) that turned out to be much worse, beyond comprehension. The entire construction of the extermination camp was diabolically well planned so that Jews (and to a lesser extent Christian Poles and Gypsies who were taken there) had no chance to predict what laid ahead for them. No words are capable of describing the horrors of what those people had to face at the hands of German SS, men who had turned into heartless killing machines. Regardless of how much one reads about the Jewish extermination, how many documentaries one watches, the idea of annihilating masses of innocent people of all ages and backgrounds in such a cruel and mechanical manner that resembled a factory conveyor belt defies imagination. Hitler's followers developed a precise mechanism that stripped camp prisoners of all their possessions in order to then smoothly and efficiently annihilate enormous numbers of people. Without going into details, those people died naked, with shaved heads, as a result of suffocation in meticulously designed gas chambers.

By tracing the Jewish community's history, it comes to light, that over the years, even before the Holocaust, Jews have repeatedly suffered from different forms of aggression in various parts of the world. They had been persecuted, expulsed, forced to renounce their faith or wear humiliating outfits such as dark spiky hats or sew-on badges so as to make them easy targets. Their holy books were burned and they were forbidden to live outside ghettos. For

many years they lived in uncertainty at the mercy of powerful elite forces. Lastly, but certainly not least, they experienced the Holocaust, an unprecedented act of hatred, designed by Nazis, but executed on Polish soil. Bearing all of this in mind, it cannot be denied that it remains relevant to investigate issues touching upon anti-Semitism and racism today. It is of utmost importance to uncover if prejudices and antagonisms have affected following generations, if such attitudes remain alive and what possibility there is to reach a point where stable, harmonious relations between Christians and Jews could be spoken of. Finally, since the issue of mutual perception between Christians and Jews has continually spurred people's deep emotions, it deserves scientific investigation and a detailed analysis of facts so as to minimize misunderstandings based on the lack of knowledge, prejudices or ignorance.

The thesis in question stands out as even more relevant in light of recent events such as the current immigration crisis in Europe which has awakened among many people fear, aversion, or even hatred and cruelty directed towards refugees in need. The recent tensions between native Europeans and immigrants seem to closely resemble the time when Jews were perceived as a serious threat and danger to order and stability, followed by a clear proclamation of - it is "us" vs. "them". Today's events somewhat resemble times when hardened anti-Semites refused to try to understand the real motives behind Jewish behavior, but rather chose to believe stereotypical, propagandist slogans. Admittedly, the enormous influx of migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and other countries coming both by land and sea is an extremely difficult situation to cope with and requires implementation of a common policy by many countries. Nevertheless, it seems that the worst option people can adopt is to spread terror, hatred and build both real as well as metaphorical walls between themselves and those whom they see as "others".

The importance of conducting studies that examine the existence of prejudices, stereotypes and xenophobia has also been stressed by Sara Bloomfield (Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) and Irina Bokowa (Director General of UNESCO) who took advantage of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2017 as a reminder that the Holocaust did not begin with mass killings, but with words and propaganda[3]. The authors pointed out that in 1932 the Nazi party had skillfully made use of public opinion polls that were only in initial stages at that time. They recognized the hopes, fears and needs of their

[3]https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/pl/sara-bloomfield-irina-bokowa-holocaust-zaczal-sie-od-slow-nie-od-masowych-zbrodni/

countrymen and adjusted their rhetoric in such a way so as to present its program as the best possible option that was able to increase employment as well as protect traditional values. Needless to say, today nationalists and various extremists have far more advanced tools at their disposal that can create chaos, shape attitudes and spread ideologies on a global scale, which highlights the absolute necessity to educate people on racism and xenophobia before it slips out of control once again.

I brought up the recent immigration crisis not only because of the similar mechanisms that seem to connect it with anti-Semitism in the world and the innate responsibility of all people to curb potential flows of hatred. At the same time, recently some Poles have demonstrated an increasing abhorrence towards refugees (the number of hate crimes and antagonism of refugees is on the increase) which has explicitly been compared to a special kind of Polish anti-Semitism, namely: "anti-Semitism without Jews". Sakson[4] openly points out that although not even one refugee has officially been admitted in Poland so far, they are already a liability. Similarly, although the percentage of Jews living among Christians today is insignificant, many tend to believe that they are surreptitiously in charge of the country or even the entire world. Obviously, terrorist attacks perpetrated by extreme Islamists enhances a simplified way of thinking, according to which every refugee is either an economic immigrant that will deprive native workmen of their jobs or an extremist aiming at the Islamization of Europe. Interestingly, Islamophobia has been found to be positively correlated with Polish anti-Semitism. According to the latest research (January 2017) conducted by the Center of Research on Prejudice the number of Polish anti-Semites has risen since 2014 and the pattern is quite simple: the more anti-Muslim people are, the more anti-Semitic they are as well[5].

Returning to the research in question, it has been carried out in Przysucha, because the town, being a shtetl (small Jewish town or village in central and eastern Europe before the Holocaust) and a recognized Hassidic center, created a chance for its residents to be involved in *direct* contact with representatives of the other community. Although we might expect the opinions expressed by those interviewed to some extent to be subjective, they will not be based *solely* on information drawn from media or conveyed over generations. We have every

[4]http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1027191,title,Prof-Andrzej-Sakson-dla-WP-zjawisko-niechec-do-uchodzcow-przypomina-fenomen-antysemityzmu-bez-Zydow,wid,18297727,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=118ac0

[5]http://forward.com/news/world/360967/anti-semitism-spikes-in-poland-stoked-by-populist-surge-against-refugees/

right to assume that should there be anti-Semitism, it will not be "phantom anti-Semitism" (Wisse 1987)[6] which represents hatred based only on deeply rooted stereotypes, symbols from the past, prejudices that one generation inherits from another and a tendency to build Polish identity as in opposition to Jewish.

The Jewish settlement in Przysucha was founded between 1710-1776 and was one of three settlements that constituted the town (Guldon 1995:9, Abramczyk 2010:75). The remaining settlements were Evangelical German and Polish Catholic, all of which were established as a result of economic initiatives of Przysucha's subsequent owners. Before the 1750s, Jews reportedly had a mikvah (ritualistic Jewish bath), a cheder (school for Jewish children) and a cemetery. In 1764 the Jews submitted an official request to the Archbishop of Gniezno for permission to erect a synagogue (Penkalla 1990:9). As mentioned, Przysucha was formed as a town of three separate quarters, occupied by residents of three different religions and nationalities, surrounding three separate squares. The population of the town towards the end of the 18th century is presented in the chart below:

Year	***Total number of houses***	***Jewish houses***	***German houses***	***Polish houses***
1775	189	76	44	33
1777	153	85	39 (4 empty)	22

Figure 1: Population in Przysucha in 1775 and 1777 (Abramczyk, 2010:77)

The table clearly shows that Jews significantly outnumbered the Polish and German communities and it was the only community whose population continued to grow. In 1775 Jews constituted 40% of the total population and by 1777, as much as 55%. As for the location of the three communities, until the end of the 18th century, the issue seemed a bit complicated. On one hand, Przysucha was not given the edict of *de non tolerandis Judaeis*, on the basis of which Jews would have been forbidden to enter the town or settle in it. Technically, the Jewish population was allowed to live on any of the territory of Przysucha and, as Fidos (2006:59, in ed. by Piątkowski) pointed out, Jews from Przysucha did try to buy houses in the Catholic quarter. However, it needs to be underlined that both Germans and

[6]https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/polands-jewish-ghosts/

Jews originally came to Przysucha to fulfill the lack of native craftsmen to keep the economy growing. Thus, Jewish and German communities were allowed to settle according to royal decrees that determined which districts of the town they could occupy, as a result of which residents of each nationality were not scattered, but lived close by one another, next to their individual houses of prayer and cemeteries. As far as professions are concerned, the Jewish quarter was described as "trade and service oriented" (Guldon, Krzystanek 1990:265). Furthermore, as Muszyńska (1998:156-159, in Zarychta-Wójcicka 2006:24, in ed. by Piątkowski) indicates, among the Jews living in the Jewish quarter there were a goldsmith, a barber, a musician, an administrator and two bachelors. In regard to Polish Catholics, they dealt with shoe-making, carting, smithery, and farm work, whereas Germans were predominantly tailors, saddle-makers, wheelwrights, drapers and grave-diggers (Abramczyk 2010:77).

At the turn of 18th and 19th centuries, when Przysucha became the seat of Rabinowicz, the Holy Jew, the Jewish population significantly increased. Rabinowicz had already become so famous and well-respected that many people decided to settle nearby solely for that reason. According to the National Archive in Radom (file 2130a, in Fidos, ed. by Piątkowski 2006:57), in 1820, out of the 1.775 residents Przysucha, some 1.150 were Jewish, 498 were Catholic and only 107 professed to be Evangelical. Forty years later the number of Jews was still growing: from 2.520 inhabitants 1.966 were Jewish, 542 Catholics and only 12 Evangelical.

Year	***Jews***	***Catholics***	***Evangelicals***
1820	65%	29%	6%
1860	78%	21.5%	0.5%

Figure 2: Population in Przysucha in 1820 and 1860 (Fidos 2006:57, in ed. by Piątkowski)

The outbreak of World War II resulted in drastic persecutions of the Jewish population by German invaders aimed at the Jews' total exclusion from public, economic and cultural life. At the beginning of the War there were 1.650 Jewish inhabitants in Przysucha, however, Polish Jews living in the neighboring villages or towns such as Przytyk, Drzewica, Szydłowiec and Płock were then transported to Przysucha. They were all forced to live in the ghetto by a decision issued on the 10th of July 1941. According to the National Archive in

Kielce (file 23, in Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:35) on August 1st 1941 there were 3.119 Polish Jews in Przysucha, and the number grew to around 6.500 before the liquidation of the ghetto, which was initiated between 27th-31st October 1942. Final dismantling of the ghetto took place in February 1943. Jews from Przysucha were transported to the railway station in Opoczno and escorted to their death in the extermination camp located in Treblinka.

> "Think of all the brilliant minds, the sterling souls, the wonder-filled children's eyes, the sweet old faces, the proud and beautiful girlish heads (…) think of all this as a huge silent flood precipitated into oblivion. A few minutes sufficed to destroy that which had taken nature aeons of travail to evolve." (Grossmann 1946:386)

……..

It is very difficult to estimate if any or how many Polish Jews from Przysucha survived. None of them returned home.

As already mentioned, the generation which witnessed Polish-Jewish co-existence and the events of World War II still live in Przysucha. The fact that they are the last living individuals from those times made me deeply appreciative of the opportunity to gather their stories. I realized that within the next 15-20 years or less, such an invaluable occasion will have become lost for-ever. In fact, hardly a day passes without a new death notice being posted on the information board in Przysucha informing of the passing of yet another witness. Today, the only signs that remain to remind us of the Polish Jews from Przysucha are their cemetery and synagogue. Local residents, Robert Bomba and Jan Werens, hold the keys to these places and make them available for visiting Jewish pilgrims. Obviously, during periods of intensive renovation of the synagogue, the premises are inaccessible to visitors.

1.2 Research questions

Bearing in mind the background of the study, which is the previous Jewish dominance of the population of Przysucha, the importance of its religious leaders, school and dynasty as well as its current significance to Hassidic Jews it was highly interesting to discover what attitudes towards the Jewish heritage and community are held by residents of Przysucha. It was assumed that there must be some present connection between attitudes held and decisions

that are taken, both on an official and personal level. The focal issue of the research was today's mutual perception Christian and Jewish communities, without ignoring the casual connection, such as historical experiences between the two communities that might have had influence on what is now visible or apparent.

Thus, the research questions are as follows:

- What were the mutual relations between Christian and Jewish Poles in Przysucha like before World War II?
- What are the relations between Christian residents of Przysucha and Jewish pilgrims like today?
- How is common cultural and historical heritage preserved?
- What traces of new trends (such as a revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history) are seen in Przysucha?

By conducting in-depth interviews as well as engaging in participant observation I aspired to:

- trace the process of how mutual Christian-Jewish relations were shaped,
- make a significant contribution to our understanding of these relations both on a micro level - in Przysucha, as well as on a macro level - between today's democratic Poland and Jewish people,
- clarify the historically uncomfortable relationship between Jews and Christians by exposing distortions, inaccuracies and misunderstandings that set them apart,
- present an honest examination of persistent sources of Polish anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-Polonism and the roots of mutual antagonisms,
- raise historical, cultural and social awareness among local residents of Przysucha,
- contribute to individual and collective identity,
- provide a tentative analysis of attitudes before the Jewish center in Przysucha is established.

In my research, I relied on the assumption that microcosmic studies based on the examination of one community at a time may result in better comprehension of the broader picture. Such an attitude is congruent with the view Guldon advocated, who claimed that turning from global to regional research is indispensable when creating a new synthesis of history of Polish Jews (1990:5, Introduction). Despite the subject's wide coverage in

literature, movies and other means of expression, I believe that such an important, multi-faceted and timely issue deserves further discussion and clarification, so as to replace prejudices and stereotypes with factual knowledge. Finally, I expected that touching upon the issue of relations between Christian and Jewish Poles in such a small community as Przysucha might resonate and encourage people to rethink common experiences and opinions as well as potential means for improvement.

It should be underlined that the only literature available concerning Jewish communities from the region is historical and concentrates on larger units such as voivodeships or gubernyas. Therefore, the timescale that is encompassed is much more limited. Such research studies include various generalizations of the life of Jews in Polish cities and villages and how it was determined by different legal regulations, functions and the number of inhabitants. In this project, rather than broad generalizations of large areas, a reverse strategy has been employed. Przysucha was the only area subject to analysis and both past and current relationships were touched upon.

1.3 Theoretical framework: Symbolic Interactionism

Interaction theories have been developed as a result of the need to examine sociological micro-processes, actions of particular entities and relations between individuals, all of which are increasingly more frequently believed to underlie the existence and endurance of society. Since the present research aims at analysis of subjective viewpoints and experiences of individuals, a theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) has been employed. LaRossa and Reitzes put forth the following definition of the approach:

> "As the name suggests, 'symbolic interactionism' focuses on the connection between symbols (i.e. shared meanings) and interactions (i.e. verbal and nonverbal actions and communications). It is essentially a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior." (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993:35)

As has been repeatedly argued the theory in question (Giddens 1997:565, Macionis and Plummer 1997:537, Bilton et al. 2002:362, in Dennis and Martin 2005:192-193) is perfectly suited for micro-sociological research. Therefore, by taking into account the setting of the

study in a small Polish town, the choice of the SI framework seems all the more fitting. However, most importantly, the research examines mutual attitudes and perception in a *changing* socio-cultural context, visible in the revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history that Poland is currently experiencing. Regardless of the discussion about the suitability of SI for the analysis of social change (e.g. in Vaughan and Reynolds 1968:208-213), in the present study I rely on the rudimentary concept developed by Mead and Blumer, who claimed that meanings which people attach to objects are subject to constant interpretation and therefore are not static (Blumer 1986:5). For all of these reasons, the focus on personal, subjective views that might evolve over time in a limited area of study (Przysucha), Symbolic Interactionism proved to provide the most suitable theoretical framework possible.

Among others, to the intellectual antecedents of the SI theory belong nineteenth-century German idealists, Johann Fichte, Friedrich von Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. However, it was the influence of the American pragmatists such as Josiah Royce, Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey that most shaped SI. LaRossa and Reitzes indicated four crucial contributions to the SI approach that pragmatism may be credited with.

> "First, they argued that the static, predetermined and inherently structured pictures of reality, popular at the time, should be replaced with a dynamic, emergent, historical world in the making view. Second, they made the case that social structure was an emergent process. Third, they rejected both idealist attempts to root knowledge in perception and materialist attempts to locate meaning solely in objects and insisted that meanings emerge from the interaction between subject and object. Finally, they exhibited an ideological commitment to progress and to democratic values and saw science both as a methodology for achieving advancement and as a model for democratic organization" (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993:136)

Given the fact that SI tradition has evolved over time, and that it lacks one single founder, scholars face some difficulties in the systematic exposure of the. Rose (1962:vii, in Vaughan and Reynolds 1968:208) also points to a certain kind of dispersion of SI by stating that it developed "crescively with an idea here, a magnificent but partial formulation there, a little study here, a program of specialized studies there". Nevertheless, we may undoubtedly state that among the first symbolic interactionists belong George H. Mead, William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Everett Hughes and Ernest Burgess, namely the sociologists who in 1892-1935 formed the so called Chicago School. It should be remembered that Georg H. Mead who

has been credited with the synthesis and elaboration of rudimentary SI concepts, drew inspirations from ideas and achievements of behaviorists, pragmatists and Darwinists. He expanded the concept of "self", originally proposed by William James, and emphasized its significance in the process of adaptation to the environment. Mead's posthumously published ideas, based on lectures compiled by his students were subject to various analyses.

Following World War II, the so called "Second Chicago School" arose with members such as W. Lloyd Warner, Robert Redfield and Anselm Strauss. The group also included Herbert Blumer, who in his article, "Man and society", published in 1937, first coined the term "symbolic interactionism". Blumer's interpretation of Mead's assumptions was not the only one, an alternative understanding was suggested by sociologists working at the State University of Iowa, especially by Munford Kuhn. Contentious issues among symbolic interactionism-oriented scholars pivot around the nature of human beings, interactions between them and societal organization as well as methodological issues (Turner 2008:422). Nonetheless, since the scope of the present section does not encompass the analysis of divergences between SI sociologists in detail and since the methodological stance advocated by the Chicago School is more suitable for the present study, it will be Blumer's notion of symbolic interaction and his terminology I will rely on here.

In order to fully understand the symbolic interaction theory and its employment in the present research, it is advisable to start by having a look at the dichotomy suggested by Burrel and Morgan (1979:3) who confronted an interpretative paradigm (to which SI belongs) with an opposing, normative one. This dichotomy implies the most crucial assumptions each paradigm proposes. Thus, *nominalism* (names, concepts and labels are used to structure reality) has been opposed to *realism* (the social world consists of hard, intangible structures that exist regardless of our names and labels), *anti-positivism* (social world is relativistic, there is no chance for science to generate objective knowledge) to *positivism* (search for regularities and causal relationships may result in creation of objective knowledge), *voluntarism* (man is free-willed and autonomous) to *determinism* (man's activities are determined) and *ideographic* (only by "getting inside" is it possible to understand the social world) to *nomothetic* (emphasis on scientific rigor, hypotheses testing, quantitative methods).

The alternative views on social reality are presented in Figure 3.

The subjectivist approach		***The objectivist approach***
Nominalism	ONTOLOGY	Realism
Anti-positivism	EPISTEMOLOGY	Positivism
Voluntarism	HUMAN NATURE	Determinism
Ideographic	METHODOLOGY	Nomothetic

Figure 3: The subjective/objective dimension (by Burrel and Morgan 1979:3)

Analyzing the scheme with regard to the present research not only the previously mentioned act of attaching labels and search for subjective knowledge can be observed, but one can also find a hint of the methodology that has been used in the study. Hence, we learn that standardized research instruments such as quantitative methods, questionnaires and verification of hypotheses developed *a priori* have been discarded in favor of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, which enable to naturalistically enter the world of informants. The chosen methodology will be given broader coverage in the following subsection as well as chapter 3.

Regarding SI as such, according to Blumer (1986:2) there are three fundamental pillars the theory is based on:

1. People act towards objects on the basis of meanings attached to them.
2. The meaning of objects results from social interactions between people.
3. The meanings are modified in the process of interpretation.

By looking over these three postulations, one may become aware of the originality of the approach in question. SI does not explain human actions using psychological terms such as motives, attitudes, inner drives or unconscious complexes. Neither does it employ sociological notions of a functional perspective such as values, norms, external pressures, roles and statutes. Instead, there is a concept of meaning, which is presented as a dynamic process, since it involves both social interaction and interpretation. Thus, one may conclude, the meaning is nothing pre-established, fixed or given, but to the contrary, it is subject to constant possibility of change. What is more, by having a closer look, it becomes apparent that these three assumptions do not explicitly refer to the structure of society, an issue so

frequently repeated in sociological textbooks. The reason for that may lie in the fact that regardless of what kind of acts are spoken, whether single (individual) or collective (involving other people), their nature stays the same, that is, they are based on meanings produced through the process in which people perceive, interpret and align their actions. Therefore, structure, organization, values, norms or any network of interdependency one may think of are also viewed as moving, dynamic and not static affairs.

There are a few notions central to having a fuller understanding of SI theory:

Objects

With the symbolic interaction approach, people are seen as living in a world of objects towards which they direct their actions. The term "object" has been broadly defined and includes everything that humans may take note of in their lives. Thus, objects can be physical (e.g. a book), they may denote other human beings or their categories (e.g. a father), institutions (e.g. a university), ideals (e.g. freedom), activities (e.g. giving a command) and situations (e.g. learning at school). For purposes of convenience, objects have been divided into three basic categories: physical, social and abstract. However, it must be underlined that:

1. Objects are regarded as social constructs, whose nature depends on the meaning attached to them.
2. The meaning people attach to objects is neither intrinsic to the things nor does it arise out of elements of the person's psyche, mind or psychological processes.
3. The meaning arises out of the interaction between human beings.
4. People are ready to act towards the objects based on the meaning they have adopted for them.
5. "Acting" towards an object involves a conscious process of thinking, planning and adjusting one's actions. Therefore, "acting" is not "reacting" in the same way as an object is not a stimulus.

Furthermore, due to mutual indications, *common objects* emerge, that is such objects that have the same meaning to a group of people. However, human worlds consist only of the objects that particular entities perceive, indicate to themselves and are ready to act towards. Therefore, it is possible for people to live close to one another, but in fact, live in separate worlds.

There is one more postulate of supreme importance to the present research:

> "The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts" (Blumer 1986:11).

In the present study I examine mutual relations between members of Christian and Jewish communities who might not have been involved in a direct interaction with each other, but still hold strong opinions about one another. Blumer, by explaining the emergence of the meaning, points out the relevance of the environment people live in and influence of others with whom they interact on the formation of their own views.

The self

A human being is equipped with the ability to treat oneself as an object. Thus, a person is able to perceive oneself, communicate with oneself or act towards oneself in the same way they act towards other objects. What is more, similar to other objects, the self-object also arises out of the process of social interaction. However, more importantly, the "self" is not a static inner structure, such as "ego" or a set of needs or motives. In contrast, it is a dynamic process in which individuals act reflectively, give themselves indications, respond to them and adjust their action accordingly.

An individual is not born with a fully developed "self". Mead proposes three stages, in which the self matures, each of which enables us to view ourselves from broader perspectives. Thus, in the early "play" stage, a child can perceive him/herself only from the perspective of a very limited number of people, usually one or two in the very beginning. This is followed by the "game" stage at which time a person is able to view life through the standpoint of an organized group of people. Finally, when the self is fully matured, a person is ready to assume the role of the abstract community or, as Mead calls it, "the generalized other" (Mead 1975:214).

The fact that a person can possess a "self" is directly connected with the process of *self-indication*, through which a person constructs their conscious action. Therefore, it is not personality, attitudes, reference groups, values, status, class, race, gender or others that shape our behavior (although they might equip us with tendencies to act in a certain way). It is the communicative process of self-indication, in which a person notes things and interprets them that determines the actions which ensue. As a consequence, symbolic interactionists view

people as free, spontaneous, open to novelty and emergence rather than hostages to their personality.

The Act

Taking into consideration the fact that a person possesses a "self" and can engage themselves in self-interaction, the act is preceded by the analysis of the existing situation (e.g. one's needs, motives, feelings, memories or projections of what others may do). Before acting, one needs to set a goal and plan the way to achieve it. However, also while acting, an individual continuously interacts with oneself in order to change pre-established meanings, comfort oneself in case of a failure, prepare "plan B" if such a need arises, etc. Therefore, the act is not a result, reaction or release of psychological or sociological factors, but dynamically and reflectively constructed behavior.

Social Interaction

What differentiates SI from other sociological theories is that social interaction is not taken for granted or treated as a medium of expression of various psychological or sociological schemes. Hence, social interaction is viewed as an issue far more important than just an action stirred up by determinants such as status positions, cultural prescriptions, norms, values, sanctions, role demands, social system requirements, motives, attitudes or hidden complexes. To the contrary, it is understood as a form of *creation* of human conduct. Different situations people must handle continuously require constant alignment of one's actions and reinterpretation of pre-established meanings, as a result of which an undertaken action may be suspended, redirected, continued or stopped.

Mead described (1975:64-68) and Blumer renamed (1986:8) two categories of social interaction: *non-symbolic* (using Mead's expression: "the conversation of gestures"), in which a person reacts automatically and unreflectively as well as *symbolic* (Mead's "use of symbolic gestures") which consists of presentation of gestures and one's *meaningful* reaction to them. As for the latter, it consists of a double process: interpretation (in which a person analyzes actions of other people involved) and further defining (i.e. indicating to others what they should do and how they should act). Symbolic interaction is effective only due to the ability of role-taking, which on one hand signifies human capacity to predict another person's actions and on the other – to look at oneself from the perspective of the partner (Hałas 2006:233). In a symbolic interaction, gestures convey three meanings.

The gestures signify:

1. what the author of the gesture plans to do,
2. what the recipient of the gesture is supposed to do,
3. or a joined action that is to take place by the articulation of the acts of both.

(Blumer 1986:9)

Joined Action

A human society or group consists of people who engage themselves in social symbolic interactions. According to the symbolic interaction theory, joined action (or Mead's social act) represents all types of inter-linkages of actions, ranging from basic and limited cooperation between individuals to complicated societal institutions. The original view of society proposed by SI is based on the idea that the essence of society lies in action and not in a pre-established firm structure. Joined action is based on the continuous alignment of one's actions to actions of others and it involves the process of interpretation and defining. Common interpretation and definitions give the impression of certain regularity, endurance and repetitiveness. However, since networks of dependency are highly complex and situations people encounter are often unpredictable, there is room for change of interpretation and/or defining. Symbolic Interactionism does not deny the existence of structure, social roles, statuses, hierarchy, norms, values, etc., but at the same time it refuses to accept that they determine human behavior. The only function of sociological and psychological schemes is to exert some influence on the process of interpretation and defining.

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All the above presented issues (objective/subjective dimension of social reality, certain dispersion of Symbolic Interactionism as such, its basic assumptions and central concepts) in a way imply the methodological perspective it advocates. Therefore, since the world is not viewed as having a hard, fixed and immutable structure, standardized methods and strict scientific protocol have been rejected. By reviewing the way SI itself has been developed it can be seen that interaction-oriented sociologists oppose theorizing a priori and prefer to stay open to unexpected discoveries. Additionally, the key premises that SI relies on entail serious indications as to how a research study should be conducted. As a result, a coherent, logical methodological stance is obtained that is discussed below.

First, due to the fact that SI presupposes the existence of an empirical world that can be observed, studied and analyzed, it supports *direct* examination of the world instead of working on simulations or preset models of this world. Blumer strongly criticizes "the prevailing disposition and practice" to "allow the theory, the model, the concept, the technique, and the scientific protocol to coerce the research and thus to bend the resulting analytical depictions of the empirical world to suit their form" (1986:33). Therefore, all claims concerning the empirical world should be tested in it, because only then is the scholar able to meet the requirements of empirical science.

Furthermore, considering the fact that each human being creates their own, unique world of objects and organizes actions on the basis of meanings attached to them, it is absolutely indispensable that the researcher try to identify these objects along with the meanings they bear. This requires the arduous task of taking the role of informants and replacing one's opinions, stereotypes, prejudices, and conjectures with them. Also, human action is considered as a complicated, dynamic process in which a person constantly interprets, defines and aligns their actions to actions of others implies the existence of an entire range of relations and therefore entails "a lack of warrant for compressing the process of social interaction to any special form" (Blumer 1986:53) such as harmony, conflict or deviance. Additionally, assuming that a social action is a process (not a product) it should be examined only by tracing the manner in which it was shaped (not released) taking into consideration factors that influenced the process of interpretation and defining. The macro level is perceived as the ground for complex inter-linkages of actions (not as a system, machine or organism operating in its own right with its own dynamics), in which people, stationed at different points, have to handle the ongoing situations by the process of interpretation and further defining. Therefore, the search for organizational or system principles should be replaced with a search for the explanation of the way in which participants define, interpret and meet situations at their respective points. Last, but not least, since joined actions are temporarily linked with each other and "the designations and interpretations through which people form and maintain their organized relations are always in degree a carry-over from their past" (Blumer 1986:60) the historical connection must not be ignored.

Qualitative research should consist of two parts that Blumer labeled as "exploration" and "inspection" (1986:40). In the exploration part, the researcher is supposed to grow as close as possible to the examined object and, by flexible adjustment of methods, gather

her/his data. What is highly important at this stage is for the researcher to stay open to new concepts and be ready to revise the ones that he/she has already developed. In the stage that ensues, all the data gathered from the empirical world are divided into analytical parts (broad or narrowed concepts), which are then carefully examined, both separately as well as in terms of relations between them. As can be seen, the symbolic interaction theory offers a reverse method from that of traditional social research. Grounded Theory Methodology, which will be delineated in the section that follows, contradicts the traditional model of research, as well.

1.4 Methodological framework: Grounded Theory

Symbolic Interactionism may serve as a theoretical framework for a range of both quantitative and qualitative research designs, although traditionally it has been mainly associated with the latter (Benzies and Allen 2001:541). In the introductory section of their work, "The Handbook of Qualitative Research" Denzin and Lincoln provided the following definition of the term that will be adopted in the present study.

> "Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term qualitative research. These include the traditions associated with post-functionalism, post-positivism, post-structuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, and/or methods connected to cultural and interpretive studies." (Denzin and Lincoln 2009:21)

It seems clear that the authors do not treat qualitative research as an umbrella term for a more general paradigm, but rather reserve it for a description of methods. Consequently, they refrain from underpinning both qualitative and quantitative methods to any specific ontological and epistemological position.

Bryman (2008:393), in turn, explained the qualitative strategy by contrasting it with the quantitative strategy:

Quantitative	***Qualitative***
Number	Words

Point of view of a researcher	Point of view of participants
Researcher distinct	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalizing	Context understanding
Hard reliable data	Rich in depth
Macro	Micro
Behavior	Meaning
Artificial settings	Natural setting

Figure 4: Quantitative vs. qualitative research (Bryman 2008:393)

As seen in the table above, qualitative inquiry is more words and meaning-oriented and takes into account viewpoints of participants (their meaning of the world, values, emotions etc.) Furthermore, the gap between the researcher and respondents is reduced and data that are provided are rich and gathered in a natural setting. Finally, qualitative research aims at understanding the context of the investigated phenomenon and is open to unexpected findings.

Since the present study is of a qualitative nature, it is worth mentioning the ongoing debate of the last few decades, in which qualitative research has been fighting for its due recognition. First and foremost, although the situation is gradually changing, until recently quantitative studies significantly dominated over qualitative ones. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) spoke about "the patent overemphasis on quantitative methods"; Heyink and Tymstra (1993:291) mentioned "the prevailing positivistic view on science", whereas Ambert, Adler et al. (1995:879) presented disturbing data regarding the number of qualitative articles in the "Journal of Marriage and the Family" stating that only 1.9% of all articles published between 1989-1994 were entirely or partly qualitative. This situation was the result of the same popular opinion that terms mathematics the "queen of science" and views easily

quantifiable fields, such as physics or chemistry, to be "hard" sciences, that is precise and dependable. In these sciences researchers focus on verification or rejection of previously developed hypotheses, with the use of mathematical propositions and formulas to obtain quantitative data, widely considered as "ultimately valid" or "of high quality" (Sechrest 1992, in Guba and Lincoln 1994:106). Accordingly, qualitative research has been looked upon with a certain degree of suspicion and regarded as being unsystematic, vague and "soft". Furthermore, since such findings are not quantifiable, their validity and reliability are therefore considered questionable.

However, as a consequence of covering the boundaries between different disciplines as well as the growing awareness that each type of research is to some degree "morally and politically entangled" (Denzin and Lincoln 2009:3) we might speak of a current revolution that aims to give full legitimacy to qualitative studies. Podemski (in Denzin and Lincoln 2009:XXIV) acknowledges the existence of this revolution in Poland as well and points to an increasing number of Master and doctoral dissertations which have been composed using a range of qualitative techniques. Today, it is argued that the positivistic principles of objectivity, criteria of repeatability and generalizability as well as the linear mode of analysis might have enormous utility when the research aims at prediction and control of natural phenomena, nevertheless there are numerous disciplines where the qualitative approach seems far more accurate. Heyink and Tymstra (1993:300) presented the following clear indications for qualitative research:

1. initial phase of the research
2. interest in respondents' own interpretation and wording of their past and present behavior, motives, experiences and emotions
3. delicate topics
4. small research groups
5. practical considerations (e.g. language problems)
6. source of complementary information

Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1994:106) enumerated the following drawbacks which quantitative research is laden with.

1. A quantitative approach, with its use of selected variables, ignores the existence of other relevant variables that might seriously affect final findings.

2. In such research scholars attempt to understand human behavior without much attention paid to understanding what meanings informants attach to their activities.
3. Generalizations, as statistically meaningful as they can be, in fact do not apply to the individual case.
4. Pre-conceived hypotheses exclude discovery of unexpected data.

The choice to follow the qualitative approach for the present study may be explained by Strauss and Corbin's (2008:12) reply to the question: "Why do qualitative research?" They simply and accurately responded "(…) the research question should dictate the methodological approach that is used to conduct the research." Given that the present study aims to answer questions concerning present and past relations between Christian residents of Przysucha and Jewish pilgrims as well as determining what social representations both communities hold, i.e. topics commonly regarded as delicate, intimate and emotional, the qualitative approach seemed the most accurate choice. Additionally, the research encompasses residents of only one town and is primarily directed to elderly persons who had experienced World War II, witnessed cruel and unforgettable events, lived in incomprehensible fear and had their humanity tested. Furthermore, qualitative research, as Strauss and Corbin (2008:13) argue, "allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables. (…) It is not distance that qualitative researchers want between themselves and their participants, but the opportunity to connect with them at the human level." Finally, the authors mention certain personal traits of qualitatively-oriented researchers such as attraction to "the fluid, evolving and dynamic nature of the approach", appreciation of serendipity and discovery and a certain curiosity and willingness to play with words (2008:13). Strauss and Corbin's words clearly express what I have struggled to achieve with this work: a personal relationship with my informants enabling them to share with me very private experiences and thoughts. I also believe my personal traits and qualities made me pose research questions the way in which they were asked.

Among qualitative methods, those either loosely or closely related to particular epistemologies there are: open ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus-group interviews, ethnographic studies and participant observation. Hence, qualitative research is based on life experiences expressed by words, whether oral (in conversations, interviews, monologues) or written (in letters, diaries, journals) or in the form of field notes in which the researcher records observations concerning a range of issues (e.g. body language, facial

expressions etc.). However, as Heyink and Tymstra (1993:294) state: “Beyond any shadow of doubt, the method most used and best documented in qualitative research is interview”. Kvale (1983:74, in Opdenakker 2006) defined a qualitative research interview as: "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena". Opdenakker (2006) analyzed different kinds of qualitative interviews which thanks to technological advancement have become available for research workers and have opened new ways for gathering data. Obviously, the choice of the type of interview (face to face, via telephone, E-mail and instant messenger), depends on the research questions, time and budget that the researcher has at their disposal as well as access to their informants. Face to face interviews, as the core of the present research, have been ascribed many advantages, such as the possibility to take advantage of social cues (voice, intonation, body language etc.) as an important source of additional information, a chance to directly react to words uttered by respondents, to record what is being said and to create a friendly ambience between interlocutors.

This qualitative, exploratory research is based on narrative interviews with residents of Przysucha and Jewish pilgrims as well as participant observation. To be more precise, I have conducted eighteen face-to-face interviews with the oldest representatives of the Christian community, along with five interviews with so called privileged actors, namely: the mayor of Przysucha, the parish priest of Przysucha, the manager of the Oskar Kolberg’s Museum in Przysucha, the personal assistant of the starost of the region (important note: the starost refused to be interviewed due to “too much work”) as well as one of police officers who coordinates Israeli trips to the town. Regarding the Jewish community, I seized an opportunity to talk to a privileged actor on the Jewish side, who is the originator of Christian-Jewish gatherings in Przysucha as well as a direct descendant of Rabinowicz, the Holy Jew. Moreover, I conducted five narrative interviews with Jewish pilgrims of all ages whom I met either in Przysucha or Warsaw or talked to via the Internet using either Skype or Messenger voice service.

As previously mentioned, neither the qualitative nor quantitative research approach has been reserved to one, particular paradigm. Consequently, they may have a different function and value in contradictory paradigms (e.g. to serve as introductory in an objectivist approach and capable of providing explanation of the world using a subjectivist approach) (Konecki 2000:20). In fact, there are many scholars (e.g. Bryman 1988, Brannen 1992, Cresswell 1994, Kelle and Erzberger 2004, Flick 2014) who advocate the procedure of triangulation, in which

qualitative and quantitative methods are integrated. Kelle (2005:102) argues that in some cases triangulation may serve the functions of complementarity (when a combination of the methods results in a fuller picture of the investigated phenomenon) and validity (when qualitative and quantitative results indicate whether research is valid or not). In the present study it was believed that qualitative methods would suffice, especially given the fact that data were gathered and analyzed with the use of the Grounded Theory Methodology, which by offering guidelines as how to conduct research systematically and meticulously, seems to have bridged the gap between quantitative and qualitative research.

The Grounded Theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 for the needs of research on dying hospital patients and in response to the prevailing use of quantitative research procedures at that time. It is interesting to note that the theory's originators represented two contrasting and competing traditions: Columbia University positivism (Glaser) and Chicago School pragmatism and field research (Strauss). Glaser advocated the rigorous and systematic approach, codifying qualitative research so as to "demystify" it, development of middle-ranged theories pertaining to specific social phenomena and the use of specified terminology, resembling the terminology employed in quantitative studies. Strauss, on the other hand, "brought notions of human agency, emergent processes, social and subjective meanings, problem-solving practices, and the open-ended study of action to grounded theory." (Charmaz 2006:14) By publication of their book, the authors endeavored to challenge the overarching belief that qualitative research is impressionistic, unsystematic and unable to generate a theory and it could only serve as an introductory phase to truly scientific, quantitative research. Moreover, they questioned the necessity to separate data collection for their analysis and the division between theory and research.

Grounded Theory Methodology, which is defined as "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser, Strauss 2006:2), has an inductive analysis as its principal technique. Patton explained the term as follows:

> "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis." (Patton 1980:306, in Bowen 2006:2)

However, this model of research, although reverse from the traditional approach in which the researcher first develops hypotheses that are later tested, should not be treated as linear. To the contrary, Grounded Theory "calls for a continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory during the research process" (Bowen 2006:2). The GT consists of a variety of methods including concurrent data generation or collection and analysis, constant comparative analysis, initial coding and categorization of the data, intermediate coding, selecting a core category, advanced coding, theoretical integration, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, theoretical sensitivity and writing memos (memoing). Hence, Grounded Theory may be viewed as a painstaking process, in which the researcher analyzes their textual database and identifies concepts expressed by their informants, establishes codes, groups them into categories, illuminates contradictions and produces a cohesive theory grounded in the data. The strength of such a theory lies in the fact that it "can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation", as Glaser and Strauss argue (2006:4). While generating his/her theory, the researcher should remain theoretically sensitive, i.e. be able to give meaning to the data, grasp what is relevant, and notice subtleties. It is the theory that emerges that controls the process of data collection and guides the researcher as to where and what they should look for next. Thus, it is very important that scholars launch their research with their minds as blank as possible (2006:46). Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss oppose population representativeness and argue for employment of, so called, theoretical saturation, i.e. the phase of research when no additional conceptual insights are generated (2006:61).

I suggest taking a closer look at the work of Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills et al. (2013:3-4) who may be credited with linking both the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the present study. Their findings prove the coherence of the current research.

- Coding (which constitutes the process of ascribing meaning to data) corresponds to the SI assumption that meaning is neither innate to objects nor an expression of psychological or social factors, but arises in the process of interaction.

- Constant comparative analysis (in which codes are compared to codes, codes to categories and categories to categories, thus modifying previous meanings and generating new ones) refers to the nature of meaning that is not fixed and immutable, but fluid and open to change.

- Symbolic interaction (understood as a process in which individuals interpret and define objects as well as actions and acts on the basis of the assigned meanings) pertains to key activities in Grounded Theory as interacting with participants, the data and oneself.

- Concurrent generation or collection and analysis of data, as well as theoretical sampling are linked with the SI assumption which states that every future action depends on review and evaluation of previous actions.

- The concept of "self" (being an object to oneself and one's own actions, expressed in the process of self-interaction and role taking) predominates in the act of memoing and developing theoretical sensitivity.

There are two basic kinds of theories, substantive ("developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations") and formal ("developed for a formal, or conceptual area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility" (Glaser, Strauss 2006:32). Thus, substantive theory refers to a particular area or a specific setting, whereas formal theory seems more abstract and applicable to a wider range of sociological issues and problems. Each theory, whether substantive or formal, consists of conceptual categories with their properties as well as hypotheses. Categories and properties are defined as being concepts indicated by the data which vary in degree of abstraction, whereas hypotheses stand for relations between categories. Charmaz (2013:15) indicates that the majority of grounded theories are substantive, since they refer to particular problems in specific areas, however, simultaneously she encourages combining results from a number of substantive theories in order to develop a more general formal theory. As for the present study, it aims at generating a substantive theory, since it answers questions concerning a particular community. At the same time, it is believed that the scope of the present dissertation does not enable raising this very specific, substantive theory to a formal theory which would be applicable on a larger scale.

Although the book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" was the result of successful cooperation between Glaser and Strauss, they could not agree as how to apply the method, which led to a widely commented upon and heavily debated split between the authors. The

split surfaced publicly, when Glaser criticized Strauss and Corbin's version of Grounded Theory claiming that the method they proposed was no longer GT, but a new method called "full conceptual description." (Walker and Myrick 2006:547). In fact, since 1967 when the theory was first introduced, three discernible interpretations have emerged: traditional or classic (associated with Glaser), evolved (represented by Strauss, Corbin and Clarke), and constructivist (advocated by Charmaz). It is not the aim of this text to analyze the differences in detail between the theory's co-originators for two reasons. First, on the surface, they are barely indistinguishable (all the authors engage in a process that includes gathering data, coding, constant comparison, categorizing, theoretical sampling, developing a core category, memos and finally, generating a theory) (Walker and Myrick 2006:547). Furthermore, as Mills and Boner (2006:2) accurately pointed out, variations of Grounded Theory in fact reflect their epistemological underpinnings and thus the version to be followed depends on clarification of the nature of the relationship between the researcher and participant, and on explication of what can be known of the field.

Despite the fact that Glaser rejected linking Grounded Theory with any philosophical stance by stating that "GT is a general inductive method possessed by no discipline or theoretical perspective or data type" (Glaser 2005:1), his position as a post-positivist researcher is well documented (Bryant and Charmaz 2007, in Salaun, Mills et al. 2013:1). His version of GT refers to critical realism ontologically and modified objectivist's epistemology (Annels 1996, in Devadas and Silong 2011:348). Hence, as a researcher, Glaser pursues true reality, independent of our beliefs about it. As for as Strauss and Corbin, in the 3rd edition of their book (2008) they formally articulated philosophical and sociological perspectives underlying their evolved version of grounded theory by presenting 16 assumptions, based on their interpretations of works by Dewey, Mead, Blumer and Strauss himself. Thus, their version was officially linked to pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism. Regarding the relationship of a theory to reality and truth, Strauss and Corbin formally disagreed with Glaser by stating:

> "A theory is not the formulation of some discovered aspect of a preexisting reality 'out there.' To think otherwise is to take a positivistic position that (…) we reject, as do most other qualitative researchers. Our position is that truth is enacted (…) Theories are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or researched by researchers." (Strauss and Corbin 1994:279, in ed. by Denzin and Lincoln)

What is more, they defined knowledge in constructivist terms, viewing it as a product made of multiple constructions engaging both the researcher who constructs concepts and theories and his/her informants who construct their stories in a process of attaching meaning to their lives and experiences (2008:10).

Strauss and Corbin's constructivist approach might also be found in some of the aforementioned assumptions (Strauss, Corbin 2008:7):

> "Assumption no 5: Actions are accompanied by temporality, for they constitute courses of action of varying duration. Various actors' interpretations of the temporal aspects of an action may differ according to the actors respective perspectives; these interpretations may also change as the action proceeds (Mead 1959)
>
> Assumption no 6: Courses of interaction arise out of shared perspectives, and when not shared, if action/interaction is to proceed, perspectives must be negotiated (Blumer 1969)
>
> Assumption no 13: The embeddedness in interaction of an action implies an intersection of actions. The intersection entails possible, or even probable, differences among the perspectives of actors (Strauss 1993)
>
> Assumption no 15: A major set of conditions for actors' perspectives, and thus their interactions, is their membership in social worlds and sub-worlds. In contemporary societies, these memberships are often complex, overlapping, contrasting, conflicting, and not always apparent to other interactants (Strauss 1993)".

As can be seen, they acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of perspectives and a complex network of memberships in various worlds and sub-worlds, all of which influence actions, interactions and the course of research. Hence, a grounded theory investigation cannot be regarded as an objective process, but rather a process which combines the phenomenon under study as well as the researcher's and their respondents' interpretations and beliefs. These perspectives are constantly negotiated and integrated at various stages of the research, such as during data generation and analysis, coding, categorizing, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity and memoing. Thus, one might speak of constructing a theory, and not its discovery. Regarding Kathy Charmaz, she is credited with developing GT

so as to fully reflect a constructivist paradigm. Therefore, her version that will constitute the methodological framework applied in this text.

Since the ensuing section deals with the literature review (another polemical issue among GTM's originators and followers), I suggest having a closer look at two basic questions: *if* and *when* to analyze findings already provided by other scholars. So far I have repeatedly underlined key concepts common for both Grounded Theory advocates as well as symbolic interactionists: focus on discovery, flexibility that guides the research and a blank (or at least open) mind, all of which are intended to help create theories grounded in data rather than force them to fit pre-established ideas. Scanning literature *a priori* might defeat the purpose for at least two reasons, which a number of GT followers accurately point out. On one hand, it may result in reproducing or pushing someone else's ideas rather than creating one's own. On the other hand, it may undermine a researcher's (especially a novice) self-confidence to deliver equally valuable findings as have previously been published.

When one reflects on the issue from a historical perspective, it can be observed that originally Glaser and Strauss presented a purist approach on the matter, i.e. they advocated refraining from any literature review at an early stage of research. Their "Discovery of Grounded Theory" states: "An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas." (Glaser, Starus 2006:37) However, although Glaser remained staunch in his position, Strauss's standpoint eventually changed and together with Juliet Corbin he began to encourage an early review of relevant literature which can be "a stimulus to research", an indicator of "contradictions or ambiguities among the accumulated published studies", a suggestion that "a new approach is needed to solve an old problem even though it has been well studied in the past" and a chance to "come across a finding that is dissonant with a researcher's own experience" (2015:33). Kathy Charmaz addressed the issue quite pragmatically by noticing that at times it is simply impossible to delay the review due to institutional requirements, but at the same time she repeatedly emphasizes throughout her book that Grounded Theory is not a set of fixed procedures that should be rigidly followed, but rather a bunch of recipes to be applied flexibly and intuitively (2013:17). Thus, also while reviewing extant literature, the researcher should never forget about *his/her* own ideas. Charmaz states: "Many research reports require a standard-rigid-format. The trick is to use it without letting it stifle your creativity and strangle

your theory." Additionally, she underlines: "Delaying a literature review differs from writing a scanty one." (Charmaz 2006:213)

Personally, I find Bulmer's (1979), Dey's (1999) and Leyder's (1998) refusal to view the researcher as *tabula rasa* reasonable. In my opinion, every scholar, even at the nascent stage of their study, already has some ideas and knowledge regarding the examined phenomenon. Therefore, I employed the stance advocated by Karen Henwood and Nick Pigdeon (2003:138, in Charmaz 2006:213) who coined the term: "theoretical agnosticism" which stands for taking a critical position towards earlier theories and treating existing concepts as problematic, thus needing further examination.

1.5 Literature review: current state of research

Since their first encounters in Poland during the tenth century, the history of Polish Jews has borne the marks of numerous juxtapositions: life vs. death, arrivals vs. departures, privileges vs. pogroms, oblivion vs. discovery and many others. The tragedy of the Holocaust carries its own symbols of dualism, among which bravery vs. cowardice and meanness vs. goodness spring quickly to mind. It is no wonder that Polish Jewry has become a worldwide subject of analysis by both laymen and professional researchers (historians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists and many others) The visible revival of interest in the subject has resulted in a rapidly increasing number of publications on the Polish market as well, with potential to contribute to the present thesis. Although it is believed that every event, regulation or a process, even seemingly irrelevant, in fact does affect current mutual Christian-Jewish perception, the scope of the present research impedes the analysis of even a fraction of the available literature. Hence, the section will take into consideration literature that fulfills at least one of the following three requirements:

1. it provides information about Przysucha, essential for understanding the broader social and historical context of opinions presented by my respondents (an issue of utmost importance according to Herbert Blumer, whose theoretical framework has been employed in the present research),
2. it explicitly deals with current research questions,
3. or potentially affects mutual perception between the two communities.

The chapter aims to convey a clear message about what ideas have been established on the topic, what findings have previously been provided by scholars and where potential blank spots lie that could be filled in by the present dissertation. By scanning the literature and identifying unbiased and valid studies I hope to clarify known and unknown issues, accentuate areas of controversy and formulate questions that could stimulate further research. Existing literature will be grouped according to the subject it concerns. The first part will present literature concerning Przysucha and its Jewish community (as well as Jews from broader administrative units that the settlement belonged to), whereas the second part will demonstrate findings referring to contemporary Christian-Jewish relations in Poland.

First and foremost, it needs to be clearly stated that there are no published works that analyze relations between Christian and Jewish residents of Przysucha. This includes past relations when Jews constituted the majority of the town's population and today when Jewish pilgrims are frequent visitors. It seems that the Jewish heritage in Przysucha, not only the tangible heritage in the form of the synagogue and the cemetery, but also the intellectual aspect represented by thoughts of Hassidic religious leaders has been forgotten. What is more, studies concerning anti-Semitism, social representations and potential prejudices in Poland are mainly conducted with the use of quantitative methods and are commonly based on surveys addressed only to Christian respondents. As was covered in some detail in the previous section, such a situation stems from the fact that qualitative research is still fighting for its due recognition by science.

Today, the Jewish community in Poland is scarce. At the beginning of the 21st century it was estimated that only around 7 thousand citizens declared having Jewish identity. According to the National Census compiled in 2002, only 1.055 people declared Jewish nationality, which leads to the conclusion that the remaining Jews regard themselves as having a double nationality or being either Jews of Polish origin or Poles of Jewish faith (Grabski, Rykała 2010:421, in ed. by Sienkiewicz) Also, literature that analyzes mutual perception between the two groups in Poland concentrates mainly on past experiences, during times when Christians and Jews were regularly involved in direct contact. Obviously, the period of Nazi occupation and the Shoah have also been given thorough coverage. We might then conclude that common relations as they are now, in the 21st century, are in fact rarely discussed or compressed into an analysis of Polish anti-Semitism. For all of the reasons above, the present research may be viewed as interesting and necessary. By conducting in-depth interviews in the former home of Rabinowicz (the Holy Jew) and Simcha Bunem I

aspire to fill in an important gap. Especially that both communities are given an opportunity to speak.

Knowledge about Przysucha may be drawn from a limited number of sources, not all being equally reliable. These include two comprehensive monographs dealing with a range of issues, two publications dedicated to a particular period (18th century and the Second World War) and a historical book written by Abramczyk presenting the history of the region located between Radomka and Drzewiczka rivers, in which Przysucha has been included in a separate section. Although the works in question do not directly contribute to answering the questions that pose the core of the present research (the publications refer to past centuries), they may be evaluated in terms of their usefulness as a source of information about the sociological and historical context of Christian-Jewish co-existence in Przysucha before the Holocaust. By presenting both the visual as well as internal structure of the town and touching upon issues such as the material situation of its residents, their economic and political activity, their life conditions, education, rites, ceremonies and social affinities, they help to decipher processes behind the shaping of individuals' attitudes towards representatives of the other community.

As for literature dealing with Jews living in Przysucha or broader administrative units that the town belonged to, the choice turned out to be far more complicated and has been determined by careful understanding of Poland's turbulent past, which as a result of three partitions and two World Wars, German, Russian and Austrian occupations repeatedly underwent different administrative reforms. Studies on Christians and Jews in different districts, voivodeships or gubernyas were meticulously scrutinized based on knowledge about subsequent administrative orders. The chart below aims at clarification of the issue:

Year	***Przysucha belonged to:***	***Occupation***
From 1999	Masovian Voivodeship	
1975-1999	Radom Voivodeship	
1950-1975	Kielce Voivodeship	
1945-1950	Łódź Voivodeship	
1939-1945	Radom District	German
1918-1939	Kielce Voivodeship	

1845-1918	Radom Gubernya/Kingdom of Poland	Russian; Austrian and Hungarian (since 1915)
1815-1845	Sandomierz Voivodeship/Kingdom of Poland	Russian
1809-1815	Radom Department/Duchy of Warsaw	French/Russian
1795-1809	Galicia	Austrian

Figure 5: Administrative affiliation of Przysucha after the third partition of Poland (developed by the author)

As seen in the figure above, along with the rest of the country, Przysucha shared great instability as over the years it was governed by Austrians, Russians, Germans, Hungarians and even the French. Not only has such a complicated history affected the choice of literature to be reviewed and employed in the present study, but most importantly it sheds light on the fact that due to changing affiliations and governors, Jews living in Przysucha were given different degrees of rights, privileges and limitations, which might have affected their standard of life as well as mutual relations.

Turning now to a macro perspective, as the range of available literature is far too large to be included in the scope of the present research, I decided to resign from purely historical publications presenting a thousand year long history of Polish Jewry and focus on a review the latest findings on Christian-Jewish relations as well as recent books that have stimulated a nationwide discussion in Poland. Without doubt, Gross should be included in the present analysis. Not only is he credited with unraveling one of the darkest spots in Polish history (the Jedwabne massacre), but he was also able to stimulate a heated nationwide discussion touching Polish consciences and encouraging a re-interpretation of Polish history in general. His most important publications are "A Ghastly Decade. The Essays on Stereotypes of Jews, Poles, Germans, Communists and Collaboration in the Years from 1939 to 1948", "Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne", "Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz" and "Golden Harvest. Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust". In a very direct and uncompromising way Gross described how Christian Poles murdered, robbed or remained fixed in their attitudes towards Polish Jews in need. Hence, it came as no surprise that the publications have repeatedly caused controversy, been referred to, analyzed, criticized, appraised or discussed in the mass media by historians, sociologists, journalists as well as ordinary citizens. Finally, apart from Gross's works, I will include the publication

issued by the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations dealing with difficult questions in contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue as well as the publication "Rethinking Poles and Jews. Troubled Past, Brighter Future". The book is edited by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska and analyzes deeply rooted stereotypes still existing on both sides. I find these books especially important since they concentrate not only on Christian but also on Jewish viewpoints. These authors have managed to achieve what I am attempting to accomplish, that is, to stay focused on present and future relations, yet not ignore past experiences.

1.5.1 Literature about Przysucha and Jews from the region

There are many key differences between the two main historical monographs regarding Przysucha. Although both monographs aimed to present essential information about the town, the one written first is of incomparably lower scientific value. The foreword to the book explicitly and honestly introduces the publication as "a nicely and interestingly written historical story" or "a regional guidebook" in opposition to being "a strictly scientific monograph" (Osuchowski, Osuchowska 1993:5). The lack of serious study based on reliable sources that could serve as a basis for further scientific research or history lessons was also accentuated in the introduction to the monograph that followed (ed. by Piątkowski 2006:6). Nevertheless, the first publication must not be excluded from the present review for two important reasons: literature dedicated solely to Przysucha is extremely limited and an analysis of *if* and *how* Jewish residents were presented in the monographs might prove to be a key to understanding how the Jewish people are currently perceived by residents of Przysucha. As the present study deals with uncovering any potential discrepancy between the value of Jewish heritage and its place in the memory of residents, it is equally important to analyze what has been included or excluded by the authors and what has been given greater attention. The books that will be scrutinized are widely available not only in Przysucha, but throughout Poland, and for both local residents as well as visitors, they are essential sources of knowledge concerning the town.

Scientific value of the monographs' content as well as their reliability and usefulness for further research is most likely connected with their authors' scientific experience. The book issued in 1993, simply titled "Przysucha", was written by local liberal arts teachers and cultural activists, Adam Osuchowski and Teresa Osuchowska. To the contrary, the second

monograph titled “Przysucha. The history of the town” was the result of a common effort by a few local researchers (Piątkowski, Zarychta-Wójcicka, Fidos, Latawiec, Nowak and Gapys), all of whom are acknowledged researchers interested in the history of the region. The latter book is based on a range of sources. Apart from a number of relevant publications, the authors also searched the National Archives in Radom, Warsaw, Kielce and Cracow as well as the Parish Archive in Przysucha. Although, as they point out, certain invaluable documents were destroyed by invaders during the Second World War and therefore second-rate sources had to suffice at times, there is no doubt that the monograph poses one of the most important sources of reliable data, statistics, names and crucial events shaping the history of the town.

“Przysucha” (1993) is divided into fifteen main sections, each of which touches upon a different issue, important for getting oriented in the town's history. Thus, a reader has a chance to find out basic information concerning location of the place, etymology of its name, its beginnings, crucial events (such as obtaining urban rights), its educational and cultural institutions, industry, agriculture and health services. The monograph also includes a separate chapter dedicated to famous residents of Przysucha, but only the previously mentioned famous ethnographer - Oskar Kolberg, together with well-known teacher and activist - Ludwik Skowyra (a controversial personality, known for his aversion towards Jews) were described in greater detail. The latter monograph, on the other hand, consists of five main sections which each concentrate on a different historical period. The first presents the town from the oldest recorded times until 1809. The second focuses on the affiliation of Przysucha to the Duchy of Warsaw and Kingdom of Poland. The third deals with the times of national captivity. The fourth describes Przysucha between 1915 and 1939, whereas the final chapter mentions the Second World War and Nazi occupation. Each section, apart from presenting unique events characteristic of a given period, concentrates on such areas as administrative orders, building development, population, religious life, schooling, industry and politics.

Although the monographs do not include a separate chapter dedicated to relations between Jews living in Przysucha and its remaining residents, in both of them a reader can find more or less direct hints as how the two communities perceived one another until the times before the War. The authors of “Przysucha” (1993) present the issue on the basis of subjective opinions of witnesses who experienced Christian-Jewish co-existence. From a short extract of the book one finds out that the relations were tense and reserved and that the communities lived *next to* rather than *with* each other.

Regarding the Christian-Jewish relations as described in the latter monograph, the book contributes to the present thesis in two crucial ways. First, it provides detailed statistical and factual information concerning the Christian and Jewish populations (such as demographic division, income, professions, investments, etc.) and helps to analyze the interviews carried out with the oldest generation. Knowledge about economic and political reality is indispensable to assess to what extent shared memories are subjective and distorted. Second, due to the fact that the monograph is based on research conducted in various regional archives and touches upon religious, political and financial aspects of mutual co-existence, it poses a source of invaluable information about potential areas of conflicts, difficulties and cooperation between the two communities. Hence, Christian-Jewish co-existence in Przysucha before the War, as analyzed by regional historians, might be summarized as a necessary, yet ambivalent symbiosis. Both monographs share the same standpoint on the matter.

It is also interesting to evaluate the two works in the light of the new trend which prompts people to look for their Jewish roots or at least acknowledge that the history of Poland is incomplete without clarifying the history and involvement of Polish Jews. The present research was stimulated by a discovery of enormous importance of my hometown being a Hassidic center honoring the exceptional wisdom of Rabbis that established their school and dynasty in Przysucha. My attention was drawn to the large, traditionally built, yet almost completely destroyed synagogue. It thus came as a big surprise to find a total contradiction of my original motivation on the very first page of the first monograph. The authors stated:

> "Although Przysucha did not have its 'great' history, because it never became a place of a groundbreaking historical event or it never had a great monument, it in fact has its 'small' history of every day, its residents' work, interesting fate of its gradual advance, visible only nowadays, realized consequently and with effort, worth noticing and commemorating." (Osuchowski, Osuchowska 1993:5)

As seen, the story of the two centuries long inhabitancy of Polish Jews in Przysucha, by which Przysucha evidently became more fruitful than a typical shtetl, goes untold. Nevertheless, in the same introduction the authors repeatedly mentioned Oskar Kolberg as well as major Henryk Dobrzański "Hubal", whose squadron fought in the forests of Przysucha during the Second World War. Such an introduction may be treated as an indication of the place that Jews from Przysucha occupied in the memory of the authors and residents.

The whole book includes very limited information about the Jewish community. It describes the establishment of Przysucha in three stages, as a result of connection of squares inhabited by Poles, Germans and Jews. It also lists which professions were popular among the communities and basic statistical data connected with ethnic division of the town's population. Additionally, in the section regarding local buildings and monuments the synagogue has been given a succinct introduction. Interestingly, the presentation ends with a sentence pointing to the value of the building: "The synagogue of Przysucha is qualified as one of the most palatial Jewish houses of prayers in Poland" (1993:37), which might be regarded as a serious contradiction to what one could read in the introduction. Rabinowicz and his followers, establishment of their school and dynasty have no mention at all.

On the contrary, the latter monograph repeatedly emphasizes the presence of Jews in the town. Actually, in the first sentence of the book one can read: "Przysucha is a town of a several hundred year old history, located in central Poland, in which three communities: Polish, Jewish and German lived next to one another for over 200 years" (ed. by Piątkowski 2006:5). It is also worth underlining that the book is completed with an index of names (among which are many Jewish names) along with a number of photographs showing not only important monuments or portraits of the town's owners, but also genre scenes presenting Christian and Jewish inhabitants on streets or market places. In conclusion, it can be argued that the monograph published in 2006 reflects assumptions of an ongoing trend according to which it is impossible to analyze the history of Poland (and its micro-regions) without inclusion of its Jewish community.

The monograph edited by Piątkowski is undeniably the most valuable source of demographic, economic and political information about the town from the oldest recorded times until the end of the Second World War. It provides many facts and data also mentioned in the publication that concentrates solely on the 18th century as well as in other historical books that discuss the life of Jewish community over different time spans and under various administrative units that Przysucha belonged to. Penkalla, for instance, described the Jews in Radom Gubernya between 1815-1862. Guldon and Krzystanek analyzed the Jewish community concentrating on the left side of the Sandomierz Voivodeship in 16th-18th centuries, whereas Urbański presented the Jewish community in Przysucha from its inception to extermination. However, since contemporary Christian-Jewish relations are significantly influenced by the assessment of the role of Christians during the War and Shoah, for my research it is far more essential to analyze how Christian and Jewish Poles were presented

during the years preceding the War, during Nazi occupation and following the Jewish extermination. Such an analysis is also important due to the fact that it refers to times and experiences of the oldest generation of my interviewees.

Regarding the years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, all of the authors who wrote of Przysucha's and the region's history brought up the issue of unstable relations between the two communities, which at some points resulted in acts of aggression or boycotts of Jewish services. However, it is Abramczyk (2010), Renz (1990) and Piątkowski (2006) who attempted to analyze the events in greater detail and discuss the grounds for anti-Semitic riots and incidents. The authors take into account the broader context of the events (recent regaining of national independence, economic situation, political influence from Germany etc.) and scrutinize the events to find out whether they were spontaneous or organized, spurred by racist, xenophobic or economic reasons. Other historians of the region, such as Urbański (2004) and Piątkowski (2006), provided a more detailed analysis of the time that ensued, namely the Nazi occupation and their "final solution". Thanks these authors' descriptions, readers learn the steps the Germans took to enforce their politics towards Jews, starting with various forms of persecution (such as wearing badges, property confiscation, open-air killings, ghettos, forced labor) and ending with their carefully thought-out total extermination of the Jewish population in gas chambers. Furthermore, Urbański (2004) may be credited with the analysis of attitudes presented by Christian neighbors in the district of Radom during the occupation. His discussion is deeply rooted in the reality of War, which makes the assessment of the action or inaction of Christian Poles more understandable.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Zarychta-Wójcicka's work (2009) dedicated to the presentation of Przysucha from 1939-1945 contains an extract from a diary written by one of the town's inhabitants. This provided the opportunity to deal not only with dry data, but also with a passionate, subjective relation that stirs the imagination. Michocka, the diary's author, wrote the included extract in October 1939, therefore, it describes events as they happened and is not based on more or less distant memories. Michocka's diary presents Christian-Jewish relations as being extremely tense, full of aversion and even hatred. Michocka mentions disreputable actions perpetrated by Christian inhabitants of Przysucha (a lack of compassion, confiscation of Jewish property, even exhilaration concerning Jewish tragedies) and although she neither approves of such behavior nor mentions some basic proportions concerning how popular the shameful approach was during that time, sadly, her diary seems to confirm nationwide findings provided by Gross of the same and similar behavior.

1.5.2 Literature about Christian-Jewish relations

The decision to include Gross's works in the present review has been determined by three reasons. First and foremost, they reflect the aforementioned assumptions that Christian-Jewish relations are extremely complicated, dramatic, rooted in a broader context, marked by contradictory opinions and full of blank, light and dark spots. The mere fact that the author brought to light the Jedwabne massacre 60 years after it happened shows that despite great scientific efforts aimed at understanding these relations, researchers still have much to discover. Secondly, Gross's publications deal with issues that influenced mutual perception between the communities during their co-existence and finally, since they continue to be widely discussed in Polish media, these issues still affect how Christians and Jews perceive one another. In fact, on the very day as this present section is being written, a debate organized by the Polish Center for Holocaust Research and inspired by Gross's books is scheduled to take place in Warsaw. Among others, the discussion is to revolve around such questions as: "Is there still a place for further research on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations in Poland?" and "What are results of Polish-Polish discussion regarding the Holocaust spurred by works of Prof. Gross?". However, despite the undeniable resonance of Gross's writings it needs to be clearly emphasized that Gross is a highly controversial author and as will be shown in subsequent paragraphs, leading historians and columnists have been unsparing in their criticism of his publications.

Generally speaking, Gross's books present Christian attitudes towards their Jewish neighbors during the War, Holocaust and years that followed. The newest version of "Ghastly Decade" consists of four essays, each dealing with a different issue: Polish-Jewish relations during the Shoah, mutual relations from 1944-1948, the history of Jews under Soviet occupation and Polish-German collaboration. Gross's signature publication: "Neighbors" refers to the dramatic history of the Jewish community that inhabited the village Jedwabne and who were exterminated in 1941, soon after the Germans invaded the territory in question. Gross claims that the Polish Jews of Jedwabne were cruelly harassed by the local Christian society and eventually burned alive in a stable. From Gross's viewpoint, the Jedwabne massacre was an entirely Polish (not German) act, performed spontaneously by ordinary men (as opposed to the margins of society), with the approval of Catholic bishops. In "Fear" Gross analyzes experiences of Jews who survived the Holocaust and returned home, whereas in "Golden Harvest" the author presents the alleged common practice among Christian

inhabitants, who driven by greed, plundered Jewish cemeteries and houses in search of valuables. By providing his thoughts, observations and research findings, Gross invites a reinterpretation of Polish history that would lead to a sincere confession that Christian Poles participated in the extermination of Jewish Poles and willingly took advantage of their plight.

As mentioned, the spectrum of issues that Gross touches upon is very broad and includes Christian passivity in face of the Holocaust, crimes (sometimes incredibly cruel) perpetrated on Polish Jews in the name of revenge, hatred or greed, plundering of Jewish possessions, after-War anti-Semitism, pogroms and a lack of human empathy or compassion towards the Polish Jews. These issues as such are not new to Polish and international scholars, yet Gross's approach and conclusions are. The author is fully aware of existing stereotypes and the common knowledge that from the Polish perspective, Christian Poles were victims (not perpetrators) of the Nazi regime and ascribe disgraceful actions to only a lower class fraction of Polish society. Not only did Gross challenge the existing Polish mindset on the subject, but he also described the motives that had driven Christians to perpetrate crimes. His writings portray Christian Poles as ruthless, greedy and revengeful neighbors driven by their baser instincts, who joyfully harassed, murdered and robbed the Jewish community on their own accord, without German encouragement. Gross's findings and portrayal of Christian Poles undermined previous historical findings and left the average Pole dumbfounded, which in turn has spurred a heated debate that is still taking place on international, national and personal levels.

Publicly providing newly discovered data (even if shocking), fighting against common misinformation and attempting to raise awareness in a society should be perceived as basic obligations of every scholar. After all, it is only by challenging existing findings that our civilization is able to move forward. At first sight, by publishing his findings, Gross is fulfilling this noble aim. However, careful scrutiny of comments issued by well-known and respected historians in response to Gross's works raises doubts as to whether his methodology and logic is appropriate and whether his suggested reinterpretation of Polish history is so necessary. Two key publications by Gross's critics, "The Price of Fear" and "Golden Hearts or Golden Harvest?", pose a compilation of articles and essays in which Polish scholars point to contradictions and methodological deficiencies in the books in question. Essential charges leveled against all works by Gross refer to lack of a broader historical context of presented events that would enable readers to understand and assess the actions of Christian Poles (e.g. Gontarczyk 2008:18, Chodakiewicz 2008:46, Żaryn 2008:330, in ed. by Jankowski 2008).

Several authors mention the selective treatment of sources, that is presenting only such information that confirms his pre-established hypotheses (e.g. Pogonowski 2008:33-34, Żaryn 2008:326, in ed. by Jankowski; Stachura 2011:65, in ed. by Chodakiewicz 2011). Others covered the purposive manipulation of quoted excerpts, as a result of which the total meaning of the passage is distorted (e.g. Pogonowski 2008:31, Chodakiewicz 2008:45, in ed. by Jankowski 2008) and Gross making vast and deeply offensive generalizations based only on very limited data (e.g. Strzembosz 2008:105, Meducki 2008:311, in ed. by Jankowski; Stachura 2011:65, in ed. by Chodakiewicz 2011). Others point out employment of highly unreliable sources (e.g. Chodakiewicz 2008:41, Musiał 2008:200, in ed. by Jankowski 2008) and a lack of scholarly, objective analysis of gathered information (e.g. Stachura 2011:66, in ed. by Chodakiewicz 2011).

An analysis of Gross's publications leads to two key conclusions: in order to fully understand Christian-Jewish relations one must be highly knowledgeable about the reality of the co-existence between Christian and Jewish Poles before and after the War, yet in particular during the Holocaust. It also shows that details regarding analyzed events along with processes that led to them are of great significance and seemingly basic questions such as "who?, when?, why? and how?" can be quite difficult to answer. Furthermore, public reactions that followed publication of Gross's works took the form of a heated debate against his conclusions in Poland and their appraisal in Jewish circles indicates the existence of deeply rooted stereotypes that make Christians and Jews interpret their role in history in quite a contradictory manner.

In response to extant literature on Christian-Jewish relations during the Holocaust Chodakiewicz and Muszyński point to the existence of two extreme interpretations of the history. The first is the "black legend" which falsely accuses Christian Poles of collective complicity in the Holocaust and the other is "heroic mythology" which without criticism presents Christian Poles in a favorable light. Both the black legend and heroic mythology generalize single actions or attitudes and portray them as a dominant approach (2011:13).

Stereotypes on both sides that impair the existence of harmonious relations between the two groups today have been touched upon by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska as well. However, most importantly, their work represents a moderate approach to the complicated Christian-Jewish history. Their publication is all the more valuable for the present review since the authors employed a reverse research model and only after a careful examination of reality did

they move on to put forward any hypotheses. Furthermore, Cherry and Orla-Bukowska concentrate on the evolution of Christian-Jewish relations, pointing to a range of positive changes currently visible in Poland, such as an increase in the number of Philo-Semites, decrease in xenophobic attitudes, open archives that enable solid research studies, greater responsibility for Jewish heritage, etc. Last but not least, the authors contextualize presented events and explain how political systems greatly influence the attitudes of average residents. Their publication describes how the two communities each demonstrate conflicting interpretations of their role in World War II and the Shoah. Poles tend to concentrate on the complicated history of their country with its numerous uprisings, partitions, wars and short periods of national sovereignty. They view pogroms in Kielce or Jedwabne as incidents perpetrated by the lowest margin of society. They underline the fact that Polish citizens have the world's highest count of individuals who have been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem although Poland was subject to the most rigorous regime of Nazi Germany (2008:18). Whereas, Jews on the other hand, regard Polish anti-Semitism as more common and virulent than elsewhere and books or memories written by Jews who survived the Holocaust very often present Christian Poles as either passive towards Jewish suffering or glad that Germans took care of their "Jewish problem". Additionally, the Jews view the post-War pogrom in Kielce as an attempt to exterminate the Jewish population in its entirety, as originally planned by Hitler (2008:18).

An enormous value of the book lies in the authors' attempt to present neuralgic issues in the most objective and balanced way, so as to avoid extreme standpoints which either overestimate the anti-Semitism of Polish Catholics or underestimate the patriotism of Polish Jews. It is the sole publication that I have come across that explicitly deals with the issue of anti-Polonism according to which Poland is a subordinate nation and Poles resemble animals with underdeveloped brains and incapable of creating true human culture (Radzilowski 2008:37, in ed. by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska).

An honest analysis of difficult issues that shape mutual Christian-Jewish perception has also been offered by the Forum for Dialog Among Nations. The editors of the publication took advantage of the fact that Israeli youth increasingly more frequently visit Poland so as to learn about Jewish life in Poland. Since difficulties in dialog between the two communities appeared when delicate subjects such as the Holocaust, attitudes of Christian Poles during the War or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were touched upon, the Forum asked Polish and Jewish students to write down their most difficult, irritating or worrisome questions and then invited

a team of renowned Polish and Jewish renowned scholars (Gutman, Polonsky, Szarota, Dancyg etc.) to answer them in the most professional and unprejudiced way. All in all, the publication, similarly to the one edited by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska, refers to the past, present and future, concentrates on stereotypes, attempts to replace them with factual knowledge and proves that contemporary Poland is undergoing a deep evolution in attitudes towards "its elder brethren in faith".

Hopefully, in the present review I have been able to establish that there does exist reliable and comprehensive literature concerning past Christian-Jewish co-existence in Przysucha and although the subject of common relations has not been included in a separate publication or even a chapter, facts concerning the reality from the 18th century upwards are quite helpful when it comes to reconstructing the picture of mutual perception between the two communities. Regarding contemporary relations in Poland, although Gross's works are filled with controversies and methodological deficiencies, by challenging common opinions leading to nationwide outrage, the author was able to prove how strong the existing stereotypes are and how many spheres of life they pertain to. The publication issued by the Forum for Dialog Among Nations and the publication edited by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska confirm that stereotypical interpretation of historical events is a characteristic common on *both* sides, however, through regular contact and honest education its influence on mutual perception might diminish in the future. Definitely, there is a blank spot regarding Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha in the currently changing socio-political context. It would also be interesting to find out to what extent the inhabitants of Przysucha who have had chances to get involved in direct contact with Jews share similar prejudices popular in Poland among Christians who have not had such opportunities.

2. The social and cultural context of the research

Having outlined rudimentary issues concerning the research, i.e. its questions and goals as well as the theoretical and methodological viewpoints that will provide the thesis framework, the time has come to look at the broader social and historical context of the dissertation. Its significance for providing reliable research outcomes has been underlined by Blumer, who explicitly stated that meanings which people ascribe to things emerge and are transformed only within the context of human life. Hence, neither stereotypes, prejudices nor social representations under scrutiny here are innate or stripped of the further-ranging perspective. They arise as a result of a long process, in which representatives of the examined communities assign their meanings and align them when necessary. Also Charmaz, whose interpretation of the Grounded Theory will be extensively analyzed in the ensuing chapter, emphasized that all gathered data have their contextual history and refusal to attend to it may result in underperformance or provision of false results. Therefore, analysis of all kinds of information including interview transcripts, elicited and extant texts must include an attempt to understand how and why they came into being.

Keeping both these suggestions in mind the current chapter aims to outline social and cultural issues without which any analysis of contemporary Christian-Jewish relations seems impossible. The first section will be more macro-oriented and thus deal with topics that are important nation- and worldwide (the emergence of the extensive Jewish Diaspora in Poland and its legal situation before the extermination, Polish anti-Semitism, the Shoah, recent revival of interest in Christian-Jewish relations in Poland). Whereas, the second section will focus on Przysucha and outline its local history (geographic deployment of the communities, demographic changes, pre- and post-War Christian-Jewish interactions) and its peculiar character.

2.1 Selected issues and events crucial for mutual relations

Out of a range of subjects that shape mutual perception between Christian Poles and Jews I have chosen the ones that show specific stages of Jewish life in Poland. An attempt will be made to understand the process of creation of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland and answer the questions: Why did the Jews settle here? Before the extermination what caused Poland to host

the greatest number of Jews in Europe? From a legal perspective, was Poland really a paradise for Jews (*Paradisus Juadeourum*) before the Nazis implemented their "final solution"? Then, anti-Semitism, probably the most popular term that appears while bringing up mutual perception will be described. When referring to Poland, the term is commonly regarded as the most virulent and specific (e.g. in Lehmann 2001:5). By presenting the typology of anti-Semitism developed by the Polish researchers, Helena Datner and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, the idea that the notion has many faces will be proven. Additionally, while analyzing the Holocaust, reports of selected pogroms and acts of aggression from before and after the Second World War, as well as the issue of the Christian reaction to the tragedy of Jewish neighbors will be addressed. Finally, the recent resurgence of Jewish life in Poland that sheds a light of hope that there is a chance to lead to full Christian-Jewish reconciliation will be covered.

Nevertheless, it needs to be clearly stated that the above introduced issues entail so many questions and stimulate such polarized attitudes it will not be possible to provide a comprehensive analysis or give simple answers and solutions to problems that have remained unresolved over decades. Experts on Christian-Jewish relations agree that the history of Polish Jewry is so rich and complicated that it can easily be interpreted in contradictory ways (e.g. Harris 2006:17, in ed. by Kozłowski et al.). Therefore, considering limited scope of the present research, the thing I aspire to achieve is to provide a simplified outline of issues commonly regarded as relevant or sensitive, as well as explain what is meant by terms that are absolutely essential for any discussion on Christian-Jewish relations.

2.1.1 Rights and privileges of Jews in Poland

It is believed that the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Poland date back to the Middle Ages. The first encounters between Poles and Jews took place in the 10th century, when Jewish traders crossed Poland on their mercantile expeditions. The permanent settlement of Jews began in the 12th century, which is evidenced, among others, by coins with engraved Hebrew letters or documents confirming various commercial transactions. Due to the fact that Christian-Jewish co-existence has such a long history, its beginnings have been eternalized also in the form of fanciful legends, which seem to intertwine with historical facts. According to one of the most popular of such legends, (from which the Polin Museum of the History of

Polish Jews derives its name), Jewish traders, upon reaching the territory of Poland, saw signs on trees (or, in another version, heard a voice from the sky) which said: "Po-lin", which in Hebrew has two meanings: "Rest here" or, when written together, "Poland". According to the legend (and as history proved) the traders regarded the vision as a good omen and decided to settle in Poland for good.

It is important to stress the context of the establishment of the earliest Jewish settlements in Poland. The first settlers arrived in Poland from the West, where they were being persecuted as a result of the spread of Christian religious fanaticism and the activity of the Inquisition (Zamojski 2012:21). Jews were commonly accused of ritual murders, forced to wear conspicuous, degrading outfits, were isolated from Christians and excluded from social, political and cultural life or simply expelled from cities, regions or even whole countries (on the grounds of the edict of *de non tolerandis Judaeis*). The Jews were banished from England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Italy (and others) and in search of a better place to settle found their home in Poland. Apart from being a relatively safe place for asylum, Poland offered opportunities for successful business activities. Observing the potential of these well-educated and resourceful settlers, the Polish rulers provided them with royal protection[7] and over the following centuries, the Jewish Diaspora in Poland expanded until it became one of the largest in the world. Before the Second World War, as many as 3.5 million Jews lived in Poland and constituted 10% of the country's population at that time.

Jewish life on Polish territory revolved around autonomous communities (kahals)[8] that provided basic religious, educational and legal needs. Each kahal had its own rabbi, synagogue, cemetery, judiciary, school, ritual slaughterhouse, refuge as well as councils and committees entrusted with various essential issues. One of the first written documents that regulated Jewish life in Poland was *the General Charter of Jewish Liberties* issued in 1264 by Bolesław the Pious, the Duke of Greater Poland. The charter, known as the Statute of Kalisz (as it originally referred only to Jews living on the Duke's domains) touched upon issues connected with jurisdiction over Jewish settlers, rules pertaining to business and credit

[7] Zamojski (2012:21-22) emphasized that Polish rulers were not driven by sentimental or altruistic motives, but sheer pragmatism. Due to the fact that the Polish state was in its initial stages, help was needed to organize its trade and economy.

[8] The term "kahal" denotes both the community (also known as kehilla) and the autonomous communal administration.

activities, as well as general Christian-Jewish relations. It was not an entirely unique document, for was modeled on charters previously issued by other European rulers. Nevertheless, it was expanded and modified so as to ensure Jewish freedom and safety in various spheres of life. For example, thanks to the statute, Jews were directly subordinate to royal jurisdiction. Certain penalties were introduced for desecrating Jewish cemeteries and synagogues and blood libel addressed against Jews was forbidden. The statute soon became a symbol of safe co-existence of Jews with their Christian neighbors. In 1334 and 1367, during the reign of Kazimierz the Great, he not only ratified the statute, but also expanded it to include the entire territory of Poland. The statute formed the basis for regulating the legal situation of Jews in Poland for many centuries and continued to be approved by subsequent rulers of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until the First Partition of Poland.

The Statute of Kalisz was an example of Poland's extraordinary tolerance during times that were highly intolerant. "Poland was haven for nobility, purgatory for burghers and paradise for Jews" (in Adalberg 1889–1894:419), as the contemporaneous proverb said. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Poland was not a completely safe haven. As Zaremska stressed: "Refugees chose places of their settlement those countries in which hostility towards them was *lesser* and in which they were offered *relatively* safe conditions to live." (*own italics*, 2010:34, in ed. by Sienkiewicz). Therefore, the Jews did fall victim to anti-Semitic assaults in Poland, they were accused of desecrating the Host and of ritual murders. However, in Poland such tumults did not happen as often as in other European states due to the fact that Jewish settlement in the Middle Ages was only in its initial stages and participants of the first crusade (known for inciting anti-Semitic perturbations in Germany and Czech) did not march through Poland and the plague (if it reached Poland at all) had far less severe consequences than in Western Europe.

Furthermore, it is interesting to emphasize a certain dissonance between secular and church authorities noticed by Zamojski (2012:23). Whereas subsequent Polish rulers had encompassed Jews with their royal protection, the authorities of the Catholic Church took contradictory actions. They aimed for Christian-Jewish segregation (proposed the establishment of Jewish ghettos), discrimination (wearing special hats) and limitation of the various Jewish rights granted thus far. Although these proposals were not fully implemented, Jews did suffer some local repression (e.g. they were expelled from Wrocław in 1319). Therefore, a fair conclusion is that until the first half of the 17th century Poland was comparatively a very tolerant and progressive European nation.

As the number of Polish Jews grew, their own autonomy became increasingly more sophisticated. Jewish communities soon connected into greater regions (Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, Ruthenia and Volhynia), as a result of which there arose a need for the Jewish settlers to create one, central governing body. *The Council of Four Lands,* which was in operation from 1580 until 1764, became the highest authority of Jewish life in Poland and dealt with a whole spectrum of issues including administrative, economic, religious, and social legislation, appropriation of taxes, supervision of local communities in financial and educational fields as well as regulation of inter-communal matters. It also became the representative body for Polish Jewry to the agencies of the Polish government and others. The Council was the most elaborate and developed Jewish institution in Europe, serving the function of a Jewish parliament which aimed at coordinating the policies of hundreds of Jewish communities in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As Rosman (2013) stated: "In the absence of Jewish sovereignty anywhere in the world, the Council of Four Lands (…) served both as a reminder of Jewish sovereignty in the past and as a harbinger of the promised messianic Jewish state of the future."[9] The existence of the Council reflected the extent to which Jewish autonomy was advanced in Poland as well as common tolerance in Poland, that still remained incomprehensible in other contemporaneous European countries.

Apart from the two aforementioned outstanding examples of the Jewish status in Poland, numerous other privileges were also granted to Jews by subsequent Polish rulers. To give some examples: in 1578 King Stefan Báthory permitted free business operations throughout the entire country, in 1643, King Wacław the Fourth exempted Jews from payment of the toll, in 1576, King Stefan Báthory declared the death penalty for committing blood libel without merit and in 1568 King Zygmunt August granted the privilege of *de non tolerandis Christianis* to the Jewish district of Kraków (Kazimierz) and Lublin. The majority of towns that came into existence at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries encouraged Jewish settlers to establish their roots in them. Christian and Jewish merchants (although in competition with one another) in fact successfully cooperated especially when it came to long-range transactions. As a result, until the middle of the 17th century not only did Poland experience unprecedented settlement and demographic expansion, but also further development of education and culture.

[9] http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/156093/council-four-lands

The "Golden Age" of Christian-Jewish relations began to wane in the middle of the 17th century due to the political and economic crisis as well as the Vatican's official stance which regarded Judaism "as a fatal danger to Christianity" (Zamojski 2012:28). The ensuing wars with Cossacks, Tatars, Russia, Sweden and Turkey damaged the Polish economy, brought impoverishment to the bourgeoisie and exacerbated Christian-Jewish competition. After the Chmielnicki Uprising,[10] in which many thousand Jews were killed, the first massive emigration of Jewish settlers was noted. Although Polish Kings took some measures to improve the situation of Polish Jews (for instance, King Jan Kazimierz exempted Jews from taxes for four years beginning in 1658, and then in 1667 he ordered the Polish army to protect them from persecution), financial difficulties and general discontent made Jews gradually lose their status and rights. During the ensuing years Jews were expelled from Sandomierz, assaulted in pogroms in Eastern Poland and defamed in popular anti-Semitic literature. Finally, on the grounds of default on tax payments, The Council of Four Lands, the symbol of Jewish autonomy in Poland, along with other higher level governing bodies, were all dissolved in 1764.

The fall of the First Republic of Poland in 1795, when Polish territory became divided between three countries, marked the beginning of a very difficult era in the history of Polish and Jewish communities which brought about a radical change in Christian-Jewish relations. It is of utmost importance to understand that the bilateral scheme: Christian-Jewish relations changed into a multilateral system which included different policies of the occupants. Except for a few short periods of liberation and periods of autonomy (the Duchy of Warsaw or the Kingdom of Poland), Poland lost its sovereignty for 123 years during which time it faced the politics of denationalization, impoverishment as well as various economic, moral and physical repressions. Life conditions for the different occupants varied, but in all cases the destruction of Poland as a sovereign state meant that Jews were subject to legislation of the partitioning powers (the anti-Semitic Russian Empire, Austro-Hungary and the Kingdom of Prussia). Therefore, our further analysis of the legal position of Jews in Poland will skip to the inter-bellum period, at which time Poland was an independent state and able to provide its own regulations concerning all spheres of life, including relations between Christian Poles and Jewish citizens of the country.

[10] Chmielnicki Uprising (1648-1657) was a series of Cossack rebellions in Ukraine under the command of Hetman Chmielnicki directed against Polish nobility and Jews. Jewish massacres were especially cruel and bloody, often referred to as "slaughter of Jews" (Wijaczka 2010:106-107, in ed. by Sienkiewicz)

The status of Polish Jews was one of the most salient issues from the time Poland first regained its sovereignty. The first talks regarding the matter took place the day following the official defeat of Germany was announced (November 12th 1918). During the first elections in independent Poland Jewish politicians took 11 parliamentary seats. Although this figure was not proportionate to the number of Polish Jews living in Poland, the mere fact that the Jewish community had representatives in the Polish Parliament meant that their expectations and reservations could be voiced and heard. Nevertheless, regulation of the position of Polish Jewry was quite complicated because the enactment of new laws did not automatically invalidate regulations that were in force in the annexed territories. Therefore, despite the fact that the Polish constitution ratified on the March 12th 1921 guaranteed full equality of all citizens regardless of their faith, language or nationality, some provisions that discriminated against Polish Jews (especially on lands controlled by the Russian Empire) were still in effect. Not all of such regulations were abolished over the years, despite efforts taken by Jewish members of the Parliament to repeal them.

Another complicated issue referred to national rights that would enable Jews to preserve their tradition, culture and language. The Jews demanded that they should be treated as an autonomous group and rights should be granted to them *collectively*. Nevertheless, the minority treaty signed between the League of Nations and the newly established state of Poland on the June 28th 1919 during the Versailles Peace Conference did not include a postulate about cultural-national autonomy. Thus, the treaty conferred basic rights on all inhabitants of the country, without distinction of birth, nationality, race or religion, but *individually*, which avoided the necessity to establish a separate governing body that would represent Jews as a whole. The aforementioned Polish Constitution took the same stance on the matter, so as to avoid "creating a country within the country" (Żyndul 2010:278, in ed. by Sienkiewicz).

The position of Polish Jews and mutual Christian-Jewish relations depended significantly on the governing party. In so far as it was full of antagonisms, conflicts and lack of trust during the first years of Polish sovereignty and in the second half of the 1930s certain marked improvement took place when Piłsudski became Prime Minister. To give some examples: 700 thousand Jews that arrived in Poland from Russia were granted Polish citizenship (1926-1931), Hebrew and Yiddish could be spoken during public meetings (1927) and a fight against economic anti-Semitism was undertaken (1931). After Piłsudski's death, right-wing radicals grew in strength and the Parliament increasingly more often considered the enactment

of legal acts directed against the Jewish populace, two of which were eventually ratified (the first restricted ritual slaughter, whereas the latter limited access to advocacy). Furthermore, Jewish Poles started to frequently be discriminated against at universities. Not only did they have difficulties with admission, but were also forced under the threat of expulsion to take seats together with their own fellow religionists and not with Christians (the so called bench Ghetto). The official stance of Polish authorities towards the bench Ghetto was indirect. Although the Minister of Education formally disapproved of it, he authorized college presidents to take necessary measures that would soothe the atmosphere between students, which in practice led to segregation in the seating of students.

Overall, the inter-bellum period was characterized by enormous chaos (because of the necessity to rebuild the state), dissonance between acts of law and their implementation, dualism in the attitude of the Polish Church (condemnation of physical violence against Jews, yet encouragement of an economic boycott) as well as the subject which follows - growing anti-Semitism by Christian Poles.

2.1.2 Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism[11] poses another very complicated issue, due to its centuries-old endurance, penetration of geographical barriers, range of aspects it includes (social, political, religious, cultural, legal, etc.), as well as drastic consequences it has proven to entail. Many scholars (e.g. Arendt, Poliakov, Guillaumin, Nipperdey, Cała, Krzemiński, Tokarska-Bakir, Datner and others) have attempted to define the term, trace its genesis and examine relations between its variations (traditional and modern, old and new, religious and political, etc.). One of the most frequently quoted analysis of the notion was compiled by Hannah Arendt in the first volume of her classic work, "The Origins of Totalitarianism". In the first sentence of her groundbreaking text, Arendt differentiates between anti-Semitism and religious hatred towards Jews, yet admits that both religion and ideology to some extent do influence each other, both emotionally and substantively. She wrote:

[11] The term anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by the German political agitator and journalist Wilhelm Marr to label the anti-Jewish campaigns under way in central Europe at that time. (http://www.britannica.com/topic/anti-Semitism)

> "Anti-Semitism, a secular nineteenth-century ideology - which in name, though not in argument, was unknown before the 1870s - and religious Jew-hatred, inspired by the mutually hostile antagonism of two conflicting creeds, are obviously not the same; and even the extent to which the former derives its argument and emotional appeal from the latter is open to question." (Arendt 1979:xii).

Furthermore, Arendt refuted common theories and contended that:

1. The rise of anti-Semitism is *not* correlated with the rise of nationalism (1979:3).
   (In fact, modern anti-Semitism grew at the time when nationalism throughout Europe was in decline. Furthermore, Nazis underlined the transnational character of their movement.)
2. Jews were *purposefully* selected by Nazis as the main target of their terror and abuse (1979:5).
   (Not only does Arendt criticize the scapegoat theory[12] that would make the choice of victims accidental or arbitrary, but she also finds the idea of "eternal anti-Semitism", perceived as an unbroken series of persecution of Jewish communities over the centuries, a dangerous fallacy since it exempts the necessity to analyze behavior both of victims and perpetrators.)
3. Jews became a target *not* because of their extensive influences, but rather because of their statelessness and powerlessness (1979:4).
   (Anti-Semitism reached its peak at a time when Jews had already lost all their public functions. Consequently, they possessed wealth without power, which has been found to intuitively stir hatred. The fact that Jews never had their own state made their physical persistence highly dependent on non-Jewish authorities and thus more vulnerable to attacks.)
4. The rise of anti-Semitism was a "furious reaction to emancipated and assimilated Jewry" (1979:xii).

As can be seen, Arendt's analysis is limited to the ideology and political movements that came into play during the 19th century in Western and Central Europe. However, regardless of one's opinion of Arendt's conclusions, it should be admitted that her examination correctly reflects a number of issues that potentially shape an anti-Semitic approach, such as national

[12] The Scapegoat Theory is given greater coverage on page 86.

consciousness, collective projections, legal status, financial position or political fluctuations, making the issue even more problematic and multi-layered.

Other researchers view the phenomenon in question from a more general perspective. For instance, Helen Fein claims that anti-Semitism is:

> "a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective manifested in *individuals* as attitudes, and in *culture* as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in *actions* - social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence - which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews." (Fein 1987:67)

Langmuir, in turn, is credited with coining the term "chimerical assertions" that "in contrast to xenophobic assertions[13] (…) present fantasies, figment of the imagination, monsters that, although dressed syntactically in the clothes of real humans, have never been seen and are projections of mental processes unconnected with the real people of the out-group" (1996:334). Thus, anti-Semites differ from xenophobes because the obsessions they hold regarding the target group of their hostility are not only deeply rooted, but first and foremost improbable.

Regarding anti-Semitism in Poland, "perhaps the most popular and widespread view of Polish-Jewish relations, is that Poles are virulent anti-Semites and that the Polish Jews have been their unfortunate victims" (Lehmann 2001, Preface). This view is confirmed by Claude Lanzmann, whose film "Shoah" presents Poles as naive, passive, and even culpable onlookers of Nazi crimes perpetuated on the European Jewry. Also Hofmann (1998:5, in Lehmann 2001:5) spoke about the "natural inclination" of all Poles, including past and present generations, to participate in the genocide. Furthermore, Cherry and Bukowska (2008:17) admit that from the Jewish perspective, anti-Semitism in Poland is increasingly "more common and poisonous". Additionally, since today's Jewish community in Poland is incomparably smaller than the one from before the War, Polish anti-Semitism is often referred to as "anti-Semitism without Jews" (e.g. Szopski 2013[14], Cała 2012) or has been compared to

[13] Xenophobic assertions are "propositions that grammatically attribute a socially menacing conduct to an out-group and all its members but are empirically based only on the conduct of the historical minority of the members." (e.g. Jews as Christ-killers) (Langmuir, 1996:328)

[14] https://www.polskieradio.pl/7/1691/Artykul/939093,Polski-antysemityzm-bez-Zydow

the lingering sensation following the amputation of a limb, a kind of "phantom anti-Semitism" (Wisse 1987[15]). Finally, Michlic speaks about the "anti-Semitism without anti-Semites" so as to show that "the majority of supporters of anti-Semitic theses (…) claim that they are not anti-Semites (…)" (in Cherry and Bukowska 2008:187).

Following the assumption that it is of utmost importance to try to understand why individuals demonstrate anti-Semitic attitudes Datner, (1996, in Krzemiński 2004:20-21) characterized anti-Semitism in Poland taking into consideration the arguments that Poles use to justify their animosity and hostility towards the Jewish community. Consequently, she distinguished two basic types of anti-Semitic arguments: *traditional*, which justifies negative attitudes by references to religious reasoning (Jews as Christ-killers) and *modern*, based on popular anti-Semitic ideology (Jews as controllers of world finances, ruthless capitalists, exploiters, communists etc.). Tokarska-Bakir (2006:28, in ed. by Kozłowski et al.) suggests a similar typology: *anti-Judaism* (that arose as a result of official teaching of the Catholic Church from before the Second Vatican Council), *modern anti-Semitism* (inspired by Russian and Nazi ideology) and *new anti-Semitism* (as a consequence of globalization and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

Datner's typology was used by Krzemiński (Warsaw University, Department of Sociology) who examined the dynamics and scale of anti-Semitism in Poland in three separate quantitative (survey-based) projects which took place in 1992, 2002 and 2012. Not only did Krzemiński's research aim at providing statistics concerning traditional and modern anti-Semites, but also the number of "anti-anti-Semites", i.e. people who definitely oppose popular anti-Semitic views. According to his study results, in 1992 the 17% of the respondents were modern anti-Semites, and 11.5 % traditional anti-Semites. In 2002 modern anti-Semites significantly increased to 27%, whereas the number of traditional anti-Semites remained almost the same (11.6%). The study in 2012 showed indicators of both types of anti-Semitism were lower than the ones from the previous study (20% for modern anti-Semitism, and 8% for traditional). Furthermore, Krzemiński's studies reflected a growing number of modern anti-anti-Semites: 8% in 1992, 16% in 2002, and 21% in 2012. For traditional anti-anti-Semitism the amounts were 29% in 1992, 35% in 2002 and 45% in 2012.

The chart below makes the data more transparent:

[15] https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/polands-jewish-ghosts/

	1992	*2002*	*2012*
Modern anti-Semites	17%	27%	20%
Traditional anti-Semites	11.5%	11.6%	8%
Modern anti-anti-Semites	8%	16%	21%
Traditional anti-anti-Semites	29%	35%	45%

Figure 6: The number of modern/traditional/anti anti-Semites in quantitative studies conducted by Krzemiński in 1992, 2002 and 2012 (2015:24)

In regard to the indicators of anti-Semitic attitudes, all three projects pointed to a positive correlation between anti-Semitism and the national-Catholic worldview, whereas a negative was found between anti-Semitism and education as well as anti-Semitism and age (younger and better educated respondents were found to be less anti-Semitic).

Bilewicz, Winiewski and Soral (Center for Research on Prejudice) scrutinized the level of anti-Semitism (also on the basis of surveys) in 2009 and 2013. They provided data concerning the three types of approach in question: the aforementioned *traditional* and *modern* anti-Semitism as well as *secondary* anti-Semitism (the belief that Jews have abused the history of the Holocaust and bear the responsibility for anti-Semitism). The authors' results differed significantly from Krzemiński's. In 2013 they found as many as 63% of respondents who demonstrated modern anti-Semitism (in 2009 - 65%), 58% demonstrated secondary anti-Semitism (in 2009 - 60%) and 23% traditional anti-Semitism (in 2009 - 15%). Furthermore, in their 2013 study, Bilewicz et al. included statements that measured the level of anti-Israel sentiment in Poland. The results showed that harsh criticism of Israeli contemporary actions was very high. Some 59% of the informants compared the way Israel treats Palestinians to the way Hitler treated Jews during World War II. Regarding the indicators of anti-Semitism, in contrast to Krzemiński's outcomes, anti-Semitism was found to be unrelated to religiosity, but rather to "general authoritarian political attitudes (right-wing authoritarianism: a mix of conventionalism, submission to authorities and aggression against deviants and out-groups)"

as well as "victimhood-based national identification (perception of Poles as more victimized than other ethnic groups)." (Bilewicz et al. 2013:5)[16]

It is worth stressing that both Krzemiński's and Bilewicz's inquiries were presented and discussed during the session of one of the Polish Parliament's committees (the National and Ethnic Minorities Committee) on January 9th 2014, which indicates that the problem is monitored and dealt with on the highest national level with the intention to minimize it as much as possible.

Anti-Semitism is also measured worldwide, which enables a comparison of the scale of Polish anti-Semitism to levels in other countries. This makes the data all the more significant due to the aforementioned widespread view that the intensity of the approach in question in Poland is far greater and specific. The unprecedented research, involving 102 countries and territories, conducted in 96 languages and dialects, has recently been compiled by the Anti-Defamation League. Based on 11 statements developed by researchers at the University of California (which randomly chosen informants were asked to assess as "probably true" or "probably false"), the study aimed at providing extensive insights into national and regional attitudes towards Jews as well as knowledge about the Holocaust.

The statements, which are listed below, pose a perfect summary of commonly held anti-Semitic beliefs:

1. Jews are more loyal to Israel than to (this country/the countries they live in).
2. Jews have too much power in international financial markets.
3. Jews have too much control over global affairs.
4. Jews think they are better than other people.
5. Jews have too much control over global media.
6. Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars.
7. Jews have too much power in the business world.
8. Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind.
9. People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave.
10. Jews have too much control over the United States government.
11. Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.

[16] http://cbu.psychologia.pl/uploads/f_winiewski/PPS2%20raporty/raport_antysemityzm_ang.pdf

The study results are shocking: 1.09 billion informants (26%) worldwide were found to harbor anti-Semitic attitudes (they found at least 6 of the stereotypical views presented above "probably true"), while only 54% of the total respondents had ever heard of the Holocaust. Laos was found to be the least anti-Semitic (0.2%), whereas the West Bank and Gaza region the most (93%). Regarding Eastern Europe, the highest number of anti-Semites (45%) was found in Poland, while in Western Europe - in Greece (69%). Regionally, the greatest cluster of anti-Semites live in Middle East and North African countries (74%) and the least - in Oceania (14%). [17]

Despite the inconsistency of results provided by the above discussed studies, it seems clear that anti-Semitism in Poland remains a serious problem that should be tackled with the help of various institutions (educational, political and religious), as well as within Polish homes. Admittedly, it is quite easy to encounter anti-Semitic views in Poland on a daily basis. The Internet for instance, remains a source of hate speech in the form of an incalculable number of comments and slogans directed against Jews, regardless of how unrelated to Jews the issues commented upon actually are. Additionally, neologisms created on the basis of the word "Jew" that demonstrate stereotypical vices that Jews are believed to possess (such as meanness) are well-known and frequently used. In fact, even the mere word "Jew" continues to be connoted as a racial slur. What is more, images that depict traditional Jewish money-lenders are often hung in Polish homes as it is believed that they bring good luck. Finally, anti-Semitism is still popular among sport fans (especially football fans).

However, the research commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League suggests that Polish anti-Semitism, widespread as it proved to be, is not unique, more virulent or more poisonous than attitudes demonstrated in many other countries with comparable or higher levels (e.g. 37% in France, 41% in Hungary, 44% in Bulgaria). What is more, it needs to be strongly emphasized that all kinds of anti-Semitic behavior in Poland are officially regarded as shameful and reprehensible and those who spread anti-Semitic judgments act against the approved stance of Polish authorities (both secular and religious). Krzemiński (2004:16), an expert on anti-Semitism in Poland, ascribes the shift in the official discourse to the gradual awakening following the tragedy of the Holocaust: "We can say that spiritual, intellectual and moral consequences of the Shoah had been slowly ripening until they reached its current

[17] Results found on the ADL webpage dedicated to the research: global100.adl.org

shape manifested also in the anti-anti-Semitic *political correctness.*" Michlic (2008:185, in ed. by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska) adds that although certain influential centers (such as the popular, right-wing station Radio Maryja and other institutions at their disposal) continue to proliferate more or less veiled anti-Semitic opinions they fall outside the dominant trend of political culture.

Also, the Catholic Church, infamous for its centuries-long fight with Judaism, took a few milestone steps and gave a green light for improvement in Christian-Jewish relations. As a result of the Second Vatican Council of 1965 the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*[18] was announced. In the year 2000, during his historic visit to Israel, John Paul II apologized for sins committed by Christians against Jews. Last, but not least, in 2013, the current Pope Francis adamantly stated: "It's a contradiction that a Christian is anti-Semitic: His roots are in part Jewish. (…) A Christian cannot be anti-Semitic! May anti-Semitism be banished from the heart and the life of every man and every woman!"[19]

The Pope's words seem to pose a fitting conclusion for the present section.

2.1.3 The Holocaust

The Holocaust[20] is a type of common denominator between the history of Polish Jewry and anti-Semitism. It is the most horrific expression of anti-Semitic attitudes perpetuated on Jews. When we confront the issue of the Holocaust with reference to mutual Christian-Jewish relations, we face a few unavoidable questions: Why was the Jewish extermination carried out on Polish soil? Did Poles do absolutely everything they could to help their Jewish neighbors? Why were Polish Jews continued to be murdered when the War ended?

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[18] Nostra Aetate - the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, expresses a positive regard of the Catholic Church towards other faiths.

[19] http://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BB56CE535-6DC7-41DA-AA53-AF4C926E2CA5%7D

[20] Lucas (2012:7) points to the fact the word "holocaust" was derived from the Greek word "holókauston" meaning "completely burnt" and for hundreds of years the word was used to define various disasters. Only when World War II ended did Ellie Wiesel coin the notion of "Holocaust" (written in uppercase letter) in order to replace the euphemistic "final solution" and thus underline the significance and uniqueness of this particular genocide.

Unfortunately, fundamental as they are, these questions have been answered in extremely contradictory ways, which leads to the conclusion that the history of Polish Jews has totally different interpretations and that there is no common memory of the War and the Holocaust, but instead, at least two distinct memories: one held by Christians and another by Jews. Many authors acknowledge the existence of opposing views regarding the history of Polish Jewry. Gebert (2002:139, in ed. by Kessler et al.) speaks about "separate and irreconcilable visions of Polish-Jewish relations in the past, particularly during World War II." Sinnreich (2008:117, in ed. by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska) draws attention to "(…) controversy and conflict, particularly with respect to depictions of events during the Second World War" and admits that "although these events took place in the same geographic place and time, the aspects emphasized by Poles and Jews and the ways this period fits into the larger national history of each people differ greatly." Furthermore, Lucas (2012:15) and Dreifuss (2008:116, in ed. by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska) demonstrate that even within one community (Christian and Jewish respectively) testimonies of individuals that experienced the War evolved over time and today, as they are being examined, often exclude one another.

It seems that both the Christian and Jewish interpretations tend to accentuate selected events and diminish others, refrain from presenting the broader context and frequently generalize attitudes of the whole communities, which as common sense dictates, will always result in a distorted, incomplete picture. Currently, Poles tend to recall Poland is listed as the top of the Righteous Among Nations[21], accentuate the Nazi penalty for aiding Jews[22] or mention the highly commendable missions such as those of Jan Karski[23] or Irena Sendler[24]. Conversely, a confrontation with the dark spots of Christian-Jewish history (such as the series of pogroms, especially the Jedwabne massacre) took place only in 2000, after the publication

[21] The Righteous Among the Nations is a title given to Jewish rescuers who disinterestedly took on the entire responsibility for the Jews' survival, as opposed to offering one-time, temporary help. The number of Poles granted the title in question remains the highest and is currently 6532 (the second position belongs to the Netherlands - 5413 and the third to France - 3853.)

[22] Only in Poland was any kind of aid provided to the Jewish population (such as refuge, night's lodging, food, money etc.) punishable by the death penalty imposed not only on Jewish protectors, but also on their entire families.

[23] Jan Karski was a Polish courier who, being an eye-witness of the genocide perpetuated on Polish Jews, reached London and Washington in order to inform the free world about Nazi crimes and hence - prevent their further escalation. Unfortunately, the world remained passive.

[24] Irena Sendler cooperated with other members of the Polish Council to Aid Jews (Żegota) and managed to smuggle thousands of Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto to the Aryan side.

of Gross's book, which controversial as it may seem, left Christians stunned and shed light on the myth which presented Christian Poles only as victims and not perpetrators. Jews, on the other hand, see their torment as incomparable to the suffering experienced by Christians and recall that the vast majority of Christian Poles have always demonstrated harsh anti-Semitic attitudes and during the War most were passive onlookers or blackmailers, interested only in financial advantages they could obtain as a result of Jewish extermination.

All in all, adverse opinions regarding such a complicated past do not come as a surprise. Not only was the Holocaust a series of incomprehensibly cruel mass murders leaving millions of broken lives and hearts and a shaken belief in mankind, but also a series of paradoxes that are difficult (if not impossible) to grasp. Pawełczyńska (2004), the Auschwitz survivor, shed light on the paradoxes from the macro perspective. She noticed that the Third Reich, with its secret and anonymous character, resembled a wide branching and hierarchical criminal group, in which SS functionaries constituted the lowest limb responsible to higher links of the authority, up to the top leadership, i.e. the government and the Nazi party. Under the Nazis, the nation acted as a fully legitimized criminal gang, regulated by official decrees, directives and orders, for which its employees were given a salary. Furthermore, when one becomes aware of what this legitimized state entrusted to its personnel, namely unjustified death on a mass scale through random methods, forced, senseless, unregulated labor and/or using Jews as living subject for pseudo-medical experiments, the legitimization of such incomprehensible acts makes the paradox become even more striking.

From the perspective of the micro scale, it is enough to mention the testimony by Eli Zborowski who states:

> "It is very hard for me to generalize attitudes of Poles. When Germans engaged in deranged hunting for Jews, our Polish neighbors protected us in caches, risking their own lives to save ours. But when my father fled from Germans, on his way to a hideout he was murdered by Poles, leaving me, the eldest son, as a caregiver for mother and siblings." (Zborowski 2008:10, in ed. by Cherry and Orla-Bukowska)

Cherry and Orla Bukowska (2008:10) wrote of another salient paradox as well: the simultaneous existence of Polish underground organizations, of which one dealt with fighting Germans but denouncing Jews, whereas the other, the Polish Council to Aid Jews (Żegota)

under the auspices of the Polish Government in Exile provided food, medical care, money, false documents etc. to rescue Jewish residents.

Coming back to the questions posed above, it should be accentuated that Poles are very sensitive to the combination of the two terms, "Poland" and the "Holocaust", for although it is common knowledge that the majority of labor and concentration camps were in operation here, it is very stubbornly emphasized that the idea behind the extermination of the entire Jewish race to lead to the supremacy of Aryan race was of German origin, and only German. The chosen location and realization of the so-called final solution in Poland was a natural consequence of the fact that Polish Jews constituted the largest Jewish community in Europe and before the War every tenth citizen of Poland was of Jewish faith. Hence, phrases such as "Polish concentration camps" that occasionally appear in foreign media or the implication that Christian Poles were responsible for the Holocaust to an extent comparable to the Germans' role result in "a feverish reaction" among Poles, as Gross stated (2015, interview in "Newsweek"). Polish historians (e.g. Bartoszewski 2006:55-57, in ed. by Kozłowski et al.) underline that although concentration camps were built on Polish soil, as an occupied country with no government or governing body, Poland had no influence on the invader's activities. These Polish historians also remind that Christian Poles were imprisoned and murdered as well, that much of the Polish elite were exterminated en masse, and that some extermination camps (for instance in Treblinka) were purposefully located in hard to reach places, which made it difficult to gather information about them.

However, one cannot deny that the inter-bellum period along with the years directly preceding the outbreak of World War II were replete with anti-Semitic disturbances. As early as the first month after Poland regained its independence (November 1918), Polish Jews were assaulted in anti-Semitic pogroms in Kielce (4 people killed, many wounded) and Lwów (72 people killed, 433 wounded). In the following year 35 Jews were murdered in Pińsk, while other pogroms took place in Lida, Wilno, Mińsk, Kolbuszowa and Strzyżow. In 1920, other pogroms were noted in Łuków and the neighboring villages. It is worth underlining that although the wave of violence observed at that time was previously unseen, the Polish authorities of that time did not oppose or persecute such acts thoroughly or efficiently, and as a result many culprits remained unpunished. Also partly in consequence of the economic crisis and anti-Jewish propaganda spread by the right, following Piłsudski's death, Christian-Jewish relations became very tense, which was visible in a number of lethal disturbances (Przytyk, Grodno, Mińsk Mazowiecki, Brześć). When the aforementioned discrimination of

Jewish students at Polish universities is also considered, the broad-based attitude of Christian Poles might have given an impression of a prevailing readiness to collaborate with the Nazis.

Regarding the spectrum of attitudes demonstrated by Christian Poles during the War Polish collaboration with Nazis can also be found. However, as Bartoszewski (2006:45, in ed. by Kozłowski) purposefully stressed: we may not speak about collaboration between Christian Poles and German Nazis *on a national level* since the legitimate Polish authorities in exile overtly expressed their support towards Jews, encouraged providing aid to them and informed the governments of Great Britain, United States and other independent countries about the extreme danger the Jews were facing. Furthermore, by setting up the aforementioned underground organization "Żegota" (the Polish Council to Aid Jews), the only government-financed organization in Europe (!) whose goal was to rescue Jews, help provided to Jewish residents became institutionalized.

When discussing reactions of Christian Poles to the reality of War and Jewish faith, it is impossible to provide a single homogenous description of reactions since people acted differently depending on the changing stages of the War, specific occupation conditions they found themselves in, and in various locations (for instance, in big cities, towns or villages) (Bartoszewski 2006:51, in ed. by Kozłowski). It may be stated that Christian Poles' behavior ranged from a readiness to help regardless of personal cost, through passivity and indifference, to fierce hostility. Out of these three attitudes, a lack of reaction was reported to be the most common (which among other reasons, might be ascribed to the difficult situation Christian Poles faced in an occupied country filled with terror, humiliation and difficulties to provide for one's family and own basic needs). Admittedly, anti-Semitism by Christian Poles during the War was popular and there exists a vast number of testimonies and reports which prove the existence of hostility towards Jews and even reports of joy of their annihilation. Certainly, Jewish citizens of Poland of that time could not feel safe among their Christian neighbors who they felt might murder or denounce them. Some acts of aggression were spontaneous, some planned, some inspired and encouraged by the Nazis, whereas some were the result of hatred that Christian Poles felt towards Jewish Poles. The Jedwabne massacre was probably the worst example, and regardless of its scope or the Nazis' role in its organization and realization (a highly contentious issue among Polish historians), it accentuates that beastly acts by Christians were a fact.

Incomprehensible as it may seem, anti-Semitic disturbances continued to take place in Poland even after the War ended, especially in smaller towns located in the Central and Eastern parts of the country. As one might expect, during this time the riots and pogroms resulted from a number of different reasons: widespread chaos and anarchy, racist and/or political convictions (Jews were commonly regarded as Communists, loyal to the Soviet Union, acting to the detriment of Poland) as well as financial motivations (Christians murdered Polish Jews to prevent their regaining personal property which had already been seized). It is estimated that at least 800 Polish Jews were slain by Christians in the first years following the War (Grabski, Rykała 2010:403, in ed. by Sienkiewicz). The most momentous act of aggression, which resulted in the deaths of as many as 37 Polish Jews, took place in Kielce (July 4th 1946). In Poland today, victims of the Kielce pogrom are commemorated in annual celebrations.

2.1.4 Revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history in Poland

Resurgence of Jewish life in Poland is an ongoing, dynamic process, spreading around the entire country and could be analyzed on three intertwining levels. The first level is national and refers to the official stance represented by Polish secular and religious authorities, the second encompasses activities of numerous public institutions as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, whereas the third pertains to the individual, personal sphere which encourages people to search for one's roots, discover one's identity and/or become better oriented with the history of the Jewish community, without which the history of Poland remains incomplete.

In spite of the fact that following the War the number of Jewish citizens of Poland was relatively high (around 300.000), persistent anti-Semitism among Christian Poles (visible in the riots and pogroms mentioned above) along with the politics advocated by the Communist regime resulted in repeated waves of Jewish emigration (in the years following the Kielce pogrom, 1955-1956 and 1968). However, 1989 brought about significant changes in governing and economy and marked the beginning of increased freedom in many spheres. Open archives enabled objective scientific studies, freedom of religion and press was introduced, new business and travel opportunities made development of international contacts

possible, all of which created a new, fresh atmosphere that affected mutual Christian-Jewish relations as well.

As for as the national level, a number of official visits and speeches undoubtedly accelerated rapprochement between the two communities. First, Poland and Israel resumed their full diplomatic relations which had been broken after the Six-Day War of 1967. Among other milestone events was a visit to Israel, by Lech Wałęsa, the first President of free Poland, during which time he apologized for all the mischief Jews experienced at Polish hands. Furthermore, in 2001 the subsequent President Aleksander Kwaśniewski offered public apologies for the Jedwabne massacre. Also Lech Kaczyński (President of Poland from 2005 to 2010) emphasized the necessity to maintain harmonious relations and supported the erection of the Museum of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

In fact, the above mentioned Museum seems to pose the most significant symbol of the ongoing changes on what could be called an intermediate level, by joining the authorities and common citizens. A large difference of the Museum is its focus not only on presenting the turbulent history of Polish Jewry (like the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem or Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington), but by using symbols, organization and activities it makes the implication that the last word on Christian-Jewish relations is yet to be said. The following is the official mission and vision of the Museum:

> ”To contribute to the formation of modern individual and collective identities amongst Poles, Jews, Europeans and citizens of the world by recalling the thousand years of Polish-Jewish history. To make the Museum of the History of Polish Jews an important and innovative center of research, education and culture - a platform for social change, offering a profound, transformative experience and promoting new standards of narrating history.”[25]

The galleries found in the Museum reflect these assumptions without reserve. The exhibition starts by telling the beginnings of Polish-Jewish co-existence marked by complete cultural, religious and linguistic strangeness, but ends with a high and empty space that symbolizes the continuity of common history, awareness of the past, yet openness to the future.

[25] http://www.polin.pl/en/about-museum/mission-and-vision

It can be proudly confirmed that during the time of its relatively short operation, the Museum has proven to be a great success, attracting thousands of visitors from Poland and from all over the world. Both its traditional function as a museum and as an educational and cultural center which organizes lectures, discussion panels, meetings with artists, concerts, performances and workshops for children have drawn common appreciation and successfully managed to promote the idea of tolerance, variety and dialog among people of all ages and ethnicities. It is also a signal for Jews worldwide that Poland is much more than a huge cemetery, but a place where people can join together to consider the common future.

Another salient institution that involves both Christian and Jewish communities is the Foundation for the Preservation of the Jewish Heritage in Poland, which was established in 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization. The Foundation's aim is to protect and commemorate Jewish sites in Poland and it therefore organizes and coordinates revitalization of synagogues as well as cemetery renovation (including cleaning, fencing and installing commemorative plaques to memorialize different cemeteries). Its renowned educational program "To Bring Memory Back", involves hundreds of schools whose students are educated regarding the 1000 year long history of Polish Jews. Another initiative of the Foundation called "Haverim Friends" focuses on Polish-Jewish youth encounters during which difficult issues, such as national stereotypes, prejudices, anti-Semitism, etc. are discussed and explained.

Also, as its name suggests, the non-profit Polish organization "The Forum for Dialog Among Nations", concentrates on fostering a substantive, factual dialog between Poles and Jews aimed at eradicating antagonistic attitudes based on misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge. The Forum sponsors a number of interesting events, initiatives and programs, such as seminars, publications, exhibitions and youth exchanges. One of its landmark activities, "The School of Dialog" is carried out in middle and high schools both in Warsaw as well as in former shtetls. Its aim is to convey knowledge about the Jewish presence in Poland, encourage common preservation of Jewish historical sites and create space for open discussion, which is a powerful force to abolish long-lasting barriers and reluctance.

Official approval of initiatives aimed to promote Jewish culture and tighten Christian-Jewish relations is visible through the patronage and/or financial support that national and regional authorities grant to certain events. The most significant, regularly held events include: the Festival of Jewish Culture in Cracow (25th edition held in 2015), Singer's

Warsaw Festival (12th edition held in 2015), Pardes Festival of Jewish Culture in Kazimierz Dolny (3rd edition held in 2015), Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church (18th celebration held in 2015) and the Jewish Motifs International Film Festival (11th edition held in 2015). Furthermore, in Poland subsequent anniversaries of historic events connected with Christian-Jewish history (such as the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, its liquidation, the commemoration of victims of the Jedwabne massacre, etc.) are annually accompanied by solemn marches, concerts and other, widely promoted events.

The resurgence of Jewish life in Poland on a personal level involves both Jewish and Christian communities, sometimes blurring the line between what is Jewish, and what is Christian. Poland's chief Rabbi, Michael Schudrich points to the fact that after free and democratic Poland was born in 1989, many families faced identity revolutions as family members either overtly admitted or discovered they were of Jewish heritage (2008:60, in Cherry and Orla-Bukowska). All of these discoveries were definitely unique and individual and at times also surprising and confusing, and often arose as a result of coming across old family documents. At times people had the courage to admit their Jewish roots only on their deathbeds. However, as Schudrich contends, a far more important question was whether Poles who discovered their Jewish origin *wanted* to remain Jews and thus establish a bond with Jewish culture and the Jewish nation and whether there was a possibility to create a Jewish community with all its necessary components among such people.

Today, Poland seems to have passed the test and Jewish life in Polish cities such as Warsaw, Cracow and Łódź is flourishing. Positive changes that are being discussed and initiated in Poland have also been noticed and appreciated by the Jewish community. During a conference marking the 25th anniversary of the renewal of Polish-Israeli diplomatic relations, Jonathan Orstein, the director of the Jewish Community Center in Cracow, explicitly stated:

> "There's a miracle going on in Poland; Jewish life is thriving, and it's easier, safer and better to be Jewish every day in Poland than anywhere else in Europe (…) there has been an amazing rebirth of Jewish life (…) Now the environment is conducive to Jews and they're finding their way back."[26]

This dynamic process is also flourishing in Przysucha. In fact, the present thesis takes special note of how the almost completely devastated synagogue is regaining its former

[26] http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/The-resurgence-of-Jewish-life-in-Poland-406073

spectacular beauty, how the once abandoned cemetery is being restored, and most importantly, how the two estranged communities are beginning to crave for an opportunity to finally get to know one another.

2.2 The research setting - Przysucha

Admittedly, to acquire a full understanding of meanings conveyed by the informants engaged in the present study one needs to understand the realities they currently face. Contemporary Przysucha has no resemblance to Przysucha before the War. Today it is only a small Polish town, where most inhabitants know one another, follow comparable routines and have a similar set of values. With two churches, many shops, a recently erected sports complex, a few schools and a market fair that takes place once a week, life in Przysucha appears calm, predictable and safe. All residents are native Poles and almost all explicitly label themselves as Roman Catholics. The starost, parish priest and mayor all enjoy a high status and authority. In other words, *uniformity* is what characterizes the town today.

A closer look shows the residents take pride in the fact that Oskar Kolberg - a famous Polish ethnographer - was born there. The only Museum in Przysucha bears his name and holds a permanent exhibition telling about his life. The secondary school and main square are named after Kolberg. "Kolberg's Days" is the town's greatest local cultural event in the past 50 years, Kolberg's monument stands in the town center, while a commemorative plaque hangs on the house where he is believed to have lived. Kolberg has obviously been chosen as patron of the local association that aims at promoting Przysucha and the region, all of which suggests he was deeply connected with the town. Surprisingly he was not, he just happened to be born in Przysucha and he was three when his parents decided to move from the town. Needless to say, Przysucha's two hundred year co-existence of Jews and Christians is preserved only in the form of the devastated (yet under renovation) synagogue and overgrown cemetery. The multicultural Przysucha of three squares of Evangelical Germans, Polish Catholics and Jews, with Yiddish, German and Polish heard spoken on the streets - the *diversity* - the reality that the oldest generation still remembers - is gone.

I suggest returning to those times when Jews and Christians lived next to one another as neighbors and analyzing the spatial, economic and social spheres of interaction that the oldest experienced and the youngest have no possibility to remember. By spatial integration I refer

to the territorial deployment of the communities resulting both from top-down decisions as well as personal preferences. The economic sphere represents the main type of interaction - business transactions - that Jews and Christians were involved in, whereas the analysis of the social sphere will encompass mutual perception and visible psychological boundaries that both communities manifested.

It should be stressed that the analysis and interpretation of mutual assessment together with its influence on today's relations is highly difficult to carry out due to the wide range of events that must be taken into account. Concerning world politics, we must remember that soon after the first Jews settled in Przysucha, Poland faced its first partition in 1772 followed by the partition in 1793 and the partition in 1795 - as a result the country ceased to exist and was erased from the world map. Servitude to foreign powers spurred two national uprisings, which entailed harsh repercussions from the occupants. In the 20th century First World War broke out, followed just over twenty years later by the Second World War and the unprecedented massacre of Jews in the form of the Holocaust, executed by Nazis on Polish soil. Therefore, it becomes obvious that political decisions and policies aggressively affected what people thought, how they acted and perceived one another, as well as the regional variables of community and personal inclinations that also played a significant role in Poles' and Jews' mutual assessment of one another.

2.2.1 Spheres of Christian-Jewish interaction before the extermination

Przysucha was first mentioned in written sources in 1415 as "Przesucha". It was formed as a result of the connection of three ethnically different settlements. During the time between the 15th and 17th centuries, Przysucha was a very small village, consisting in fact of only one street (Wiejska), with a population dealing mainly with agriculture. The very first person known to use the title: "from Przysucha" was Rafał - the son of Warsz from the neighboring village of Skrzyńsko. Until the end of the 17th century Przysucha was little more than one of hundreds of tiny villages in Poland, with no industrial significance. It was Przysucha's subsequent owner - Antoni Czermiński, who out of the desire to create a competitive munition center, took all the necessary legal steps to encourage German workers to settle in the town. The first settlement of Germans dates back to between 1710-1713. Jews first settled in the village in the 18th century, between 1710-1776, most likely around 1723 (Trzebiński 1955:88,

in ed. by Barancewicz). German and Jewish districts each composed around 30 ares. The last settlement (Polish Catholics) was founded between 1740-1750 and was three times larger than the remaining two. The formation of the above mentioned quarters as well as the successful economic activities of consecutive owners resulted in Przysucha gaining urban rights in 1745. Formally recognized as a single town, territorially Przysucha was a composition of three separate settlements - each ethnic group lived in their own district which fulfilled basic needs of its settlers, particularly religious ones, since soon the synagogue (1778) and the Catholic church (1786) were erected in Jewish and Christian districts respectively.

It should be emphasized that the spatial layout of the town was regulated by several important documents. The first was the lack of the privilege of *de non tolerandis Judaeis* which formed the basis for the establishment of the Jewish quarter. The next were the privileges issued by consecutive Polish Kings August II and August III, who permitted German and Jewish workers to settle and work in the town and finally - the decree from June 5th 1862 that guaranteed equality of Jewish and Christian population in most of their rights and duties (including abolition of constrictions of Jewish territorial mobility). Territorial separation of the three communities up until 1862 resulted from the royal privileges which stated precisely which parts of the settlement newcomers could occupy, as well as from the fact that the Jewish and Christian communities were culturally, linguistically and traditionally strange to one another, as is repeatedly stated in literature on the region (e.g. Osuchowski, Osuchowska 1993:21; Renz 1994:87-88). Therefore, the settlers *preferred* to live among those who shared their same religion.

Appendix no 1 (page 249) presents the map of Przysucha from 1865, which shows the exact location of the three settlements in question. The map proves that the communities lived separately according to their ethnicity and thus were not *direct* neighbors with inhabitants of other ethnicities. However, in the 1830s it was reported that for unstated reasons, Jews intended to buy houses in the Christian quarter, but all their attempts were refused on the grounds of the original foundation of the Jewish settlement within the Jewish district (Fidos 2006:59, in ed. by Piątkowski). Therefore, until at least 1862 Jews are believed to have remained exclusively on their own territory.

Chapter 1 briefly touches upon demographic changes that took place in Przysucha from the times of the formation of the German, Jewish and Polish quarters up until the extermination of the Jewish population. It was also determined that Jewish inhabitants were

the dominant population. Originally, this was in part thanks to foundation of the Hassidic court by Rabinowicz (the Holy Jew) and due to the fact that in the 18th century Przysucha's economy was thriving. At the same time, a gradual decline of German Evangelicals was observed. The interwar period was characterized by demographic stagnation, whereas German occupation (stationing of German troops and ensuing casualties among inhabitants of Przysucha) and the establishment of the Jewish ghetto (connected with the influx of Jews from neighboring towns and villages) blur the actual image of Przysucha's population. It can therefore be concluded that from 1777 until their eventual extermination, Jews constituted no less than 50% of the total number of residents. Exact numbers are listed in the Figure below:

Year	***Jews***	***Catholics***	***Evangelicals***
1775*	37%	40%	23%
1777*	55.5%	14%	30.5%
1820	65%	29%	6%
1860	78%	21.5%	0.5%
1920	53.5%	46.5%	-----
1939	51.5%	48.5%	-----

*percentage of houses

Figure 7: Population of Przysucha between 1775 and 1939, compiled by the author on the basis of statistics in Zarychta Wójcicka (2006:23-24, ed. by Piątkowski), Fidos (2006:57, ed. by Piątkowski), Nowak (2006:130-131, ed. by Piątkowski), and Gapys and Piątkowski (2006:179, ed. by Piątkowski)

Turning now to economic interactions, Jews earned their living by dealing in trade and crafts (until 1862 Jews were forbidden to buy land and therefore could not establish farmsteads). However, it is worth stressing, that as much as trade was essential to the development of the country, activities connected with business and commercial transactions were still regarded as discreditable according to Polish tradition (Kincler, in Penkalla 1991:3). This might have affected mutual perception of the two communities. As soon as in the first half of 18th century Przysucha played a significant role in national and international trade. A look at the registers of contemporaneous customs house shows that Jews from Przysucha were very active, among others, they exported leather, horns, wax and honey (Guldon 1995:9). In

the 18th century Przysucha was one of the largest towns in the region. Neighboring Radom which today is incomparably better developed was at the time only slightly larger - in 1775 it had 252 houses, whereas Przysucha had 189 (44 German, 33 Catholic and 76 Jewish) (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2006:24, in ed. by Piątkowski). As for the professional structure of the town: the German quarter was inhabited by smiths, gunsmiths, tailors, saddle-makers, wheelwrights, gravediggers and a clothier. Catholics dealt with shoe-making, carting, smithery and agriculture, whereas Jews - predominantly with trade (Abramczyk 2010:77). Furthermore, the Jewish quarter included a musician, a goldsmith, a barber, an administrator and two bachelors.

Concerning the 19th century, life in Przysucha was very similar to life in other small towns in the Duchy of Warsaw and then Kingdom of Poland. 25% of the Christians were farmers, cultivating fields of an average size amounting to approximately one hectare. The remaining Catholics dealt with crafts and were shoe-makers, tailors, skinners, locksmiths, bakers, clothiers and smiths. Both farmers and artisans had home gardens, although crops they grew were used mainly for their own purposes and were not for sale. Commodities manufactured by craftsmen from Przysucha were sold at a local market which took place weekly in the town. As for Jews - similar to their ancestors from previous centuries, they mainly dealt with trade and industry (Fidos 2006:64, in ed. by Piątkowski). Fidos observed that both past and contemporary mutual perception might be affected by financial statistics (2006:60, in ed. by Piątkowski) and emphasizes that inasmuch as incomes of Christian population were comparable, there were great wage differences among Jewish residents: 30% were average or well-off, whereas the rest - poor or very poor. Such a discrepancy in revenues among Jews might have given a false impression that the majority was wealthy, thereby breeding frustration and grudges on the part of the poor Christian peasants.

In regard to the political aspects of the 19th century, it should not be forgotten that the three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793 and 1795) resulted in Austrian (1795-1809) and Russian (1809-1915) occupations, all of which led to gradual impoverishment of the settlement. Marches of troops, requisitions and two uprisings (November Uprising of 1830-31 and the January Uprising in 1863) wreaked havoc in Przysucha and caused increasing oppression of the inhabitants. Depletion of acreage, stagnation of agriculture and industry as well as political factors, such as engagement of residents in the January Uprising led to the official abolishment of urban rights of Przysucha in 1870. Unfortunately, the available literature on the region does not mention crucial facts that might have played a decisive role

in mutual relations, such as the situation of Jews in Przysucha under Russian occupation, their attitude towards aspirations of Polish independence or their participation in the two uprisings. This leaves a significant historical blank spot since collaboration with Russians and suppression of Polish pursuits towards independence appear very often among anti-Semitic slogans popular in Poland today.

Nevertheless, there are writings about certain economic tensions that residents of Przysucha were involved in during the period of Russian control. For example, Abramczyk (2010:80) brings up the notes written by the contemporaneous mayor of the town - Michał Morawski who complained about the degradation of Przysucha and analyzed reasons that led to such a miserable condition of the settlement. The mayor described sourness and discontent of Christians due to the exclusive right of Jews to sell all kinds of drinks (including alcoholic beverages, as well as coffee, orange soda etc.) manufactured by the owners of Przysucha. Furthermore, all the territory of Przysucha was leased out to one of the richest Jewish resident of the settlement - Herszek Kozłowski, which resulted in "double serfdom", as Abramczyk (2010:81) concludes, since the leaseholder aimed at obtaining as many financial profits as possible for himself and for the owner of the settlement. This last fact should be scrutinized more carefully: a Jew was a lease-holder of the whole territory, which means that Christian inhabitants were forced to work land for his profit, a situation that undoubtedly did not result in improving mutual Catholic-Jewish relations. This was an asymmetrical relationship where the Jewish businessman functioned as a patron, whereas the rest of population were his servants. This dependency must have affected Christians more severely, since it was them who predominantly dealt with agriculture and it was them who served a person who was culturally and religiously strange to them.

Additionally, economic tensions are confirmed by the establishment of an association called "The Future" (1912), the main goal of which was to encourage and support economic initiatives among Christian residents in order to "compete with private trade dominated by Jews" (Latawiec 2006:100, in ed. by Piątkowski). It is worth mentioning that the association succeeded in setting up Polish stores not only in Przysucha, but also in neighboring settlements such as Bieliny, Borkowice, Goździków, Skrzynno and Skrzyńsko (Nowak, Piątkowski 2006:148, in ed. by Piątkowski). It is interesting to notice that Jewish shops were more stable than Christian ones despite the clearly unfavorable system under which they operated: Jews could sell merchandise only 5 days a week, whereas their Catholic rivals - 6 days. Jews did not trade on Saturdays since it was their religious holiday or on Sundays, for

otherwise they would have met opposition on the part of the Christian community. Therefore, in order to maximize their profits, Jewish shop owners were known to implement solutions that would result in attracting as many customers as possible: they accepted payment in installments or on credit and generally speaking were very attentive to all their clients, which kept their businesses thriving while arousing animosity and frustration among their Christian competitors.

It was previously mentioned that Oskar Kolberg is one of the most prominent and recognized former residents of Przysucha. However, our discussion here would be incomplete without mentioning another inhabitant of the town - Ludwik Skowyra (1878-1965), a teacher and educationalist, whose relentless efforts were honored by his name being chosen as patron of one of local high schools. Skowyra is credited with introducing a pioneering new form of teaching, as he extended care over his students also after obligatory lessons. What is more, thanks to his commitment, children in Przysucha were involved in non-standard activities such as theatrical performances or other forms of cultural entertainment. Conversely, from the perspective that analyzes relations between Jewish and Christian residents of the settlement, Skowyra might be viewed as a controversial person. It was him, who together with other residents of the settlement, established the aforementioned association "The Future". Furthermore, he was known to have crystallized political views connected with ideas supported by the openly anti-Semitic National Democracy[27] (Latawiec 2006:121, in ed. by Piątkowski). It is worth noting that Skowyra was involved in a serious conflict with Jewish residents of Przysucha who accused him of leading a boycott of Jewish shops and of encouraging Christian children to harass their Jewish colleagues. Jews from Przysucha became so desperate that they submitted two official requests to the educational authorities located in Radom in which they postulated a dismissal of the pedagogue. Although both

[27] National Democracy is a widely understood political right-wing national formation made of a range of formal or semi-formal structures, organizations, associations, clubs etc. in which Jewish issues (such as their function and position within the Polish society and in the world) played a significant role. With the use of various forms of communication (slogans, articles, reports, drawings, conferences, rallies and others) National Democracy supporters aimed at convincing as many Poles as possible (the mobilizing/ activating element in the formation was very important) of the truthfulness of their anti-Semitic objections, according to which Jews acted to the detriment of Poland in political, economic and cultural spheres, which called for actions that would diminish their role. (Bergmann, 1998)

According to Gapys and Markowski (in ed. by Piątkowski 1999, vol. 34, p.45-46, in Nowak, Piątkowski 2006:146, in ed. by Piątkowski) "Political preferences of Polish population living in Przysucha fully overlapped with preferences of residents living in the region of Opoczno which was one of the best known bastion of the right in Poland."

applications were signed by many Jewish residents (70 and 80 respectively), the requests were turned down and Skowyra continued his educational activities (State Archives in Radom, sign. 268, vol. 8, p.460-461, in Latawiec 2006:121-122, in ed. by Piątkowski).

In the second decade of the 20th century the political landscape in Przysucha shifted when Russian occupation was replaced by Austro-Hungarian domination. Although the available literature on Przysucha does not touch upon the situation of Jews under rules of different occupations, broader literature does mention that Jewish status significantly varied depending on whether the governor of Polish lands was Austrian, Prussian or Russian. "(…) the socio-economic position of the Jews and their relationship with the host society depended on the policy of the authorities on whose lands they resided (…)" as Lehmann (2001:9) points out. One should be aware that inasmuch as before the three partitions, Jews posed a separate quasi-estate whose position was regulated by a number of general, local and individual privileges, the new authorities aimed at forced transformation of the Jewish community so that it became unified with other residents of occupied Poland (Wodziński 2010:158, in ed. by Sienkiewicz). The new legal regulations issued by Austrian, Prussian and Russian conquerors are difficult to assess from the perspective of their positive or negative influence on Jewish well-being. On one hand, some of them permanently abolished cumbersome restrictions that the autonomous quasi-estate entailed (which resulted in new economic possibilities), but on the other hand, they generally evolved from liberalism towards absolutism and aggressively affected all spheres of life, including personal and family matters (Wodziński 2010:159, in ed. by Sienkiewicz). Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to mention, that apart from the obvious economic and social repercussions, the enforcement of certain acts had a hidden goal: to prevent Christian-Jewish fraternization. One of the best examples of such regulations was the aforementioned decree from 1862 that equalized Christians and Jews as far as their rights and duties, but in fact aimed to tighten bonds between Jews and Russia in order to suppress Christian-Jewish cooperation leading towards Poland regaining its sovereignty.[28] Therefore, meanings that both communities ascribed to one another were subject to top-down, well thought-out manipulation.

[28]https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/tradycja-i-kultura-zydowska/historia-zydow-w-polsce/historia-zydow-w-polsce-krotki-wyklad-czesc-13

Given that the scope of the present research does not encompass a detailed analysis of the legal situation of Christians and Jews under subsequent occupants, it seems advisable to conclude that the enormous influence of world politics on the lives of average residents, their serfdom and uncertainty of the future must have significantly affected the stability of mutual relations between the communities, in Przysucha as well.

An interesting source of information regarding the settlement in the 20th century is an address book issued in 1930 that lists all the shops and services available in Przysucha at that time. A quick glance at the book suffices to recognize that the majority of the town's shops were owned by Jewish inhabitants, who sold various products such as dishes, cold cuts, haberdashery, colonial goods, etc. The view of the occupational structure of the town is completed by an observation made by Nowak and Piątkowski (2006:137, in ed. by Piątkowski), who mention that during the inter-bellum period Christians earned their living mainly from agriculture and breeding animals as well as metal and building trade. Hence, one may observe that the traditional division of Jews as tradesmen and Christians as farmers was still present before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Holocaust is unarguably the most significant event that influenced Christian-Jewish co-existence, as after the Shoah the pre-war world virtually ceased to exist. Before the Second World War broke out, Poland had faced the First World War followed by regaining its independence after 123 years of servitude. All these milestone occurrences affected attitudes that Christian and Jewish Poles presented towards one another. Nowak and Piątkowski describe certain serious conflicts between the two communities that are believed to have lasted until Nazi Germans invaded Poland (2006:137, in ed. by Piątkowski). Mutual aversion in Przysucha was clearly visible during open community meetings that were held in order to discuss investment and organizational issues crucial for inhabitants of the settlement. The authors report that, while voting, Christians and Jews were grouped into two opposing fractions, so as to block and modify legal acts according to their current needs. Hence, community sessions became a battleground of the two conflicting groups. Bearing in mind the fact that Jewish inhabitants were in the majority, it was easy for them to vote their proposals through, which at times resulted in paradoxical situations, for example: supporting the poor of Jewish faith automatically (without the necessity to submit an application) while demanding such applications from the poor of Christian faith who would like to receive financial assistance (Nowak and Piątkowski 2006:136, in ed. by Piątkowski).

Another conflict arose over division of funds dedicated for improvement of the settlement's infrastructure. The Jews officially protested after the local Council delegated investments solely for the Christian district. However, although it was assumed that Jewish opposition stemmed simply from "hidden animosity towards the Administration and Parish Council" (State Archive in Radom, sign. 11, in Nowak and Piątkowski 2006:137, ed. by Piątkowski), it is interesting to notice that despite the fact that the conflicts erupted in the second and third decades of the 20th century (i.e. half a century after Jewish emancipation), not even one Jewish resident was a member of the Council in question. Nowak and Piątkowski (2006:136) ascribe this situation to "weak Jewish socio-political activity", but such an argument seems questionable taking into account the massive participation of Jewish inhabitants in open community meetings, as well as their regular submission of official written requests as a form of their protests. It is more probable that residents of Jewish faith were simply *not admitted* to local administrative organs.

The 1930s were marked by a series of disturbances in Christian-Jewish relations in the whole of Poland, including Przysucha and the surrounding region (Odrzywół, Przytyk and Radom). Due to their cruel character, the perturbations continue to be recalled, widely discussed and interpreted so as to grasp their meanings. They are especially significant for our study since some respondents from the oldest generation experienced them personally as witnesses or participants. Przysucha faced such a disgraceful incident on November 28th 1935, when Christian inhabitants were physically forced to boycott Jewish shops or allow them to engage in any business transactions. Jewish fair stands were tipped over, windowpanes in their stores broken and Jews beaten and harassed. According to the local School Chronicle which describes the event, the riot was caused exclusively by inhabitants from neighboring villages (not from Przysucha itself). The riot was quelled by local police, although no one was arrested (Osuchowski, Osuchowska 1993:22, Abramczyk 2010:117).

A week earlier (November 20th 1935), a far more brutal situation was reported in Odrzywół (a village located circa 25 kilometers from today's Przysucha), which was also provoked on the grounds of economic competition. The police were unable to suppress the incident before its total eruption, for peasants were armed with pitch forks, scythes and flails. Once again, the situation revolved mainly around not letting Christian farmers enter into any business transactions with Jews or let Jews sell merchandise in their stores. Incited by propagandist slogans spread by the National Democracy, Christian peasants collided with the police, as a result of which 4 people died (3 farmers, 1 policeman), which escalated the

conflict even more, mobilizing supporters of National Democracy in neighboring regions. However, as Abramczyk (2010:119) underlines, activists taking part in this revolt did not manifest hatred based on racial prejudices, since they did not beset Jewish *farmers* whom they met on their way. The riots entailed the necessity to engage hundreds of policemen, armored cars and air reconnaissance, for as many as three thousand peasants were involved in the conflict. The tragic balance of the incident was: 12 persons killed and 25 injured (Abramczyk, 2010:120).

Also in Przytyk (a village located around 30 kilometers from today's Przysucha), National Democracy supporters were very active, as for some time they had been inciting boycotts of Jewish stands and shops and installing Christian stands in order to compete with Jewish ones and spreading propagandist slogans. These tensions escalated on March 9th 1936, a day when a weekly fair took place. The incident started when Christian peasants collided with local police after "an energetic boycott of a Jewish bread stand" (Abramczyk 2010:121). However, in comparison to the engagement of the local police in Odrzywół, on that day in Przytyk, they were reported to be passive and reluctant to act, despite word of mouth reports according to which Jews had been arming themselves and Christian peasants preparing to attack them. The police did not try to suppress the first signals of the upcoming events at which time Jews and Christians began tipping one another's stands over, slapping one another and calling each other names. Consequently, when the fair was nearly finished, serious rioting began, as a result of which 3 people were killed and 13 seriously wounded. Jewish houses were then vandalized and their owners beaten.

Territorial deployment and economic rivalry in Przysucha was accompanied by certain social barriers that both communities manifested. While analyzing mutual relations between Christian and Jewish Poles in neighboring Radom, Piątkowski (2006:143) warily stated that "perhaps it would be true to say that despite the centuries-old presence of Jewish populace in Poland, from 1918-1939 Jews were perceived by Poles as the strangest nation among all minorities living in Poland." Although the conclusion does not refer to Przysucha as such, we may safely assume that it also reflected the situation there.[29] Osuchowska and Osuchowski

[29] Przysucha was inhabited by Orthodox Jews due to its relevance as a Hassidic seat. Therefore, most Jewish residents from the settlement were not interested in integration but chose to remain separate in order to preserve their traditional way of life, unlike in bigger cities (e.g. Warsaw) populated by less religious Jewish dwellers, advocates of Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), who became assimilated and were since referred to as "Poles of the Mosaic faith".

(scholars who deal solely with the town in question), confirm the existence of a solid social border between the two communities in earlier centuries as well:

> "The history of Jews in Przysucha is the history of an abstracted community, living its own life (…) The attitude of Poles to such a numerous group of strange nationality and faith was reluctant. (…) The reluctance of Poles was deepened by a certain mysteriousness of the Jewish community." (Osuchowska, Osuchowski 1993:21-22)

In fact, the only thing that actually bonded the two communities was business, since all other aspects of their lives, such as the existence of separate Catholic and Jewish districts, different cultures, religions and mentalities, revealed their willingness and intention to stay separate. It was not easy (if possible at all) to bring Christians and Jewish Poles closer since allegiance to tradition, religion, clothing, language, education and upbringing had been formed over many years and played a role of utmost importance - it determined national identity, especially among Jews, who happened to live in Diaspora. Renz, who specializes in everyday life in towns located within the Kielce voivodeship between 1918-1939 (the time when Przysucha belonged to the voivodeship in question) also points to the fact that:

> "Poles and Jews living in the same town constituted two separate communities. (…) It is a startling phenomenon: such significant proximity and such great psychological strangeness." (Renz 1994:87-88)

The social barrier mentioned by the authors above was visible in Przysucha's everyday events. For instance, Jewish parents out of fear that "attending a state local school would spoil their children and abstract them from religion and tradition" resigned in entirety from sending their offspring to the school, despite being obliged to pay dues for the school's maintenance (Fidos 2006:71, in ed. by Piątkowski). Instead, they set up their own school - a cheder, where boys were taught to read, write and study the Torah. The social boundary might have also been deepened by the fact that there was a sharp contrast in the level of literacy between Christians and Jews that resulted in an intellectual gap favoring the Jews. The figure below provides exact numbers which make it clear that the number of Jews able to read and write significantly exceeded representatives of the Christian population:

Year	*Christians M**	*Christians W***	*Jews M**	*Jews W***
1810-1815	36%	-	80%	-
1826-1830	25%	22%	94%	3%
1850-1855	12%	8%	60%	-

*M- Men, ** W-Women

Figure 8: The percentage of literacy in the parish of Przysucha between 1810-1855 (Caban, Urban, 1980:31-49)

Additionally, certain nationalistic/religious phobias in Przysucha were revealed in 1905 in connection with the lease of chambers which could serve as classrooms. After an existing Christian leaseholder raised the price of the rent, the vogt of Przysucha, with the intention of keeping the lease costs unchanged, decided to sign a contract with a local Jew. However "local élites could not agree with the fact that the school would be situated on the premises which belonged to a Jewish believer", as a result of which the contract was signed by a Catholic (Latawiec 2006:114, in ed. by Piątkowski). It is interesting to note that the inhabitants overcame their phobias when the Christian leaseholder doubled the price of the rent: only then did they allow to sign the contract with the resident of Jewish faith. However, it should be underlined that the antipathy of Christians was also directed towards inhabitants of other than the Jewish faith, which was reflected in the example of a Russian Orthodox teacher, whose presence in Przysucha resulted in the local parish priest's resignation to continue work in a regional school. "Totally alienated in a strange environment, surrounded by animosity" (Latawiec 2006:120, in ed. by Piątkowski) the Orthodox teacher soon left the town and took up a teaching post in Radom.

All these events prove that despite its lasting multicultural character, inhabitants of the settlement in question for most of the time preferred to live in "peaceful isolation" with other ethnicities, as Renz (1990:153-154) stated, both territorially as well as psychologically. Regular economic interactions were a consequence of certain mechanisms that had been set in place over the years with the help of political and sociological systems in which Christians and Jews happened to live. Incoming Jewish settlers skillfully took up the commercial and entrepreneurial niche that Polish Catholics were unable to fill. First, they worked for the

Polish Kings as minters, bankers or commercial agents. later they also became subjects of the Polish nobility and magnates.

> "In forming a separate estate within the feudal society, and linking the estate of the peasant serfs with the estate of Polish nobility, the Polish Jews then served as ideal economic *middlemen* or *brokers.*" (Lehmann 2001:10)

Lehmann grasped the key idea of the Polish society - Jews took the position of the Polish middle class that due to the feudal system that had persisted over the years was simply non-existent among Polish inhabitants. Leon Noël, the former ambassador of France in Poland, noticed this fact as well.

> "One of the characteristic features of the social system in Poland over the years was the lack of the middle class. Consequently, almost all trade, and then freelance occupations became in certain regions the German, and especially Jewish monopoly." (Noël 1996:32)

The reality of 20th century Poland proved to be highly complicated: regaining Polish independence, awakening of the national spirit among Christians (inevitable after 123 years of serfdom) and the economic crisis significantly affected the stability of Christian-Jewish relations in Poland, including Przysucha. The appearance of a Polish middle class, i.e. the collapse of the traditional social system, seemed to be the last straw that finally broke the camel's back:

> "(…) the situation became more and more complicated when, among Poles who started to live in their own country, the middle class began to appear which in its march forwards met Jewish competition at all times. And thus, the system that had persisted over years, became unbearable. Therefore, the Jewish issue was not as much religious or racial, but rather social and economic." (Noël 1996:32)

The economic nature of anti-Semitic perturbations of the 1930s was also confirmed by other scholars: Abel (speech in 1936, Renz 1994:89) ascribed riots in Przytyk to economic issues, Wapiński (1980) and Tartakower (1938) underlined the decisive role of economic motives in the character of Christian pre-War anti-Semitism. Finally, Renz (1990:150-51, 1994:88-90) pointed to antagonisms on the grounds of economic competition.

Furthermore, Renz, while analyzing Christian-Jewish relations in Kielce voivodeship, shed light on another vital aspect: economic competition as well as non-economic methods of

competing with Jewish rivals was reflected in the fact of a deeply rooted conviction that Jews were the main reason for financial problems of Christian Poles. Jewish competition was perceived as a serious threat on a micro scale (i.e. to individual petty traders) as well as in a broader perspective (as a threat to the entire Polish economy) (1990:150, 1994:86). Christian Poles, being unable to explain their financial difficulties were susceptible to anti-Semitic propaganda which resulted in the eruption of the aforementioned disturbances. The myth of the Jewish economic threat was particularly strong before the outbreak of the Second World War, during the economic crisis experienced in the 1930s. Thus, we may conclude that the Christian attitude towards the Jews confirmed assumptions of the scapegoat theory, i.e. the social psychological theory dealing with prejudice, according to which there is a link between aggression towards minorities and frustration caused by other sources such as constitutional factors, personal/family matters and societal-level issues (Allport 1954).

As Krzemiński and Bilewicz explain:

> "Anti-Semitism was usually described as resulting from widespread frustration and insecurity in times of economic depression, postwar readjustment, or other rapid social change. In the classic formulation of the scapegoating, (1) frustration generates aggression; (2) aggression is displaced toward relatively weak and defenseless minority groups; and (3) the displaced hostility is justified and rationalized by prejudiced attitudes, stereotypical beliefs, and so on." (Krzemiński, Bilewicz 2010:236)

Consequently, incidents in Przysucha, Przytyk and Odrzywół might be ascribed to a distorted perception of reality, in which depriving Jews of their shops and stands would result in improving the economic condition both on a personal and national scale.

Renz also mentions other aspects that determined mutual relations between the two communities during the inter-bellum period, such as extant religious antagonisms that juxtaposed Jewish perception of themselves as a chosen nation following the one true God versus the Catholic view of the Jewish community which perceived Jews mainly as the killers of Christ. Furthermore, Jews were believed to use the blood of Christian children to produce matzoh (unleavened bread), an insinuation popular among illiterate Catholic peasants. Widespread sayings summarized popular Polish opinions about Jewish habits, business, behavior or appearance, predominantly in a pejorative way, with a few positive exceptions. Christians often referred to Jewish liturgy negatively or stated they were negligent of their

hygiene or wore scruffy clothes, while at the same time acknowledging Jewish solidarity, patience, intelligence or frugality (1990:152-153).

To summarize, although feudalism no longer had any legal basis since its abolishment in 1848, its main features survived, which meant that the status of Polish Jews as the main representatives of Polish middle class remained unchanged until the disintegration of the Jewish community during the Second World War. However, despite the fact that traditionally the two communities functioned in a certain kind of symbiosis, with a clear division of roles and duties (Christian farmers and Jewish merchants), we could see that their relations, although for most of the time reciprocal and cooperative, were ambivalent and tense, ready to escalate in more difficult circumstances.

2.2.2 Spheres of Christian-Jewish interaction after the extermination

The outbreak of the Second World War resulted in the embodiment of huge parts of Polish territory into the Soviet Union and German Reich as well as the establishment of the General Government (also called the General Governorate, in German: Das Generalgouvernment für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete- GG) over central Polish areas. The GG was divided into four districts, among which Przysucha was included as part of the Radom district. The GG gradually introduced anti-Semitic legislation, a consequence of which Jews were discriminated against, segregated, deprived of basic needs, restrained in terms of their territorial mobility and exterminated. In order to execute Operation Reinhardt (the codename for the secretive plan of Nazi Germany to murder Polish Jews living in the General Government district of occupied Poland on a mass scale), it was necessary to define the term "Jew" as well as a "Jewish business enterprise". This began to be carried out on July 24th 1940 on the basis of a decree issued by Adolf Hitler. The decree was broadly worded and introduced such notions as: "a full Jew" and "a Jewish *Mischling*" (hybrid Jew) in order to encompass a wide range of Jewish residents.[30]

As far as segregation and discrimination are concerned, according to another act of law issued on November 23rd 1939 all Jews were obliged at all times to wear a sewn on white

[30] https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Definition.html

badge with the blue Star of David on it, as well as mark their shops with the Star, so that it was immediately clear which businesses were Jewish. Piątkowski remarked that:

> "Enforcement of this legislation first of all aimed at humiliating the Jewish populace and their peculiar revilement. Germans also gained some 'practical' benefits from this practice. The badges made it easier to recognize Jews on the streets when it was necessary to organize a group of forced laborers (…) Jewish shops marked with the Star became target for robberies and other harassment carried out by Nazis. All of this made daily lives of Jews significantly harder and the introduction of the markings is commonly regarded as the beginning of organized repressions". (Piątkowski 2006:160)

As described, apart from its humiliating effects, enforcement of the Jews wearing the Star of David entailed other repercussions connected with another tactic of the ruthless politics of Nazi Germany: forced labor. In the Radom district, the official announcement regarding this ordinance took place on October 26th 1939, nearly two months after the German invasion of Poland, and as Piątkowski emphasizes, it was "enforced with hard and fast consequences" (2006:161). The decree was followed by another more specific act released on December 12th 1939, which precisely stated that all Jewish inhabitants from the ages of 14 to 60 were subject to forced labor for two years unless prolonged. It is important to note that the work Jews were compelled to perform was usually absurd and meaningless, which suggests that the real aim behind it was to humiliate, harass and ridicule them further (2006:161).

Segregated, discriminated against and obliged to carry out servile and punishing duties, the Jews were additionally repressed financially, the aim of which was to deprive them of essential needs. On the basis of a decree from November 29th 1939 all Jewish bank accounts and deposits were blocked and controlled. A month later (December 16th 1939) Jews became no longer eligible for unemployment benefits, pensions and annuities. On January 24th 1940 they were forced to report all their possessions and subsequently hand them over to a trust (in German: das Trauhändwesen), which in practice meant expropriation of all Jewish real estate and property by Nazi Germany. Such proceedings of economic exploitation resulted in divesting thousands of Jewish inhabitants of their essentials less than half a year after the outbreak of the Second World War. Furthermore, Jewish communities (kahals) were abolished, ritual slaughter banned and Jewish schools closed.

Nevertheless, as severe as these tactics must have been, the above mentioned repressions were only a prelude to the key phase of the Nazi policy: establishment of ghettos and the Jews' subsequent liquidation. The process began with numerous deportations, as a result of which Przysucha faced frequent demographic fluctuations. In 1940 the first influx of 1,500 newcomers from neighboring Przytyk settled in Przysucha, whereas in the spring of 1941 Jews from Ciechanów district (Regirungdbezirk Zichenau) arrived. It is estimated that the total number of settlers were around a thousand (Gapys and Piątkowski 2006:179, in ed. by Piątkowski), eventually, in 1941 circa 1,500 Jews from Szydłowiec and 1,000 from Drzewica were relocated. All in all, it is assumed that when the liquidation of the ghetto started there were 6,500 Jews in Przysucha. The first decree that restrained territorial mobility of Jewish inhabitants was issued on June 20th 1941, according to which Jews were not allowed to leave their current abode under the threat of penalty of a three month custody or a 1,000 zloty fine. A month later, the vogt of Przysucha released a document which banned Jews from entering fields, pastures, meadows, balks and forests. Finally, on July 10th 1941 the decision to restrain the Jewish populace within a particular quarter of the town was announced. Interestingly, all the three aforementioned ordinances had official justifications: the first aimed at fighting against illegal, under-the-table trade, the second protected crops from being destroyed, whereas the third was supposedly intended to stop the spread of infectious diseases such as typhus.

The ghetto of Przysucha encompassed two parts of the settlement: the first was located around the synagogue (limited by what are now Wiejska and Warszawska streets and the local park), the second, far smaller part extended along what are currently the Kręta, Ściegiennego and Krakowska streets. Due to the fact that Przysucha was inhabited both by local Jews as well as Jews that had been relocated, one of the most serious problems in the ghetto was overcrowding (one house was inhabited by as many as 15-20 people), which resulted in the eruption of many diseases (particularly scabies, dysentery and typhus). This was a paradoxical situation bearing in mind the fact that officially the establishment of the ghetto was a preventive measure against such illnesses. Additionally, Jewish houses were often robbed, their owners or even accidental passers-by shot or beaten, especially by one especially cruel gendarme named Moritz.

The final liquidation of the Przysucha ghetto, which was initiated between the 27th- 31st of October 1942 (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:36), proceeded according to a typical scheme.

Germans asked all the Christian inhabitants of the settlement who had a cart and a horse to arrive in front of the Catholic Church in order to take their Jewish neighbors to the railway station in Opoczno. There they were loaded in cattle cars to be transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka. Jews were allowed to take with them some personal belongings (no heavier than 20 kg). Around 100 Jewish residents were told to remain in the settlement (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:36)[31]. We can only imagine how horrific the scenes of forced deportation must have been: available literature mentions around a hundred Jews were killed on the spot, either because they refused to follow the orders or because of their disabilities, old age or illnesses. The Jews that remained in Przysucha served two grim functions: they were obliged to bury their fellow Jews murdered during the relocation and search through their abandoned houses in order to find any valuables left behind. It is assumed that the group remained in Przysucha until February 10th 1943 at which time they were transported to a "temporary" camp in Ujazd, from where they were taken to Treblinka (Gapys and Piątkowski 2006:183, in ed. by Piątkowski).

Considering the aforementioned hell unleashed by the Holocaust, the analysis of mutual interactions during the War revolves predominantly around the issue of what help Christians provided or failed to provide to their Jewish neighbors in need. As touched upon in the previous section of the present chapter, the question is more complicated than it appears to be at first glance and I personally agree that it must have taken enormous courage to risk one's life and the lives of one's entire family in order to save the life of what was very often a stranger. Urbański, a historian dealing with Jewish extermination in Radom district, points to a few crucial facts that shed a broader light on the problem:

- Jews were being exterminated while the entire world remained passive,
- Germans took advantage of the most depraved Christian and Jewish Poles to reach their goal,
- the occupational reality entailed attitudes that were uncommon in normal circumstances (people first of all cared about themselves and their own families and only afterwards did they consider helping others),
- sometimes Jews refused help, for instance offered by clergy, for fear of forced conversion.

[31] Gapys and Piątkowski mention only 60-80 people (2006:182, in ed. by Piątkowski).

Taking into consideration all these exemplary aspects Urbański concludes that:

> "on the territory of Radom district the attitude of Polish society towards Jewish populace was no different than in other parts of the country. There were some who helped sacrificially and paid with their lives for it, there were some who denounced, many remained indifferent. Help was provided to Jews for various reasons: patriotic, Christian, sometimes material." (Urbański 2004:217-218)

Gapys and Piątkowski (2006:183, in ed. by Piątkowski) mention that thanks to the sacrifice of a few Christian families some Jews from the group responsible for cleaning up after the main deportation managed to survive. Zarychta-Wójcicka added that at least several Jews were hiding in Przysucha and the region after the liquidation of the ghetto.

> "People who took them under their roofs did it for many motives, but all of them risked their lives. Some of the hidden Jews were murdered by Poles for profit, some - denounced, robbed and beaten by residents of Przysucha and Skrzyńsko (a neighboring village) (…) Some Jews survived and came back to look for information about the close ones. However, they left soon since their houses and shops already had new owners." (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:36)

The tragic picture of the Holocaust in Przysucha is completed by an excerpt taken from the diary of Zofia Michocka, one of the town's residents (in Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:57-59). The fragment touches upon the beginnings of the Second World War and illustrates the entire range of emotions that the inhabitants of Przysucha were filled with. In very vivid and suggestive language the author depicts how hope, fear and faith were interwoven and the manner in which people dealt with their new unexpected reality. At some point Michocka mentions that out of fear of German bombs, Christian and Jewish inhabitants "squeezed together in ditches" (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:57), which gives an impression of some form of cooperation between the two communities. However, the part she wrote pertaining to the procedure of deportation of the Jewish populace points to the extremely disgraceful behavior of Christians who "were generally pleased" with the situation and "delighted in Jewish suffering" (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:59). It is interesting to stress that although the author did not share the feeling of joy that was popular among Christians in Przysucha she regarded her attitude as "a weakness". Tensions in mutual Christian-Jewish relations were also reflected in

the author's commentary of how Jews, facing the unavoidable deportation, destroyed their valuables so as to prevent goys from taking over their possessions. Finally, she reported:

> "I saw corpses with butchered heads, some banged up cheeks or backs, but around the corner peasants were on the lookout for loot, like hyenas for grub. It is awful that the smell of human blood was still fresh, and bloody corpses around, but their houses already being robbed. It was disgusting and painful beyond description" (Michocka's diary, in Zarychta-Wójcicka 2009:59).

The excerpt, although obviously very subjective (as personal diaries always are), sheds light on the extent to which Christian-Jewish relations were complicated, especially during the War which blurred moral rules normally guiding human behavior. The level of complication is shown by the fact that the author herself was filled with contradictory emotions: on one hand she was fully aware of the incomprehensible tragedy that Jews had to go through, on the other - she felt ashamed that she was incapable of enjoying the situation. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that if one person demonstrated such opposing emotions one might expect that the analysis of relations between the whole communities does not allow its interpretation to be squeezed into a simple binary format.

In today's homogenous Przysucha there are no Jewish settlers, but only frequent Jewish visitors who come to see the synagogue and the cemetery. They arrive either as an organized group, by coach or even a couple of coaches, or independently - with their families. The groups of visitors, usually dressed in their typical outfits (long, black coats, black hats, with sidelocks) are easily noticed, since once they have parked their bus near the synagogue (or the cemetery) march towards the other destination in a multitude, talking, laughing or singing. Their age varies: sometimes they are Jewish schoolchildren, sometimes - adults. More often than not Mr. Bomba (who cares for the synagogue) and Mr. Werens (the cemetery caretaker) receive a call about the incoming visit so that the group can enter their sacred places and pray in peace. Now and again, Jewish visitors, upon coming unannounced, knock on Mr. Werens' door and ask him to open the ohelot (mausoleum). A careful observer will also notice that both caretakers will prepare a bowl with water so that the Jewish guests can rinse their hands, as their tradition dictates. Furthermore, organized groups are protected by the local police who patrol the area a couple of times before the bus arrives and afterwards supervise the visit. Hassidim are known to pray ecstatically, therefore, they move their bodies, shake their heads,

perform dance-like moves, and generally speaking - they engage themselves in their prayers vigorously. Christian passers-by and onlookers are not well seen during their visits.

As far as the other Jewish visitors are concerned, due to a lack of special features in the form of eye-catching outfits or behavior atypical of local residents (such as euphoric prayers), their visits are hardly noticed.

An analysis of mutual relations after the extermination of Jewish inhabitants must not exclude a commentary on recent Polish-Jewish meetings in Przysucha. Two meetings have already taken place and pose a wonderful example of the modern trend that aims at bringing the two communities closer together. Both meetings were organized by David Chernobilsky from Israel, who not only has family roots in the area, but is also fully aware of the importance of Przysucha as a famous Hassidic center. The gatherings (as their author prefers to call them) are aimed at drawing from local Hassidic tradition and invited all people interested in revival of Jewish culture in Poland to meet in order to discuss issues that Hasidism promoted, such as dialog, expression of emotions, healing, etc. Although both events (in 2013 and 2014) were barely promoted and the message about them was spread solely by word of mouth (which resulted in a small turnout of local residents), Mr. Chernobilsky takes credit for motivating local school teachers to encourage high school students to take care of the Jewish cemetery and share a report on their work through a multimedia presentation. Undoubtedly, it was an unprecedented event - local youth cleaned the cemetery and deciphered Jewish matzevot (tombstones). The last slide of their presentation read: "We remember and continue caring for the dead". Additionally, it is worth noting that following Mr. Chernobilsky's meetings, all participants had a chance to eat lunch together and afterwards - walked to visit the sacred Jewish sites.

2.2.3 Jewish heritage in the town

When discussing Jewish heritage in Przysucha, one can make two basic distinctions: the first differentiates between intellectual and physical heritage, whereas the second - between heritage left by ordinary Jews and religious leaders. By intellectual heritage I mean the contribution to the Hassidic movement that the rebbes (rabbis, religious leaders of the Hasidic sect) from Przysucha may be credited with. Physical heritage refers to the synagogue, Jewish

cemetery and the tzadik's house. Obviously, these distinctions overlap: intellectual heritage was left by prominent Hassidic leaders, while the synagogue along with the cemetery pose examples of the historical remains of ordinary Jewish citizens from the town. Only the ohels (structures around graves) and the tzadik's house which attract Jewish visitors from all over the world seem to blur the distinctions described: they belong to what is considered the "physical heritage" group, but exist thanks to intellectual and spiritual superiority of the Holy Jew and his followers.

Rebbes from Przysucha

All the prominent figures connected with Przysucha represented a branch of Orthodox Judaism called Hassidism (which denotes "piety" or "loving kindness"). It is a religious and social movement that originated in Eastern Poland in the 18th century. One of the best recognized precursors of the movement was Yisra'el ben Eli'ezer, known as Ba'al Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name; abbreviated Besht). Besht was a healer, expert on herbs and plants, as well as a mystic who carried a new religious message. Ba'al Shem Tov advocated ecstatic zeal in religious practices, at the same time he discarded the religious paradigm according to which asceticism was the only way to holiness and salvation. Under his teachings study of the Torah ceased to be regarded as the best method to reach God and all the actions that a human being engages oneself in, even the most mundane, were supposed to exert great influence on God. Hence, Hasidism resulted in enormous changes in Jewish religious and social life. Judaism became less formalized, but more emotional and personal. Boundaries between the sacred and profane were no longer clear.

It is worth underlining that Hassidism came to exist in the form of spontaneously created elitist groups consisting of Torah scholars and kabbalists. Only after the death of Besht did his followers began to call themselves Hassidim. It was a term previously applied to individuals who were found to be especially pious and as a consequence of this piety allowed to adopt distinctive ritual practices. However, Hassidism has never turned into a centrally organized movement, but continued to consist of a wide range of groups and sub-groups, who advocate certain approaches and ideologies. Since the 19th century Hassidic sub-divisions have been identified by the dynasty of their spiritual leader along with the name of the town in which the so called "courts" of these dynasties were established. A tzadik, meaning "righteous one", (also known as rebbe or admor) represented a new kind of leadership in Judaism. The tzadik was neither elected or appointed, nor did he have to prove his determination to study Torah.

Nevertheless, thanks to his charisma and spiritual eminence, he enjoyed great status, prestige and authority. A tzadik took his post due to allegiance expressed by his followers or by his descent from a dynasty of previous tzadiks. The history of Hassidism is in fact the history of dynasties that subsequent tzadikim came from (Wodziński 1998:22).

Before Ba'al Shem Tov died, he had managed to teach a wide range of followers, thanks to whom Hassidism thrived. One of the most outstanding figures among Besht's disciples was Dow-Ber (Maggid) from Międzyrzecz, whose disciples gave rise to the majority of Hassidic dynasties. Another tzadik that was closer to the rebbes from Przysucha was Magid's pupil-Elimelech Lippman from Leżajsk, who started a principal Hassidic center there. Rebbe Elimelech had two disciples that are important for our current discussion: one was Israel Hepstein of Kozienice and the other, Yaakov Yitzchak Horovitz (the Seer) from Lublin. The first worked as a melamed (teacher of Hebrew language and religious practices) in Przysucha and not until in 1798 did he move to Kozienice. Horovitz exerted enormous influence on Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz (the Holy Jew) - the founder of the school and dynasty of Przysucha[32]. Literature repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the school and dynasty in question. Wodziński (1998:19) states: "All the subsequent development of Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland is, to a large extent, the history of the school of Przysucha." or "We can say that for the Kingdom of Poland the school of Przysucha became the leader" (Wodziński, 1998:21). Buber (1989:63) asserts: "A great and independent community is the school of Przysucha along with its sister-school in Kock. (…) Its uniqueness may be grasped only when one grasps the uniqueness of its founder - Jehudi". It is essential to notice that one of the chapters in Buber's book is titled: "Przysucha *and related schools*" (my italics), which clearly points out that the school of Przysucha gave rise to other, highly significant Hassidic centers in Kock, Warka, Góra Kalwaria and Aleksandrów.

Due to the fact that Yaakov Yitzchak from Przysucha had the same name as his spiritual Master from Lublin, he was given the nickname "Jehudi" (Jew), but he soon became called the "Holy Jew", which proves his superior character. As a child, Jehudi was very inclined to asceticism and Talmudic studies, which, as we already know, was not the key concept of the Hassidic movement. Buber (1989:63) mentions a few anecdotes connected with young Yaakov. For instance, even if he was punished, he refused to pray at fixed hours together with

[32] See Appendix no 2 (p.250) for the presentation of the *Biala* dynasty originated by Jaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz of Przysucha.

his community. Instead, he preferred to meditate individually, after the synagogue had closed. Being a boy, he also went to mykvah (ritualistic bath) on his own (not in a group of several men as was the custom), although the water was freezing cold. Only after he had met Rebbe Abraham Joshua Heschel from Opatów did he become interested in Hassidic ideas. However, it was the Seer from Lublin to whom the Holy Jew was most deeply attached and by whom-influenced. "Although the bond with Rebbe from Lublin was the reason for many fears and bitterness, Jehudi regarded it as most significant", wrote Buber (1989:64). Their relation was very tumultuous, for they advocated different ideologies, as the Holy Jew opposed miracle-centered Hasidism, supported by Rebbe Horovitz. Hostility that arose between the two masters resulted in suspicions that it was the Seer who, by the use of magic, had killed the Holy Jew when he was still in his prime. According to another legend - the Holy Jew was supposed to choose if it was his master or himself that should be kept alive. Jehudi's death revealed his decision.

The most outstanding disciple of Yaakov Yitzchak from Przysucha was Simcha Bunem - a writer, woodmonger and a pharmacist. After Jehudi died, Hassidim from Przysucha pledged allegiance to Rebbe Bunem, however, he accepted their choice with great resentment. As Buber (1998:65) reports, Bunem made his disciples wait for his preaching or advice all day long because he found his new duties so difficult to fulfill. However, once Rebbe Bunem was ready to teach, he was able to exert tremendous impact on his disciples, causing them to have a spiritual breakthrough and renounce their families, home and money to remain close to their master. Some Rebbes were anxious about the influence of Simcha Bunem: "I don't have anything against Rebbe, for he is a tzadik, but this way is dangerous for his disciples. We serve many years to gain power and zeal that they gain there in one instance. God forbid that the evil spirit of Venus appears there"- as Rebbe Naftali from Ropczyce reportedly said (Buber, 1998:68). After Simcha Bunem died in 1827 some Hassidim accepted the authority of his son - Abraham, but most followed Rebbe Menachem Mendel from Kock. It is worth underlining that other disciples from the school of Przysucha such as Israel Yitzchak Kalish from Warka, Isaac Meir Alter from Góra Kalwaria, Henoch Henich Kohen Levin from Aleksandrów and Yaakov Arie Guterman from Radzymin played a significant role in shaping 19th century Hassidism as well. Both Jehudi and Simcha Bunem dedicated their lives to encouraging their disciples to repent and prepare for salvation (Buber 1998:66). Under their influence Hassidism moved closer towards Talmudic studies (Wodziński 1998:18-19).

Martin Buber compiled a number of Hassidic tales that prove the exceptional wisdom of Rebbes connected with Przysucha. Some of these tales are anecdotes thanks to which we discover the symbiotic relation between the tzadik and his Hassidim, while others pose examples of their preaching. The scope of the current discussion does not encompass a closer analysis of their content and meaning, however, let me take the liberty to quote a tale that I had known long before I started to work on the history of Jews from Przysucha, at which time I had no clue that this was a tale spread by the local Jewish spiritual leader - Simcha Bunem.

"*Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need.*

When feeling lowly and depressed, discouraged or disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words: For my sake was the world created.

But when feeling high and mighty one should reach into the left pocket, and find the words: I am but dust and ashes." (Buber 1998:228)

Jewish cemetery in Przysucha

Located by Wiejska street, established around 1745 and extended in 1929, the local Jewish cemetery is regularly visited by Jewish pilgrims due to the ohels which were built over the remains of tzadiks from Przysucha. Wodziński (1998:7) points to the "enormous significance (of tzadiks' tombs) in Jewish culture, and especially in the religious cult of Hassidim. Ohel (…) is one of few elements of Jewish world in Poland which despite the Holocaust and exodus have remained culturally present. Paradoxically - a tomb is a living place" - the author concludes. The ohels in Przysucha were erected thanks to the Foundation of Nissenbaum Family, which in 1987 had the area cleaned, installed a metal fence and constructed solid tombs in memory of the Hassidic leaders who had been active in the region. The first, single ohel commemorates Abraham of Przysucha (died in 1806), one of the first propagators of Hasidism in central Poland. The other, double ohel honors Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz (the Holy Jew), Simcha Bunem, Jerachmiel from Przysucha (the son of the Holy Jew), Yaakov Isaac Elchanan from Przysucha (the son of Jerachmiel from Przysucha, the grandson of the Holy Jew), Jerachmiel Juda Meir from Przysucha (the son of Yaakov Isaak Elchanan from Przysucha, the great-grandson of the Holy Jew) and Cwi Hirsch Mordechai (the grandson of Simcha Bunem).

The Jewish cemetery in Przysucha is indeed a living place. On entering one can see a number of candles and many kvitelach (little notes) which literally fall out of tombs of the Holy Jew and Simcha Bunem - there are so many of them. Kvitelach prove that the position of tzadiks in the Hassidic movement is quite exceptional. Its ideological basis is the quotation from the Bible: "(…) the righteous has an everlasting foundation" (Proverbs, 10, 25). A tzadik poses the ultimate source of religious knowledge, his words have the same value as the words of God. Having such a perfect soul that he can be united with God, he is so merciful that he descends to average human beings in order to make them closer to God and present their personal prayers. Not only do tzadiks help with matters connected with faith, but also with mundane issues such as business, marriage or general worldviews. The habit of submitting kvitelach originated due to the fact that tzadiks could not talk to all their disciples in person. The most influential Hassidic courts had even hundreds of thousands followers, so kvitelach started to be the key form of communication between the tzadik and his Hasidim (Wodziński 1998:28). Hassidic pilgrims believe that once a year the soul of their tzadik comes back to the site where his body was buried and takes all the prayers that he finds there to God. The ohels in Przysucha are one of the most popular destinations of Jewish pilgrimages.

According to the Virtual Shetl website, the last burial at the Jewish cemetery in Przysucha took place in 1942. During the same year the cemetery was devastated by Germans who used the gravestones to indurate the local military police station. After the War, during the Communist regime, local authorities planned to close the cemetery and use its area (1.35 hectares) to create a park. The cemetery hosts about twenty destroyed gravestones and two well-preserved ones. The oldest matzeva dates back to 1771. Recently, students from the local High School cleaned the territory from soil, leaves and moss and, with the help of professionals from the Jagiellonian University, prepared the documentation of the cemetery (that included decipherment and translation into Polish personal data of the deceased).

The tzadik's house

Nearby the synagogue there is a small, grey house, inhabited by local residents. There is no commemorative plaque on it, but according to the literature on the subject (Penkalla no year given:152), the house was inhabited by the last tzadik of Przysucha, or even the Holy Jew himself. (The assertion seems quite questionable since features of the building suggest it was erected in the second half of the 19th century.) Interestingly, not even the house owners are aware that the building is believed to have such a fascinating history.

The synagogue

The synagogue in Przysucha was erected as a consequence of permission extended by the Archbishop of Gniezno. The permission was granted under the condition that 3,000 zloty were to be paid by the Jews to support the erection of the Catholic church in town. (Zarychta-Wójcicka 2006:27, ed. by Piątkowski). The synagogue is a massive limestone building, occupying an area of 650 square meters. Before the erection of the Church, the building towered over Przysucha. Its main prayer chamber is rectangular, with a vaulted ceiling descending in the middle towards a four-piered structure formerly framing the bima (reader's podium). The Torah ark (aron ha-kodesh), framed by a portal topped with stucco griffins along with some wall polychromies have been preserved. One of the external walls (from the Eastern side) holds a "cune" which served as a punishment for petty criminals. Unfortunately, after the extermination of the Jewish population the building gradually began turning into a ruin. Over the years it was used as a fertilizer store or left abandoned and unattended. The only renovations it had undergone until it was taken over by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland were partial and did not halt the process of deterioration. Only after 2007 when the Foundation took over care of this rare and precious remnant of Jewish life in Przysucha did its condition visibly improve.

Currently, as the present dissertation is being written, the Foundation is facing financial difficulties resulting from refusal on the part of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage to continue supporting the renovation of the synagogue. The financial assistance obtained so far has enabled only necessary renovation works so as to prevent the synagogue from collapsing. Due to the fact that the building is one of largest baroque synagogues in the entire country, as well as the significance of its location in the former thriving Hassidic center, the Foundation has undertaken two steps. First it has rejected the decision of the Ministry with the intention of reaching a compromise on the matter and has nominated the synagogue to the World Monument Watch List for year 2016 - an organization that since 1996 has been calling international attention to all heritage sites worldwide which face risks of all kinds: natural, social, political and economic. As of today (March 2015), the renovation works remain suspended.

3. Methodology and techniques of the research

Chapter 1 aimed at outlining fundamental assumptions, concepts and methodological guidelines of Symbolic Interactionism, as interpreted by Herbert Blumer. The justified use of the Grounded Theory, which poses the methodological framework of the current study, has also been presented. The task turned out to be quite a complicated endeavor due to the magnitude of publications on the subject and the lack of agreement on many crucial issues even between the theory's originators. As mentioned, since its inception in the 1960s the theory has evolved in three different directions underpinned by competing ontological and epistemological positions. Even intuitively, one may assume that a kind of "pick and mix" approach is not advisable in a serious project. Every research should also be congruent with the scholar's personal views on reality. Therefore, in the present thesis it is Kathy Charmaz's version of GT that has been chosen.

Although, as shown in Chapter 1, it is possible to also track down a constructivist thread in the works by Strauss and Corbin (1994, 2008), Kathy Charmaz was the first to explicitly label her GT as constructivist. Apart from the philosophical perspective advocated by Charmaz, also the way she employs the Grounded Theory attracted me as a researcher. Her focus on flexibility, encouragement to use the method instinctively and her underlining the role of a researcher as a co-constructor of the theory - all determined my choice of her methodological framework. Charmaz's stand appears to be very coherent: she developed her constructivist theory in response to Glaser and Strauss's invitation extended in their original publication to "codify and publish their *own* methods for generating theory" (Glaser, Strauss 2006:8). Paradoxically, Charmaz's version was subsequently criticized by Glaser who noticed that her suggested divergences from the original method were so significant that her newly developed version could no longer be regarded as Grounded Theory (Glaser 2002). Nevertheless, by sticking to her ideas, Charmaz proved that her incentives to follow one's feelings rather than rigid rules bear much meaning.

The present chapter aims to clarify what questions are asked and what answers are sought for in a research study guided by constructivist methodology. The text will cover ontological, epistemological and methodological issues since they highly influence subsequent evaluation of the quality of a generated theory. After that, Charmaz's practical and technical guidelines as how to apply the theory as such will be addressed. All stages that constitute the method will be covered, such as data collection, coding, development of categories, memoing, etc.

Certain salient notions such as sensitizing concepts, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation will be explained. Furthermore, some limitations that may be found in GT (as in any other research methodology) will be delineated. Finally, a detailed "report" will be submitted showing how the theory has been employed in the present research.

3.1. Grounded Theory Methodology (Kathy Charmaz's version)

Full understanding of Kathy Charmaz's interpretation requires looking both at her philosophical commitment to constructivism as well as the practical guidelines she offers. As far as the first issue is concerned, I suggest a closer look at the conclusions of Guba and Lincoln who confirm that "differences in paradigm assumptions cannot be dismissed as mere 'philosophical' differences, these positions have important consequences for the practical conduct of inquiry, as well as for the interpretation of findings and policy choices" (1994:112). To prove their stance, the authors compiled a list of questions, answers to which differ significantly depending whether they are provided by constructivists, positivists or supporters of other philosophical approaches. These questions are indeed crucial to every research study along with their subsequent evaluation and are as follows:

1. What is the aim of a research study?
2. What is the nature of knowledge?
3. How does knowledge accumulate?
4. What criteria are appropriate for judging research quality?
5. What is the role of values in a research study?
6. What is the place of ethics in a research study?
7. What voice is mirrored in the researcher's activities?

Table no 6 clarifies the constructivist position on these issues:

Issue	***Constructivist position***
Research aim	Understanding, reconstruction
Nature of knowledge	Individual reconstructions revolving around consensus

Knowledge accumulation	More informed reconstructions
Quality criteria	Trustworthiness, authenticity
Values	Included-formative
Ethics	Intrinsic
Voice	Passionate participant

Figure 9: Constructivist position on selected issues by Guba and Lincoln (1994:112, in ed. by Denzin and Lincoln)

Therefore, scholars committed to constructivism aim to understand constructions that individuals hold, remain open to new interpretations, yet struggle towards reaching a consensus. Once a consensus is reached, we may speak of knowledge. However, it is possible for multiple views of knowledge to be constructed when there is a disagreement among equally competent investigators. In fact, knowledge is built up only in a relativist sense, when more informed and more sophisticated constructions are created. Research projects are judged on the basis of their trustworthiness (reliability and validity) and authenticity (capability to enlarge personal constructions and enhance understanding of constructions of others). Both ethics and values are intrinsic to this paradigm, since it deals with participants' mental constructions and employs methodology based on close, personal interaction. As for the inquirer, his/her role is to actively engage in "facilitating the 'multi-voice' reconstruction of their own construction as well as those of all other participants." (Guba and Lincoln 1994:115, in ed. by Denzin and Lincoln)

To summarize, the constructivist approach may be analyzed by looking at three basic issues:

- ontologically this stance is relativist, which means that realities are viewed as mental constructions, personal, yet often partially shared among individuals or cultures,
- epistemologically it is transactional and subjectivist, with emphasis on the *creation* of findings as a consequence of interaction between the scholar and respondents,
- and methodologically it is hermeneutical and dialectical which denotes that knowledge is elicited, interpreted and constructed through social interaction.

By developing the constructivist Grounded Theory, Charmaz's approach was in opposition to Glaser's original conception according to which GT should remain epistemologically and ontologically neutral, suitable for use of any type of data. Holton explains Glaser's position:

> "This is not to say that classic grounded theory is free of any theoretical lens but rather that it should not be confined to any one lens; that as a general methodology, classic grounded theory can adopt any epistemological perspective appropriate to the data and the ontological stance of the researcher". (Holton 2007:269)

However, even if we agree that Charmaz in some way "pre-framed the lens through which data are processed", as Breckenridge (2012:69) expressed, congruence with views advocated by the author of the present study as well as development of the method in agreement with Blumer's perception of the world makes the constructivist approach that Charmaz took beneficial for the research in question.

The process by which a grounded theory is generated consists of several steps:

- setting a research problem and opening research questions
- opening to sensitizing concepts and general disciplinary perspectives
- initial coding and data collection
- making initial memos and raising codes to tentative categories
- data collection and focused coding
- making advanced memos and refining conceptual categories
- theoretical sampling
- theoretical memo-writing and further refining concepts
- adopting certain categories as theoretical concepts
- sorting memos
- integrating memos and diagramming concepts
- further theoretical sampling if needed
- re-examination of earlier data
- writing the first draft (Charmaz 2013:19)

Nevertheless, although it is possible to present these stages in the form of a linear diagram as presented above, the process is in fact highly flexible and therefore not at all linear. As

Charmaz repeatedly argues, it is important to remain aware that at every stage, even during the very late stage of a research project, the scholar may feel the need to return to some earlier particular phase, including the initial one. Such an attitude protects newly constructed theories from being forced into pre-conceived hypotheses. In fact, in response to the question: What is GT methodology? Charmaz writes:

> "Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules." (Charmaz 2013:8)

Thus, the author encourages each researcher to use their own thoughts, experience, intuition and feelings in contrast to blind employment of fixed regulations. In Charmaz's opinion the researcher should remain focused, yet open to unexpected, sudden twists as his/her research proceeds.

3.1.1 Data collection in Grounded Theory

When dealing with the subject of gathering data following Charmaz's constructivist theory, three equally important components are employed: data as such, methods that enable gathering such data and the researcher as a person who has their own personal qualities, skills, experience, filters, etc. All these components are interwoven and deeply connected: data should be "rich" and reflect meanings that respondents ascribe to their worlds; methods should be flexible and adjusted appropriately so that rich data can be gathered, and finally, the researcher should stay open, respectful and have a willingness to virtually enter the world of their informants in order to uncover what meanings respondents ascribe to objects. The following section analyzes each of these components separately.

Data

Supporters of the grounded theory start their research by gathering data, which means that they construct data through observations, interactions and by analyzing relevant sources. Charmaz (2013:24) encourages gathering "rich" data, i.e. "detailed, focused and full", which "reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as contexts and structures

of their lives." Only by gathering such data are researchers able to construct solid grounded theories. Rich data might be of different kinds depending on their availability and the researched subject. Certain issues help (especially novice researchers) assess their quality. Thus, data should:

- enable the researcher to understand and depict the full range of contexts of the study,
- provide comprehensive descriptions of participants' views and actions,
- reveal what lies beneath the surface,
- be sufficient to expose changes over time,
- include multiple views of participants' range of actions,
- enable to expand analytical categories
- as well as allow to make comparisons between data, which in turn will generate/inform ideas. (Charmaz 2013:30)

In order to construct such data, a researcher should concentrate on words, actions and processes, remembering that careful delineation of the context in which analyzed actions, processes and words occur is of utmost importance. Systematic recording of when, why and how particular actions and processes came to exist is one of the strategies to construct rich data. The researcher should attempt to see the world through the eyes of their informants and ascertain which assumptions of theirs are hidden, which are taken for granted and which words or phrases bear a particular meaning for them. As for Glaser's (2007) signature statement: "All is data" Charmaz advocates the researcher assume an agnostic approach, which helps them to remember that all data already provided in the form of surveys, documents, reports and others were also *constructed* by people, for particular purposes and in particular socio-political contexts. Therefore, their relevance and quality should always be subject to careful scrutiny.

Methods

Bearing in mind the aforementioned assumption that only rich, focused and full data result in constructing valuable grounded theories, researchers should adjust employed methods so that they lead to gathering such data. Charmaz (2013:25) states: "Although methods are merely tools, they do have consequences. (…) *How* you collect data affects *which* phenomena you will see, *how*, *where* and *when* you will view them and *what* sense you will make of them." Hence, we observe that the choice of methods is laden with great significance.

Nevertheless, qualitative researchers (and especially grounded theorists), by conducting flexible studies, have a chance (or even obligation!) to follow emerging hints and shape and re-shape employed strategies so as to gather high-quality data. It is important to remember that it is the problem examined which determines the choice of methods.

Flexibility and readiness to adjust employed methods should be present from the very beginning of the research. Scholars may make use of the tool developed by Herbert Blumer (1954:7) called "sensitizing concepts", which give "a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances." Therefore, as Charmaz (2013:27) noticed, sensitizing concepts pose the source "of initial ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic." However, apart from being a kind of "starting point" for a qualitative study, the concepts in question may also serve another function. Bowen (2006:3) observes that researchers "may use sensitizing concepts in examining substantive codes with a view to developing thematic categories" and gives an example of Macintosh who employed them in the process of substantive coding to collect and analyze further data. What is more, while discussing the notion of sensitizing concepts one should remain aware that inasmuch as such concepts might alert scholars to some important issues they may also distract attention from other crucial matters (Gilgun 2002, in Bowen 2006:3, Charmaz 2013:28). Additionally, a researcher should be ready to accept such a situation when initial questions and interests are not reflected in gathered information and therefore refrain him/herself from forcing pre-conceived ideas upon data. "Grounded theorists evaluate the fit between their initial research interests and their emerging data. (…) we follow leads that we *define* in the data, or design another way of collecting data to pursue our initial interests", as Charmaz (2013:28) points out.

Methods relevant for the present study that Charmaz covers in her guidebook are in-depth interviews, participant observation and text analysis. In-depth interviews, understood as a "directed conversation" (Lofland, Lofland 1984, 1995, in Charmaz 2013:39) enable researchers to ascertain how his/her informants interpret their experiences, what meanings they attach to their worlds as well as learn of respondents' feelings, thoughts and actions. In this manner the scholar has a chance to reach beyond a superficial description of specific events. To conduct an in-depth exploration of a given topic one should:

- formulate a few open-ended, non-judgmental questions (some of them may overlap so as to explore a given issue in greater details),

- direct general questions so as to invite a more detailed discussion,
- help to express respondents' intentions and meanings,
- remain focused, yet flexible, so as to be able to adjust the pace of the interview, come back to a particular issue or further the discussion, change the topic, etc.,
- make sure that shared information is well understood,
- consider making use of a voice tracer so as to be able to focus the attention on respondents and maintain eye-contact
- and be ready to improve questions that turn out to be superficial, inappropriate or leading to forcing data (transcriptions make it easy to spot such questions).

Charmaz differentiates between rules that guide a regular, daily conversation and an intensive interview. She underlines that "an interview goes beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examines earlier events, views, and feelings afresh." (Charmaz 2013:40) Furthermore, although an intensive interview may be conversational, its aim is different, for "the researcher should express interest and want to know more" (Charmaz 2013:40). Thus, he/she should remain curious, ask follow-up questions and finally, try to truly understand what his/her respondents are sharing.

When we have a look at intensive interviewing from a constructivist and symbolic interactionist perspective it can be observed that an interview leads to forming a construction or reconstruction of a reality. "(…) an interview reflects what interviewers and participants bring to the interview, impressions during it, and the relationship constructed through it." (Charmaz 2013:41) The researcher and his/her informants interact with each other, appraise one another, assess the situation and act upon their assessments. Direction and content of interviews depend on a range of influencing factors such as power, status, past and immediate identities, gender, race, age and others. Therefore, researcher's skills and experience are of utmost importance: inappropriate/irrelevant questions and/or the way the interview is carried out may impair the exploration of crucial issues. Finally, using a wrong approach may lead to forcing data and exerting influence whereby the researcher's opinions and pre-conceptions are projected upon his/her informants.

Since the topic of the present study deals with highly sensitive, often painful stories it is important to cover the rules, that in Charmaz's opinion should guide what we will be called "sensitive" interviews. Hence, the researcher should:

- accept that the participants' comfort level is more important than obtaining sensational data,
- pay close attention at which point to start exploring the issue,
- attempt to understand shared experiences from the participant's view and to validate their significance
- finish each interview with questions that would hopefully stimulate positive responses and release tension.

As for participant observation, it has been found to be one of the most popular tools of collecting data about people, processes and cultures in the qualitative research paradigm. Participant observation was first used by American anthropologist Cushing who entered the natural environment of Zuni Indians, virtually adapting their native customs to conduct a research project on their culture. Another participant observer, who is often credited for being the first scholar to employ the technique was Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski. He became a participant observer in the Trobriand Islands and extensively contributed to the studies dealing with decision making. Since those times (Cushing's study of Zunis took place in 1879 and Malinowski's project in 1922) the method has been hailed as a hallmark of both anthropological and sociological research.

Participant observation has been defined and analyzed by numerous scholars. Marshall and Rossmman (1989:79, in Kawulich 2005), for instance, defined the term as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study". Furthermore, DeWalt and DeWalt (2002:1) compared the technique to entering a new, strange crowd which the researcher intends join and explained that participant observation "is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit[33] and tacit[34] aspects of their life routines and their culture." Simultaneously, the authors adamantly emphasize that the term does not function as a kind of umbrella term of qualitative research as such, but refers to a particular technique, existing beside other qualitative research techniques such as interviewing or text analysis.

[33] "Explicit culture is what people are able to articulate about themselves" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:1)

[34] "Tacit aspects of culture largely remain outside our awareness or consciousness" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:1)

When the technique is examined more carefully, we become aware that the two words "participant" and "observation" reflect a kind of spectrum of the role that the researcher takes on while employing the method. On one end there is a *complete participant* - a member of a group under study who conceals his/her role as a researcher. On the opposing end of the spectrum is a *complete observer* who unobtrusively observes the subject of his/her interest. In the middle there are *participant as observer* and *observer as participant* stances, in which the first denotes a researcher who is a member of a scrutinized community, with his role as a scholar exposed, focused more on observing than participating, whereas the latter pertains to a situation when a researcher does not belong to a given group, but has its permission to participate and thus gather necessary data (Gold 1958, in Kawulich 2005). Obviously, all these positions have their advantages and disadvantages as well as invite certain ethical considerations. However, all of the mentioned roles of the researcher revolve around his/her membership in a given group (*peripheral*, *active* or *full* to use Adler and Adler's terminology from 1987) along with the level of participation (ranging from *non-participation*, through *passive*, *moderate* up to *full participation*, as Spradley pointed out in 1980).

It can be summarized that regardless of the extent to which the researcher decides to observe, participate and/or enter the examined community, certain key elements of the method can be delineated. DeWalt and DeWalt enumerated them as: living in the context for an extended time, learning/using the local language/dialect, participating in a range of activities with full participants, engaging in everyday conversation as part of the interview technique, informal observation, making field notes and using both tacit and explicit information in the analysis. On the whole, participant observation, by representing a "uniquely humanistic, interpretive approach, as opposed to supposedly 'scientific' and 'positivist' positions" (Albert 2005:297), seems to enhance the present study rooted so deeply in the interpretative paradigm.

Moving now to texts, they are often used as supplementary sources of data by qualitative researchers. There are two types of texts: *elicited* (written by informants in response to the researcher's request, e.g. questionnaires, surveys, diaries etc.) and *extant* (the researcher has no influence on their construction, e.g. public records, documents, mass media, literature, internet forums, personal correspondence, etc.). Bearing in mind the fact that the researcher does not affect construction of extant texts, he/she must not take their objectivity for granted, but rather examine them carefully, contextualize them and remember at all times that they were constructed, for some specific purpose and that presented definitions and meanings may

have changed over time. Therefore, Charmaz encourages asking questions that, apart from the analysis of contents, would help to find out by whom, when, for what purpose and for whom and how a given text was constructed.

The researcher

When trying to analyze the aforementioned rules of gathering data it can be seen that they tell much about the qualities of the researcher. By choosing appropriate methods and being ready to adjust them, the researcher should prove their ability to be competent, concentrated, open and flexible. Furthermore, sensitizing concepts, understood as initial interests to be followed, prove that researchers do have certain filters through which they observe the world.

> "Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it. We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured (Charmaz 1990, 1998; Glaser and Strauss 2009; Glaser 1978) We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority. Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world." (Charmaz 2013:26)

However, although it is impossible for the subject to return to the state of tabula rasa again, researchers should make an attempt to understand their informants and enter their inner worlds as deeply as possible, which entails discarding sensitizing concepts once they are shown to be irrelevant. Researchers should be humble and open to criticism - only then are they able to shape and re-shape their questions in order to improve their quality. Finally, as shown in the tips guiding interviews touching upon sensitive issues, researchers should be ready to give a high priority to their respondents' feelings and make them feel comfortable even at the cost of sensational information. Care over respondents' comfort is deeply connected with Blumer's famous motto to "respect your subjects" **(**Wertz, Charmaz et al., 1969, 2011:292**)**. This approach has all the more value when it comes to any clashes between values and opinions presented by participants of a study and the researcher.

> "Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other. Nevertheless, researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it." (Charmaz 2013:26)

In consequence, the researcher should refrain from being judgmental and strict but to always try to understand what their respondents have on minds. Furthermore, establishing a good rapport is important for research also for pragmatic reasons: the scholar never knows if he/she will need to return to a given informant in order to saturate emerging categories.

3.1.2 Coding interviews (texts and field notes)

Coding is a process of attaching labels to particular words, segments or events of gathered data so as to categorize, summarize and interpret them. In other words, codes are short "titles" which are ascribed to chosen elements of data, a type of first step leading to further analysis. In fact, GTM coding consists of two essential stages: initial and focused coding. In the first stage particular phrases are analyzed and the most suitable "caption" is written next to them. In such a way, the researcher is able to create a summary and assemble a tentative interpretation of what informants have said or written. In the phase that ensues, initial codes that seem the most relevant are compared with other codes and with remaining data. GTM takes pride in creating a theory that is grounded in data to such an extent. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that codes stick to data very strictly, regardless if they pose the core of the analysis (the codes include essential information) or only provide the context of presented events, actions, experiences or feelings.

Coding is the most important link between gathering data and constructing a theory, therefore the researcher must read gathered data very carefully, remain open to different analytical directions and attempt to look at analyzed segments from their respondents' perspective. At this point the researcher's initial interests, predictions or previously acquired knowledge may prove to be irrelevant, which in turn constitutes another strength of GTM. Initial codes are provisional, since they may be changed into better fitting ones. They are also comparative, as various types of comparisons (codes with codes, codes with data, data with data) are carried out. Finally, they are grounded in data which they are intimately attached to.

It is worth noting that coding is an interactive process, in which the researcher first "physically" interacts with other participants of the study in order to gather what has been spoken and then, by cautious analysis of the uttered words, observed actions and body language, the researcher interacts with informants once again, this time by recalling the initial interaction and interpreting it. The role of language, as Charmaz (2013:64) accurately notices,

is highly important for this. All abstract meanings, intimate feelings, experiences, etc. must be given a solid form, a form constituted by words. Therefore it goes without saying that "language reflects opinions and values. (…) Codes stem from language, meanings and perspectives, with the use of which the researcher sees the empirical world, both his own as well as of other participants of the study" (Charmaz 2013:64). Hence, keeping in mind that no language is neutral, the researcher should feel obliged to discover if meanings and assumptions that are expressed through words are in fact clearly interpreted between them and their respondents.

Certain practical tips help to construct codes. (The word "construct" was used here purposefully: after all, codes are words chosen in line with meanings that the researcher ascribes to the empirical world.) Thus, it is advisable to:

- use words that reflect action (i.e. gerunds, for instance: convincing instead of conviction, repeating instead of repetition). Gerunds help to detect processes and result in gaining a strong sense of action and sequence. (Glaser 1978, in Charmaz 2013:68),
- work quickly and spontaneously, moving rapidly through data. Such an attitude sparks thinking and encourages taking a fresh glance at the data,
- create short, simple and precise codes instead of overly long or general ones that would tell very little about the phrase,
- employ "in vivo" codes[35] when necessary since they help to preserve meanings that respondents attach to their actions,
- and stick to data, make codes fit data instead of forcing data upon codes.

Depending on the kind of data to be analyzed (documents, Internet data, interviews, etc.) as well as the extent of their abstraction and the purpose of the study researchers prefer to code a different size of data units: each word, line or incident. In the present research I attempted to employ line-by-line coding so as to look closely at respondents' actions, experiences, feelings and fears, regardless of whether they were hidden or explicitly stated. While coding line-by-line the researcher attempts to ascribe each line a name, (even if a given

[35] "In vivo coding is the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase taken from that section of the data. The aim of creating an in vivo code is to ensure that concepts stay as close as possible to research participants' own words or use their own terms because they capture a key element of what is being described." (King 2008:472, in ed. by Given)

line does not include a whole sentence or seems less relevant) and thus define actions that data rest on, look for blank spots as well as implicit assumptions or meanings to be explained. Line-by-line coding involves constant comparative analysis, during which all sorts of data and codes are compared in various configurations.

To identify crucial processes and spot actions Charmaz encourages asking the following questions:

- "What processes are at issue here? How can I define them?
- How does this process develop?
- How does the research participant(s) act while involved in this process?
- What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process? What might his/her observed behavior indicate?
- When, why and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process?" (Charmaz 2013:71)

Once the above quoted questions have been answered[36], the researcher proceeds to the second phase of coding, called "focused coding", which aims at synthesizing and explaining larger units of data.

> "Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. One goal is to determine the adequacy of those codes. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely." (Charmaz 2013:79)

When initial codes are compared with focused ones, it can be observed that the latter are more "directed, selective, and conceptual" regardless if initial codes were ascribed word by word, line by line or incident by incident. Both initial and focused coding constitute one of the great strengths of GTM, since it engages the researcher in action, instead of more or less passive reading of collected data. Active coding enables to see unexpected perspectives, events, interactions and events, which lead to *discovery* of a theory and not its *verification*.

[36] Moving to focused coding does not have to be a linear process. Sudden understanding of implicit issues may prompt a researcher to come back to earlier respondents and/or collected data and try to find out more. (Charmaz 2013:79)

Obviously, codes and data should be constantly compared, since each code has potential to illuminate some other code or issue. In such a way, data might be improved so as to become richer, fuller and more focused.

3.1.3 Developing categories

Focused coding is found to be selective (since the researcher has to make a choice which initial codes are the most significant) and conceptual (after all, it aims at raising sorted data to a more analytical level, and not purely descriptive) and leads to developing categories. Thus, categories are the most relevant focused codes that reflect what is taking place in the data. They help to explain ideas, events and processes from the data. Well-developed categories are conceptual, general and abstract, yet at the same time precise and grounded in data. Categories may stem directly from the language used by respondents (previously mentioned "in vivo" codes) or they may reflect the researcher's analytic inclinations and observations. Once a category begins to form, all data should be meticulously scrutinized to find out all information it hosts that might clarify the category or break it into sub-categories. Scrutiny of collected data aims at developing and delineating properties of constructed categories which would define them and point to their characteristics. The process of developing categories may be supported by knowledge drawn from extant literature, which can help to expand and clarify emerging codes as well as sensitize the researcher as to which direction to continue their analysis.

It is very important to emphasize that categories should not be treated as separate, single topics. As scholars employing GTM are dedicated to examining processes, they try to "weave categories together into a processual analysis through which they can abstract and explicate experience" (Charmaz 1983:117). Therefore, categories are studied to show relationships between them, which in turn leads to explanations of the issues in question. Developing a family of codes that refers to a given category is a common practice among grounded theorists. Such codes encourage further questions, shape the analysis and identify blank spots. Another crucial technique that accompanies the process of developing categories is writing memos, which constitutes a kind of intermediate phase between coding and writing the first draft. Memoing helps to construct and fill in categories and by memoing codes are raised to an analytic level.

Charmaz advocates writing memos throughout the entire research process, starting with initial memos written when first interviews are conducted and first observations are made. Initial memos serve a similar function as building a family of codes, i.e. they point to areas worth further exploration and help to develop ideas. Depending on the individual style of the researcher, memos come in different forms: they can be short or long, and more or less abstract. However, all of them should be given a title and a description as to what they concern. In general, memos should:

- define a category,
- point to its properties,
- present conditions in which a given category arises, exists and changes,
- show its consequences,
- and reveal connections between categories. (Charmaz 2013:122)

As the research proceeds, memos are then refined, sorted and integrated. Sorting memos means putting together those that reveal the same category in order to elucidate its dimensions and to differentiate it from other categories by integrating and revealing relationships between categories. Both of these strategies enable the researcher to gain further insight into their research and identify crucial issues, variables and phases of the examined process.

Memoing should not be underestimated, since in fact it constitutes one of the most crucial techniques in GTM. Memoing encourages the researcher to analyze their data and codes from the very beginning of the research process and helps them remain engaged at all times. Memoing reflects assumptions advocated by Mead and developed by Blumer, namely the concept of "self" and "self-interaction", in which a person communicates with oneself in order to grasp one's thoughts and prepare for action. Writing down such thoughts and observations makes them more solid, precise and comprehensible. Communicating with oneself while memoing should be spontaneous, informal and fluent. Charmaz encourages employing a kind of personal brain-storming that is based on recording everything that comes to the researcher's mind. Therefore, "memo-writing requires us to tolerate ambiguity" (Charmaz 2013:113).

While engaged in memoing, the researcher may realize that categories that they construct are incomplete and thus more data should be gathered. *Theoretical sampling,* which represents collecting more information in order to "fill out, saturate and exhaust the category"

(Charmaz 1983:125), becomes the technique that a grounded theorist should employ. It significantly differs from other techniques used by qualitative researchers such as:

- sampling so as to refer to initial research questions,
- sampling in order to reflect the distribution of population,
- sampling with the aim of finding negative cases,
- or sampling until no new data emerge.

Theoretical sampling aims at collecting useful data that would clarify the emerging category, so that the researcher does not focus on presenting statistic generalizations concerning the examined population. It differs from initial sampling due to the fact that it is employed after more or less careful analysis of data. Furthermore, its goal is not to collect new ideas until they no longer crop up, but rather develop existing ones till all blank spots they contain are eliminated. Technically, theoretical sampling may be based on conducting further interviews with the same or new respondents, as well as making more observations or analysis of documents. It is worth underlining the emergent character of this kind of sampling is that the researcher is guided by ideas which cause them to explore a given field and ask questions that he/she could not predict earlier. Theoretical sampling leads to *theoretical saturation,* namely reaching such a point in gathering new data, in which categories become saturated, i.e. new data stop to reveal more properties of theirs or fresh theoretical observations. Theoretical saturation is a direct indicator to finish the phase of theoretical sampling.

3.1.4 Criteria for evaluation of Grounded Theory research

Before moving on to the discussion of certain limitations that GTM has been criticized for, it seems advisable to concentrate on criteria that each GT study should aim to fulfill. Charmaz (2013:234) listed 4 umbrella terms, namely *credibility*, *originality*, *resonance* and *usefulness*, each of which is later supported by detailed requirements.

As far as credibility is concerned, a GT research of high quality should:

- demonstrate direct and solid knowledge of the location and topic of the research,
- be based on rich data that would support presented assumptions,

- include systematic comparisons between observations and categories,
- reveal that its categories encompass a wide spectrum of observations,
- demonstrate a solid link between data and their analysis,
- and include a sufficient number of proofs that would result in readers' agreement with presented statements.

Regarding originality:

- categories should shed a new light on the examined issue,
- presented analysis should enable a new conceptual interpretation of data,
- the research should have social and theoretical significance,
- and a grounded theory should expand, improve or question commonly accepted assumptions and ideas.

Concerning resonance:

- categories should fully reflect the examined problem,
- all kinds of meanings, regardless how obvious they may be, should be presented,
- a link between institutions and lives of individuals should be demonstrated,
- and a grounded theory should be meaningful to people it refers to and make them understand their experiences more profoundly.

Finally, when it comes to the usefulness of GT research:

- a presented analysis should be useful in a daily life,
- analytical categories should reflect general processes,
- a newly developed grounded theory should stimulate another research projects,
- and contribute to creating a better world. (Charmaz 2013:234-235)

The above presented quality criteria will be revisited in the Conclusions chapter to ascertain if they have been fulfilled in the current study.

3.1.5 Limitations of Grounded Theory

Although GT has many advantages, such as its ability to generate concepts, foster creativity, provide tools that enable a systematic analysis as well as its focus on rich and deep data or active involvement of the researcher, etc., like any other methodology it has also been subject to certain criticism. Some scholars (Myers 2009, LaRossa 2005) point to the fact that the method is laborious, time-consuming and exhausting, for it requires engagement in a tedious process of coding and memo-writing. Furthermore, GT guidelines may seem opaque and confusing. The mere fact that the method comes in a few variations (classic, evolved and constructivist) underpinned by competing epistemological and ontological assumptions makes it easy for a scholar to feel discouraged (LaRossa 2005**).** What is more, some tensions in GT usage may be spotted, such as remaining open to emerging ideas vs. having certain pre-conceptions or acting like "tabula rasa" vs. doing a literature review. Finally, because of the role of the researcher as a co-constructor of the theory, as well as its heavy reliance on the researcher's abilities, GTM is frequently regarded as highly subjective.

In the present study every effort was made to minimize potential disadvantages of GT. The choice of the constructivist version was made at the very beginning of the research, which determined the questions asked and the answers sought for. The explicit commitment to constructivism made it obvious that the emerging theory would be perceived as subjective and not regarded as a drawback. Lastly, as for the tensions connected with having or not having some pre-suppositions, the incisive assumption made by Dey was relied upon: "an open mind is not an empty head" (1993:223) which seems to reconcile the two opposing ideas.

3.2 Use of Grounded Theory for this research

The very first assumption made and fulfilled in the present study, an assumption repeatedly emphasized by both Herbert Blumer and Kathy Charmaz is that there exists an empirical world which can be observed, analyzed and examined and which should remain the central point of the research. Moreover, keeping in mind the feedback that can be drawn from the empirical world regarding projections and expectations towards it resulted in maintaining a continuous openness to unexpected turns and changes that the study could take and in fact

turned out to take. The supposition that a reality exists in the empirical world and not in the methods dedicated for its examination was relied upon. Therefore, it was believed that only direct examination of the world could lead to real understanding of the ongoing processes that were of my interests. The aforementioned assumption determined the location of the present study directly in the town in question (Przysucha) and resulted in conducting the research in such a way so as to get close to its participants, take note of their problems, become oriented to situations they deal with on a regular basis and observe their everyday life.

To accomplish the aim outlined above, the author stayed in Przysucha for two months each summer (July and August) for four years in a row (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016) as well as visited the town several times a year for a few days each time. Fortunately, I was able to stay in my parents' home located approximately 150 meters from the synagogue and 200 meters from the cemetery, which enabled me to observe and/or take part in group pilgrimages of Israelis (Orthodox, youth and others) as well as individual trips that Jews of different origins went on. Fortunately my parents' home where I stayed is situated by Wiejska street which leads from the synagogue to the cemetery. Consequently, all Jewish visitors must pass by it on their way between the two sacred sites, which significantly aided my being able to establish contact with them. Furthermore, the appearance of one or two police cars cruising Wiejska street usually implied that an organized group of Israelis (whose visits entail strict security measures be taken) was about to enter the town. In such situations, I prepared to go to the Jewish cemetery or walk around the area surrounding of the synagogue with the hope of finding a Jewish person willing to talk to me. At times, I introduced myself as a PhD student, briefly presented the topic to the trip guide, bus driver or (if it was possible) to pilgrims and asked if we could either speak together at that time or exchange E-mail addresses for later correspondence. The results of my efforts depended on the kind of pilgrims that were in Przysucha at that time: Hassidim were decidedly reluctant to get involved in any sort of interaction with me, whereas youth and individual visitors frequently gave me such an opportunity.

As far as the inhabitants of Przysucha, the possibility to conduct quality in-depth interviews was deeply connected with my informants' reaction to the fact that I am a former resident of the town and, which entailed in the majority of cases, a person they are familiar with. My role as a researcher might be regarded as two-sided, since on one hand, being born and raised in Przysucha, I felt like a "native". On the other hand, having left the town 15 years before the research started made me rediscover and observe it from a different perspective,

especially considering that the period during which the study was carried out (2013-2016) was replete with significant social changes on both a national and regional scale. All in all, Blumer's words quoted below did not apply to my case, for after having spent the first 20 years of my life there, and having made regular visits to Przysucha as well as having all my family there, made me feel well oriented with the historical and socio-cultural context of the town.

> "(…) almost by definition the research scholar does not have a firsthand acquaintance with the sphere of social life that he proposes to study. He is rarely a participant in that sphere and usually is not in close touch with the actions and the experiences of the people who are involved in that sphere. His position is almost always that of an outsider; as such he is markedly limited in simple knowledge of what takes place in the given sphere of life" (Blumer 1986:35-6)

Nevertheless, such acquaintance had the power both to impair and enhance my research, depending on the personality of my respondents, who either revealed more trust towards me for being a known "neighbor" and therefore without hesitation agreed to share with me their stand on mutual Christian-Jewish relations or on the other hand felt embarrassed or inhibited to open up to someone they would most likely continue to meet in the future. What is more, on a personal level, being born and raised in Przysucha definitely required great effort on my part to discard lingering opinions and expectations regarding the town and its inhabitants.

In fact, it is important for the present study to report that the initial reactions to my decision to conduct the present research among the residents was overall negative. People of all ages that I shared my intent with pointed to a range of potential problems that lay ahead of me, calling the whole idea "challenging", "impossible", "very difficult", "controversial", "hard", "a tough nut to crack", etc. They warned me against people's unwillingness to speak, their fear of opening up and aversion to becoming engaged with the Jewish issue, without giving any solid reasons or explanations of their predictions. When such remarks continued to reach me, I felt they reflected the thoughts of Głowiński, who happened to be one of children rescued from the Warsaw Ghetto by Irena Sendler:

> "Fear. Even in year 1990 I could not yet speak about myself publicly. The Association of the Holocaust Children was issuing then their first book with memories. They asked me to write something. I did… and I did not want to reveal my last name, I printed the text

> under a pseudonym. There was fear, deeply rooted in me. Fear that people would change their attitude towards me. That they would reject me. Immediately, without the attempt to understand the complexity of somebody's biography and identity. That they would misunderstand me. I was afraid of rejection. Stemming not out of hostility, but misunderstanding." (Głowiński, in Torańska 2010)

I realized that even 70 years after the Holocaust people might still be afraid to talk to me about the War and possible traumatic experiences they may have experienced. I began to think that they were afraid of being misunderstood and treated superficially or felt that their stories would be stripped of the actual context, such as the wartime conditions or their personal inclinations.

Nevertheless, in part thanks to my requests, as well as my parents, grandmother and friends who actively supported my scientific undertaking and who asked their friends, colleagues, neighbors and relatives to let me interview them, I was able to find numerous respondents. Furthermore, once I had conducted a personal interview, I employed the "snowball sampling" technique in which the researcher asks their informants to recommend other respondents. This technique was especially useful with the older generation of my informants, since among them the previously mentioned unwillingness, reluctance and fear were the most common inhibiting factors. What is more, to conduct my research I needed to speak with elderly inhabitants who *were born* in Przysucha and *not relocated* there after the Holocaust, as otherwise they would have no memories of prewar Christian-Jewish co-habitation in the settlement. The residents whom I interviewed were knowledgeable about such facts, they knew which inhabitants of Przysucha were native, as well as who was physically and mentally able to be interviewed.

While interviewing the elderly, I noticed that most mentioned the same stories, sometimes certain facts did not completely match, but they all brought up events that were common among those from their generation, such as stories of either rescuing or denouncing a Jewish family, mixed marriages between Christian and Jewish inhabitants of Przysucha or the case of conversion from Judaism to Christianity by one woman. Especially the last piece of information seemed to evoke many emotions. The seniors recommended that I interview the daughter of the woman who had been converted, yet insisted I keep it secret as to who had informed me about her family story. Interestingly, they all secretly referred to her in the same way, as a "*przechrzcianka*", meaning "a female convert", even though she had not undergone

a conversion herself. They also often told me off the record that the woman I should communicate with "is strange". I am mentioning this fact because this was one of very few cases when the snowball sampling did not function at all. Even though all of the senior residents pointed to this particular woman as a potential respondent, the woman firmly refused to participate in my study repeating the same words to all my tentative, gentle, general, open-ended questions: "I do not know anything. I do not remember anything." Supposedly, her attitude towards me might have resulted from her awareness that her mother's conversion made her conspicuous to the people among whom she lives.

Undoubtedly, conducting in-depth interviews provided the most valuable information for the present research, nevertheless, at the same time, the participant observation that I engaged in should not be underestimated. This was especially evident as I took on various roles as a researcher. At times I acted as a complete participant, behaving as just another of Przysucha's residents from the younger generation (born in free and democratic Poland) who just happened to be around during trips of Israelis and was trying to establish contact with them to analyze how they treated me as a Polish woman from Przysucha. At other times I decided to take on the role from the opposite end of the spectrum (complete observer) and unobtrusively observed relations between Przysucha inhabitants and Jewish visitors, while at other times (for instance, during the third annual gathering organized in Przysucha by the Israeli, David Chernobilsky) I was explicit about my scientific project, yet at the same time behaved as an average resident from Przysucha (participant as observer). Finally, I took on the role of "observer as participant" when I would receive permission from Jewish groups to participate in all their activities (praying at the cemetery, visiting the tombs of the Holy Jew and Simcha Bunem). Therefore, employing the technique of participant observation enabled me to gather data from the perspective of a researcher as well as a female resident of Przysucha.

Before delineating more detailed aspects of the Grounded Theory usage in the present study, it can be concluded that the most salient GT components such as: simultaneous engagement in data gathering and analysis (through interweaving interviews, their transcription, coding and analysis), constant comparative analysis (which entailed the necessity to conduct other interviews to make data become clear and logical), developing and re-developing the theory at each point of the research (so as to avoid forcing theories upon data), engaging in memo-writing, referring to existing literature or other written sources if needed were all employed in order to see the world through the eyes of my informants and clearly understand them and refrain from being judgmental.

3.2.1 Ethical considerations

The analysis of ethical considerations seems to be very significant for the study owing to at least two reasons: first, the relative freedom of the qualitative approach (additionally enhanced by Charmaz who underlined the role of flexibility and intuitiveness in her interpretation of the theory in question) calls for boundaries set by ethics. Both ethics and values are intrinsic to this paradigm, since it deals with participants' mental constructions and employs methodology based on close, personal interaction. Secondly, the topic itself which involved recalling the events of the war, the Holocaust, tense relations, acts of aggression, sensitive issues such as hunger, uncertainty, fear, poverty, stratification, financial claims, etc. as well as the age and condition of informants from the last living generation of witnesses demanded that ethical issues and concerns be given the highest priority.

In my research I was guided by a few rules advocated by Charmaz who emphasized making informants' well-being and comfort more important than obtaining data that could disturb them. The age of the oldest respondents made them appear very fragile in my eyes and vulnerable to sudden health problems. Therefore, I tried to be especially careful as to *when* to proceed deeper with my questions and *to what extent* I probed at all. Also, during the interviews I tried to remain fully focused on my informants, such as by looking into their eyes (I resigned from bringing notes, so as to create the feeling of a friendly conversation and not a rigid interview) and made sure the interview finished in a positive way (both to leave my respondents in a good mood as well as in the event I needed to make a return visit in order to get more information so as to saturate emerging categories). Finally, it is important to mention that the voice-tracer which I used made it more difficult for me to create a relatively relaxing atmosphere that would encourage sharing personal experiences, therefore I made sure that my respondents always first agreed that I make a recording of our conversation.

At the same time, Charmaz's principles were not the only ones that guided me throughout the research. I also relied on suggestions put forward by Kvale (2011) who indicated that ethical issues are present during *all* stages of qualitative studies. Therefore, even at the beginning stage when the research problem is selected, it is of utmost importance for the researcher to aim at improving the life situation of their informants (obviously, apart from the scientific goal, i.e. constructing new knowledge). Second, when preparing to carry out the study, scholars should bear in mind to give their respondents all the necessary information about the project, assure the confidentiality of the undertaking and finally, get their agreement

to participate in the research. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, informants' well-being and comfort during the interview should not be exchanged for trying to extract sensational data. The process of transcription should also be carried out in an ethical manner, by making sure that it fully reflects the respondents' own words and does not reveal their personal data at any time. Additionally, the analysis of the interviews invite the question as to whether the informants should have influence on the interpretation of the data and if so, to what extent. Finally, when the research results are presented publicly, ethical issues once again revolve around the preservation of the informants' confidentiality as well as any potential consequences which published reports may have on the lives of people whom they concern.

The ethical instructions suggested above were fully implemented in the present research. All participants were clearly informed about the aim of the study, its topic and the procedure. At times, especially as far as the oldest generation of respondents was concerned, it was not easy to make the respondents believe that the thesis would not include any of their personal data (especially considering that during interviews, for statistical purposes, I recorded data concerning my informants' names, date and place of birth, education, profession, marital status and religion). I believe that all of them were fully aware of potential benefits and consequences of the research, which resulted in their voluntary agreement to participate in the project.

3.2.2 Development of interview questions

There were three essential goals that I wanted to achieve while developing interview questions. The first was an umbrella goal, to develop such questions that would help answer the research problems introduced at the beginning of the study, whereas the remaining, auxiliary goals were to make the questions depict realities my informants live in or lived through, as well as to reveal basic terms and notions of the theoretical framework employed in the study.

Questions that will be presented below should be treated only as approximate questions, as each interview was a dynamic situation involving two people subject to a number of external and internal factors that naturally proceeded differently, influencing responses that were given, which in turn determined what questions followed. At times original, planned questions needed to be reformulated so as to encourage a fuller answer. At times follow-up

questions were formed on the basis of certain unexpected key-words that required further clarification. Everything was important: the age difference between the informant and myself and the informant's gender, mood, general attitude towards the research, physical and mental condition as well as the way the interview proceeded (some respondents needed more time to get accustomed to the voice tracer and overall situation to be able to relax and open up). At times some unexpected events occurred, such as a sudden phone-call, a neighbor's visit, etc. However, despite all these potentially differentiating circumstances that were beyond my control as a researcher, all questions were intended to give freedom to informants to share their thoughts and encourage them to share their personal stories, words, formulations and issues they found relevant and worth mentioning. While conducting the interviews I was especially careful not to impose any opinion or put words into the respondents' mouths.

Consequently, in-depth interviews conducted with the oldest generation of respondents (born after 1920), consisted of native inhabitants of Przysucha and revolved around the following questions:

1. Can you please tell about the times when Jews lived in Przysucha?

By asking this first, general, open-ended question I intended to find out more about the informants personal reality during those times and try to find out what Christian and Jewish Poles did for a living, how they lived and what an average day in Przysucha was like. I endeavored to learn about the economic situation and stratification of Przysucha as well as commonly held beliefs that may have been the reason for negative attitudes towards Jews frequently found in Poland. Furthermore, I intended to hear my respondents' interpretation of the common division of inhabitants of Przysucha into Christian farmers and Jewish shop owners since this was another factor that was thought to evoke certain antagonisms. Finally, due to the fact that Przysucha was a bastion of the right-wing, nationalistic party (National Democracy), known for disseminating hatred towards Jews, contemporaneous political options (along with potential affiliation to them) were of interest as well.

Since the question did not impose any specific area to be first touched upon, it was important for me to see what the initial thoughts of my respondents were and whether they revolved around wartime, the ghetto, personal encounters, Jewish shops or school, etc.

2. How would you describe the mutual relationship between the two communities?

This question was intended to invite stories about potential acts of aggression or aversion or help coming from either community which my respondents either experienced or witnessed, as well as stories about friendships or even marriages that occurred when Jewish and Christian Poles lived near one another. What is more, I expected to hear some recollections that involved people that functioned as contemporaneous authorities, such as Polish clergy or school teachers who might have helped shape mutual relations by giving suggestions of how to treat believers of the other faith or who acted in such a way that would reveal their attitude (for instance, Catholic school teachers could have favored Christian children). Any interpretations as to why either community took one approach or the other towards the other community was also of great importance.

3. Can you please share any information about personal contacts with Jews that you or someone you know had?

Obviously, by asking such an open-ended question I was hoping to find out as many details about potential Christian-Jewish interactions as possible, for only contextualized information could be regarded as valuable. As many Jews in Przysucha at that time were shop owners, I was also interested in obtaining information about possible business interactions, along with any potential complications or conflicts that may have arisen on the grounds of competition.

4. Can you please tell about the time during World War II?

This unavoidable question opened the door to a wide range of delicate, controversial and often painful issues, since it revolves about the ghetto of Przysucha, Christian attitudes towards their neighbors in need as well as personal experiences (not necessarily strictly connected with the topic of the thesis) which must have left an enormous impact on all informants who are World War II survivors.

5. Can you please tell about the time following the War?

Since only a small percentage of Polish Jews were fortunate enough to survive the War and none of them ever settled back in Przysucha, I aspired to find out what Przysucha looked like, what happened to the Jewish possessions and who claimed the fields in which the Polish Jews had been active before the extermination. Furthermore, I was interested in obtaining

information regarding the attitude of the new national authorities towards Polish Jews once the war was over as well as the approach of average Polish Christians towards them. Bearing in mind the fact that the War was followed by the Communist regime's reign (characterized by strict Russian control over Poland) it was extremely important to learn what opinions and slogans were popular at that time, whether in Przysucha Jews were viewed as communist agents, enemies of Polish people and conspirators to be blamed for Polish servitude, as is still believed today in some anti-Semitic circles. Finally, I intended to direct the conversation in such a way so as to touch upon the term: "Judeo-Communism", according to which Jews were responsible for the introduction of Communism in Poland and had used the regime in order to seize power in the world.

6. Have you ever seen or encountered any Jews that currently make visits to Przysucha?

This question was intended to revolve around the current visits Jewish pilgrims make to Przysucha and potential interactions between them and the town's residents. Moreover, the question was aimed at finding out how the oldest generation of my informants perceive visitors, if they are aware why Jews keep coming to the settlement, if they are able to describe what they do, how they behave and what attitudes and emotions these visits evoke.

7. What is your opinion about the current condition of the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery?

In the current thesis it is assumed that the attitude towards Jewish heritage might be regarded as an important indicator towards the community attitude as such. Therefore, I endeavored to learn my informants' opinions regarding care of the synagogue and the cemetery, preserving the memory of the Jews from Przysucha by erecting monuments, placing commemorative plaques in the town or organizing initiatives that would honor the memory of the local Jews who had lived in Przysucha. I also intended to listen to my respondents' viewpoints regarding the latest restoration of the synagogue and the plan to turn it into a vibrant Jewish cultural center that would potentially draw even more Jewish pilgrims.

It is of utmost importance to mention that each of the above presented questions was followed by a request of my informants to support their views, opinions and stories with specific moments, situations or examples that would make it easier for me as a researcher to more fully enter their personal lives, understand their way of thinking and interpret it. I was also highly interested to learn if the issue of Christian-Jewish relations was evident in the

homes of my informants or it remained a more or less taboo subject. I was eager to uncover what opinions, values, and attitudes were advocated in families of my respondents, provided the topic was even relevant at all.

Regarding my interviews with the second group of respondents - Jewish visitors to Przysucha of all ages - they turned out to be highly challenging for me due to certain cultural differences as well as language problems (many of them did not speak English, Polish, German or Spanish all of which I am able to communicate in) as well as their being on tours and their stops in Przysucha were often short due to the pilgrims' tight schedules which reduced chances to conduct interviews at all.

Therefore, I set myself a minimum goal to find answers to very basic questions:

1. What is/was the reason for your visit to Przysucha?

2. How do/did you like your stay in Przysucha? How do/did you feel there?

3. Where did you go, what did you do? Could you tell about your experience, please?

By asking such questions I aspired to find out if the only, obvious reason was to pray at the Jewish cemetery and visit the synagogue or if perhaps they were also interested in establishing an interaction with locals, if they felt safe, welcome, or if they experienced any form of verbal or physical aggression. It is worth emphasizing that apart from the responses provided, an equally important indicator for me was the Jewish pilgrims' attitude towards me as a researcher, a Pole and a woman. In cases when potential informants staunchly refused to speak with me, I also suggested that they could respond in writing, as a result of which I received five e-mails or messages sent via social media portals.

I also managed to conduct five full, face-to-face in-depth interviews with Jewish respondents who were deeply interested in the topic. Apart from the fundamental questions presented above I also asked:

4. What do you think of Christian-Jewish relations? Why?

5. Is it important to preserve memory about the common past? Why? In what way?

The issue of Christian-Jewish relations, which seems to represent an even broader topic - the issue of interracial, international relations, the attitude held towards those whom we consider as "others" as well as the responsibility (or lack thereof) to educate people regarding history and to preserve the common past were especially important to me in light of the latest refugee crisis and implications for future actions and projects.

Turning now to the theoretical framework of the current research, it should be underlined that the questions presented above were constructed in such a way so as to correspond with the terms and notions typical of Symbolic Interactionism, such as the self, self-interaction, social interaction and joint action. As previously mentioned, according to SI, the meaning people assign to objects develops through the process of self interaction and social interaction. The table below clarifies the idea by grouping selected questions according to the operational concepts they represent:

Theoretical concepts	***Interview questions***
The self Self-indication Self-interaction	• How did you like your stay in Przysucha? • How did you feel in Przysucha? • What is/was the reason for your visit to Przysucha? • Can you tell about your experience connected with…?
Objects Social objects- Jews, Christians Physical objects- Jewish physical heritage Abstract objects- Jewish intellectual heritage	• Do you think it is important to preserve memory about the common past? • What is your opinion about the current condition of the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery? • What do you think of Christian-Jewish relations?

Social interaction Symbolic social interaction	• Where did you go, what did you do during your stay in Przysucha? • Can you tell about personal contacts that you (or somebody you know) had with Jews? • Have you ever seen Jews that visit Przysucha nowadays?
Joint action (culture, institutions, norms, values etc.)	• Can you tell about the times when Jews lived in Przysucha? • Can you tell about the times during World War II? • Can you tell about the times after the War? • What is your opinion regarding initiatives to open Jewish centers, museums, erect monuments etc? • Is it important to preserve the memory of the common past?

Figure 10: Linkage between theoretical concepts of Symbolic Interactionism and interview questions (developed by the author)

There was one last group of respondents, namely the privileged actors who are in charge of spiritual/cultural and financial/legal/organizational spheres in Przysucha (the parish priest, the mayor, the personal assistant of the starost, the manager of the Oskarg Kolberg Museum as well as a police officer) and they were asked the following questions:

1. Taking into consideration the high percentage of Jewish population before the War along with the fact that Przysucha was previously an important Hassidic center, should we commemorate the memory of Jews in town?
2. If so, how can it be done and what has been done so far by your office/institution?
3. How would you describe contemporary Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha?
4. What can be done to harmonize/improve such relations?

3.2.3 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews with the senior residents of Przysucha

Having left Przysucha in the year 2000, I realized that most of the oldest residents of the town would not recognize me or would rather remember me as a young girl or as a teenager. Fortunately, my mother was employed in the district governor's office as a social worker, so she had regular contact with the elderly of the town or their children and it was in her office where those people had to submit applications for financial aid to buy any necessary equipment the ill and elderly had need of. Bearing in mind the fact that the issues I aspired to examine are found to be extremely delicate in Poland and obviously in Przysucha as well (in such a small town, such pressure was even greater and more evident and I would have hated to leave Przysucha and leave my parents to cope with any potential misunderstandings or tensions that my interviews might have created), I found it indispensable that one of my parents introduced me to a potential interlocutor, vouched for me and ensured potential interviewees that I would not use any of the stories for any other reason than purely scientific.

My mother or father would say: "This is my daughter Sabina, you probably don't remember her, because she left Przysucha after finishing high school, and now she is writing a university thesis about Przysucha and the War times and it would be so nice if you found some time to tell her, in your own words, what it was like. I am sure you understand that it is completely different to hear a story from an eye-witness than to read about it in books…" As one can see, at the very beginning of establishing contact with future respondents, the word "Jews" or "Christian-Jewish relations" were not brought up at all, as judging by the very first reactions that my idea to examine the issue had spurred - I did not want to risk losing a potential informant. There were so few of them at that time and so many of them were either physically incapable of being interviewed or their family members did not want to expose them to a situation that could make them tired or feel vulnerable. However, it must be clearly emphasized that regardless of these well thought over strategies that were intended to prevent any possible discouragement, many older residents (or their family members) decisively refused to give me such an opportunity. I especially remember one situation when a senior female inhabitant became very irritated (even furious) at my request to have an interview with her and acted as if she was afraid that I would find out something that she was desperate to keep to herself. She kept shouting: "I don't know anything! I don't remember! I don't want to

talk to you!" and it was very obvious that nothing could be done. Other unwilling respondents refused to get involved in my research in a more moderate way.

After establishing the very first contacts with the initial aid of my parents, the snowball sampling proved to help me gain increasingly more respondents. I conducted the majority of in-depth interviews in their homes, although I was very flexible in this respect and prepared to conduct the interviews under any conditions they felt comfortable in such as my family home, the park, my parents' yard, etc. Each time I was able to carry out an interview I was aware that far more was involved than my personal ambition to follow my dreams and ambitions to accomplish the research pertaining to my hometown. I realized that by opening their homes and lives to me, the members of the oldest generation of Przysucha were opening deeply personal spheres of their lives that perhaps they no longer preferred to speak of. I knew that by talking about their childhoods, families and by bringing up their old memories, they might reveal a range of family stories and situations, such as divorces, affairs, financial issues, living conditions, all of which are considered highly personal and intimate. Furthermore, having lived in such a small, hermetic community as Przysucha I knew that my elderly informants were especially concerned of my opinion of their homes, wanted to make a good impression on me and did not want to be regarded as uneducated, unprepared, neglected or inhospitable. One of the female interlocutors went to a hairdresser just before our appointment to be sure she had her hair styled nicely and put on a nice white blouse and elegant skirt especially for my visit… One man wore a suit, while many other respondents bought or made cakes or cookies and prepared tea to show me that our conversation was important to them. Some of them were quite lonely, so a visit of a relatively young person was a kind of special entertainment for them. For them it was an opportunity to talk with someone and share their thoughts (which were not always necessarily connected with my project) as they had no one else to talk with.

During my visits I tried to constantly keep in mind the fact that it was a great honor and challenge for me to be able to talk to people who were often more or less suspended between life and death, some of whom could even possibly die at any moment or fall ill because of the stress brought on by my questions regarding the war times… In particular, my own grandmother, my first elderly respondent, unexpectedly died just four days after she let me interview her. But for this dissertation, I would have never been able to collect such special personal memories as our recorded conversations about her lifetime. For all of these reasons, I was ready to show my deepest respect, support, kindness, appreciation and willingness to

build inter-generational relations between my elderly respondents and myself. Employing an ethical approach to the endeavor in question was also of the highest priority to me. Therefore, I always asked for permission to use a voice-tracer (instead of hiding it in my bag, which would have definitely reduced the initial anxiety) and made certain I was well-prepared, focused, alert, empathic and polite. It was essential to me that my respondents felt completely comfortable in my company, because only then was it possible for them to open up.

Obviously, each interview was a separate situation, governed by its own laws, influenced by many variables, involved many twists and turns that left me more or less satisfied. There were certain problems, challenges and tensions that I needed to solve once they appeared. One was my request to have our conversation recorded. Some of the people I was invited to speak with lived in homes that very often had previously belonged to Jews, so they might have been worried that my visit could be somehow connected with the issue of regaining possession of lost property by Jews. The other challenge revolved around gathering statistical data (such as my respondents' name, date and place of birth, occupation, religion and education) and ensuring my informants that the thesis would remain fully anonymous. Many had difficulty understanding that my collecting the data in question was not contradictory to writing a dissertation with no names given. I believe that the initial technique of having my parents introduce me to the respondents was very helpful in this matter.

It should be underlined that in order for the respondents to articulate their emotions, report their attitudes and reactions and personal approaches to the issues, they had to demonstrate awareness of certain situations and then have the ability to articulate and describe them. Hence, another task that I needed to cope with as a researcher was to gently help informants find any proper words they lacked (due to health problems, tiredness or a lack of education) and make certain that at all times they were not manipulated to utter what I had expected to hear. Therefore, I made use of auxiliary questions such as: "Do you mean…?", "What are you trying to express by that?" or "I am not certain I completely understood what you just said. Is it…?" It was important for me to make certain that I clearly understood how my informants perceived their world, because unlike interviews with young people, I was aware that I might have no other chance to return and disperse any potential doubts or misunderstandings. This proved to be all the more essential as oftentimes my interviewees used words that I did not know, although they spoke Polish and I am a Polish native speaker. Some of the expressions they used were either old-fashioned and outdated or pertained to objects and phenomena that no longer exist. Since the age difference between myself and the elderly respondents was

often fifty or even sixty years, the reality that they expressed was of course obvious to them, although at times totally strange to me. Consequently, sometimes the language they employed sounded almost foreign to me and needed clarification.

As previously mentioned, once senior respondents let me interview them, they had a serious attitude about the idea of inviting me to their homes and talking to me about their lives. In order to provide me with as much information as possible, some of them were excessively focused on details and wanted to recall every single house that was standing in Przysucha before the War, every single shop (with prices included), institutions, dates, people (with their names, descriptions of their physical appearance, character, etc.). Certainly, their knowledge of street names and modern-day dwellers were a big help in reconstructing an accurate picture of prewar Przysucha. Additionally, I felt very much like a native and was treated familiarly when they asked, for instance: "You know where the bank is, don't you? It used to be a Jewish institution." Or: "Your great-granddad had a horse and he went with Jews to sell different things". The interviews also became a one-time opportunity to gain information about my own family as well.

Since it seemed many of my informants had been craving the opportunity to have a conversation with someone, I had to make sure they did not get lost in their stories. I had to remain focused and remember the original idea they brought up and therefore at times had to direct such interviews in a way that would help them return to their initial thoughts. Some of the respondents had great difficulties sticking to the topic, or they desperately felt a need to share recent family photos with me as well as more current stories that they were proud of. My task in such situations was to continue collecting relevant data, without giving them the impression that I was not interested in listening to present-day, unrelated stories that *they* considered important.

Obviously, my full concentration was also needed because of certain unavoidable disturbances, such as background noises (e.g. a lawn mower or vacuum cleaner), unexpected visits (of a neighbor or door-to-door salesperson), phone-calls (family members called to make sure everything was fine), etc. However, by far the greatest challenge that I faced while interviewing eye-witnesses of the War and anti-Semitism was to remain strong, non-judgmental and professional. For example, it repeatedly happened that some senior residents laughed at memories of how they persecuted Jews and although I certainly did not find any humor in such stories, I had to carefully monitor my body language so that it would be

possible for us to continue the interview in a nice, friendly atmosphere. Not only did I have to refrain from frowning or raising my eyebrows to indicate my surprise or anxiety, but most importantly - I had to make an effort to try to *understand* why they acted the way they did. Similarly, when they were telling stories pertaining to inhumane persecution of Jews from Przysucha by the Nazis, I was forced to curb the despair I felt welling inside, so as not to burst into tears, because such reactions would have definitely ended our meeting.

In-depth interviews with Jewish pilgrims

I managed to conduct five, full, in-depth interviews with Jewish pilgrims whom I met either during the Christian-Jewish initiatives in town or via snowball sampling. Additionally, one of my respondents was "recruited" to my research by my brother, who happened to be passing by the synagogue when he encountered a couple of Spanish-speaking Jews. They were kind enough to agree to set up an appointment and subsequently met me in Warsaw. Other interviews took place either in Przysucha or in Warsaw, in various cafeterias where it was quiet enough to concentrate and record a conversation and were carried out in English and Spanish.

The main focus of my interviews with the Jewish respondents regarded experiences that they had in Przysucha, however, it was unavoidable that the issue of mutual Christian-Jewish relations cropped up, as well as the issue of implications for the future, namely: if, why, and how the memory of the common past should be preserved. Similarly, as with the interviews conducted with the elderly from Przysucha, the greatest challenge I faced as a researcher was to grasp my respondents' point of view, *their* vision of life and *their* world. This was especially important, considering that during these interviews cultural differences played a role. There were no doubts concerning the use of the voice tracer or their anonymity in my scientific project.

While looking for potential respondents from the Jewish community, social media portals proved to be significantly helpful. Once I was able to meet Jewish pilgrims in Przysucha, we became virtual friends and were therefore able to keep in touch, arrange an appointment or use tools, such as Messenger to exchange information. To my surprise, there were also cases when Jewish visitors to Przysucha were the first to contact me online, with no initial meeting in person. They had heard about the project and wanted to stay connected.

3.2.4 Transcribing interviews

I must admit transcribing interviews was a highly time consuming and painstaking process, for I found no software that could recognize the old-fashioned Polish used by my elderly respondents. Furthermore, I was not sure if there was any software that I could fully trust, especially considering the need to be extra-careful about the use of certain prefixes and suffixes in Polish, whose usage can dramatically change the meaning of spoken words. Consequently, all the transcriptions were done manually, word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph with the use of Windows Media Player and Word. The speed and the level of difficulty depended on many factors: how fast my interlocutors spoke, if they used more or less full sentences, employed words I was unfamiliar with or if there were any background noises (for example one respondent was fidgeting with a cellophane ball, which turned out to be very loud in the recording), etc. All in all, the strategy I adopted was to transcribe two or three sentences – pause – rewind – check if there were any mistakes – if so, correct them – then move on. I did not use any special transcription symbols, apart from "(…)" when I could not clearly hear what had been spoken. However, I placed important observations in brackets that would potentially facilitate a subsequent analysis such as "the respondent is laughing / is excited / is raising their voice / is pausing" etc.

Although I was very reluctant of the idea of conducting manual transcription of interviews in the first place, I must honestly admit that it was an incredible experience for me. Once I become accustomed to my own voice (which was stressful for me at the very beginning of engaging in transcriptions) I began to go through my interviews again, experiencing what could be called a kind of déjà vu. I could almost recall the smell of houses I had been in, detect the atmosphere and clearly recall my feelings, reactions or observations. Listening to the voice of my respondents also posed a useful prompt for me to think of new ideas for my research. This became a kind of guideline I could turn to and helped me decide which sensitizing concepts I should drop or suspend and which I should follow. I experienced the transcription process as an active interaction both with my informants as well as with myself - each pause spurred another self-indication process, that determined the actions that ensued. Since the nature of transcription in not at all passive, it kept me focused, engaged and as a result, exhausted, yet at the same time satisfied.

3.2.5 Data analysis

There are four types of data that I dealt with: in-depth interviews, elicited texts, extant texts and participant observation field notes. All of them aimed at developing concepts that would eventually help to understand meanings, experiences and viewpoints of respondents in their natural (as opposed to experimental) setting. Since the data subject to analyze in the present research were not quantitative I expected to arrive at findings that could be placed on a continuum, rather than results of 0-1 type. The research was exploratory, so I was also prepared to be guided by data (and not by the research questions) and to encounter a number of ambiguities along the way.

Once all the data had been transcribed and organized I engaged in line-by-line coding of the interviews I had conducted, field notes I had taken and elicited texts I had requested. For all of these I tried to reach beyond words, so as to be able to interpret what had been said and/or written and spot details that could have been lost had I chosen an incident-by-incident coding technique. Certainly, the analysis involved much reading, but I also relied on "on the spot" ideas that came to me as first impressions, without going deeper. I moved quickly through the data and tried to construct short, simple codes that would reflect actions (as opposed to concepts). Occasionally, in vivo codes came in handy, especially with old-fashioned phenomena brought up by my elderly respondents.

Obviously, since coding, similar to transcribing, spurred a number of personal reflections, I made sure to write them all down straight away (self memos). The collected data needed to be repeatedly sorted, sifted and compared in various configurations, so as to find similar phrases, expressions, patterns, relationships and differences that could result in blank spots to be eliminated during other fieldwork. Finally, the consistencies that were discerned in the database were elaborated and refined in order to construct categories that when compiled would make a coherent theory. It is clear that all the steps in the process of analysis were circular and concurrent.

As for the technical aspects of data analysis, I mainly adapted the traditional method, because it helped me to distance myself from the computer. Although this involved laborious reading, coding, cutting out coded passages, sorting and then gluing them under emerging category titles, it proved to be more relaxing and creative.

4. Research findings

Finally came the last and probably the most important part of the entire research process. This section presents the way that both average and prominent inhabitants of Przysucha see their hometown, how they view Jews, to what extent they are willing to maintain relations with them, what troubles them, what their fears are, what memories they have and what lessons they would like to pass down to younger generations. It is important to emphasize that in the interviews with the oldest generation, in fact we meet children, or youngsters that they were when the War broke out or straight before its outbreak. There are dolls in their stories, school times, preparations for their First Holy Communions, idealized images of their parents, as well as their memories of the smells and tastes of childhood that cannot be compared to anything else. There is also a certain difficulty to grasp the reality of what they experienced and a kind of passive approval of it. Through their stories we encounter children caught in the middle of a terrible drama and are able to observe how they, their parents and neighbors reacted, what they did or did not do, what emotions drove them, what feelings stopped them as well as how they perceive their experiences from the perspective of a person whose life is nearing its end. It is well-known that drama defines a person far more than daily, unbroken, peaceful routines. Personality traits that may never surface under ordinary circumstances often become fully revealed when dramatic occurrences arise.

In all the cases - be it with the elderly, Jewish pilgrims or the prominent figures of the town, close attention was paid to small details, not only to what the interviewees said during the interviews, but how they said it, how long were the answers they provided to questions, how long were their pauses between questions and answers, how often a given concept recurred and how particular lines (and codes) fit in the overall picture. I tried to achieve an understanding that is impossible to acquire in a quantitative analysis by exposing situations in which initial answers (often politically correct ones) did not reflect the stories that followed. Such an analysis is *not* aimed at obtaining provision of factual knowledge that can be checked, measured and verified. By such an approach, it is not important if obtained numbers, names, typologies or dates are correct (the outline of the history of Przysucha, with trustworthy data can be found in numerous archives, collected and analyzed by local scholars and is included in the second chapter of the present thesis). The focus is rather on what the people care about, what they remember and what they *believe* to be true. Furthermore, although some of my oldest respondents have already died and are no longer among the

potential passers-by that Jewish pilgrims to Przysucha may meet on their way, they still exert a sort of indirect influence on mutual Christian-Jewish relations. Their influence is especially visible in the actions, decisions and attitudes of their children and grandchildren as well as relatives to whom they conveyed memories of their experiences and emotions.

Influence of those responsible for taking official decisions is self-explanatory, but as will be proven - limited, since improvement in mutual relations depends on efforts from both sides.

4.1 Prewar relations between Christian and Jewish Poles in Przysucha

Whether we are young or older and more knowledgeable and whether deemed desirable or not, an analysis of Christian-Jewish relations entails a certain need to evaluate actions, reactions, and attitudes of people who lived before the War, when the War broke out and during the time it ended. The drama that Jews experienced on Polish soil, preceded by extremely tense Christian-Jewish relations makes people wonder if Christian Poles acted in a human manner, if they did everything they possibly could, if their actions (or inactions) proved the existence of persistent anti-Semitism in Poland or on the other hand perhaps it was the Jews who had provoked animosity between themselves and their Christian neighbors. It is a struggle to find out how the examined communities acted and what (if anything) can be done to improve current relations worldwide not only between Jews and Christians, but with every community that wishes to keep its traditions, culture and rites alive.

I am not sure if it is appropriate to assess the actions of these people, but there is a chance that such an analysis may in some way help to prevent the same mistakes being repeated by others. What I am certain of is that only by making a truly in depth effort to understand their personal realities are we able to provide a relatively fair and unbiased evaluation. There is no other possibility available that could take us to prewar Przysucha, allow us to experience living conditions of those times, participate in activities that constituted the everyday routines of the town's inhabitants or experience the common social roles that were in practice during those times. Therefore, only by closely following the gathered data, are we able to become knowledgeable about both the mundane and spiritual aspects of the lives of our informants. It

is important to comprehend what Przysucha was like before the War, what buildings existed, what houses people lived in, what they ate, drank, how they spent their days, where they worked, what they believed in, what was important to them and what their life priorities were. It is crucial to understand their problems and dreams as well as what they meant when they uttered seemingly obvious words such as "poor" and "rich", "good" and "bad", "close" and "separate" or "safe" and "dangerous".

Each category will be analyzed in a twofold manner. Not only will it focus on shared memories, stories and observations and therefore be rich in quotations so as to vividly reflect both the described reality as well as manifested opinions, but it will also be conceptualized, with the intention to stay close to the gathered data so as to reach a clear understanding of their meanings to the furthest extent possible. What is more, discerned ideal types will be based on the degree of tensions between Christian and Jewish Poles so as to verify the existence of certain phenomena in the settlement under study such as the prevalent ambivalence towards Jewish residents, anti-Semitism as well as the possibility to create a strong intercultural bond.

4.1.1 Prewar reality - context of tensions

As contemporaneous residents recall, before the War broke out there were many Jews in the town. Looking at Przysucha today it is hard to imagine it was so heterogeneous, inhabited by communities that differed significantly not only in terms of their customs but also in external appearance and character. This is even more difficult to picture, because in today's Poland people tend to close themselves off and fear "the other", who these days, may not only seize their workplaces, but foremost endanger them physically. Nevertheless, before the War "the other" and local residents somehow co-existed. Residents from Przysucha had no difficulty recognizing who was a Christian, and who was a Jew since the latter group used broken Polish, spoke with an accent, while the men had a different hairstyle (earlocks), long beards, wore kippahs and dark coats. Young Jews were less distinguishable, because their clothes were similar to the ones worn by Christian Poles. On holidays Jews put on elegant clothes. For prayers men wore a special shawl with fringe as well as *"something square"* (Anne, 82, dressmaker), *"a wooden square (...) with some tubes coming out of it, plus some leather straps (...)* (Joanne, 84, dressmaker), *"something like a matchbox"* (George, 85,

bricklayer). Jewish girls were known to be especially beautiful with black, curly hair and dark complexions, while married women had shorter hair and wore wigs. The Jews ate much garlic, herrings and onions, which made them smell. They obeyed religious dietary requirements, that is kosher cuisine. Thus, they refused to eat pork or hind parts and they made sure animals were ritually slaughtered according to Jewish custom. On leaving the house, they touched a *"lamb's skin or something"* placed on their front door, as Timothy (79, locksmith) observed.

Anne (82, dressmaker) said:

> "Everything here was Jewish. And over there it was Jewish. Poles lived only on Wiejska street and at the corner of the German square. The rest *(of the town)* was Jewish. (…) When it was Saturday, you couldn't walk the streets, as all the Jews would be taking strolls. There was no place to walk - there were so many Jews!"

As can be seen, Christian and Jewish Poles customarily lived among their own co-religionists, therefore there were "Polish" and "Jewish" streets. Jews occupied the territory next to the synagogue (along with Warszawska and Krakowska streets), whereas Christians did not live directly next to the Catholic Church. However, although it was not very common, some Jewish families had their homes among Christian neighbors or Christian families - among Jews.

Charles (91, locksmith) remembers:

> "(…) when we go on the left side, there was a Jew, then another one, then nothing and then the apartment of Mr. Buszyński, a Pole, who lived among them (…)"

In his further story, he also states:

> "Germans first took care of the Jews who lived individually among Poles."

Peter (83, clerk) shared his memory:

> "I used to live on Grodzka street, number 13, opposite us lived a Jew and as a neighbor another Jew. (…) We were here, and the kitchen had an almost common wall, behind this wall there was their apartment."

Thus, in some cases - Christian and Jewish Poles were *direct* neighbors, but it was not a predominant pattern.

The numerical dominance of Jews over Christians was even more noticeable because Jews were active in various occupations. They were shop owners, tailors, blacksmiths and shoemakers. Whenever interviewees mentioned deployment of the communities and spheres of their activities, the model was always the same. Among a number of Jewish houses, businesses or professions, there was a single or very few examples of Christians. Thus, one may speak of a huge disproportion as far as business and craft activities are concerned. Respectively, there was an even greater disproportion regarding possession of land and cattle, since it was an exclusively Christian domain.

Anne (82, dressmaker) reported:

> "Jews did all the jobs one can imagine. They sold goods, vegetables, they had shops with glass, plates, all of it was in Jewish hands".

Pauline (87, shop-assistant) recalls:

> The entire town, from Krakowska street, to Partyzantów street on up to Tomczak's house was all Jewish. On one side and the other (…) Everybody *(meaning: every Christian)* had a piece of land and they took care of it, while all the professions were in Jewish hands."

Therefore, there was a clear division of social roles that inhabitants were involved in - Jews were predominantly entrepreneurs, while Christians - farmers. Interestingly, the last phrase both Anne and Pauline used, *"it was in Jewish hands"* turned out to be very common among my respondents. Undoubtedly, it is not a neutral expression. A careful look at the data as such, as well as a study of the course of history in which Christian Poles gradually took over all the spheres in which Jewish Poles had been active before the extermination suggests that Jewish Poles had managed fields that were not their own, as if the Jews had snatched something that should have belonged to Christians and subsequently had not let Christians in those areas, forcing them to do the hard work of farmers.

Joanne (84, dressmaker) seems to confirm such an interpretation:

> "I think that this trade became so innate in them *(Jews)* that Poles lost in result. They had seized everything and we were left behind. This is how it was."

It is important to understand that unlike today, Przysucha was multicultural, and therefore in the town there were institutions, buildings and routines necessary to carry out religious and cultural duties. The Jews had their synagogue, cemetery, mykva, court and a Zionist organization (*"where the youth met, danced in the evenings and did various things"*, as Charles points out). They also had a religious leader - their rabbi who made himself especially visible every Friday evening by walking the streets and calling all the Jews to finish their work, close their shops and start celebrating Sabbath. Christians had their church, city hall, primary school and a fire brigade station. They carefully observed the celebrations and traditions of the Jewish community. As young children, the informants reported they frequently ran to locations where an interesting rite was taking place. Wide-eyed, they would observe the Jewish clothing, accessories that Jews used to say their prayers, funerals as well as services in the synagogue. Therefore, they were able to report how Jews built shelters for Sukkoth (a Jewish holiday), placed a large stone in front of the synagogue for newly-wed couples or hired women to ululate during a funeral. It was not possible for any of the interviewees to explain why Jews engaged in such activities, even what God they believe in (!), but they were certainly interested in Jewish festivities with a kind of curious interest that people have when they observe incomprehensible performances. While I was listening to their stories and subsequently, while doing manual transcriptions and analyzing transcribed interviews, I could observe a clear division that the Christian interviewees always made: "us" vs. "them". They did not perceive Jewish Poles as part of the broadly understood community of Przysucha. My respondents differentiated between Poles and Jews, as if Jews were not actually Polish citizens. Conversely, Jewish Poles were foreigners, who settled in Przysucha, set up businesses, wore strange robes, had strange hairstyles and preserved perplexing traditions. Furthermore, since on occasion Christian and Jewish holidays overlapped, conflicts and awkward situations arose, that will be analyzed more carefully in the ensuing categories.

Although respondents emphasized the number of Jews in the town, it is also necessary to realize that at that time there were much fewer houses. Therefore, informants challenged themselves to enumerate all the inhabitants they remembered, one by one, giving their names and professions. Obviously, since they were past their prime at the time of our meetings, it sometimes turned out to be an exhausting and ineffective practice, but they usually insisted on providing as many details as possible. They also strongly emphasized that the contemporaneous reality of that time was incomparable to today's in many respects. There was no asphalt, but rather cobblestone, there were only a couple of cars owned by the richest

residents as well as few bikes. Owning a radio was considered a luxury, while goods and services were widely accepted as the equivalent of money. Christian houses were predominantly made of wood, clay and thatch, with almost no furniture, very often with earthen rather than a solid floor. The homes had neither running water nor a sewage system (wastewater was poured directly in front of people's homes making streets unbearably filthy and smelly). Dirt was also visible inside buildings.

Frank (86, soldier) gave an example of a bakery in Przysucha:

> "One time he *(a shop assistant)* was cutting bread or something and I saw a black spot. You know what it was? He said, 'it's a blueberry', but it was a worm! There were plenty of cockroaches in bakeries before the War. There were no chemicals to get rid of them. And he said it was a blueberry… a blueberry!"

The discrepancy in standards of living was also visible in the food that people ate and drank which were mainly potatoes, eggs, milk, sour cream and uncomplicated dishes made of flour. Meat was eaten occasionally, usually once a week - on Sundays. The following is an exemplary shopping list as recalled by one of the respondents:

> "When one did holiday shopping, one bought half a kilo of fatback, half a kilo of blood sausage, a kilo of sausage and this was considered holiday shopping! And apart from that one milked a cow, baked some bread - 6 or 7 loaves! And we ate it till it was all gone. Not like today!" (Lucas, 82, miner)

Families were larger, people dressed modestly, with only a few garments for each person. Children ran barefoot, accustomed to covering long distances in that manner on a daily basis.

> "You go to church by car now, and I used to go at 9 a.m. and then at 4 p.m. again, not like you today, where you only go one time and that's it, we ran, we went on foot! Barefoot! Only drops of blood were left where we ran!" (Laura, 79, housewife)

Since people had far less than they do today, they appreciated everything much more and did not waste anything, they knew the value of every penny and every scrap of food. When they were able to have meat more often than occasionally, or had shoes or warm coats for winter, when they could eat their fill - they considered themselves to be especially fortunate, because they were aware that most people in Przysucha did not experience such "wealth".

As can be gathered, seemingly obvious words such as “poor” or “wealthy” carried totally different meanings. It was enough to stay warm and full to consider oneself affluent. Poverty meant that a person had almost *nothing* to eat or wear, poverty implied that a mother had to hide bread from her children so that they would not eat it during the day and be left with nothing to eat for supper. Similarly, it was enough to have a place to sleep to consider oneself living in comfortable conditions.

Thomas (93, forester) pointed to different meanings of commonly used words at the very beginning of my interview. Having been asked: “Could you tell me what it was like before the War?” he answered:

> “Prewar time for me meant going to primary school. I didn’t have to walk far - only 7 kilometers.”

Needless to say, for a primary school student today to cover 7 kilometers on foot twice a day, six times a week would seem to be an enormous distance.

Both the difficult living conditions of the time as well as the special character of country life significantly shaped the personalities of the contemporaneous inhabitants of Przysucha. In order to make a living, Christians had to be hard-working, vigilant, close to nature, flexible, resourceful, tough and ready to settle for the absolute minimum.

> “Doctors treated everything: they extracted teeth, delivered babies. They had knowledge of everything. Such were doctors” (Pauline, 87, shop-assistant)

But also ordinary people, in search of even slim earnings, were ready to do any job, at any time and under any conditions. They were happy to work either day or night shifts, work at home or leave the town for weeks, just to be able to earn enough to survive. They constantly remained on the lookout for any opportunity to earn some money. If there was an opportunity to become a tailor - they learned to sew, if there were fish - they tried to catch and sell them, if Jewish Poles needed to have their goods delivered - they left home for as many days as necessary, arranged to find a horse and did so. They also covered long distances on foot, sometimes carrying heavy goods to sell, or even carried animals - they would wrap a new born calf around their neck and off they would go. To check if a fish was fresh, they would bite off the fish’s head. They were able to make stamps or gorgets by hand, etc. Therefore,

throughout their lives, men often ended up having many, unrelated professions, whereas women were usually housewives or did farm work.

Christine (80, farmer) shared her story:

> "When it comes to our family, dad was the only one who worked. First he was a shoe-maker, then he was a chimney-sweep, because shoe-making didn't go that well anymore."

Such a situation resulted from the fact that there was no steady employment in Przysucha. Apart from the count who hired Christian workers and a Jewish foundry, there were no factories or other possibilities where residents of Przysucha could work and rely on a secure monthly income. As already mentioned, most Jewish Poles had shops, so their survival was more or less secure.

Upbringing of children before the War centered around one simple idea: let a child participate in as many spheres of life as possible and they will learn everything they needed to know. Hence, children were engaged in house-keeping and cultivating land as early as possible. They cooked, took care of their younger siblings, went on errands, did shopping and pastured animals.

Caroline (82, dressmaker) remembered:

> "I don't know how old I could be (at that time) but there was a manor house. We would go there to work, people went to dig potatoes or *(gather)* vegetables (…) and when mommy would go I cooked lunch and at twelve o'clock I was in the field, they ate, and mommy asked if I could stay to earn some money (…)"

Since children were not protected from hard work and the natural cycle of life, they matured far more quickly than their peers of today. They were more independent, self-sufficient, hardened and accustomed to the fact that people die and animals are grown for food. Also school teachers, enjoying great respect in the town, proved to educate young inhabitants of Przysucha in a heavy-handed manner. Physical punishment of students was very common and obviously widely accepted.

Regarding schooling, Frank (86, soldier) reported:

> "You didn't like something? Then he *(the teacher)* took you by ears with a stick and dragged you to the blackboard… your neck turned blue afterwards… There was a teacher named Zagdański. When he hit you, your palm became purple. Once a student's father came and asked him: 'What have you done to my son's hand? It's purple!' The teacher grabbed the father by his back, shoved him out of the classroom and locked the door."

The lifestyle people led, their manner of raising children, the educational system they approved of - all suggest that the highest priority that people valued before the War was survival of oneself and one's family. Survival required being tough enough and skillful enough to be able to fight for a job, but it also meant (especially for Christian Poles, since most of them did not own shops) having some acreage that would guarantee food regardless of possibilities to find another source of money. The attitude of Christians towards land cultivation was incredibly ambiguous and it seriously affected the way they treated their Jewish neighbors (an issue that will be scrutinized more in detail later). On one hand we deal here with patrimony and long lasting tradition of Christian Poles being farmers, on the other hand - with hard, arduous, and often unrewarding job as cultivating land certainly is. After all, farmers are highly dependent on changes of weather or changing economic situations.

Frank (82, soldier) expressed a kind of yearning for the past and his sentiment for land in this way:

> "Before it was better than now. You could work for a Jew, for a locksmith, for a blacksmith. Now all is gone. There are no locksmiths, no blacksmiths, all is gone. Everyone had cows, pigs, horses, geese, life was different. Now life sucks. (…) There was poverty, but a different kind. There was poverty, but there were fruit, pigs and cows - you worked and you lived better than now. (…) It was beautiful: rye was here, potatoes there, and now it's a jungle, everything is overgrown with weeds!"

As seen from Frank's recollections, the things that were dear to people before the War such as land or cattle have lost their value. Overgrown, abandoned fields are now the best symbol of such changes.

It is apparent that the reality of prewar Przysucha as well as the personal qualities that arose from it were far different from what we observe today. Aside from some of the extreme difficulties already mentioned, residents of the town who I had the pleasure and honor to speak with recalled the incomparable quality of food, especially meat, bread, eggs or fruit as

well as the quality of tailored clothes that the more affluent wore, which were scrupulously sewn out of solid fabric. They also appreciated the fact that once a person found a job or owned a piece of land one could actually survive (as opposed to current times when having a job does not guarantee a decent living, having a good education is not necessarily assurance of finding employment or having a pension is often not sufficient to even buy needed medication). However, the respondents did acknowledge the comfort people enjoy today, the speed of transport, the choice of goods that are currently at our disposal, and ease that modern devices provide. The difficulty to unambiguously assess prewar and contemporary reality in Przysucha is captured by what Caroline (82, dressmaker) shared:

> "I will tell you honestly: those were very hard times, but at the same time they were happy and peaceful. Now people have everything - everything but peace of mind."

The reality of Przysucha during the War is covered in a sub-category as it accentuated many of the same life patterns and personal qualities presented above, however under much more extreme conditions. In order to survive, people took advantage of their innate curiosity and ability to observe the world and adjust to it. However, during this time, rather than the Jewish rites and traditions that formerly attracted scrutiny, attention was drawn to the behavior of the enemy - the Nazi Germans. The residents' flexibility and readiness to settle for discomfort and acceptance of the minimum to survive was indispensable when they had to change their plans unexpectedly, pack their belongings and spend the night in the fields or cemetery, under the open sky. Engaging children in all household duties even from the earliest stages of their lives helped harden them and enabled them to gain a sense of independence that proved to be useful when they were sent to scout, find food or told to protect animals as a consequence of fire arising because of bombardment. All of their former characteristic features remained visible, although there was one major difference that significantly affected how people lived and acted during the War: constant fear and anxiety about tomorrow.

The very first noteworthy event in Przysucha that made it clear that the War had indeed started (although many believed that it would not have) and implied something extremely serious which was about to change people's lives forever was the bombardment of Wiejska street, which took place on September 6th, five days after the beginning of the Second World War in Poland. It only took around half an hour for numerous homes of Christian Poles to be destroyed - they vanished quickly and thoroughly, since wood and thatch burn easily. From

one day to the next people were left with nothing whatsoever. All their possessions, however few they may have been, were completely gone. As often happens during war time, the bombardment found the inhabitants of Przysucha in the middle of their daily routine and duties. Christine (80, farmer), who was only 6 at the time, had just returned from the fields where she had been digging potatoes with her mom. George (85, bricklayer), who was 11 then, was pasturing cows in his aunt's field. The majority of Christian Poles had been taking advantage of the exceptionally sunny day and were out of their homes cultivating land. However, as Anne (82, dressmaker) related, *"the atmosphere was strange".* Przysucha was bombarded because the Germans had spotted some Polish soldiers in the park and presumably thought that more of them were hiding nearby, which turned out to be a misconceived assumption.

Pauline (87, shop-assistant), who was a thirteen year old girl on September 6th 1939 and who was living on the bombarded Wiejska street at the time, recalls her terror this way:

> "I remember I was running around the yard shouting, and my father started to curse at me. He broke open the sty where there was a sow, pigs and a horse, while the cows were already in the pasture (…) He asked me to chase the pigs out among the walls and sheds which were burning - to chase them out to the field. I brought the horse out as well. There was a plane over me flying low, dropping bombs, but none hit me. I have said many times: I wish a bomb had hit me then."

Pauline's recollection reflects a variety of emotions such as fright, nervousness, anxiety and confusion which must have been enormous considering the fact that Wiejska street was bombarded at the very beginning of the War. Therefore, people had no idea of what the future held in store for them. Moreover, these incidents highlight the necessity of the residents to make quick decisions, their feverish attempts to save property, and high dependence on luck and automatic readiness to engage children in highly dangerous tasks. Needless to say, the reality of wartime was extremely unpredictable, which forced people to make decisions that they were by no means certain of or comfortable making. Having suspected danger, they fled from their homes to forests and surrounding villages, they built shelters where they could hide in case of bombing, they busily made food stores, sorted out documents and valuables, realizing their fate depended on coincidences, luck, being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time and whether they met good or bad people along their way. Furthermore,

their personal flexibility and skills to align their actions to arising circumstances cannot be underestimated.

The omnipresent fear, anxiety, uncertainty, tension and confusion was accentuated by the presence of Nazi soldiers, who walked around the town in their uniforms, checking if their orders had been implemented. Anne (82, dressmaker) stated:

> "When Germans entered Przysucha, Poles became extremely fearful. They *(Germans)* were walking around the town, all of them dressed in uniforms, you could see that they were very… unfriendly. Yes, definitely unfriendly!"

The word: *"unfriendly*" that Anne was trying to find seems quite appropriate when we attempt to describe relations between Christian inhabitants and the German invaders. The Germans repressed the Christian community in numerous ways: Christians were not allowed to leave their homes after 8 p.m. and they were obliged to provide Nazi soldiers with certain products such as milk, meat or crops. Food rationing drastically limited the number of goods inhabitants could buy. Christians were forced to do hard, stressful work for the invaders, they were demeaned, humiliated, occasionally beaten, etc. Nevertheless, if the average Christians in Przysucha agreed to keep their heads down and comply with the imposed regulations, if they did not help Jews or join or support the guerilla movement, they considered themselves more or less "safe". They lived in constant anxiety and discomfort, although their suffering was incomparable to the fate that befell their Jewish neighbors.

There are in fact many stories and situations which clearly show how the Christian Poles and Germans did manage to successfully communicate together and make certain agreements. For instance, in order to make sure that an animal would be turned over to German gendarmerie, it had to wear a kind of an earring, so that a Nazi soldier who was in control of a designated area could easily monitor how the animal was being raised. Nevertheless, Christians sometimes managed to replace an earring from a grown pig or cow and place it on a piglet or calf so that the German soldier would lose track of when the animal was expected to be handed in. Farmers were afraid to take such actions, because they risked losing the killed animal as well as being imposed a fine (as can be observed, the punishments were relatively mild), but nevertheless, this was a practice that people dared to engage in since there were German soldiers who turned a blind eye to it.

Lucas (82, miner) reported how one of the gendarmes supervising a neighboring village spotted that an earring had been removed:

> "One time *(the German)* Zajdler said: you know what? Instead of growing larger, this pig is becoming smaller and smaller! Give me some fatback from the other one! *(the one father had already slaughtered)*. He was like that. So father cut off a piece. That fatback was different than what you find today, he cut out a kilo or more and wrapped it in paper… this Zajdler was a good man."

Christine (80, a farmer) also recalled friendly relations between Christian Poles and Germans. Every day she (along with her friends) visited German army headquarters in search of food, as a result of which she regularly returned home with bread, tins, lard or pea soup with large pieces of meat. Caroline (82, a dressmaker) shared a story of how a German soldier saved many children in a nearby located village by instructing them to say they were younger than they were in reality. Had they said they were over thirteen years old, they would have been killed outright as an act of revenge for a Nazi who had been killed. Furthermore, Lucas (82, miner) recalled how Germans treated Christian inhabitants to sweets and although Christian Poles were initially highly suspicious as to whether the candies were edible (not poisonous), they somehow managed to reach a mutual understanding.

The original lack of trust towards invaders contrasted by the Germans treating Christian Poles to sweets reflects the fact that residents of Przysucha met a wide spectrum of personalities among the German soldiers. There were "good Germans", as my interviewees called them (the word: "good" seems to acquire a different significance. After all, Germans depicted as "good" were still a part of one of the evilest plots ever foisted on mankind), who did not strictly abide by Nazi rules and who shared their food and showed their humanity, who cherished universal values such as God, motherland, family, honor, etc.

Joanne (84, dressmaker) whose parents were forced to give up a room in their house so that a Nazi soldier could stay there said:

> "At Christmas his wife sent him a wafer, an envelope, and a fir twig. He said he was Orthodox."

Since a wafer symbolizes peace, forgiveness and agreement, the image of the soldier was definitely softened, whereas being religious posed a common feature between the repressed and the oppressors.

Laura (79, housewife) whose family was also obliged to make their house available for a German shared a similar memory:

> "When his wife sent him a parcel from Germany, he would always come to the kitchen and treat us to something. And when he came into the room, he always took off his shoes and put on his slippers. So well-behaved he was."

George (85, bricklayer) reported how his father worked for Nazis as a mason, which gave him the green light to arrange moon for his son's wedding.

> "Had it been somebody else, he would have been arrested", he emphasized.

Christine (80, a farmer) described the Germans as a *"cheerful nation"* as the soldiers visited a Przysucha restaurant every evening where they would sing and dance accompanied by an orchestra.

> "It was very a jolly occasion. We *(the children from Przysucha)* were standing outside the window observing."

The mere fact that small children were not afraid to watch the invaders enjoying themselves, and presumably had their parents' permission to do so, clearly implies that most of the time Germans did not pose a serious threat to the Christian inhabitants of the town.

Conversely, Anne (82, dressmaker) shared a story of how her father met a soldier who was less amicable towards Christian Poles. Being caught outside after the curfew and anticipating severe punishment, he tried to bribe the soldier with vodka. Unfortunately, his offer was rejected and he was subsequently told to find some young Christian girls, or direct him to a house where such girls lived so that he could sexually abuse them.

> "How was he to find girls for him? On the other side of the street, in Sołtys's house, there were three girls. So father told him: go alone! Otherwise, Sołtys will be angry with me! And he *(the soldier)* went, started knocking and father ran away."

One can hardly imagine the tension and awkwardness of a situation where a person is forced to betray their countrymen, their friends or their neighbors. It definitely required sharp thinking so as not to endanger oneself, one's family and, ideally, no one else. Nevertheless, the story presented above was only a small prelude of the severe cruelty that German soldiers resorted to, although most of the indescribable brutality was directed towards Jewish, and not Christian Poles. When referring to the ongoing "suffering competition" that might have been observed among the Christian and Jewish communities, there is no doubt, that unsurprisingly, in Przysucha as elsewhere it was the Jews who suffered far, far more. Terrified as Christian Poles might have been that they would suffer the same fate, for the most part they were only witnesses of how the theory of a master race was implemented in practice.

Pauline (87, shop-assistant) claims that her father overheard German plans towards Christians:

> "They *(Germans)* were laughing that if they won the War they would take as many hectares as they wished and they would take young Poles as their slaves, to work for them, and the old Poles - would be killed."

It was also common among my respondents to recall how they were frightened by the statements the Jews allegedly made as they were being forced into the ghetto such as: *"Now us, later - you!"* or *"We - for breakfast, you - for dinner!"*. We may only speculate if any of those threats would have come true had the War proceeded in a different way, but these are only thoughts that are impossible to verify.

I would rather stick to the facts of incidents which took place in Przysucha during the wartime. One of the most horrific and heart-wrenching events mentioned by many of my interviewees, some of whom claimed to be eye-witnesses to an occurrence was the killing of Jewish infants, placed for this purpose on a tennis table, where they were shot, right in front of the contemporaneous arrest, nearby the Catholic Church. This abominable crime proves the lack of any boundaries used by the Nazis to repress the Jewish community. This act was perpetrated by a gendarme called Moritz, who was infamous for his boundless cruelty. Moritz was not present in Przysucha constantly, but appeared in the town once every two or three weeks, each time murdering Jews without giving such acts a single thought, with no regard to the person's age or physical condition and killing for no other reason than he seemed to enjoy murdering Jews as if it were some sport or a form of relaxation for him. Moritz murdered

Jews like a hunter shoots birds. When he would come upon them by chance he would shoot them unexpectedly or shoot at them from his car as he passed by. Therefore, all my respondents reported repeatedly witnessing such traumatic events during which children, young women, the elderly and young Jewish men were murdered or seriously wounded. They reported seeing survivors rambling through the town, drained, hopeless and searching for their loved ones. The respondents spotted them lying dead in the streets, begging for food or taking feed for animals to survive. The Christian residents were fully aware of the unbearable conditions in the ghetto and knew how overcrowded and unsanitary were the houses the Jews lived in. They realized what acute hunger the Jews suffered as a result of the impossibility to work or buy essentials and were aware that life in the ghetto meant being exposed to various diseases from hunger or cold which often led to death. They also knew Jews were the main target for the Germans, even if they feared they as Christians could be next.

In fact, the Nazis wanted the Christian Poles to observe their atrocities and to actively or passively participate in the killings of their Jewish neighbors. They encouraged Christian passers-by to watch their persecutions. Christians were ordered to be "police" in charge of guarding the ghetto. Inhumane "funerals", were conducted where Christian youngsters were forced to dig holes which Jewish Poles were later thrown to. Therefore, the reality of wartime not only required settling for far less but becoming hardened and even insensitive if one wanted to survive. It required being focused on one's priorities, which for Christian Poles usually meant survival of oneself and one's family, as opposed to helping Jews or fighting for universal values such as justice or peace. Christian residents were also part of the ghetto liquidation as they provided transport for their Jewish neighbors - transport for which Jews had to pay (!) before leaving. It is striking that Jews were not assigned to particular Christian for such transport, so they normally chose the ones they knew, did business with and were familiar with… They paid their Christian neighbors, and amid tears, weeping, sobbing, screaming, and general incomprehensible despair they left to Opoczno, from where they were sent further, to the camp (in Treblinka) which my respondents neither knew the name nor location of.

Christine (80, farmer) told me about the fate of her Jewish friend from school:

> "They took her away, they took them *(Jews)* away, they rushed them to the square next to the church, it was fenced with planks, and from there they took them to Opoczno on carts. What weeping was there! What screaming! The utter image of misery and despair.

Germans, monsters did it. They were such monsters! Some Jews escaped, hid themselves, and… they took them to Opoczno, maybe to some camps or something."

It is clear that the wartime reality in Przysucha had many dimensions and was experienced completely differently by the town's Christian and Jewish inhabitants. Christian Poles could feel relatively safe (once again, the meaning of the word "safe" takes on a completely different meaning), whereas the Jewish Poles were doomed to die. For the Jews the persecutions went through stages of before and after the establishment of the ghetto when their living standards and chances of survival were drastically limited. One could say that the process of slow death had already been initiated. However, although Christian Poles were not the main target for the Germans and although the repressions directed towards them were far less severe, the trauma they endured cannot be underestimated. Conversely, the existence of multiple kinds of traumas they were subjected to should be acknowledged, such as the trauma of passive Christian witnesses who were forced to observe or participate in the process of Jewish extermination, the trauma of Christian children or young Christian Poles who had little or no understanding of the geopolitical reasons for the War which caused them to be even more helpless and terribly confused, the trauma of heroic Christians who risked everything to help their Jewish neighbors in need often exposing themselves to suspicion or aversion on the part of other Christian Poles, and most importantly, the horrific trauma of Jewish victims as well as the very few Jewish Poles who did manage to escape the ultimate solution, but lost all they had, their families, their possessions and importantly, their faith in humanity.

Pauline (87, shop-assistant), who was a young girl at that time, was given a shovel and forced to spend 40 days excavating holes for Jewish corpses.

"Oh… oh… I still see it. I remember when we went to dig graves, they assigned us some plots, they assigned how many meters we should dig, how deep, how wide, how long (…) I remember there was a German next to us and he started saying something, but I was so young, I didn't understand, he started to talk and I talked back and he said: If you don't shut your mouth, you will find yourself in this hole right away!"

Timothy (79, locksmith) admitted his feelings of helplessness typical of a young child:

"(…) I came out and from the side of the Jewish cemetery and a young girl was staggering along - she was about ten and I was only nine, so she was almost like me, she had her eye poked out, she was bleeding right from there… maybe she regained her consciousness

after a few hours? Maybe the shade came upon her? She was walking… but how can a child help another child?"

Laura (79, housewife) confessed of certain memories that have remained with her for her entire life:

"I think it was 1942 when the Jews were transported on carts from Przysucha to Opoczno and one Jewish woman who was going there passed this way, and she had a girl, maybe ten years old, and she came over, to our yard… and this girl was crying so terribly… This voice I will… (…) I am 79 today and I still remember this child, I can't get her out of my head!"

Definitely, none of the victims' trauma should be diminished. My informants' body language, their sighs, persistent coughing, shivering hands, pauses, broken sentences - all suggested how real their traumas were, and for many still is.

***

The first concept that loomed out of the stories presented so far was the concept of a *shtetl* whose importance cannot be underestimated due to the mere fact that the term is included in the title of the present thesis. There is no doubt that whoever confronts the subject of Polish Jewry is soon confronted with the notion of a shtetl which had "became a symbol of Jewish life before the Holocaust."[37] Furthermore, shtetls pose a recurring theme in texts by Polish and Jewish writers (Aksenfeld, Linetski, Abramovitsh, Peretz, Aleiechem, Krall etc.) although the truthfulness of some images depicted in literature seems highly questionable (e.g. in Miron 1995).[38] It comes as no surprise that clearly defining the concept under current debate requires a great deal of struggle, with cultural scholars, sociologists and historians being unable to reach an understanding that would go beyond a very basic definition:

"(…) The shtetl refers to the socio-spatial construction of a small settlement: a town." (Markowski 2007:51, in ed. by Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė and Lempertienė)

[37] https://sztetl.org.pl/en/

[38] Miron (1995:4) observed that Jewish writers tend to Judaize shtetls, i.e. present them as if they were purely Jewish, as if Christian rituals and institutions were non-existent there. In the present paper the emphasis was put on presenting the two sets of all the necessary secular and religious organizations and establishments that enabled Jews and Christians to lead life in agreement with their cultures.

There is no agreement whether the concept of a shtetl pertains only to a Jewish part of a town (e.g. Cała 2000:338, in ed. by Cała, Węgrzynek and Zalewska) or to a town as a whole whose population was (among others) Jewish (Unterman 2014, Zborowski 1996). Markowski (2007:52) suggests employing a broader definition that would encompass (or even rise above) perceiving the notion through "spatial lenses" (that focus on a Jewish district), "social lenses" (that revolve around a Jewish community) as well as "mixed lenses" (which take into account socio-economic-spatial conglomeration) and hence, a shtetl is defined as:

> "a socio-economic-religious conglomeration situated in a certain defined physical space that does not have a clearly rural structure." (Markowski 2007:52)

Additionally, the YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe provides the following definition:

> "The Yiddish term for town, *shtetl*, commonly refers to small market towns in pre-World War II in Eastern Europe with a large Yiddish speaking Jewish population. While there were in fact great variations among these towns, a shtetl connoted a type of Jewish settlement marked by a compact Jewish population distinguished from their mostly gentile peasant neighbors by religion, occupation, language and culture."[39]

The YIVO entry makes it clear that shtetls were not "desert islands" but constituted an integral part of a wider local and regional economic system. What differentiated them from other Diaspora settlements such as those in former Babylon, France, Spain or Italy was the fact that Jews comprised (sometimes a significant) majority of the whole population inhabiting the town and they represented a wide spectrum of occupations, ranging from wealthy entrepreneurs, through shopkeepers, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors on down to water carriers.

It is interesting to notice that from a legal point of view shtetls did not exist. Jews, being extraterritorial and having little political power, were not allowed to decide on legislation and thus determine the official status of their various kinds of settlements. As a result, for non-Jewish inhabitants or rulers the term "shtetl" bore no meaning whatsoever, whereas for Jews it could denote both a city, a town or a village under Polish, Russian or Austrian law. In Yiddish there is a distinction between *a shtetl* (a town), *a shetele* (a small town), *a shtot* (a city), *a dorf*

[39] http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl

(a village), and *a yishev* (a tiny rural settlement). In order to qualify to be viewed as a shtetl, a town had to be big enough to host the basic set of institutions essential to carry out duties connected with Jewish communal life, such as a synagogue, a ritual bathhouse, a cemetery, a school and a voluntary association in charge of fundamental religious and communal functions. As we could repeatedly observe - Przysucha fulfilled all the above requirements.

4.1.2 Tension - ambivalence

Ambivalence was by far the most prevalent attitude demonstrated by Christians towards their Jewish neighbors. It is also the least biased definition, since it assumes the existence of a spectrum upon which a whole range of approaches may be placed. It should be remembered that at least two interwoven grounds were being covered during the interviews. On one hand there was the picture of pre-War Przysucha with the tensions, conflicts and problems of all types it faced. There were Christian children or young people who nagged Jewish Poles and then recalled such incidents with a certain sentiment that is usually awakened when one remembers their youth. On the other hand, opinions presented by the respondents have been shaped throughout all their lives and reflect recent changes in public discourse in Poland, such as political correctness that has become omnipresent in Polish society. The viewpoints were also filled with experience of old people who are well aware that their tomorrow is uncertain. The respondents acted differently depending on the situations they found themselves in or their perceived role of self and the other. During our meetings, they readily pointed to actions of other fellow residents, so as to delegate responsibility for mutual tensions to others. Those people were often unable to explain their actions from 80 years ago, which suggests their approach was not static, but subject to many changes.

This ambivalent attitude is perfectly captured in the perception of Jewish neighbors the respondents reported along with their prevailing unwillingness to preserve common heritage. The informants pointed to Jewish religiosity, solidarity, resourcefulness and calmness which indicates admiration, yet at the same time their responses were often contaminated with fear and jealousy. A lack of interest in commemorating Jewish victims implies the existence of tensions and events that none wish to cherish in memory.

Christian respondents had very mixed feelings about Jewish religiosity. Their stories tell of Jews who were found to pray intensively and who showed their religious dedication by

slightly bending their torso back and forth as well as by their giving prayers the highest priority, which captured *all* their attention.

Frank (86, soldier) recalls:

> "For example, Jews had Saturday for Sabbath, so the Jews wore a box on their head[40], they had their special holy things, and brought two candles and when a Pole came a Jew wouldn't move. When a Jew was praying, when they would be saying their prayers, a Pole could take from the shop all he wanted, steal all the money (!) and a Jew would only speak when they had finished their prayers."

Joanne (84, dressmaker) shared a story when she went with her mother to a Jewish tailor to have a winter coat sewn:

> "He *(the tailor)* was praying, do you think they took us in? No way! We had to wait on a bench, it was sometime in the fall, until he finished his prayer. (…) He was praying at the table, the Bible was open, he wouldn't look up, nothing! His faith was so strong!"

Christians were well aware of the importance Jews attached to celebrating weekly Sabbath. They prepared all their food and did all household chores the day before so that they would not have to work or engage themselves in forbidden activities during the Sabbath. Also in winter (or during cold periods), when their houses required daily heating they managed to stick to their Sabbath resolutions by hiring Christian Poles to light a fire for them.

George (85, bricklayer), shared an experience of when he was a young boy pasturing cows and was called by an elderly Jewish woman:

> "- Come, boy! (…)
>
> - What do you want, you old Jewish woman? *(the respondent used a highly pejorative term "Żydowico ty", which is impossible to translate into English)*
>
> - Don't be afraid! I'll give you apples! Come here nicely, with a match, everything is ready (…) you'll light a match and you'll take as many apples as you wish! (…)

[40] "The box" evidently refers to tefillin. However, according to Jewish ritual law, tefillin are not worn on Sabbath. This is an example of bringing up information that is actually incorrect but is the result from the faded memories of the respondent as well as the fact that it refers to a situation which took place around 80 years before, when the respondent was a young boy.

She wasn't allowed to even light a match. Such was their faith. Their faith meant - when it's a holy day, it's a holy day."

Pauline (87, shop assistant) recalled two situations confirming the unstable approach of Christian Poles towards Jewish religiosity. In the first example, a Christian who was hired to keep a Jewish house warm for Sabbath decided to do a practical joke on his Jewish employers, and therefore, once the fire was lit and burning solidly, he made sure all the windows and doors were shut so that the house would fill with smoke. In the second - a Christian urgently needed to buy some spirit for his horse that had a serious bee sting, but since it was Sabbath all the shops were already closed.

"So father went to a Jew and told him what the problem was and said: sell it to me!

The Jew replied - I can't sell it to you, I'll give it to you, but I can't accept money, after the Sabbath bring me money, but don't tell anybody, because if the rabbi found out I'd be cast out of our religion!

So it wasn't allowed. How is it possible? In such a need, he should have been allowed to help and not that he couldn't!"

It is enough to carefully read the last phrase uttered by the informant to see that despite the fact that the Jew did help the Christian in need, even took the risk of suffering from religious banishment, the whole situation is unequivocally remembered and commented upon negatively, with Jewish faith portrayed as impractical and inhumane.

Christian Poles were also dismayed by the usage of a cune, which is still visible on one of the walls of the synagogue, which the respondents claimed served as a punishment for unfaithful wives or unmarried women who got pregnant.

Anne (82, dressmaker) said:

"Here, where the synagogue is, I remember, there is a recess, have you noticed? Do you know what this recess is for? When a Jewish women was a whore, they put her in it, handcuffed her and the Jews straightened her out. (…) They went after the service, spat on her, insulted her, etc."

However, as Rose (83, shop-assistant) reports, morality standards among Jewish women were much higher than among the female Christians who commonly underwent abortions:

> "Jews were like this: no-one would go wrong *(undergo an abortion)*. Here, in this house, women were taken by horse to a doctor. When she was carried away from the doctor who aborted her child, she was put on a cart, covered with a quilt and taken home, half-alive, and you could look for a Jew for the whole day but no one would bring a Jew."

The situations presented above prove the existence of a widely accepted hierarchy. Every Friday evening a Jewish rabbi called all his co-religionists to stop work and begin celebrating Sabbath (to which order Jews absolutely submitted), men (not women) were obliged to pray at regular times even if it interfered with their remaining duties and women were publicly punished if they were found to commit adultery. It is clear that religion composed the center of Jewish life and all other spheres such as family or work life were subordinate to it. Nevertheless, in Przysucha two couples decided to break the omnipresent pattern of preserving tradition and created "mixed" marriages in which women who were originally Jewish (in order to get married they had to undergo conversion) and the men were Roman Catholic. Unsurprisingly, a conversion followed by marrying a Christian man brought with it fierce opposition among Jews who were losing their co-believer. Pauline (87, shop-assistant) recalls the assistance of the police carrying sabers to protect the bride and the groom in one such situation. Christine (80, farmer) claims that one of the two couples had to flee to another town to escape the persecution in Przysucha.

Rose's mother allegedly witnessed one of these weddings:

> "(…) All of the Jews were standing in front of the Church and they had acid in bottles to burn her eyes, because she had rejected her faith."

It is worth underlining that a daughter of one of converted women still lives in Przysucha. There is no doubt that she is regarded as conspicuous, and as previously mentioned, the name residents ascribed to her was a "*przechrzcianka*", meaning "a female convert", poses evidence that the woman was pointed towards in a derogatory manner. Her nickname wrongly indicates it had been she herself who had changed religion, as if she was forced to bear responsibility for her mother's decision. All my respondents had heard of her, all suggested her as a potential informant, many asked to keep the suggestion confidential as though she was not a "pure Christian", as if her mother's conversion was shameful and as though she did not fully

belong to the community of Przysucha. Taking into consideration the fact that her mother's conversion took place decades ago, it seems reasonable to assume that differentiation between "us" and "them" is very, very deeply rooted. I met with the woman in question, but she decidedly refused to talk to me.

Today's residents of the town can also observe pious Jews, their customs, engagement and routines. They see coaches filled with young and old, Orthodox and non-Orthodox pilgrims from all over the world. They acknowledge their search for identity, care over the deaths of their co-religionists and willingness to cover huge distances to pay homage to important Rabbis.

Joanne (84, dressmaker) whose house is located nearby the synagogue shared her admiration:

> "I don't know when it was, it was fall I think, twelve coaches! Foreign ones! They came here, how they can pray, darling! When they stand in front of the synagogue they pray so beautifully, they don't move, both the youth and others, they sing so beautifully! You can hear everything in our place."

Also other respondents, for instance Peter (83, clerk), Frank (86, soldier), Anne (82, dressmaker), Christine (80, farmer), and Rose (83, shop-assistant) felt uplifted by the fact that Jews still remember and honor their ancestors and heritage.

Christians demonstrated ambivalent attitudes to their neighbors also due to their strong Jewish sense of community, which made them be perceived as *"separate people"*, living discrete lives (Anne, 82, dressmaker). Jewish solidarity has been visible on many occasions. They supported each other materially, physically and spiritually and always knew they could count on one another. The ambivalence also stemmed from the fact that Jewish solidarity was not extended towards Christian inhabitants of the settlement (with whom they were symbiotically connected) but limited solely to members of their own religious group, which gave the impression that Przysucha was inhabited by two separate camps.

To give a few examples: Charles (91, locksmith) recalled a story of when a young Jewish boy was attacked by a Christian Pole, as he tried to take some apples from an orchard. When the boy started to shout crying for help in Yiddish, *"all of the Jews from Przysucha"* rushed to lend him a hand. Charles ends his story with the following conclusion:

"They *(Jews)* were like this: when something bad happened to one of them, it didn't matter if they were offended by him or they were friends, they defended him anyway."

Timothy (79, locksmith) recalled another adversity that befell one of Jews from the town, this time arising as the result of a natural disaster. A shop, where the Jew sold soap, powder and kerosene had collapsed because of a torrential storm, but thanks to immediate help from his co-religionists the merchant was able to resume work in the blink of an eye.

"They made a roof and after three days the Jew could sell again. A Jew would get help from other Jews, they helped one another."

However, most importantly, Jews demonstrated strong business solidarity that also determined the well-being of Christians:

"Among them there was unity, one stood by another, a Jew would not outbid another Jew. When one came to a Pole to buy a calf he said: I will give you this much - and the Pole didn't want to agree. Another Jew would come and offer less and another came and said he would give even less. They didn't outbid each other by offering more. They were like that." (Pauline, 87, shop-assistant)

Thomas (93, forester) drew attention to Jewish guerilla troops which were alleged to care solely about their own survival (as opposed to fighting against German invaders), even at the cost of killing innocent Christians:

"There was a unit in the forest of Przysucha, the so called A.L. (*Armia Ludowa: People's Army*), a Jewish one, it was liquidated by a Polish unit… Why? Everyone would say they *(Jews)* were to blame for something. That they *(Christians)* had a reason *(to kill Jews).* Did they *(Jews)* have a skirmish with Germans? No. But if they *(Jews)* went to a person - and he didn't want to give them - a bullet. In Drzewica they *(Jews)* killed a couple of people. In Brzezinki they *(Jews)* killed a person. Because they *(Christians)* didn't give them what they asked for. Not everyone had enough to give away like that! So they *(Christians)* eliminated them. (…) Those Jews created the unit and wanted to keep alive only themselves, at the cost of people and whoever didn't give them what they wanted got killed."

It is interesting to notice that Jewish readiness to *"jump into the fire for each other",* as Lucas (82, miner) reported is still visible today. Laura (79, housewife) ensured me that Jews

are still willing to lend their money to the needy even if there was no guarantee they would be paid back.

> "When he *(a Jew)* needed money, he gave it to him, someday he would pay him back. (…) He just took the money out of his pocket and gave."

Rose (83, shop-assistant) noticed that Jewish politicians would always sit next to one another, which proves persistence of the same pattern visible almost 90 years ago. From distributing freshly baked Sabbath challah so that all the Jews could fully enjoy their holiday, on through financial and physical assistance, Jews have repeatedly manifested how community-oriented they are.

Although Christian Poles were aware that among Jewish Poles one could spot a broad spectrum of wealth: there were very rich Jews (who for instance owned buses operating daily between Przysucha and Warsaw), Jews who had average size properties (such as ordinary shop owners) and poor Jews who could hardly make ends meet (for example milkmen), they generally have found Jews wealthier than Christian inhabitants, which obviously has led to a certain amount of discontent. One indicator of being well off was owning a shop, since starting one's own business required some substantial investments to buy goods and pay rent. And, as already reported, Christian Poles did not possess stores (there were very few Christian businessmen), but rather cultivated land and depended on their harvest instead.

Even though there was no significant competition between Jewish and Christian shop owners, there were many examples of instances and tricks that Jews resorted to in order to win more customers. First of all, they offered lower prices. What is more, they were willing to sell products in exchange for other goods when they knew a potential client did not have enough money (*"It can be done! No problem! You bring a hen or something and it will be all right!")*. They accepted installments (*"So a Jewish woman came. - Buy it! Buy this and this! And she sold, you know, she divided the payment into installments and she knew who to sell to, who was reliable.")*. Finally, they were willing to give products on credit and wait for due payment for an agreed period of time (*"So I will write this in my notebook and next week you'll pay me back when you sell something, some potatoes or grain."*).

Joanne (84, dressmaker) described Jews as being materialistic and money-oriented, aspiring to earn as much as possible, which made them offer such conditions to clients to make a transaction happen. For instance, they were ready to deliver goods so that a potential

customer would not go to a competitor. Timothy (79, locksmith) suggested that earning money was so significant to Jews that they started each day by generating income:

> "Sometimes people laughed that a Jew wouldn't eat breakfast, until he made some money. Until he sold something in his shop. He went to his shop and he didn't eat until he sold, then he could eat. It didn't matter how much he earned, even 1 zloty, then he could eat. So it's all about this money."

Laura (79, housewife) claimed that Jews found profits far more important than esthetics or good manners:

> "They *(Jews)* didn't care about propriety, they cared about wealth".

Finally, Frank (86, soldier) recalled that Jews were very professional in their marketing skills. Free candies, enthusiastic presentation of products for sale as well as flexible methods of payment are its best examples.

All of the marketing tricks mentioned above, Jews learned along the way and prove what my respondents adamantly repeated:

> "Jews are only trade, trade and once again trade - parsley, carrot, duck, anything!" (Christine, 80, farmer),
>
> "Jews had trade in their blood." (Laura, 82, housewife),
>
> "All they did was trade." (Lucas, 82, miner),
>
> "(…) trade was innate in them" (Joanne, 84, dressmaker),
>
> "It was a trading nation" (Anne, 82, dressmaker),
>
> "They were born in trade and they were attracted by it" (Roxanne, 85, housewife),
>
> "Trade was in Jewish hands" (Peter, 83, clerk).

Jews were said to be able to sell anything, anything in the world, only to become sellers. The respondents repeatedly put forward the same statement: *"I will trade even potato peels!"* . Those who were interviewed said the Jews were allegedly ready to sell anything to show that they were born to become businessmen.

Jewish resourcefulness was not limited solely to business and marketing. Generally speaking, they were found to skillfully organize their lives so as to avoid hard, arduous work and still be able to live comfortably, which in the eyes of the hard working, constantly exhausted Christian farmers, was unfair and inexplicable.

Christine (80, farmer) asserted:

> "A Jew always has a better head, he knows how to figure things out. But only trade, they didn't care about work, they only traded (…)"

Jews were seen as sharp thinkers, good planners, determined negotiators, all of which enabled them to arrange many issues the way they wished. More often than not, Christian residents observed Jewish ingenuity with mixed feelings. On one hand they were jealous that Jews were smart enough to ensure themselves a convenient living, on the other, they suspected their Jewish neighbors of being dishonest.

Charles (91, locksmith) claimed that Jews *"had a strange character"* and that they did everything by *"wheeling and dealing".* To support his opinion he gave a few examples: Jews, for instance, used to meet every now and then to agree upon the price they would offer to goys in exchange for grain, potatoes, or other products. In such a way, being united and well-informed, Jews did not outbid one another, and made sure they got paid the amount they wished. *"Jews governed themselves very well, very well"*- Charles concluded. In his further examples he brought about an observation that Jews ran certain businesses, having no knowledge about it whatsoever. They had bakeries, but they could not bake, they had carpentry workshops, but they were no carpenters, etc.

> "Poles were hired, he *(a Jew)* only sold!"

Furthermore, (leaving business issues behind for a moment) Jews were able to organize a beautiful, copper roof for their synagogue, the kind of roof that could be found only on historic palaces.

> "They got it done and I say, what on earth, how is this in Poland? They gave the copper to Jews and when we wanted metal for our church - they didn't! Our church leaked too!"

According to Charles, Hitler decided to implement his so called final solution because he was aware of Jewish swindles.

> "Their *(Jews')* honesty was like that: he didn't eat his breakfast until he deceived a Pole and earned his breakfast. This is how it was. Such was their nature."

Some respondents pointed to Jewish scams with regards to trade. Jews were believed to have two separate sets of weights, a lighter one to weigh things while buying and a heavier one to weigh things while selling, ensuring themselves higher profits. What is more, the price they offered to Christian farmers did not correspond to the real value of a product. Finally, they were said to employ a modern-day marketing technique of price skimming. Hence, they offered a very high price at first and then they gradually kept lowering it until they reached a desired point, i.e. the profit they wanted to generate all along, giving an impression the product was a real bargain. On the whole, Jewish engagement in trade was not perceived by the Christians as real work (as cultivating land certainly was), so Jews were found to be constantly resting and yet - having enough money for themselves and to share with less wealthy co-religionists, which Christians found hard to comprehend.

Jewish resourcefulness was also visible in the summers. When Jewish tailors, shoe-makers or shop owners leased orchards with apples, they built simple summer houses, watched their fruit and enjoyed family time during holidays. They bought organic products from local farmers and thus they regularly had *"fresh milk, sour cream, cottage cheese, eggs, hens or roosters, they had everything",* as Pauline (87, shop-assistant) remembered. The Jewish ability to take advantage of various business opportunities was also confirmed when they bought forests, cut trees and sold wood for profit. What is more, they kept fish in the count's pond…

> "(…) and later, before Christmas they caught, sorted and sold them. And the pond belonged to the count. Why couldn't he take care of it? To have fish for his own people, for himself?", Pauline wondered.

Needless to say, for the Christians, the Jews seemed to have an enviable work-life balance. They were capable of finding a range of income sources and managed their time in such a way so as to have plenty of time to pray, spend time with their families and celebrate their holidays.

Peter (83, clerk) shared another example that showed how Jews managed to combine qualities that are seemingly mutually exclusive: deep religiosity and a down-to-earth ability to take care of business. One example happened in modern-day Przysucha when Jews had

arrived to arrange the building of ohels to protect the graves of the prominent local tzaddiks. Since the visitors arrived well after regular office hours, the first problem they faced was finding a clerk responsible for local heritage. After having made some research among local residents - they managed to obtain the necessary permissions. On dealing with the first obstacle, it happened that another clerk was indispensable for what they wanted to accomplish, however, it was not just an average local clerk, but the main person responsible for preservation of buildings in the Radom area. Although the city is located approximately 40 kilometers away from Przysucha and the conservator had finished his work for the day - they succeeded in obtaining his approval. It is important to highlight that despite their late arrival, potential trouble with offices already being closed, the very first activity Jewish pilgrims engaged in was… praying. They stood nearby *"a pile of stones, wood, compost, ground, weeds and all, I think they prayed 10 or 15 minutes. With their faces directed to the East"*- the witness recalls.

Anne (82, dressmaker) summarized Jewish ingenuity with a common proverb: *"It was better to lose with a Jew than to gain with a Pole".* Although Jews did not specialize in cultivating land (another informant quoted a proverb too: *"he is getting by like a Jew on the field",* to show that somebody was not doing very well), they were thought to be exceptionally gifted, streetwise, always on the lookout for opportunities to earn good money, always busy. People used to say: *"You have the mind of a Jew!"* in order to point to one's outstanding intelligence.

Rose (83, shop-assistant) also brought up an example of how she felt about Jewish intellect:

> "You know what, I heard that Germans regret that Hitler killed all the Jews off, a Jew is the cleverest man, those young ones who got burned in the camps, they should have taken them away, they should have Germanized them, because they would still have their brains, they wouldn't have put a different brain in them."

What is more, Jews were portrayed as being calm and fainthearted. In the stories mentioned by the respondents, Christian Poles were often reported to be aggressors and provokers, whereas Jews - passive cowards who, unlike Jews in Israel today, refused to stand up for their rights.

Anne (82, dressmaker) said:

"They were very peaceful people. They weren't feisty, they didn't mess with Poles. They were afraid of being beaten. (…) They were afraid. We chased them more! They never chased us."

Lucas (82, miner) recalled:

"(…) Jews were scared, now in Israel they fight, they militate and before - they were so submissive!"

Charles (92, locksmith), on the other hand, denied Jewish willingness to personally defend their country by saying:

"They *(Jews)* prefer to pay, holy smokes! And not to fight!"

It seems of utmost importance to underline that Christian ambivalence towards their Jewish neighbors did not exclude a hesitant approach towards their own Christian community. Thus, respondents' admiration of Jewish religiosity (at times mixed with irritation due to its rigidness) was often contrasted with Christian wavering, flexibility or, as Frank (86, soldier) called it: *"duplicity".* Jews were found to follow religious practices without fail, whereas Christians were reported to frequently bend the rules and by this, showing that their faith was not their highest priority. Pauline (87, shop-assistant) recalled that one day Jewish and Christian holidays overlapped, and, as we already know, Jews abstained even from lighting a fire in their houses - they paid Christian Poles to do it for them on days of religious celebration. By having everything prepared ahead of time - all the food cooked and all the housework done, they could fully relax, go for a walk to the local park or even organize a family picnic. Theoretically, Christians should have also been resting on such days, but at the same time they did not want to lose an opportunity to earn some money. And, as can be expected, there were many Christian Poles who were happy to jump at the chance to do so, which dismayed more devoutly religious residents.

"(…) They (*Jews)* paid very well to a person who would light a fire for them. And even here, in Przysucha, people reprimanded those ones *(working Christians).* How is it? They *(Jews)* don't do any work during their holidays, and you go to do it for them? How do you treat your holiday? They - this way, and we - what way? What light do you put us in?"

Laura (79, housewife) confirmed:

"What we can tell about Jews, is that they sustained their religion very strongly, their religion was better sustained than ours. (…) When they celebrated their holiday, it wasn't like in our case."

Frank (86, soldier) admitted he went to the hairdresser on Christmas Eve and got his hair cut with no problems. Having shared his story he asked a question we already know the answer to:

"Would a Jew cut somebody's hair on Saturday? Never! But we aren't like this."

In his further considerations Frank reached the conclusion that Christian faith had no reflection in real life:

"We pray here and we steal there."

Or:

"I like the Jewish faith! Ours is too unstable, it's not authentic, what we care about is money, a human doesn't count!"

Regarding mutual support within one's community, a huge discrepancy between Christian and Jewish attitudes was also strongly stated, since Christians were found to act in a way totally opposite to their neighbors. Jews were ready to offer one another support of many kinds, whereas Christian Poles laughed at their co-believers' adversities, enjoyed others' failures and had no intention to lend a hand at all. The aforementioned story of the Jewish shop collapsing and being rebuilt in no time with the help of the community ends this way:

"(…) Poles would have only laughed, they laughed at one another (…) Jews always helped each other while Poles, when they had some problems, they took advantage of the situation. (…) He *(the Jew)* was able to sell after three days, while if it was a Pole, they wouldn't have been back on their feet even after a month." (Timothy, 79, locksmith)

Pauline (87, shop-assistant) had a similar opinion. When asked if Christians supported each other the way Jews did she answered:

> "No way! A Pole would bring another Pole down! Poles are not like this. No, there wasn't mutual love. To help one another or something."

Christine (80, farmer), Frank (86, soldier) and Rose (83, shop-assistant) confessed that Christian Poles were thieves and shady operators, unlike Jewish Poles who would have never stooped to outright theft:

> "What I remember, I remember Polish people - loafers, thieves - they would go under a farmer's cart, make a hole so the potatoes would fall out. They had everything at home, but all of it had been stolen by them. (…) But I never heard even once that a Jew pulled something from the ground that was not theirs." (Rose, 83, shop-assistant)

Frank (86, soldier) pointed to Polish people having a drinking problem, which resulted in their inability to successfully manage businesses. Finally, Anne (82, dressmaker) indicated that Christians and Jews, due to their personality differences, were destined to fulfill different social roles:

> "Poles were cut out to cultivate land. Jews weren't fit for it. Cultivating land is hard work (…) Jews were not anxious to work so hard".

What can be observed is that Christians, by revealing their numerous weaknesses (that their Jewish neighbors apparently lacked) proved that they were rich in one notable strength: self-criticism.

For certain, the Christians' approach described so far was determined by certain personal qualities that can be ascribed to individual Jews, but also by the fact that those qualities were enhanced as a result of the strong bond within the Jewish community. For instance, when Christian Poles dealt with particular Jewish businessmen they were aware of the fact that they had to consider the broader group of Jewish people. Therefore, when Christian Poles were offered a specific price for a given product they could be certain it was the final proposal, that one Jew would not outbid another Jew. Jewish Poles were religious, literate, family-oriented and resourceful. As individuals they were streetwise as that is the way they had traditionally been raised. These qualities were enhanced and sustained by the overall group by their clear hierarchy and by their custom of offering financial and moral support when their fellow co-religionists were in need. These factors indeed helped in making the Jewish community even stronger, more significant and influential. It would have been easier if the Christian Poles had

to only deal with a single person but having to confront the whole, united group posed a totally different challenge.

Another fact that should be underlined is that the Christians' attitude towards Jews, as well as the ways in which it was explicitly manifested, depended on the type of interactions that took place among inhabitants. There were two basic types of interactions in question: *regular* interactions, correlated with doing businesses, when Christian Poles were employed by Jewish shop owners or when Christian farmers acted as regular suppliers of agricultural products to Jewish Poles. The other interactions were *occasional* and did not entail any kind of dependence such as encounters in the street, the park or when residents relaxed, did shopping or made use of services that Jews offered. The first type of interaction normally imposed peace, obedience and cooperation, whereas the second was far more relaxed, since one's personal survival was not determined by such encounters. There was also a rarer, third type of interaction, when Jews and Christians met for reasons other than to conduct business, buy or sell something, have one's shoes mended or a suit sewn, but when Christian and Jewish Poles met because they wanted to spend time together as friends. All these kinds of interactions had a salient influence on mutual relations before the German invasion, but also on actions that occurred during the War as well as feelings that remained afterwards.

It was previously mentioned how the Jews' engagement in prayer was total and incessant and absorbed all their attention even in light of potential theft perpetrated by their Christian neighbors. However, Frank (86, soldier), having been asked if Christian Poles did take advantage of the opportunity to rob Jewish shop owners, answered:

> "No, *(a Christian wouldn't have taken anything from a shop),* if he was loyal, if he was working for a Jew, he wouldn't steal. They *(Christians)* respected their jobs, because they made a living from it, if the Jew kicked him out, where would he have gone?"

Timothy (79, locksmith) confirmed that kind of interaction highly influenced the Christians' approach towards Jewish residents as well as readiness to explicitly give vent to one's feelings:

> "If somebody worked with them, they *(relationships)* were good, but there were those without jobs, they always thought something bad towards them. (…) When they *(Christians)* worked for Jews, they acted differently than when they met them somewhere else. Sometimes, youngsters, did some mischief *(to Jews)*."

Therefore, it can be seen that regular Christian-Jewish cooperation, if satisfying for both parties, gave some hope for proper reciprocal relations, however offered no guarantee, since people often kept their true feelings bottled up in order to keep their job. Nevertheless, high unemployment, poverty, anxiety about tomorrow, and low living standards and all that such misfortunes entailed, led to tensions between the communities and according to the Christians the blame should be laid on the Jews for their misfortunes.

It is interesting to notice that the analysis of mutual Christian-Jewish relations, as an exceptionally delicate and neuralgic issue, proves that the choice to employ qualitative research techniques (such as in-depth interviews) and not quantitative methods (such as surveys) was the only feasible possibility to obtain reliable results. More often than not, the first, general question referring to reciprocal perception between the communities was usually answered with a politically correct answer that could be summarized as "Christian-Jewish relations were very good, there was a place for everybody in prewar Poland, people cooperated and were satisfied with the cooperation". Nevertheless, by reaching deeper and asking for specific examples, it came to light that the relations in question were tense, cooperation was forced, and what was termed as satisfaction was in fact passive acceptance of a reality that in the eyes of the respondents seemed impossible to change. I am certain had I employed surveys, I would have certainly obtained far more optimistic results. Also in cases where my respondents were less positive about the past inter-community relations, it was fascinating to observe a wide range of distancing techniques or stylistic tricks they used to soften the overall message they were trying to convey. Some examples of using evasive answers regarding the subject from their responses are: "*Rather* it was *a bit* connected", "There was *a bit of* this anti-Semitism", *"If they had known what it was, perhaps they wouldn't have taken it?"*, "*People said* it was like this.", "*Generally*, they were treated *almost* the same way", "*You know*, *maybe*, they (*Christian-Jewish relations)* weren't *so bad*" etc.

It was very rare for my respondents to openly admit mutual aversion, the way Frank (86, soldier) did:

> "They *(relations)* were tense. Poles didn't like Jews."

Finally, there were situations when words chosen by respondents did not reflect their true meaning. For instance, Anne (82, dressmaker), while talking about Christian-Jewish relations stated that the two groups lived as *"one community"*. However, when asked where Jews and

Poles met, she replied: *"in shops only"* which clearly suggested only business like relations occurred and nothing similar to interactions that would reach beyond financial operations.

If I were to try and find a word to describe the Christians' attitude towards Jews other than "ambivalent" it would be "instrumental". Jews provided Christians with a livelihood by employing them, buying their products and offering special business deals in shops (installments, credit or accepting goods instead of money) that would ensure transactions took place, that would enable less wealthy Christians to purchase food, mend items or buy fabric out of which they could sew clothes for their children. Had Jews been more rigid and inflexible, strictly demanding immediate payment, many Christians would have remained hungry and unclad.

Anne (82, dressmaker) summarized the situation as follow:

> "You could earn from a Jew, you could borrow from a Jew, you could stay at a Jew's, if you had no money, there wasn't any problem that a Jew didn't give it *(a product)* to you."

Since Jews were considered rich, intelligent and resourceful, it paid off to maintain proper (or even friendly) relations with them. Furthermore, Christian-Jewish relations might be described as symbiotic, since Christians were not the only ones to benefit from the fact that Jews had settled in Poland. Jews found the Christian farmers to be regular suppliers of organic products and professional laborers that did all the necessary work in bakeries or forges. Nevertheless, this symbiosis was not seen as desirable by Christians, but the result of an age-old practice of Christian Poles being cultivators of land and Jews businessmen. The Christians lacked confidence that the pattern could ever operate differently, that they would actually be able to take over the spheres of Jewish activity.

This dependence, helplessness and feeling of being doomed to fulfill a social role of a farmer and supplier or of an employee rather than an employer (in all cases mentioned by the respondents, the Christians' role was inferior to the one fulfilled by Jews) was prevalent. All three of these aspects were present in the interviews, intertwined with a sense of bitterness, grief and confusion. The Christian residents' survival depended on Jews whom they did not understand, who they considered to be different, dirty and smelly, but nevertheless, powerful; people who had incomprehensible traditions, strange clothes and who were neither interested in abandoning their perplexing habits nor maintaining closer contacts with their Christian neighbors, the hosts of the country they lived in. Christians felt completely helpless. As much

as they disliked the division of social roles (and daily routines it entailed: Jews were found to be well-rested and affluent, whereas Christians - overworked and barely able to make ends meet) the latter group could do little without sufficient money for investment and had little knack for doing business or financial and moral support from their community. Therefore they resigned themselves to being farmers and held a love-hate relationship for their motherland's tradition, which fed them only for half a year. In the remaining, winter months they were left with no jobs and forced to look for alternative sources of income.

All the aforementioned issues were additionally enhanced by the Christians' subjective feeling of being defrauded, treated unfairly and manipulated. Although they viewed Jewish solidarity as a positive quality that was absent within their own community, the fact that they were forced to accept much lower payment than expected for their products (or services) with no hope that anyone would offer more left them along with their feeling of being abused and deceived. Furthermore, the previously discussed lack of acknowledgement that running a business was a real job led to the conviction that Christians, being suppliers of products Jews sold in their stores (products which they obtained through hard and unrewarding work), provided for Jews and unwillingly boosted the Jews' wealth. Last but not least, the Christians' inability to run shops as successfully as their Jewish competitors, who could afford to be more flexible and were more skillful tradesmen in general, gave rise to openly anti-Semitic organizations which called on average people to boycott Jewish stores in order to *"banish the lousy Jews from Poland"*. The establishment of such organizations resulted in these more militant Christians destroying Jewish possessions, tipping over Jewish stands, breaking windows in Jewish houses and shops and beating Jewish traders with objects similar to baseball bats.

Charles (91, locksmith) admitted to having been a member of such a group called "Polish Youth":

> "We put on bands and we would stand in front of a shop and we didn't let any Poles into a Jewish store. And the police were afraid of us. Huh! Those were the times! And there was another organization which disturbed us, it was… damn… I don't know why it was like this in the world, I was young and a turd, why? You understand…"

Charles recalled how this organization bought all the "bats" available at the local street market, spread them among farmers and urged people to devastate Jewish belongings.

"They pounded as much as possible!"- he confessed.

Although in Charles's story one may find attempts to justify his membership in the organization, such as the desire to take revenge for some death allegedly perpetrated by Jews or by the influence of German propaganda which reached Przysucha and promised: "*You will have jobs and everything, but you have to deal with them* (Jews)", it is impossible to overlook his confusion and inability to fully grasp the contemporaneous reality. "*Such were the times…*" he repeated this in order to show the acceptance of something he was unable to understand or change, especially being a young boy.

> "What could I know, it was the world of politics, that is how it was. Hitler said because of the Jews all the world was suffering."

He also acknowledged a certain change of his thinking as time went by:

> "I don't know. I know only one thing. That when a person is younger, it is different, and when I'm old, it is now different."

It is worth underlining that Charles was a Home Army (AK) soldier, which indicates that one person may have a complicated, ambiguous and multi-layered biography.

Thus far, it has been highlighted how the elderly respondents complained about being abused, deceived, manipulated and endangered by Jewish neighbors although as they were children before the War, they were too young to trade with Jews or work for them. One can assume that their similar stories reflected the general opinions present in the town, their own homes and social circles. For some, the War was considered the solution to all those problems. Although most Christians found it traumatic to observe the misery the Jews suffered in the ghetto as well as individual or group killings in the streets, for many, the Holocaust posed a ray of hope for a better life, without Jewish competition, without "the other". This was especially emphasized by the fact that that the Jews being forced into the ghetto meant Christians were able to take over their shops and spheres of business activities, which obviously improved the financial situation of many Christian residents.

> "It was better *(when they took away Jews).* Polish trade started developing, and all the shops were Polish, bakeries, butcher shops" (Frank, 86, soldier)

Nevertheless, the spectrum of emotions during Jewish extermination was much wider: some rejoiced, some counted their newly acquired money, but the vast majority observed the events through a prism of fear of their own personal survival.

> "During that time, people didn't think about it *(taking away Jews)*. They only said: What will come next? Today it's time for the Jews, tomorrow it may be time for us." (Thomas, 93, forester)

> "You know, some people were happy, but some, those who had an advantage from the Jews' help were sorry. You know, the world is made of different kinds of people." (Frank, 86, soldier)

Christians were anxious and their anxiety resulted from the necessity to find new consumers, new tailors or shoe-makers. As a consequence, Jewish suffering was eclipsed.

> "People complained: When the Jews are gone, how will we live? Where will we sell everything?" (Roxanne, 85, housewife)

From the respondents replies, there seemed to be little compassion, no revolt against what was taking place, no need to grieve for neighbors who were lost and no signs of the symbolism of leaving an "empty chair" that is so strong in Polish culture, that indicates a respect and longing for people who can no longer be among us. Most respondents gave solely brief answers, an unavoidable acceptance of facts along the lines of: "They were there, they are gone. End of story."… Could that be because only the strongest, least sensitive people survived? Perhaps those who truly lamented over Jews had already passed on before I started my research, maybe before I was even born?

Christian ambivalence towards Jews is also manifested by their attitude towards common heritage. There is no doubt that religion, tradition and culture have posed key values for Jews since time immemorial. This was seen before the War when Jews made sure their synagogue was covered with the most luxurious roofing material available in those days. Thanks to their efforts graves of prominent Rabbis from Przysucha are protected by solid ohels and today, the Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (in cooperation with the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture) is renovating the synagogue in order to bring back its original splendor and beauty.

When Jews were taken away by Nazi Germans, their holy sites as well as their houses and shops were left without a host who would take proper care of the Jewish heritage. Jewish premises did not deteriorate on their own but were actively destroyed by Christian inhabitants of the settlement. It has already been shown that life before the War forced people to fight for their survival, settle for an absolute minimum, look for different sources of income as well as appreciate every single piece of food, clothing and goods they were able to obtain so that nothing would be wasted. It was also reported how many families from Wiejska street lost all their homes and belongings as a result of the bombardment that took place on September 6th. Perhaps in part these facts somehow justify events that occurred following these occurrences when Jews were forced to leave their hometown or had their shops and homes robbed and businesses taken over. Christian residents took advantage of the enormous chaos that reigned in the town and simply picked houses they liked and moved into them or entered random premises in order to take away all the valuables they found, which very often entailed tearing up the floors or ceilings so as to make sure any hidden treasures (money, jewelry, etc.) were found. Through this, the victims of the bombardment were able to have homes again. The paupers were able to freely take the goods, clothing and furniture they could never afford and farmers were able to operate shops they could not open since the competition had been too strong and the budget for investments too little.

"Everybody went to those Jewish apartments and took what they liked, they left only bare walls" (Laura, 79, housewife);

"They *(Jews)* didn't stand a chance to come back here. (…) Poles settled down in their apartments and took everything in their own hands" (Anne, 82, dressmaker)

"They *(Christians)* took away everything from the houses, they wrenched everything off. When we bought this house there were no windows upstairs, no doors downstairs, nothing, everything had been torn apart, taken away, left empty, even the floors had been torn apart piece by piece - they thought something was under the floors, so it was completely destroyed and all the houses were destroyed in this way." (Joanne, 84, dressmaker)

Christians robbed the synagogue and cemetery as well, which cannot be so easily justified. The fact that they did not fully understand rules of Jewish faith could easily have been overcome by universal respect towards sacrum, however, shamefully, this did not take place.

"Some people took their Torah to make rugs, because it was made of sheep skin or something, they didn't pay any attention."

"They took away the sheeting *(from the synagogue)* from the roof the moment the ghetto was taken away, the sheet metal from the roof disappeared, before one could see from far away how it had been a shining silver color, then a peasant took it away as he was building a house." (Peter, 83, clerk)

"At the cemetery there were their graves, stones with names, people tore everything off, they made themselves stairs and took everything from their *(graves),* there isn't a single grave left, and they had a plate they dug from the ground, with the name, it was like that." (Joanne, 86, dressmaker)

Some of the respondents explained these affairs by a lack of knowledge among Christians (Peter, 83, clerk), while some admitted robbing the synagogue was unambiguously wrong (Timothy, 79, locksmith). However, most respondents passively accepted what people did, even if they did not participate in robbing the sacred places themselves. Only Rose (83, shop-assistant) was openly instructed by her father not to take any of the Jews' belongings, which confirms her (and her family's) attitude towards Jews discussed in the "acceptance" section:

"Some people from the village came and opened a shop after this Jew (…), they would have even ground his *(the Jew's)* bones into the dust and finished him off, but my daddy would say: We got burnt twice, but I wouldn't like to make money like that."

"They *(Jews)* were still warm and Górski on his cart, full of basins, and daddy says: Don't take any of those things! Even here, on the fence, sheets were wrapped around, I called daddy, he looked and said: What sheets! How white! Don't take anything! Who left it here, will take it back."

During the communist regime the synagogue was turned into a warehouse, and many residents from Przysucha continued to disrespect it by turning the place into a public toilet or a place to hold drunken revelry.

Christine (80, farmer) recalls:

"After the War there was a grain warehouse (…) they bought in calf skins there, so that was first, and then, when they took it away, they were building the post office, so they

made another warehouse (…) and then, you know, people, all brought iron or something there, dismantled doors, firewood, they did what they wanted, there was no overseer."

Laura (79, housewife) remembers the terror she experienced when her children were playing in the synagogue, not giving a single thought to the fact that their behavior was inappropriate for different, cultural reasons:

"My children had lots of fun in the synagogue, although. I felt like I was dying, they were climbing so high on those logs, if they had fallen down, they would have died on the spot."

Obviously, renovation of the synagogue was connected with political decisions and the needed finances to carry it out, but aside from resolutions on the highest level it was obvious that the average residents did not attach much importance to what would happen to the building.

Even today, as the synagogue is undergoing more serious renovations, there is very little enthusiasm connected with creating a potential Jewish center in the town among the respondents. This lack of interest may perhaps be justified by some of the elderly respondents becoming slightly senile and being aware that they might not live long enough to witness the opening after this initiative. As mentioned, some of them were fearful that their death may not be far off. Others were aware of how much money such an investment requires and doubted if it would be attractive enough to pay off, since Jews are no longer permanent settlers, but only visitors who come for short visits and leave.

Regarding preservation of Jewish heritage in a more traditional way such as by erecting a monument, placing a commemorative plaque or naming a street with a Jewish name, the respondents put forward a range of arguments: Pauline (87, shop-assistant) claimed preservation of common history is not important, because Jews abused Christians and Christians had to provide for them. Peter (83, clerk) remained convinced that such an idea would be impossible to carry out due to general anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland. Timothy (79, locksmith) decidedly advised that a commemorative plaque should be place nearby the spot where a series of killings took place (at least fifteen, or even twenty people died on the spot within a few days). Frank (86, soldier) feared that such a plaque would just be destroyed by vandals, whereas Christine (80, farmer) was openly against the suggestion, although she offered no substantial line of reasoning:

"Why on earth should we have Jews here, Jewish names, streets, what for?"

Overall, the respondents' attitude towards Jews as such was confirmed by their lack of willingness to preserve their common past. Predominant indifference, verging on a strong reluctance to keep the memory of Jews alive corresponded with the prevailing passive acceptance of Jews on through a strong aversion towards them, seems to highlight their key feelings regarding the matter.

4.1.3 Strong tension - anti-Semitism

The key term "anti-Semitism" is a notion which raises a broad spectrum of emotions and remains highly neuralgic. The interviews gathered for purposes of the present thesis include numerous clichés which anti-Semitism is built upon. For example, they contain examples of old, traditional anti-Semitism, based on religious motives: *"Until today it is still said that the Jews killed Jesus Christ and that we will not forgive."* (Peter, 83, clerk). Furthermore, one of the respondents spoke of the alleged Jewish practice of putting Christian blood in their matzoh:

> "You should remember this. That a Jewish woman baked matzoh for Easter. This matzoh was round, thinly rolled out pancakes, but they say there was Polish blood in it. They had, somewhere, they caught a Pole, they had… there were many nails driven into a barrel, they put a Pole in there, locked them in, and they rolled this barrel. And when they rolled those nails pricked everywhere, right? And they sent this blood all over the world. So, God forbid… because they treated you to it!" (Anne, 82, dressmaker).

Several times the respondents talked about Jewish dominance, their one-upmanship, how they exerted control, their Judeo-Communism and time-immemorial, selfish desire to rule:

> "There were plenty of them. But what could you do when Jews ruled over everything. Jews ruled over everything!" (Anne, 82, dressmaker)

> "They said that Communism and Jews were one. The same way as they say now that Jews govern in the government. And it is this way." (Pauline, 87, shop-assistant)

"Germans who were already older knew that Russia would come here and in Russia Jewry ruled at that time." (Lucas, 82, miner)

"I don't know, I hear what people say. That Jews rule only for themselves and that Jews are in the government. (George, 85, bricklayer),

"And you think that in Warsaw those aren't Jews? Kaczmarek- a Jew! In Polish his name is Kaczmarek, but he is a Jew! And the second, and the third… who else… there are many of those Jews, damn it! (…) They push themselves to the government to be better than Poles." (Frank, 86, soldier),

"They *(Jews)* hoped they would rule one day. And now they don't? They do. They rule now!" (Roxanne, 85, housewife),

"Don't you still hear now that Jews rule over the world?" (Charles, 91, locksmith)

and so on and so forth…

Improbable as it may seem, among the respondents there were attempts to rationalize and justify the Holocaust which, in many respondents' opinion, prevented Jews from destroying Christians. This brings us to the respondents' feeling of being in jeopardy due to Jewish dominance, wealth and cunningness:

"- Jews had seized everything. If Hitler hadn't killed them off, they would have swept us off the face of the earth.

- Why?
- Because they traded, a Jew was smart and had money. And a Pole was poor, if one didn't produce, one didn't have anything." (Anne, 82, dressmaker);

"Germans wanted to finish Jews off, because if they hadn't, they would have finished us off now." (Lucas, 82, miner).

The Shoah was also understood as a consequence of Jewish swindles which according to the respondents, Hitler had allegedly unmasked:

"(…) Hitler wanted to destroy them because he knew they did everything by wheeling and dealing." (Charles, 91, locksmith)

Anti-Semitism could easily be recognized among the respondents by the strength of their conveyed messages, combination of words, tone of voice, both verbal and non-verbal signs, grimaces, spontaneous reactions to questions as well as their unwavering conviction of being right. In other words, some of the respondents' language was replete with untranslatable slang words or phrases that demonstrated utter and complete contempt towards the Jewish community. An example was what Laura (79, housewife) put forth:

> "A Jew was so *sooty*, *snot-nosed*, *unshaven*…they had a beard and a yarmulke on his *noodle*, *as worn-out as a devil* (…) and those children… only their *noodles were sticking out*, he was sitting in a *sack* and there was terrible *stench* in this house, *one feared to enter it*, and the tailor sewed, sold fabric and made money."

Furthermore, by looking at actions that informants recollect from before the German invasion, actions that most resorted to themselves as children or youngsters, the strong suspicion that prewar anti-Semitism in Przysucha was common seems more than justified. The deeds in question are, to put it directly, acts of physical aggression perpetrated on Jews, coming in so many variations that one may be shocked by the creativity of young oppressors.

During the analysis of the Jews' image it was stated that it was Christian Poles who provoked and attacked Jewish inhabitants. The latter group was perceived as calm, fainthearted and only defending themselves (as well as each other) when such a need arose. Christian children and youngsters turned to various methods in order to harass Jews and customarily the old people that they were at the time of our meetings recalled those "pranks" as they comprehended this aggression with laughter and sentiment. The pestering was so common and its target was so obvious that we may freely assume that Christian children had soaked with aversion to Jews at homes and reflected their parents', their neighbors' or their family members' attitudes towards the Jewish community. It seems unlikely that they would uphold such attitudes against Jews solely on their own, that such things as the unpleasant smell of onion or garlic, or psychological differences and feeling of "otherness" would be enough to get involved in fights, attack Jews, destroy their belongings, interfere in their religious holidays. *Anti-Semitic acts of aggression perpetrated by Christian children on Jews of all ages as an indicator of the existence of anti-Semitism among Christian adults* became one of the foremost discoveries unveiled by the present research.

Regardless of nationality, it is not unusual for young children who attend the same school to be involved in clashes and squabbles as they are not mature enough to deal with their problems through mediation and dialog. Therefore, we may safely presume that fights among Christian youngsters also occurred on a daily basis. However, aggression towards Jews seemed to have no other reason, no direct inducement, but resulted solely from the children's disposition to harm, persecute and tease the Jews.

When asked about such conflicting situations, Pauline (87, shop-assistant) replied:

> "There were different ones *(situations)*, boys, different bullies, they started contentions with Jews in the streets, but these were not fights. I remember when we, four girls - I don't remember, it was before the War, how old could I have been? Ten or nine? We were walking along together. I remember it was Saturday, it was summer, *and it occurred to us somehow*, to pick some nettle and as they *(Jews)* were walking here along Krakowska street and here at this sidewalk we jumped out and hit their legs… I won't forget it."

(It was impossible not to notice that while relating the story, Pauline began imitating the Jews' groaning that was brought about by having been hit with stinging nettle and burst out laughing.)

Christine (80, farmer), in turn, recalled how she would sprinkle Jews celebrating Sabbath with sand:

> "It was great to sprinkle them with sand! Mom would yell at us, she wouldn't let us do it, but so stupid were children."

Although Christians were aware how seriously Jews took their religious holidays, they resorted to many mischievous deeds in order to make it impossible for Jews to peacefully pray, both during their regular Sabbath as well as annual celebrations such as Sukkoth or Pesach. Sukkoth involved building shelters in which Jewish families ate their dinner, prayed and spent time together. As the shelters were not solidly constructed, it was easy for the Christian children to throw stones, birds (crows, ravens), a cat or chestnuts inside to frighten the Jews, disrupt their holy time and cause them to run away. Such acts were common among the Christian boys even on their way home from church, where the hooligans had just participated in a service based on prayer, the use of a rosary and kneeling, which was held daily each October. Brian (86, ambulance driver) recalled one of his practical jokes with

laughter and admitted that despite the Christian tendency to spoil the Jewish holidays, Jews often treated their oppressors to matzoh and were too afraid to pull pranks in revenge or even complain to their parents about the children's despicable behavior towards them. Additionally, Anne (82, dressmaker) recalled how the Christian children took advantage of the fact that the Jews were staying in their shelters during the fall holiday and broke windows in their houses… Also, as George (85, bricklayer) pointed out, their throwing stones into the shelters at times resulted in destroying all the dishes the Jewish worshipers had prepared for dinner. Finally, when the Christian thugs spotted that Jews had returned to their homes from the shelter for a short time, they *"took away everything, including their table cloth, everything, including their food and moved it away, it was a disaster for them!"* Christine (80, farmer) shared.

Regarding everyday acts of anti-Semitism, the respondents reported such stories as throwing lard into their well to spoil their water or hiding their whip (Joanne, 84, dressmaker), throwing birds into the synagogue during their service (Christine, 80, farmer), locking a Jew who had come to buy a calf in a barn to force him to pay extra money to the children (so called *"kopytkowe"* that could be translated into "hooves-money", a kind of tip) and setting up trip wires so as to cause the milk carriers to fall over (Timothy, 79, locksmith), as well as throwing stones at Jewish stores (Lucas, 82, miner).

Furthermore, George (85, bricklayer) shared a memory which showed that people solved conflicting situations on their own (mainly through aggression regarding misunderstandings between Christian and Jewish Poles). Since Jews owned goats, conflicts arose because animals were being pastured nearby Christian lands where grain had been planted and the goats grazing on their land destroyed their crops.

"One time one man came and even my neighbor beat up a Jew.

- Will you pasture goats in this rye again? And this Jew *("Żydziok", another highly pejorative name for Jews, impossible to be translated)* didn't understand much and he said he would, so he beat him up even harder and finally he asked him again:

- Tell me, you won't pasture your goats! And only then did the Jew say:

- I won't do it anymore.

He told me, otherwise, I could have killed him and he would have kept saying that he would pasture the goats. This is what I remember, he was my year, we pastured cows together, so told me how it was."

Anne (82, dressmaker) answered the question: "Did Christian and Jewish children play together?" this way:

- "Of course! We beat them up as much as we could!
- Did you bully them?
- Yes, we did, because… well, at our home we weren't allowed to do so, mom and daddy wouldn't let us bully or beat Jews, but they got bullied anyway, only the devil knows how much…
- But why did you bully them?
- It was this age, you know.
- But did you bully Polish children too?
- No way, only Jews!
- So what did you do exactly? Tell me about it.
- We mainly threw stones at them.
- And what was the reason for that?
- Because they were Jews. And we were Poles."

Certain tensions were also visible at school that was attended by both Christian and Jewish children. Although there was no bench ghetto and both communities were at times mixed in classes, Christians and Jews preferred to sit next to their co-religionists. For example, Pauline (87, shop-assistant) did not want to share a desk with a Jewish girl due to the intensive smell of garlic (it is worth emphasizing that the respondent herself was amazed at how much she detested the smell during her time at school, yet how tasty she finds garlic now). Lucas (82, miner) admitted that *"Jews had no life at school"*, because they were beaten on a daily basis, they were robbed of their packed lunch or poked with a needle. Such situations escalated when a Jew complained to the teachers about the Christian students' behavior… and once again the provocations were only one-sided as there were also some openly anti-Semitic teachers who, as we can expect, only enhanced the inadvisable attitude of Christian youngsters.

Charles (92, locksmith) recalled a situation when a Jew had come late for lessons and the teacher looked at the unpunctual Jewish student and asked the class:

> "- Tell me, whose father among you has a horse?"

When one of the students admitted that his father had two horses the teacher proceeded with another question:

> "- And do you have a curry-comb to clean your horses?"

When the student acknowledged they had, the teacher ordered the boy to quickly go and bring the thing to school, causing some confusion among the students:

> "Damn, we were thinking, what will happen now?"

It turned out that the teacher aimed at antagonizing other students against the latecomer by commanding the class:

> "- Comb it out of his noodle, damn it, so that he learns next time to come to class clean, combed, and not to bring such filth into the classroom!"

The students appeared to be quite pleased by this encouragement and legitimization of aggression from their symbol of authority, as teachers were perceived to be during those times:

> "When they caught him, they straightened him out, they…."

Undoubtedly, the teacher sanctioned verbal aggression, humiliation, discrimination and, most importantly, urged the young Christian students to physically attack their Jewish school mate, using a hard cattle-comb, all of which seems totally incomprehensible today.

4.1.4 No tension - acceptance

There was only one respondent that fit the "acceptance" group. From the very beginning of my study, Rose (87, shop-assistant) took my study very seriously and was waiting for me elegantly dressed, having her hair done, ready to dedicate as much time as necessary for me. It became obvious that her attitude towards my thesis reflected her approach

towards Jews. She was raised in a family that maintained frequent and close relations with Jews for many generations. Rose's father had received his wedding suit for free thanks to a Jewish tailor's acquaintance with his parents. During the occupation her father became very active in helping Jews while her mother in turn was invited to the wedding of the converted Jewish girl. Furthermore, during her time going to school, Rose had a very kind, open-minded teacher:

> "Mrs. Kaszewska, our teacher was like the Holy Father, as a Pole, she was kind, pious, a saintly person, she was the one to tell us: A Jew is a human as we are and no one should laugh at them!"

Presumably, the environment Rose was brought up in resulted in her being the only respondent who reported having a real Jewish friend with whom she not only attended school, but with whom she met afterwards, in order to discuss or provide homework (if one them was absent from school), to have fun, or just spend some time together, unlike the other students. She described this friendship:

> "And there was this Perełka, she was always sitting with me, because I was tall, I sat with the Jews on the back benches and she always sat next to me (…) and when we went out for a break she wouldn't go with the Jews, but held my hand."

Both girls' parents seemed to approve of their friendship since they treated them to specialties of Christian and Jewish cuisine, such as dumplings or herrings. Rose's brother, who was three years older than her also found a close friend in a Jew, in Perełka's brother named Boruch.

As one can well imagine, Rose was incredibly devastated when the Jewish tragedy commenced and with the support and encouragement of her parents she readily engaged in providing necessary help to Jews in need:

> "Daddy woke me up. Come here! A Jewish woman is crying that she doesn't have anything to give to her child! I was twelve and I had learned to milk a cow."

It is worth underlining that all of her family were fully aware of the risk that supporting Jews entailed:

> "I gave water to those Jews, if the Germans had seen us, they would have killed me and daddy."

Rose was the only respondent who truly mourned the Jews, proving in such a way that her and her own family's approach towards them reached far beyond instrumental, forced, business like relations. She had learned to not only accept the Christian-Jewish co-habitation, but enjoyed and felt a need for it. When Rose referred to her Jewish friend she called her "my Perełka" with a deep tenderness so unheard of among my other respondents. She also confessed things such as *"I would cry all night"*, or *"I couldn't sleep at night"*, to show her despair and misery over the Jews' plight, a tenderness which was sorely missing in the case of the other respondents who looked at the extermination solely in the context of their own fears or of losing business partners.

Rose's story was extremely emotional, her descriptions vivid and suggestive and caused me to imagine and experience the grief she felt when the Jews were being taken away:

> "I carried water and six loaves of bread that mommy had baked, it was the fourth of November, in those books they write it was October, but they know nothing, they hadn't been born yet, and I was here, in this yard…"

Or:

> "How stupid I was! I went out of the gate, you couldn't see Germans anywhere, only Jews and I called… Perełka! Perełka!, I called her as I wanted to give her bread, and an elderly Jewish woman came over and said: Give this bread to me, I will give it to her, but I realized she didn't."

What is more, Rose witnessed the killing of Boruch, Perełka's brother, whom Germans found in a Christian house only a month after the Jews were transported to Treblinka. The house where Boruch was hiding had been arranged by Rose's father, who had taken advantage of various acquaintances he had in neighboring villages and had managed to convince a Christian family to help the boy. Unfortunately, as Rose reported, some heartless, envious Christian Pole, having spotted certain improvement in the family's financial situation: a better horse, better clothing, a brand new sheepskin coat, lured Boruch with food and denounced him. On finding the boy, Boruch was taken to the Jewish cemetery where he was commanded to dig a grave for himself, accompanied by a bunch of Christian children that were customarily gathered by the Germans to observe such killings… Rose was among the kids:

> "It must have been December, because the ground was so hard and frozen, and I was standing, I had a scarf on my head and when I saw him… he already had a shovel, a blue one, and they were leading Boruch there with children following him, and when a child was passing by the Germans called: 'Komm hier, komm hier!' so that there would be more of us, and when he reached the gate (…) and he didn't want *(to go further)* as we usually bury the dead next to our family, or maybe he didn't care, he only went behind the gate and started digging and I said: God, it will be so hard to dig here! I can forget everything, but I will never forget this."

Rose's despair made the men from the SS suspect she was Jewish:

> "Tears must have been rolling, but I was afraid to wipe them so that a German who was looking at me wouldn't see that I was wiping tears. But he approached me, grabbed me by my hair and scarf and shouted -You are Jewish! But all the boys and girls, it was good there were so many of them said: No! No! She isn't Jewish! She is a neighbor!"

Rose was aware that her commitment and general relation with Jews was different than those of the rest of the children:

> "They asked him to stand next to the grave and shot him, I wasn't looking, only crying so much, and the other girls who were with me weren't crying. Tell me why?"

As far as common objections against Jews are concerned, Rose had much understanding regarding tricks the Jewish used for trading, because, as she admitted, she also tried to save money by looking for the best bargain and being a shop-assistant herself, she realized that the cost of running one's own business was high. In modern times, she frequently went to the local Jewish cemetery to see pilgrims coming and struggled to establish a contact with them, which was not easy due to language problems. Furthermore, she did not consider Christian-Jewish co-habitation a taboo or unwelcome topic, but she shared her stories with her grandchildren so as to preserve the memory of her Jewish neighbors. Furthermore, she was the only respondent who uttered the name of the extermination camp that Jews from Przysucha were taken to - Treblinka.

When discussing the Christian attitude towards Jews, homage should also be paid to the remaining inhabitants of Przysucha and neighboring villages who risked their lives and well-being in order to help Jews survive the nightmare of extermination. Some of them offered

temporary help, like Timothy (79, locksmith) who provided much needed food to Jews in the ghetto, or Caroline's mother who treated starving Jewish runaways to warm soup. Timothy recalls his experience in the following way:

> "One Jew (…) he spoke German, Polish and Jewish (…) was making a list of the Jewish community which was in the ghetto and when he was coming back after this work he came to me (…) he had an entry/exit pass and he wanted some potatoes (…) Later he wanted some bread (…)"

Timothy calculated the risk he took and knew that he shouldn't be running in the street, but across the gardens. Caroline's mother, in turn, reacted when she saw Jewish escapees eat hens' feed:

> "(…) you know what mommy did? When she found out when they would come, she cooked for them simple potato soup, empty, with nothing else, and she poured sour cream into the borsch, and when they came, I remember till today, mother always cooked for them, they ate the whole bowl at once, enough for five people. They *(Jews)* were so starving!"

Both Timothy as well as Caroline's mother were rewarded in return - the boy received some money and the woman - a set of nice, pink plates she could serve cake on.

Nevertheless, spontaneous, occasional help was incomparably less risky than the acts of sheer heroism that some families from the town or nearby settlements dared to engage in- such as keeping a Jew (or Jews) in hiding in their home, attic, basement, or somewhere else on their premises. For instance, as George (85, bricklayer) reported, in the village of Kozłowiec, two Jews were hidden in a barn attic, among leaves that had been poured there so as to make the place warmer. Unfortunately, the brave family allegedly had not handed in the agreed number of contingents (potatoes, grain, etc.) and two Germans came over to take away a cow from them, as a punishment. On entering the barn, the Jews reportedly started moving, supposedly to try and hide themselves even deeper in the leaves, but the Germans climbed a ladder and found them. The two Jewish runaways were shot immediately, the host ran away to the forest, but his wife and his daughter were taken to the concentration camp, where the former died, and the latter, being younger and stronger - survived.

"And their other daughter was small, they were here, I saw them, when they were taken by the Germans, these two women, and this girl was running behind them, behind her mother crying. But they didn't take her, they took the others."

Furthermore, George recalled that another Jew was hidden in village Jakubów, in the sawmill. When George was playing with his friend, running around the place, they heard some strange noises and once again presumably a Jew was trying to hide himself better…

"And Zagdański was a janitor, he was watching the sawmill and I said - Mister Zagdański! There is something! Under this sawmill, it is moving and scaring us! What can that be? He realized *(it was a Jew)* because he knew he was keeping him there. And later, after some days, he took this Jew somewhere else."

Other villages mentioned by my respondents where Jews from Przysucha were hidden are: Zbożenna, Krzesławice and Janów. Unfortunately (as we could see in the case of Boruch) since providing help to Jews was deeply correlated with obtaining significant rewards (which made a given family visibly richer) the respondents admitted that betrayals took place as well.

4.1.5 Jewish isolation and supremacy

The analysis conducted so far brings forth the conclusion that Christian-Jewish relations were symbiotic: after all, Jews posed the only market for Christians, whereas Christians were the only suppliers for Jews, since they did not own land or cattle. In fact, it can be easily surmised that life in Przysucha created a whole spectrum of circumstances which carried much potential to bring Jews and Christians together: regular interactions in shops, at work, in the streets or the mere fact that the settlement was so small that all people were neighbors, even if they did not live next door to one another. However, both communities preferred to maintain a certain psychological distance from one another and it seems that they hardly ever initiated relations that would reach beyond a necessary level of commitment. Hence, Christian-Jewish relations were symbiotic and autonomic at the same time: symbiosis was created as a result of business interactions, which led to a certain kind of interdependence. Autonomy, in turn, was carefully guarded by Jews, and manifested in preservation of their religion, speech and their general way of life, which was much different from life led by their Christian neighbors.

By stating that Jews were the ones to guard their autonomy, the issue of their assimilation, another complex matter, is touched upon. Jews did not assimilate in their host land, but after centuries of living in Poland, should they have been required to do so? Were they not already considered full fellow residents who helped build the country hand in hand with their original Christian hosts? They made the decision to remain faithful to their religion and rites, but nevertheless, would there have been any chance for them to be viewed as true Poles if they gave up what was dear to them? One can consider the story of the converted Jewish woman, whose daughter is still thought of as being Jewish to some extent. The Jews were unwilling to bond with Christians, but how could they have trusted their oppressors, people who from an early age harassed them physically and who continually undermined their honesty?

Not only did Jewish Poles refrain from maintaining deeper relations with Christian Poles or assimilating, but they were also reported to show a kind of primacy towards Christian residents of the town. The fact that they customarily gathered as a united group, in order to discuss prices they would offer to their suppliers was regarded as conspiring against Christians, and it definitely killed the idea of haggling that is integral to a traditional Polish market. Obviously, such gatherings were legal and turned out to be lucrative for Jews, but from the perspective of the Christians they were perceived as attempts of manipulation. After all, Jews were the ones to impose conditions that highly influenced the standard of living Christians could afford. By sticking to the rule of not outbidding one another they frequently determined answers to key questions, such as would Christian farmers be able to feed their children, buy essentials and generally lead a decent life? As Charles said, *"Jews didn't want to give me as much as I needed"*. One may conclude that Jews were both honest and dishonest at the same time - they always paid the agreed amount on time, but the agreement itself to accept the amount in question was forced upon the Christians.

Furthermore, Jewish one-upmanship was visible in sayings they were alleged to repeat, such as "your streets, but our buildings". The phrase suggests that although Christians were hosts of Poland (and thus "street owners"), they were not wealthy enough to erect houses, the way Jews were.

Additionally, as George (85, bricklayer) asserted:

> "There was a Jew nearby the park, a big one *(another untranslatable, pejorative expression: "wielkie Żydzisko takie"),* he had a shop and he mainly traded there, he didn't

have much in the shop, only cigarettes, tobacco, and men who were coming back from the Church went to this shop and said something and started to insult the Jew, I don't know exactly but I heard, something like: One day, you will come here, as you come to buy cigarettes now, then to get a pass to go to your Church!"

Obviously, in this story the Jewish reaction had been provoked by Christians, but similar phrases to the one uttered by the shop-owner recurred also in interviews with other respondents.

Pauline (87, shop-assistant) mentioned another slogan Jews were reported to voice in order to highlight their superiority over Christians: *"You eat peeled potatoes, and we eat hens!"*

Charles (91, locksmith), in turn, shared a memory in which a Christian farmer was humiliated by a Jewish merchant:

"A Jew came and bought young potatoes (…) How much for this? And the farmer said 2 zloty. You, boor! - the Jew replied to this Pole - peeled?

And when they agreed (…) he didn't tell the Pole - Take a horse, I live there next to the Church. You will cart it there. It would have been all right, wouldn't it? But he didn't, he made this poor peasant take it on his back, the old man, when he came, he couldn't breathe! In this way a Jew abused a Pole."

Finally, Jews were believed to bury their deceased in a sitting position, wrapped around a pole, in order to be able to rise from dead before Christians, who are buried in solid coffins, lying down.

Nevertheless, there were certain situations which pointed to Jewish attempts to maintain closer relations with Christian Poles, regardless of their business interactions. Many respondents recall being treated to matzoh or being given free candies. Anne (82, dressmaker) claimed that a Jew proved to be selflessly helpful to their parents by offering a barn to keep a horse and a cow in after their home burned in a bombardment.

"I don't know if daddy gave him anything in return, maybe some potatoes. He helped us and that's it"- she said convincingly.

Also after the War, Anne experienced generosity on the part of Jews when she was renting a room in her house to a Jewish tailor. Originally she was very reluctant to the idea of sharing the house with a Jew as she told her father:

"- Go to hell with Jews! I almost have enough tenants already!"

Anne's father somehow managed to convince her due to practical, financial reasons:

"- Don't say anything! A Jew will pay for one year in advance and you will have a barn built!"

(It seems that the Christians' determination to secure some income, discussed in the first category, is confirmed in this case. The manifested aversion towards Jews was easily mollified by money.)

Anne recalled that Jewish kindness went beyond the lump-payment for renting the place:

"Whenever he came, you know, children did not manage to eat up all the oranges, lemons and chocolates he brought, he would always bring something, always!"

Jews also paid her openhandedly for making simple dishes such as pancakes or potato soup.

The reversal of the feeling of mutual dependence was brought about by the War and the establishment of the ghetto. These two milestone events imposed totally different rules, in which Jewish well-being became impossible without Christian commitment: selling personal belongings to Christians meant obtaining extra money that could later be used to fight for existence. If Christians took pity on Jews locked in the ghetto and ventured to provide them with some essentials, they were given a chance to live another day. Finally (and most importantly), a decision to keep a Jew in hiding made the odds of Jewish survival soar. Jewish misery turned out to be beneficial for some Christians as the Jews were reported to have fine-looking possessions which gave the Christian residents a chance to buy fancy things cheaply or obtain something for free. Anne's mother bought an elegant lady's suit and some high-quality pots that she normally could not afford to have. Anne was personally fortunate enough to get new dresses and dolls (a Jewish woman selling the suit had a daughter Anne's age), Charles's father was able to get a house in return for an old shed where he made wheels:

> "The Jew that I told you about at the beginning, called Siwa came to my father and said - Paweł, you will take my place, when the ghetto is established, and I will come here to your shed. And you will take my house."

All in all, many Jews, suspecting their fate, tried to avoid transportation or when they did manage to avoid it, struggled to remain hidden. Once influential and resourceful, they suddenly became helpless and vulnerable, which evoked a range of attitudes in Christians, highly correlated with the fear they experienced. Of course, the question arises: can everything be explained away by fear? Can refusal to help be justified by fear? Or perhaps heroism cannot be expected from average people, but only from people of unusual strength of heart and character. Nevertheless, some Christians refused to lend a hand as their fear overwhelmed them totally. Charles (91, locksmith) for instance, who spotted a Jewish doctor looking for help after Jews had already been transported to Opoczno told him:

> "I don't know how you'll get there, I won't take you there, because you know what will happen to me? Death!"

Anne's parents, who were visited by a Jewish neighbor begging to keep him in their place also refused straight away:

> "Never ever will I hide you! I won't hide you because I don't have any place to do so and you well know what will happen to me if they find out!"

Thomas (93, forester) faced a similar situation as well. Two Jewish girls came to his family home with the same dream - to be hidden among Christians. Thomas's parents let them stay for a trial period, but after a couple of days they collectively agreed that their house was not a good place, since it was always full of people, potential denouncers.

Once again, in the face of Jewish suffering and their inability to defend themselves, the majority of respondents manifested passive attitudes. Only a few manifested extreme attitudes, either as heroes risking everything they had or villains - hoping to gain as much as possible.

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It appears that full understanding of the analyzed categories is impossible without the presentation of certain interconnected concepts, among which stereotypes, prejudice and

racism are the most evident (although, as has been hinted, the intensity of manifested attitudes significantly varied among the interviewed elderly residents). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the described acts of aggression perpetrated by the very young inhabitants of the town clearly implied the existence of serious tensions in the prewar Przysucha of Christian-Jewish co-habitation. Since provocations, verbal insults and physical attacks were reported to be predominantly one-sided, the concepts suggested above, extreme as they may be perceived, should not be treated as an exaggeration or anti-Polish (accordingly to the contemporary discourse which tends to present Christian Poles as victims and heroes, whereas Poland, as a paradise for Jews). Furthermore, calling Christian attitudes by their true names and admitting that harassment directed to Jews did take place in Poland might be liberating for some and spark the intent to repair, fix, or harmonize Christian-Jewish relations by implementing concrete solutions that would prevent similar situations from arising in the future.

The stories shared thus far gave subjective answers to the following basic questions of: Where?, When? and How?

Where did Christian-Jewish relations take place?

When did they occur?

How did Christians and Jews perceive and act towards one another?

In the section that follows a more objective angle of our subject will be considered so as to contribute to better understanding of the current dissertation and thus, make the study complete.

Regarding the core of the present study, that is Christian-Jewish relations, it needs to be stated that defining others is deeply related with two fundamental processes: social categorization and social attribution. Whereas social categorization is a natural process that helps us define and categorize objects and thus act upon our defining (Allport 1954, in Fiske 1998:361, ed. by Gilbert, Fiske et al.), stemming from the necessity to view the world in a more schematic and simplified way (Paleczny 2007:125), social attribution is just its derivative, basing on ascribing a set of features to all objects that happen to share one or more quality (e.g. race, nationality, religion, age, language, etc.) Consequently, a specific person is not perceived individually, but as a member of a given group (Aronson 1999:365-372, in Paleczny 2007:126). A language plays a vital role here: it is enough to utter a given word: be

it a Jew, a terrorist or a housewife, and a wide range of interpretations, definitions and connotations immediately spring to mind. Obviously, the automaticity with which people categorize and define all objects is enhanced by tradition, ideology, literature, mass media or common opinions and may lead to the creation of collective projections that become persistent and liable to slow and insignificant modifications.

Category-based reactions towards people from groups perceived as significantly different than one's own include three components, all of utmost significance for the present analysis: stereotyping (taken as the most cognitive component), prejudice (the most affective component) and discrimination (the behavioral component) (Eagly and Chaiken 1998, Petty and Wegener 1998, in ed. by Gilbert, Fiske et al.). It is enough to watch a daily news bulletin to find out how persistent and enduring these social phenomena are. Without fail, each day somewhere in the civilized world there is bloodshed, aggression, or a variety of conflicts - all based on how people categorize others. Fiske (1998:357, in ed. by Gilbert, Fiske et al.) explains why stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination refuse to abate. According to the author, the phenomena in question have both automatic and socially pragmatic aspects, which tend to nourish them. Nevertheless, there is hope for change. In her further analysis, Fiske (1998:357, in ed. by Gilbert, Fiske et al.) contends that despite the proven persistence of category-based images, emotions and actions, they are found to be controllable on an individual level and susceptible to influence by the social structure.

Stereotyping may be defined as a collection of individual projections relating to other cultural groups that is generalized and kept in collective consciousness (Paleczny 2007:132). By developing the Stereotype Content Model theory, Fiske et al. (2002) indicated that stereotype content depends on two dimensions: competence and warmth. The extent to which we perceive others as competent and warm determines if we like and respect them, accordingly. On the basis of the two dimensions, mixed stereotypes arise, among which two are fundamental: *paternalistic stereotype* that develops when a group is perceived as warm, but not competent, and an *envious stereotype* when the reverse perception is noted. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the majority of stereotypes, being high on one dimension and low on the other, give rise to ambivalent feelings towards a stereotyped group, as opposed to purely positive or negative feelings. Common feelings related to the two kinds of stereotypes are pity and sympathy (when it comes to paternalized groups) and envy and jealousy (as far as envied targets are concerned). The feelings in question are correlated with

the conviction that a group is or is not a potential competitor and therefore threat to in-group resources.

All of the mentioned stereotypical combinations, with their accompanying feelings and target examples are grouped in the chart below:

Paternalistic Stereotype warm – not competent low status, not competitive pity, sympathy (e.g. housewives, the elderly)	***Admiration*** warm – competent high status, not competitive pride, admiration (e.g. in-group, close allies)
Contemptuous Stereotype not warm – not competent low status, competitive contempt, disgust, anger (e.g. welfare recipients, the poor)	***Envious Stereotype*** not warm – competent high status, competitive envy, jealousy (e.g. Jews, the rich)

Figure 11: Four types of out-groups, combinations of status and competition, and corresponding forms of prejudice as a function of perceived warmth and competence (in Fiske et al. 2002:881)

Regarding Jews, both Fiske et al. as well as the results of the current thesis based on in-depth interviews, unambiguously place them in an envied group, perceived as cold, but highly competent. What is more, as Zenner (1987, in Cuddy, Fiske et al. 2008:127) observes, Jews, pose an example of a "middle-man minority"[41] and "are viewed as competent but cold

[41] The concept coined by Bialock (1967:79-84), according to which a number of ethnic groups around the world (e.g. Jews in Europe, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Asians in East Africa, Armenians in Turkey and others) occupy an intermediate rather than low status position by concentrating in certain trade and commerce related

competitors who profit off the misfortunes of others who need to use their services". The ambivalent attitude that was observed among the interviewed residents of Przysucha (who regularly took advantage of business opportunities created by their Jewish neighbors, yet rejoiced over their extermination, denounced them and destroyed their belongings) is explained by the pattern according to which envied groups "elicit passive facilitation when they are viewed as serving a function, but also active harm when a society is under stress and the envy has transformed into anger." (Cuddy, Fiske et al. 2008:127) Viewed as skilled and useful, envied groups are tolerated during periods of stability, yet become extremely vulnerable to blame and harassment when economic instability ensues. The creation of the aforementioned openly anti-Semitic groups, such as the Polish Youth, whose aim was to enhance Christian trade by aggressive attacks directed at Jewish merchants, seems to confirm the findings.

High competence and perceived competitiveness appears to be correlated with conspiracy stereotypes which are found to be prevalent in the current dissertation. Respondents were thoroughly convinced of a Jewish presence in the Polish government as well as significant positions nationwide and worldwide (very often under false, Polish sounding last names) in order to rule and act to the benefit of their own religious community. Kofta (1995, in Kofta and Sedek 2005:42) claims that conspiracy stereotypes define an out-group as "a dangerous, potent and deceptive enemy" having "a collective goal - a permanent, obsessive striving for power and dominance over other groups in general (and the observer's in-group in particular), acting in a secret way based on "plots, deception, subversive activities", remaining egoistic and supportive towards one's in-group, with simultaneous disregard for out-group's interests.

Conspiracy stereotypes prove to be very useful when it comes to managing both the past as well as up-to-date political and economic occurrences. Kofta and Sedek (2005:43) pointed to the following functions they fulfill, functions that were very well reflected in the stories shared by my respondents:

- explanation of negative societal phenomena, such as unemployment (visible in the inhabitants' complaints regarding Christians' unstable economic situation and poverty),

occupations, and thus they play a role of a middleman between producer and consumer, employer and employee, owner and renter or élite and masses. (Bonacich, 1973:583)

- interpretation of history with the use of conspiracy theories (justification of the Shoah as a response to Jewish swindles),
- prediction of future events (expectation of Jewish rule over Poland if the Holocaust had not taken place),
- detection of events that are a threat to the in-group's well-being (conviction that Jews conspired against Christians during their community meetings),
- motivation to collective self-defense against the allegedly threatening events (numerous acts of aggression against Jews perpetrated by Christians)
- and moral justification of aggression and discrimination of an out-group (visible in the lack of remorse resulting from the aforementioned aggression)

Nevertheless, it needs to be specifically underlined (so as to avoid enhancing the anti-Polish assumption according to which Polish anti-Semitism is special) that conspiracy stereotypes, although stemming from a troubled past (which definitely took place in Poland) are not only from the Polish domain (Martire and Clark 1982, Quinley and Glock 1983, Selznick and Steinberg 1969, in Kofta and Sedek 2005:43). Kofta and Sedek (2005:45) state they are part of the more general, "conspiracy mentality" found in people cherishing nationalistic values, concerned about the strength of state and national security regardless of their nationality. Unfortunately, such attitudes are proven to play a critical role in generalized xenophobia and are the single most potent determinant of prejudice and negative behavior towards Jews (Kofta and Sedek 2005:41 and 45).

A careful look at the personality traits found in the stereotypes discerned from the informants' stories leads to their division into basic, yet seemingly exclusive groups: openly anti-Semitic and benign. Wilson (1996:465) comprised a list of qualities that belong to the negative and positive sets. Thus, Jews are regarded as "pushy, covetous, clannish, ill-mannered, ruthless, dishonest, mercenary, grasping, overbearing, sloppy, loud, money-loving and uncouth" on one hand, while at the same time are "financially successful, ambitious, hardworking, intelligent, loyal to family and other Jews, industrious, energetic and able to go ahead." The above quoted list visibly overlaps and can be found in the qualities ascribed to Jews by the oldest generation from Przysucha. The question that Wilson (1996) asked and which seems very intriguing to answer in the current research is whether the benign stereotypes are truly complimentary or do they veil anti-Semitism?

There are various views on the matter: Stember (1966, in Wilson 1996:467) asserts that those who depict Jews with the use of benign stereotypes are less anti-Semitic. Selznick and Steinberg (1969, in Wilson 1996:467) claim that benign stereotypes often cover underlying prejudice. Martire and Clark (1982, in Wilson 1996:467) admit that it is possible for people to perceive Jews in both a positive and negative way at the same time and therefore, embracing benign stereotypes does not guarantee that a person is not an anti-Semite. Regarding the present research, perhaps the words by Jean Paul Sartre accurately apply:

> "The anti-Semite readily admits that the Jew is intelligent and hard-working, he will even confess himself inferior in these respects. This confession costs him nothing… the more virtues the Jew has the more dangerous he will be." (Jean Paul Sartre, in Selznick and Steinberg 1969:5, in Wilson 1996:466)

Williams Jr. (1966, in Wilson 1996:466) completed the above view by noticing that the interpretation of the virtues plays a crucial role: positive traits seem desirable in the context of "us" but threatening in the context of "them". What is more, they may be interpreted differently depending on the current need: loyalty may be presented as clannishness, financial success as obsession with money, ambition as greed, whereas resourcefulness as dishonesty. As observed in the present study, steady commitment to religion was viewed twofold: as a desirable attitude, missing among local Christians, while on the other hand as excessive stiffness, impairing everyday functioning. The elderly from Przysucha, stated an awareness of Jewish superiority in many respects (religiousness, solidarity and ingenuity) and simultaneously felt Christians had been deprived of the opportunity to lead a more decent life. Therefore, Jewish virtues bred neither admiration nor inspiration but were a threat and caused anxiety. Intelligent, wealthy, hard-working, mutually supportive Jews were viewed as excessively influential and dangerous.

According to *the inevitability of prejudice perspective*, stereotypes, regardless of their type, are unavoidably followed by prejudice (Allport 1954, Billig 1985, Ehrlich 1973, Hamilton 1981, Tajfel 1981). Prejudice, as Duckitt (2001:253) contends, is a relatively new sociological concept and considered as a liability only since the 20th century. Its understanding, theoretical orientation as well as social policies towards it have been undergoing systematic changes, depending on current historical events. For example, until the 1920s, supremacy of white people, discrimination, segregation and colonial rule were perceived as a natural response directed towards individuals viewed as "backward". Only in

the 1920s and 1930s was the domination of one race over another found to be irrational and unjustified. One of the theories developed as that time, a frustration-displacement theory (Dollard et al. 1939), explained prejudice "as an unconscious defense through which social stress and frustrations were displaced through the scapegoating of out-groups and minorities." (Duckitt 2001:255) Obviously, those who were ethnically, culturally or socio-economically different from a dominant majority became the most probable targets. Regarding the 1930s and 1940s, when Nazi racial ideology led to the Holocaust, prejudice was regarded as a component of anti-democratic principles, rooted in pathological aspirations of authoritarian personalities. As mentioned previously, today fundamental and universal cognitive-motivational human processes such as social categorization and social identity are believed to underlie prejudice, which calls for multicultural policies that would foster tolerance of all groups.

Devine (1989) acknowledged the role of unconscious processes in the formation of prejudice, but she took a step further by differentiating between what is unconscious/involuntary and controlled/voluntary as well as between knowledge of a stereotype and personal beliefs. By developing the Dissociation Model, Devine emphasized the order with which an individual develops cognitive structures: stereotypes first become established in children's memories before a young person is able to critically evaluate their validity. Such an observation seems highly relevant when attempting to explain the aforementioned aggression towards Jews perpetrated by the young residents of the settlement. Presumably, Christian children had been previously soaked with stereotypical images of Jews advocated by their parents when they were unable to consciously accept or reject such assumptions. Therefore, as grown-ups they were subjected to a conflict between personal beliefs that are not developed until a later stage and cultural knowledge that is acquired unconsciously. Obviously, such a conflict may be of varying intensities: knowledge of a stereotype may be placed on a spectrum of congruency with personal beliefs, which results in people being either little or highly prejudiced towards an outgroup. Both low and highly prejudiced individuals act differently upon the initial activation of stereotypical ideas they hold: whereas the first group is capable of controlling their subsequent responses, the latter does not necessarily do so (although, as Devine asserts, even high-prejudiced people may comply with standards that prevent excessively prejudiced responses. Such cases often involve political correctness, frequently noted during the in-depth interviews carried out for the current research, especially at the very beginning of the meetings, before any initial

tension subsided). All in all, the extent to which our personal views overlap with long-lasting knowledge of stereotypes and its influence on our behavior invites reflection on types of social actions as well as the behavioral component of social categorization processes - racism.

With the intention of providing a solid analysis of social actions people may engage in, considerations of one of the most distinguished sociologists of all times, Max Weber, author of the concept of "an ideal type" employed to measure different social phenomena, will be presented. The discussion will first and foremost introduce and interpret Weber's famous typology, that is ideal types of social actions, however, before attempting to cover this subject it seems advisable to break the expression down and delineate Weber's understanding of each component separately.

As far as the term "ideal type" is concerned, its name may be slightly misleading since it does not refer to perfect (excellent) or typical cases. In fact, it is a common mental construct, deliberately simplified and exaggerated so as to study reality by selecting and accentuating its specific elements.[42] It draws from all observable phenomena and includes its characteristic aspects, while simultaneously omitting irrelevant ones. It should be stressed that the ideal type of representation of reality is not reality itself, since the empirical world is far more chaotic and less transparent. The key processes behind creation of ideal types are simplification of reality and its ongoing stream, making sure at all times that the construct is logical, potentially possible and all its components fit. As the author himself asserted:

> "An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct." [43]

Weber employed the concept of the ideal type in three dimensions, depending on their level of abstraction. The first type refers to phenomena that appear only in historic periods and specific cultural concepts. The second examines certain abstract components of social reality, whereas the third aims at reconstructing a specified kind of behavior.

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[42] https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideal-type

[43] https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/undergraduate/introsoc/weber7.html

Social action" arises when an individual ascribes a subjective meaning to his/her actions, and this meaning takes into account the behavior of other people. Obviously, the line between meaningful actions and purely reactive behavior is often blurred. Sometimes, only a psychologist is capable of deciding what sort of action took place (Weber 1978:4). Social action may be active or passive, and may be guided by past, present or future behavior of others, with "others" being either individuals known to us or an indefinite group of people that we are not familiar with. (Weber 1978:22)

Weber discerned four basic types that social actions may be divided into:

- *Instrumentally-rational (zweckrational) actions* "determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends"

Thus, an individual is motivated by the desire to reach a goal that can be defended rationally. He/she calculates and selects such means that would lead them to their aim in the most efficient way, with emotions kept aside at all times, since they may be a distracting factor leading us away from the path we intend to follow.

- *value-rational (wertrational) actions* "determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success"

This type of actions may seem irrational since values that motivate it may be hard to analyze in rational terms. Nevertheless, a person willing to achieve a desired value may act as rationally as people who strive to achieve the goals first outlined, for instance military heroes who consciously decide to defend their country's honor or saints who choose asceticism so as to attain salvation.

- *affectual actions* "determined by the actor's specific affects and feeling states"

In this case, individuals are driven by emotions, such as anger, revenge, frustration or others. Despite consequences one might be aware of or regret one may feel afterwards, these emotions are unstoppable and guide actions.

- *traditional actions* "determined by ingrained habituation" (Weber 1978: 24–25)

People act in the same manner their ancestors acted, "as it has always been done".

Once again it should be emphasized that ideal types, in their pure state, are non-existent in the real world, they will always be "contaminated" and mixed. When employed to understand actions committed by Christian inhabitants of Przysucha, it can be seen that residents acted according to a long-lasting tradition of open conflicts, tensions and isolation between Jewish and Christian communities, sometimes simultaneously being guided by strong emotions (e.g. beating up a Jew for ruining crops) and/or by rationally defined goals (destroying Jewish stands in order to boost Christian businesses). They were also motivated by values such as "strong, prosperous Poland, rooted in Christianity" according to which ethnically different competitors were often seen as intruders.

As far as the concept of race is concerned, Weber explored a link between "race identity" and a community, between race as such and its subjective perception:

> "A much more problematic source of social action than the sources analyzed above is 'race identity': common inherited traits that actually derive from common descent. Of course, race creates a 'group' only when it is subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens only when a neighborhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some common experiences of the same race are linked to some antagonism against members of an obviously different group." (Weber 1922, in Wieviorka 1995:8)

Thus, according to Weber, race matters only when there is consciousness of its existence, which can entail action (for instance, segregation, contempt, etc.) or antipathy. It should be underlined that by emphasizing the role of awareness Weber does not deny the existence of biological factors, but he

> "reverses the pre-sociological reasoning by proposing to replace the concept of race by that of ethnic relations in which the sense of belonging to a race- and not necessarily the objective reality of race- contributes to orienting the action" (Wieviorka 1995:9)

With regards to the origins of racism, there is no agreement whether it is a natural trait of humans existing since time immemorial (Levi-Strauss 1952) or whether it has developed with the rise of modernity (Taguieff 2001). The concept is all the more complicated due to its variations depending on the criteria of division into hierarchical distinct groups. Hence, there

is *biological racism* based on differences in bodies, facial traits, genes or hormones and *classical racism* rooted in discrepancies in cultural practices (in Greco 2009:44). The Christian residents of Przysucha interviewed for the purposes of the present study manifested both kinds of the notion, pointing both to Jews' external appearance (extensive facial hair, skin color) as well as cultural rituals (ecstatic prayers, lack of hygiene, mutual support, organization of household) which the inhabitants found incomprehensible and even contemptuous. Not only may racism be comprised of cognitive components (such as personal beliefs or stereotypical thinking), but also of individual racial practices (verbal and non-verbal violence) that can become widespread ideologies and finally, racism can become legitimized and institutionalized (Greco 2009:45-46). Therefore, extensive measures should be taken in order to recognize the moment when pre-constructed opinions and harmful assumptions are born in individuals, groups and media discourses as they may lead to vicious discriminatory actions that might subsequently be veiled by governments, institutions and various educational, legal and medical systems.

While discussing racism, Jankélévitch pointed to the specificity of anti-Semitism:

> "Among all the fascist impostures, anti-Semitism is not the one that reaches the greatest number of victims (this was written in 1942!), but it is the most monstrous. Perhaps for the first time men are officially tracked down *not for what they do, but for what they are.* They expiate their "being" and not their "having", not acts, a political opinion, or a profession of faith like the Cathars, the Freemasons, or the Nihilists, but the fate of birth." (Jankélévitch 1942, in Taguieff 2001:25)

Needless to say, the tragedy of the Holocaust was the full expression of blatant racism, in response to which many theories have emerged, such as the Authoritarian Personality Theory[44]. At the same time, many manifestations of racial attitudes may be far more covert, subtle, and theories which deal with them seem to be relevant also for the present study, since it includes people that avoid explicit demonstration of racial attitudes. Theories pertaining to

[44] The Theory developed by Adorno et al. (1950) revealed a pattern of hatred towards out-groups and a particular character structure responsible for it. The described authoritarian syndrome consisted of blind submission to authority, strict compliance with middle-class conventions, aggression against those who refused to act typically, as well as an inclination to think in rigid categories.

symbolic[45], ambivalent[46] or aversive[47] racism emerged as a result of a visible discrepancy between what people officially declared and how they were willing to act, i.e. discrepancy between words and deeds. They showed that although surveys that investigated attitudes of white Americans suggested a visible decline in acknowledged racism (more people willingly support school integration or a black presidential candidate, while at the same time more disapprove of laws against cross-racial marriages), subtle indicators of racism remained (such as readiness to help a white person rather than black, assigning more severe punishments to black students, speaking in a less positive tone of voice while talking about blacks) (Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985). Despite the fact that the above delineated theories were developed in the United States and thus reflected the American social structure, they strongly imply a perceived change in social norm, which is also visible in Poland, as well as a broad spectrum of ambivalent attitudes that my respondents revealed as well.

Racism is deeply correlated with the anthropological concept of ethnocentrism, understood as a kind of cultural identity reflected both in actions of individuals as well as collective awareness according to which interests of one's in-group are of the highest priority (Paleczny 2007:138).

According to Paleczny (2007:139), ethnocentrism rests on the following pillars:

- conviction of the exceptionality of one's in-group/its cultural superiority over other cultural groups,
- conviction that standards and values of one's in-group are the most important and therefore, they should be in force,
- aversion, hostility and a tendency to compete with other cultural groups,
- strong identification with one's in-group leading to its exclusivism and anxiety directed towards other groups

[45] The Modern Racism Scale developed by McConanahay and Hough (1976) rested on the assumption that Americans were no longer comfortable expressing racial attitudes in a traditional way, but demonstrated them more covertly, by approving of values and policy preferences that discriminated black people.

[46] Developed by Katz and Hass (1988) in response to discrepancy between declared opposition to racial discrimination and persistent aversion towards blacks, built upon a theory of stigma (Katz 1981) the approach revealed the existence of conflicting attitudes representing ambivalence.

[47] Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) pointed to a connection between endorsing egalitarian values dominant in America and expressing racial attitudes. Thus, those concerned with maintaining their egalitarian self-image avoided overt expression of racism.

- and conviction that members of the other groups are strangers, intruders, or even enemies.

If the above presented components were applied to the reality of pre-War Przysucha, it would certainly be obvious that they took place. The conviction of Jews being unwelcome or even a threat was manifested in various ways and degrees by the respondents. The perception of Jews as intruders resulted in discomfort, frustration and feeling of helplessness in some respondents, whereas others, overwhelmed with hatred and contempt, resorted to verbal and physical aggression (anti-Jewish discourse and violent actions). Nevertheless, at times individuals would manifest a wide range of different attitudes (such as Charles, a member of an anti-Semitic organization who did not understand his participation in Jewish victimization or Laura who described Jews in a highly pejorative way, yet appeared to sympathize with a Jewish mother trying to save her child), all of which only demonstrate the complexity of the matter.

4.2 Contemporary Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha

One of my Jewish interviewees, who had visited Przysucha a couple times, asked me: "What is your thesis about?" Having replied that I was writing about contemporary Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha he was very surprised. "But there are no Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha nowadays!" he tried to convince me. "There may be some projections, opinions, attitudes, but certainly there are no relations!" At the very beginning I refused to accept his point of view - after all, there are seasons when every week coaches full of Jewish pilgrims arrive in town. However, after years of engaging in participant observation, with certain sadness I must admit he was right: *in contemporary Przysucha there are no Christian-Jewish relations*, despite incessant opportunities for such relations to take place. Residents of Przysucha peek at Jewish pilgrims from behind their curtains, sure no one can see them. At times, they do not stop their chores as if Israelis passing by their houses were invisible. They often complain about the mess pilgrims leave behind, the trash they blindly drop on the streets, about their loud conversations or singing of songs, about groups that walk down the center of Wiejska street (instead of using the sidewalk, as common social graces would dictate), all of which gives the impression that visiting Jews are expansive, arrogant and careless about well-being, esthetics or simple peace and quiet of

native residents. Sometimes they would comment regarding the exotic outfits the Orthodox wear, occasionally residents are asked about the way to the cemetery. When young pilgrims arrive they often look at pretty Christian schoolgirls and give them a friendly smile.

And what of inhabitants who live in districts located further away from the synagogue or cemetery? Most do not see Jewish visitors at all. Although the issue of Polish Jewry frequently appears in national mass media (people suspect or accuse Polish politicians of being Jewish and thus acting to the detriment of Poland, haters label celebrities as Jewish so as to insult them, etc.), in Przysucha Jews seem to exist solely in the memories and conversations of the oldest generation. The younger generations reveal passive acceptance towards visiting pilgrims drawn from their own experiences: many Christians from Przysucha have made international trips or even some have settled abroad for good. Even the intensive renovation of the synagogue has not revived the idea of potential Christian-Jewish interactions, as people view it only through the prism of esthetic and practical implications. The residents are interested in who is funding such a costly initiative and enjoy the fact that finally it will not be a gigantic, appalling ruin, but to the contrary, maybe it will create some employment opportunities for inhabitants.

My Jewish respondent was definitely right, there is little evidence of Christian-Jewish relations in Przysucha. This revelation proved to be one of the greatest turns the current dissertation took. After all, the underlying assumption behind the thesis was to conduct interviews in a town where Christians are involved in regular direct contact with Jews, in order to minimize the chance of gathering clichés drawn from the media present in Polish culture. In consequence, the following sub-sections aim to answer the questions: Why is a lack of Christian-Jewish relations observed in Przysucha today? Must it be this way?

4.2.1 No relations

To avoid looking at the issue of non-existent Christian-Jewish relations only from one perspective, there is a pressing need to have a closer look at Jewish pilgrims who continue to come to Przysucha and analyze the readiness on both parts to engage in any form of interaction. The first aspect that needs to be underlined refers to the presence of police officers who are summoned each time a coach with Jewish visitors arrives in town. Even though there have never been any incidents in Przysucha that would endanger Jewish

visitors[48], the pilgrims are provided protection both from Polish as well as Israeli services. Such a regulation seems to be very detrimental to maintaining any kind of contact, since Poles receive a clear signal: "Do not approach us!" and Jews are told there is a definite possibility of aggression from Polish hosts. Nevertheless, Alon Simhayoff, a cultural attaché at the Embassy of Israel in Warsaw, warns against misinterpreting the presence of security men as an indicator of anticipated anti-Semitism in Poland:

> "This is really not the case, and in fact, Poland is one of the friendliest countries today towards Israel and Israelis. However, since Israel still suffers from the threat of terror, official Israeli delegations are always taking security measures, and in this regard there is no difference if the delegation visits Poland or any other destination."[49]

Another aspect refers to customs and attitudes of Hassidim whose presence in Przysucha is always widely noticed and sometimes commented upon due to their conspicuous outfits and hostile approach to any non-Orthodox population, especially women. Without having basic knowledge of Hassidic beliefs it is very easy for those who come in contact with them to feel they are being condemned or disrespected, since Orthodox pilgrims do not want to be involved in any form of interaction with people who do not share their way of life. I was affected by Hassidic hostility both personally and indirectly: my mother intended to pass on a letter which I wanted to use to establish contact with the Jewish pilgrims. She was instructed by the guide to stay away, otherwise, as the guide warned, she could be struck (!). I personally received less aggressive instructions, yet the idea behind them was the same: "Do not come near us". This made me appreciate all the more the very short conversations that I did manage to conduct with Orthodox visitors or brief E-mail answers (only 2 cases) that I obtained as a result of successful submission of my E-mail address to Hassidim. Overall, the pilgrims I met in town that did agree to participate in the present study admitted they came solely to pray (not to interact with locals or look around the town). For a careful observer this comes as no surprise - the only route that Jews cover in Przysucha is the one from the synagogue to the cemetery and the only time they leave the bus is when they pray in either of their sacred sites. For these reasons, establishing contact with Jewish pilgrims in Przysucha (especially Hassidim, but also with the less religious visitors due to their very tight schedule), requires a great deal of determination and patience and even borders on the miraculous.

[48] For the interview with one of police officers responsible for safety of Jewish pilgrims see page no. 240.

[49] http://embassies.gov.il/warsaw/Relations/ProjectActivities/Documents/HiddenOpportunities.pdf

The Hassidic way of life is not about to change. Grupińska pointed to questions extended in the 1960s by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians who were eager to find out whether Hassidim would be able to maintain their separateness in subsequent generations, or, to the contrary, if an increasingly laicized world with its material temptations would break Hassidim of their long-lasting values? The author concludes:

> "Today no one is asking such questions. Today it is common knowledge that they revealed contemporaneous fascination of lay scholars with a new technologized world, and not a real understanding of Jewish religion. Hassidim never asked such questions. Both then, as well as now when their communities live with the conviction of the inherited truth of a life path, of the order to live according to regulations formulated over hundreds of years." (Grupińska 1999:7)

Not only do Hassidim treat scientific attempts to analyze their way of thinking as an incursion of hostile strangers into the world of values they cherish, but they refrain from any confrontation with non-believers since they perceive such encounters as a threat to their centuries-long heritage. They defend their privacy and intimacy, because once it becomes an issue under debate, it turns from private to public (Grupińska 1999:8). Although Hassidic sects may be divided on the basis of a number of different criteria (their attitude towards the state, traditions, customs, clothing details unnoticed by strangers, etc.), their determination to strive to remain totally hermetic is indisputable. What is more, their religious values undergo constant radicalization, which is regarded as the only form of defense against temptations of the secular world. Grupińska speaks of a systematic closing of social circles, a narrowing down of acceptable forms of behavior, a persistent striving to minimize individual participation in the outer world, which results in the creation of a form of ultra-orthodox (orthodoxy remains applicable to persons who refuse to radicalize their behavior or have become infected with lay influences) (1998:17). The Hassidic way of life, necessarily observed from the outside, spurs a wide range of reactions: curiosity, bewilderment, indifference, but also irritation and contempt. As Grupińska asserts:

> "Both aversion as well as indifference stem first of all from common ignorance, a lack of knowledge and fear of the threatening other." (Grupińska 1998:39)

Since Hassidim choose to be inaccessible and isolated so as to remain faithful to the Torah, there is not much that can be done regarding interactions with "the other". It seems

that spreading knowledge of their beliefs and encouraging tolerance are the only steps that should be taken in this case.

Nonetheless, Przysucha regularly also welcomes less religious pilgrims whose determination to concentrate solely on visiting cemeteries and concentration camps is very strong as well. Not only are they unwilling to establish any interaction with locals (which to some extent appears understandable), but they do not attempt to obtain any basic orientation of the place they are visiting. The Israeli Youth Delegations to Poland, which are directed to 17-18 years old high-school pupils, are organized on the basis of a carefully thought-over curriculum, issued by the Israeli Ministry of Education (MOE). The first circular entitled: "Criteria and instructions for approving youth delegations to Poland" was released in 1988 and delineated pedagogical aspects of delegations which centered on Jewish identity and national discourse (Hazan 1999, in Soen and Davidovitch 2011:15).

As for the main goals of youth delegations to Poland, they are as follows:

- "Study of the Jewish space and in Poland its vitality before WWII"
- "To feel and try to understand the depth of the devastation"
- "To appreciate the heroism of those who fought against the tyrants"
- "To feel the depths of Nazi depravity"

(MOE circular, 1991, in Soen and Davidovitch 2011:15)

The syllabus was subsequently amended by Amnon Rubinstein, the Minister of Education who advocated a more liberal worldview and added two more goals in 1994:

- "To learn the national lesson of the need for a strong, sovereign Jewish state, and the universal lesson of the obligation to protect democracy and oppose any form of racism"
- "To become aware of the complexity of Jewish-Polish relations over the generations"

Although we cannot deny that a visible shift from purely particularistic Jewish to universal-humanist values has taken place indeed, it is clear that the first ones remain a priority, which breeds serious concerns as to what image of Poland thousands of young Israelis take back home. As Lehrer rightly points out:

> "Despite the fact that these Jews are going *to* Poland, their trips aren't really *about* Poland or interested in Poles; rather, they are focused narrowly on Jewish national memory and identity enacted on and against their Polish equivalents." (Lehrer 2013:60)

In fact, a certain paradox is created during youth delegations. Although the trips aim to foster tolerance and understanding of the intricate Christian-Jewish relations, in most cases the visits exclude any form of interaction:

> "In considering these (secondary) universalist issues, the nearest other towards whom Jewish youth might exercise their new tolerance would seem to be the Poles whose towns and cities they traverse during their tours. And yet ethnographic research suggests this is not often the case." (Lehrer 2013:60)

All in all, there are many reservations one may raise against the form of the tours:

> "(…) the mission's speed, decontextualization, and emotional tenor leads participants to patterned forms of (mis)interpretation of Poles and Poland, encourages 'us vs. them' thinking, obscures historical, moral and social complexity, and distracts from potential for cultural and social change. The trips work against humanistic forms of identification, encouraging instead a sense of Jewish embattlement. They also inhibit young Jews from awareness of the increasing number of Poles who are working, on the grassroots and diplomatic levels, to challenge antisemitism and narrow form of Polish ethno-nationalism. (Lehrer 2013:60-61)

Simhayoff views the matter more optimistically, as:

> "the biggest opportunity we have, when it comes to improving the relations between Israelis and Poles, and they can serve as an effective mean for building a stronger partnership between our people in the long run."[50]

The attaché emphasizes the fact that the youth delegations to Poland are preceded by extensive preparations in Israel that include a variety of topics, such as a prewar Jewish life in Poland, the Jewish and Polish fight against the invader, the complexity of Jewish-Polish relations over a thousand year long history, as well as contemporary information regarding excellent bilateral relations between Poland and Israel. While Simhayoff admits that the main

[50] http://embassies.gov.il/warsaw/Relations/ProjectActivities/Documents/HiddenOpportunities.pdf

purpose of the journeys is the visit to places connected with the extermination of the Jewish victims, students also go to see the areas in which Jews lived for centuries such as Galicia and Kazimierz. Furthermore, increasingly more Israeli schools include Polish-Jewish meetings within their delegations and are aware of persistent stereotypes that exist on both sides. Finally,

> "In 2009 an agreement was signed between Israel and Poland regarding a program of youth exchange. Unlike the youth meetings (…) this new program will include the element of reciprocity, and it will not be just the Israeli youth that travel to Poland and conduct meetings there with Polish peers, but also Polish youngsters will arrive to Israel and meet there with Israeli youth."[51]

Leaving aside collective pilgrimages, I would like to mention an exceptional Jewish visitor whom I met in Przysucha and who set an example as how to make a trip as meaningful as possible. Lorelei (59, attorney), upon coming to a former shtetl does not limit her stay to visiting the two key sites, such as the synagogue or the cemetery, but she also walks around the place so as to get the sense of its layout, approximate location of the cemetery to the synagogue, feel the town's atmosphere, etc. In other words, not only does she seek knowledge about the past, but she is also interested in the present, in people who currently live in the settlement, for, as she noticed, they know more about the history of their town than Jewish descendants who visit it. (After all, it is impossible for tourists to gain knowledgeable about the history of each town they arrive in, so it definitely helps elevate a visit to another level when a local can share his/her story concerning Jewish pre-War history). Obviously, establishing contact with residents requires some additional effort, may not always be possible, but it is worth trying. As Lorelei asserts:

> "And I think if you end up bringing together the history that Poles have worked on in the town and the family history that Jews, the Jewish Diaspora have worked on, marry the two things together, suddenly you have a fuller and more accurate picture. It's a fluid picture."

Furthermore, Jewish visitors being open to locals and to present day situations in former shtetls seems advisable taking into consideration the distorted picture of Poland that many Jews worldwide appear to have:

[51] http://embassies.gov.il/warsaw/Relations/ProjectActivities/Documents/HiddenOpportunities.pdf

"My personal feeling is if you can get American and Israeli Jews to make a trip to Poland, they will absolutely change their minds when they see that Poland is European, that it's not the black and white, outdated shtetl image that many Americans and Israelis have. And unfortunately, because of this outdated image, because there are very persistent emotions that American Jews in particular have about Poles and Poland, it sometimes stands in the way of openly experiencing the real Poland today. The fact is that you have dozens, if not hundreds of examples like Przysucha, across the country where local Poles have been stewards of Jewish culture, and keeping Jewish memory alive. (…) The Jewish Diaspora is absolutely unaware that the Poles of these towns exist and care for the cemeteries, synagogues and the history of Jews in the towns. And I think there's a very long road ahead."

As a careful observer of Christian-Jewish relations, Lorelei has spotted two parallel trends: a current revival of interest in Polish Jewry that is becoming more and more tangible in Poland, along with a simultaneous hardening of attitudes in third and fourth generations of Jews who tend to see Christian-Jewish relations in black and white. As a result, they forcefully refuse to re-discuss neuralgic issues, as if there was nothing new to be raised and no changes to be observed. Furthermore, they do not seem to acknowledge the fact that Jewish cemeteries in Poland are part of European and world heritage and thus are not Jewish only. They openly manifest their suspicion when they see Christian guides or guards of Jewish heritage. Since survivors of the Holocaust (more inclined to adopt a moderate approach) will soon be gone, it is of utmost importance that Jewish descendants see the real, contemporary Poland and not only Jewish cemeteries and deteriorating synagogues:

"I am a firm believer that if we can actually get some of these grandchildren to make their first trip to Poland, go to their towns, the heritage visit, genealogy visit, they would open up. I've seen it, I've already seen it with people coming to Poland. It's getting them to make their first trip and maybe genealogy is the doorway, as more and more people learn about their roots and they discover the towns their family came from, maybe with the popularity of genealogy a heritage tour would grow out of that and if they have a good experience on a heritage tour... somebody who takes them there, shows them the synagogue, shows them how rich Jewish life was, shows them the people who live in the town that still care, maybe that will change their minds. Giving them an experience like that."

Lorelei is aware of what has been stated so far, that the history of Polish Jews is multidimensional and complex, that the interactions between Christians and Jews were rich and varied, and although one could observe a strong element of segregation between the two communities before the War, there were also people who did mix

> "as they were neighbors, they were teachers to students, they were merchants to customers, I mean it was inevitable that their lives were intertwined, and today whether you are coming on a tour bus or a tour group, to not step out and talk to those in the town is a big mistake."

Thus, unlike how it is today, Jewish pilgrims should be encouraged and enabled to make a true heritage tour that would be as meaningful as possible; they should be armed with knowledge regarding everyday life of their ancestors, they should find out where their great great-grandparents lived, where they went to school, what route they took when they went from the synagogue to their house, where their businesses were, who their neighbors were, who they might have known… because such knowledge leads to the establishment of a real emotional connection with the town and this connection, in turn, taken back home, may breed further, milestone changes. In order to obtain all this information, Jewish pilgrims should have a chance to connect with local archivists, scholars, teachers or even average people in the street who could share with them what they know about Christian-Jewish co-habitation. An information point seems more than advisable here, but its establishment must be preceded with a need to see something more, to know something more than just where the synagogue or the cemetery are. To be more life-focused rather than focused solely on death and the past.

4.2.2 Hope for relations

Unfortunately, pilgrims with an attitude similar to the one manifested by Lorelei are rare exceptions and have a limited influence on the greater picture of Christian-Jewish relations. Nevertheless, within the last five years residents of Przysucha have had a chance to engage in various projects whose aim was to sensitize them to Jewish heritage and culture. All of the initiatives were carried out by people who neither come from nor live in Przysucha. As for the first type of meetings, it was a one-time project conducted by the Forum for Dialog Among Nations (in 2015), whereas the second type was the personal initiative of David Chernobilsky,

a teacher from Israel (meeting years: 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017), who took advantage of routine youth delegations to Poland in order to bring Poles and Jews together. [52]

With regards to the project by the Forum, it was directed to a group of selected local high school students who met with specially trained educationalists in order to learn about Jews both from a macro perspective (Jewish history, culture and traditions) as well as a micro perspective (the history of Jews from Przysucha). They discussed neuralgic issues, walked around the place with the intent to search for Jewish traces and prepared a common project pertaining to Christian-Jewish cohabitation. The project was solemnly completed during the annual gala that brings all the program participants from a given year together. The workshops have been developed as a result of the observation that young Poles often know absolutely nothing about the history of the region they live in and there are many forgotten or uncomfortable facts, many stereotypes as well as prejudices, all of which significantly impair the creation of harmonious relations between Christians and Jews. Thus, the program aims at providing solid knowledge, it encourages thinking, exploring, confronting, uncovering, reconstructing, searching, commemorating, discovering and acting. In fact, acting is a key word here, since educators are not lecturers, but trainers, and the whole series of meetings is highly interactive. Not only is the active approach visible in different types of classroom activities that are based on brainstorming, discussions, asking questions and seeking answers or building a miniature model of the town from before the War. The approach also encourages real ethnographic work such as conducting interviews with people who might be knowledgeable about Christian-Jewish history (family members, local scholars, etc.), sifting through local archives and searching for Jewish artifacts (such as mezuzahs) around the town. Having gathered all the necessary information (employers of the local Museum of Oskar Kolberg proved to be very helpful) the students who take part in the project become armed with tools that turn them into local guides who become capable of giving a tour to their parents, neighbors, friends, visitors, local authorities and others. In such a way, the limitation of the project, namely: directing it to only a group of selected students (approximately fifteen people) seems to be diminished, since again the initiative serves as a seed corn of something bigger.

[52] It has to be underlined that David Chernobilsky is the only teacher from Israel who insisted on establishing meetings with young people from Przysucha. No other delegations from Israel have demonstrated a similar desire so far.

Obviously, encouraging fieldwork helps to establish a new type of connection with one's hometown, which can then be viewed from a totally different perspective: forgotten or unknown history becomes vivid, Jews cease to be the others or strangers, but neighbors who are gone, buildings that had seemed to be invisible suddenly gain a new meaning. It is especially helpful that educators make use of stories that pertain to the lifetimes of specific individuals (not just the overall Jewish population treated collectively), giving their names and showing images, all of which appeals to one's emotions and imagination to a much greater extent. Participation in the project also means becoming more responsible for public life, taking pride in the town one lives in as well as developing commitment and creativity. But that is not all. Self-discovery and rebuilding one's identity is not only a personal experience, since students are asked to film a self-guided tour and subsequently publish it on the Internet, on social media or on a specially designed webpage. Hence, the project reaches much further, it crosses borders informing, teaching and instilling hope that the last word referring to Christian-Jewish relations is yet to be spoken.

As far as the students from Przysucha are concerned, they chose Facebook and Youtube to share their experience. The first medium was predominantly used in order to keep the students posted about subsequent steps that were about to take place (workshops, followed by an open-to-all trip), whereas the second enabled the students to share a nine minute long video showing how the tour actually went. Regarding the recording, after a few captions explaining the underlying idea behind the project the video turns into a type of report. Thus, the students are seen equipped with a microphone, holding photos of the prewar Przysucha and… two of them are dressed as Jews connected with the settlement: the Holy Jew and a Jewish dentist from Przysucha (Fejga Kagan). The students (along with a small group of local residents) visited places that are crucial to understanding the history of Jews from Przysucha: they found the last mezuzah trace in town, they located the site of the prewar mykva, at the site previously leading to the Jewish Ghetto they talked about the Holocaust, they admired elaborated gravestones at the Jewish cemetery… Furthermore, the video includes information and photos of the wall made of matzevot that was erected by the Nazis in order to protect the gendarmerie station. The culmination point of the trip was visiting the synagogue, both due to its greatness as well as the fact that for many tour participants it was the very first time they had seen the building from the inside. The tour was completed with a pleasant surprise: everyone was treated to Jewish cookies (so called *Haman's Ears)*, traditionally baked for Purim.

Judging by the picture that the participants took at the very end of the meeting one may reach two opposing conclusions: on one hand the trip attracted only twenty locals who were not students (whose participation in the project was obligatorily). On the other hand, it did resonate among the residents who took their time to walk around the town and listen to the history of their region. Such a slight turnout seems to confirm our findings and observations gathered so far: revival of interest in Christian-Jewish history is a new phenomenon in town, but still one cannot deny its existence. What is more, there is hope for its development, as the project in question had a further-ranging continuation: it led to the exhibition at school as well as the creation of an informative leaflet that is available in the local Museum. Last, but not least, the video included a short "question and answer" feedback from some of the project's participants. They all appeared to be inspired, surprised and pleased, for they had never seen, heard or suspected that the history of Jews from Przysucha could be so interesting and thought-provoking. Once again, the fact there is a long road ahead regarding residents' knowledge and awareness seems to be validated. One may assume that having become more responsible and committed, the project participants will start spreading the news that Jews were and continue to be an important part of Polish history, seen both from a micro as well as macro perspective.

Turning now to the second type of initiatives whose aim was to bring Poles and Jews closer, the potential of Przysucha should be acknowledged, due to its location (in central Poland, close to the capital city and near the vibrant Jewish communities located in Łódź and Krakow), its history and the extraordinary synagogue have not been fully recognized and fulfilled. Despite its contribution to the development of Hasidism it is not included in the so called Hassidic Route.[53] However, thanks to David Chernobilsky, the initiator and organizer of annual gatherings in town, Przysucha now stands a chance to hold events which may become its main attraction and make the town stand out among other shtetls.

There were three main factors which resulted in Chernobilsky's determination to organize regular meetings in Przysucha: the fact that his family came from Poland (his mother was born in the nearby village of Białobrzegi, whereas her family originated from Przysucha), his

[53] The Hassidic Route is a tourist route following traces of Jewish communities through southeastern Poland, joining 29 townships of the Lubelskie and Podkarpackie provinces: Baligrod, Bilgoraj, Blazowa, Chelm, Cieszanow, Debica, Dukla, Dynow, Jaroslaw, Kolbuszowa, Krasnik, Lesko, Lezajsk, Lublin, Lancut, Leczna, Nowy Zmigrod, Przemysl, Radomysl Wielki, Ropczyce, Rymanow, Rzeszow, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, Ulanow, Ustrzyki Dolne, Wielkie Oczy, Wlodawa and Zamosc. Przysucha is not included due to its location in the center of the country.

deep interest in Hassidic stories and the most immediate factor: his daughter's school trip to Poland which instilled in Chernobilsky an internal drive to visit his ancestors' country as well.

> "And I can tell you that until that time *(his daughter's school trip)* Poland for me didn't exist. It was land covered with snow, always white, with strange names like Przysucha, Kock, and the only connection I had was through my mother. (…) Poland for me lived in the memories of my mother, I didn't have any integration, intention for… anything, to come here (…) I didn't feel any connection to Poland."

As Chernobilsky pointed out, although his mother left Białobrzegi before the War, as a very young girl, she still continued to recall many details from her family's town, details regarding places her family and friends lived in, their everyday routine, their house… along with traumatic events, such as the separation from her father who was later murdered in Białobrzegi. Feeling such a vivid connection to Poland, Chernobilsky's mother asked her granddaughter who was about to embark on her school trip to Poland to visit places connected with their family history and to try to look for a friend especially dear to her heart. It might seem surrealistic, but the girl did find the man, only because it was the 1st of November (All Saints' Day in Poland) when people cover long distances to light a candle on their family members' and friends' graves. The man had already settled in Croatia but visited Białobrzegi on this particular day for religious reasons. On establishing the first contact with her grandmother's old Polish friend, they decided to make a phone call to Israel while standing in the street, and talk to the grandmother.

> "(…) for the first time after close to 80 years she was speaking Polish, all her Polish came together again, and the whole village was standing, old ladies: 'Yes, Dina! (my mother's name), I remember! I remember!' And then my daughter Tamar called me, I know exactly when it was, and she told me this story, and there was something in her voice, something broader, something more, it was voice of somebody who has a story, light, something light was in her voice, and that very second, very moment, I felt Poland turned concrete from the land of fairy tales, of my mother's memories it became something I can touch, I felt the need to come, to visit."

Not only did Chernobilsky come to Poland to see the country as a regular tourist, but drawing from his long-lasting interest in Hassidic stories he organized his stays in such a way so as to meet both Poles and Jews and share, discuss and spread Hassidic ideas of life during

café meetings, university lectures, conduct workshops in museums and Jewish centers, initially in Warsaw and Kraków and eventually, in Przysucha.

Regarding his discovery of Przysucha, Chernobilsky's first visit to town and his determination to work on an unprecedented project here is rooted in his exceptional attachment to visions advocated by the prominent tzaddiks from the settlement. His interest in Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowicz, the Holy Jew and Simcha Bunem as well as some of his hazy family connections might suggest that the initiator of Przysucha gatherings is somehow related to his revered spiritual leader who established his school and is buried in town. Upon coming to Przysucha with the intention to look for his descendant's graves, Chernobilsky went inside the synagogue and experienced a range of emotions which resulted in his craving to carry out an initiative that would be based on the Hassidic way of life:

> "I went into the synagogue, it was still possible to go in, I felt something I never felt before, I felt the emptiness, in the building, inside, the emptiness, the dysfunction of it all… not the last generation before the Holocaust, the dysfunction of the culture, such deep and rich culture, that now was empty, and I just broke there. (…) I never felt something like this. Finally, I understood and felt the meaning of destruction."

Despite the overwhelming feeling centered around the attempts to destroy the entire Jewish civilization, Chernobilsky became convinced he wanted to concentrate on the power of life, self-empowerment and human empowerment, in agreement with the essence of Hasidism. Przysucha seemed a perfect place for potential workshops, a place that could take pride in its extraordinary synagogue as well as its rich history of outstanding religious leaders.

> "I felt much less connected to Białobrzegi. To Przysucha - it is another kind of connection. I don't know… emotional, intellectual, spiritual. (…) Just imagining that I am doing something in a place that was the center of this kind of thinking, philosophy, and that I am doing something based on this is wonderful."

The first two gatherings organized in town were only a prelude to what was to come in subsequent years. Lacking proper publicity, his group attracted only a few Christian participants from the town. Furthermore, their main idea was to conduct spiritual workshops centered on a variety of concepts rooted in Hassidic teaching such as self-development, self-awareness, expression of emotions, dialog, communication, healing etc. rather than bringing Jews and Poles together so as to enhance mutual understanding. By stating that the greatest

importance seemed to be attached to each participant's personal growth I would not want to underestimate the activities that did focus on strengthening relationships between Christians and Jews. The chance to spend some time together, eat lunch, have a walk to the local Jewish cemetery, listen to Hassidic music, engage in small-group activities based on a deepened dialog cannot go without proper acclaim. Finally, encouraged by Krzysztof Bielawski, one of the participants of the gatherings, for the first time in the town's history, high school students began to take care of the Jewish gravestones located both in the cemetery as well as private premises in Przysucha. The students cleaned the gravestones, arranged for their translation and created their comprehensive documentation. Needless to say, by doing so, Przysucha's teenagers made a significant contribution to reviving the memory of Jews who formerly lived in their town.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the gatherings that took place in 2015 and 2017 (there was a year-long break between them) deserve the greatest attention due to their panache and underlying idea that appears to be a total reversal of what had taken place previously. The initiative by the Forum for Dialog Among Nations outlined above had the same aim as the project carried out by David Chernobilsky. However, discussing neuralgic issues, discovering local Jewish heritage, preparing a presentation in a homogeneous circle are not extraordinary educational methods. To the contrary, Chernobilsky's goal was not to discuss or clarify tensions that had not been dispelled over the years, but to create space where Poles and Jews could enjoy themselves and spend relaxing, quality time together. Chernobilsky's focus on life (as opposed to death) and on the future (as opposed to the past) as well as promoting universal values such as tolerance, openness and cooperation (as opposed to history-grounded issues) was the leading motivation behind the endeavor.

During a short speech by Chernobilsky, the initiator of the gatherings, a very important question was raised: "Why are we here?" The answer was obvious: to get to know one another, to find out who you are, to create common future, to cooperate and to open oneself to "the other". Although English was the designated lingua franca, it became evident that the universal language that unites young people is the same worldwide, the unspoken language of enjoying food, laughter, music and dancing together, acts capable of breaking any initial hesitations and tension. The Christian hosts acted in harmony with the long-standing tradition of Polish hospitality and therefore two long banquet tables were set up with an abundance of sandwiches, fruit, vegetables and desserts that the students from Israel and Przysucha helped themselves to while they mingled together, talked, took photos, exchanged social media

accounts or taught one another particular phrases in Polish and Hebrew, respectively. During both gatherings a short slideshow presentation on the history of Jews from Przysucha was shown, however, definitely the key activity was the dancing that took place in the school gym. It is worth underlining that these activities were very well planned and thought out, in order to gradually assist students in their experiencing "the other". Initially, teenagers from Przysucha and Israel were divided into two groups according to their nationality and encouraged to occupy separate parts of the gym, where they danced while facing the other group. Only after a more casual atmosphere prevailed did the groups begin to dance together, which was soon followed by dancing in mixed Polish and Jewish pairs. Undeniably, there was much laughter, fun and emotions not only for participants but onlookers and teachers who observed how barriers were being torn down and replaced by enthusiasm, curiosity and a willingness to stay in touch.

Both gatherings involved visits at the cemetery and the synagogue, where students explored gravestones, did some cleaning as well as learned a few Hassidic stories. On David's suggestion, participants were also encouraged to engage in a very symbolic activity. With pens and paper in hand, they were asked to leave "memory messages" on trees growing at the Jewish necropolis. Standing in front of the synagogue, a Jewish girl sang a song that she had learned from her grandmother. The following year another Jewish student played the violin, and recited Psalm 122: "For my brethren and companions sakes, I will now say: Peace be within thee". On both occasions, the participants stood in silence, remembered and reflected on the past and many were brought to tears.

David Chernobilsky based his gatherings on establishing direct and intensive contact between Polish and Jewish students, while being fully aware that the majority of Israelis view Poland as a huge cemetery of Polish Jews as they travel from one concentration camp to another and normally observe Poland solely from behind bus windows. Since his initiatives received very positive feedback both from Jewish and Polish sides, and taking into consideration the ongoing turnover of school students, there is a pressing need to repeat the meetings he originated and thus contribute to educating and sensitizing new generations.

4.2.3 Relations and local authorities

Establishment of more positive Christian-Jewish relations depends on a number of factors, some of which refer to human determination and belief in their significance, whereas others - to bureaucracy, official agreements or even viewpoints advocated by opinion-forming, prominent public figures. In order to find out what the local authorities think of potential Christian-Jewish relations I visited the local parish priest and mayor of Przysucha, the manager of the Oskar Kolberg's Museum, the personal assistant of the starost of the region (as aforementioned, the starost refused to be interviewed due to a lack of time) as well as one of the police officers responsible for order during Israeli trips. Since the interviews pertained to the various spheres of financial, legal, spiritual and educational matters as well as issues related to people's safety, i.e. spheres which the privileged actors are in charge of and in which they provide guidance to local residents, a separate analysis of each stance will be provided, followed by a conclusive summary of the implications the analyzed approaches have on the topic in question.

The parish priest

It needs to be underlined that in Przysucha most inhabitants label themselves as Catholics. Each Sunday churches are crowded with believers, residents willingly take part in processions around Przysucha to manifest their faith and only a few would refuse to open their door to priests visiting their parishioners as part of annual Christmas calls. In such a town the parish priest is a highly respected person and has power to exert a strong influence on his parishioners' minds and actions. Therefore, his view on Jews as such and Christian-Jewish relations, although not correlated with making legal and financial decisions, cannot be underestimated.

The interview with the priest was conducted on August 9th 2014, and the interviewee immediately took the opportunity to point to Christian-Jewish common heritage, by mentioning saint Edith Stein, a converted Jewish martyr, whose memory is cherished on that day each year (the anniversary of her death in Auschwitz). The very first sentences uttered by the priest revealed the nature of discourse that was about to take place, full of references to faith, religion and spiritual matters, which came as no surprise. The priest underlined Christian-Jewish commonalities numerous times, while quoting Polish Pope John Paul II who called Jews *"our brethren in faith"*, who himself had grown up among Jews, had a close

Jewish friend and later began dialog between the two communities (already mentioned in Chapter 2). The priest strongly emphasized that Judaism is no contradiction to Christianity, but a solid basis, the foundation upon which Catholicism was built. In consequence, Jews were presented as the true chosen nation, where Jesus, Saint Mary, apostles and numerous other saints had their origins, as the nation that is still being given numerous blessings because,

> "it is skilled, can manage things, not only in Poland, but in the world, in America and in other places. It is no secret that many of them *(Jews)* fulfilled important functions, responsible functions, still fulfill great functions, decide about certain matters and *here we can look at things differently*." (emphasis added)

Overall, the interviewee made a clear distinction between the past and present situation. The past represented by the Old Testament, full of God's wisdom that unites Jews and Christians and the complicated present (hinted in the above citation) which requires *"calling evil and good by their true names"*, regardless of what nationality a person who does harm or good has. Thus, his responses showed absolutely no traces of traditional anti-Semitism based on the grudge that Christians hold towards Jews for murdering the Messiah, however certain anti-Semitic clichés he used such as the presence of numerous Jewish figures in responsible positions around the globe do resemble the frequent accusations that Jews are in governments and banking institutions in order to rule the world. The word "resemble" is essential here, not even once did the priest imply that Jews fulfilling important functions act to the detriment of other countries, but rather to boost Jewish interests.

Nevertheless, although he was completely aware of the awkwardness and controversy surrounding the metaphor, the interviewee pointed to common origins by drawing from the evolution theory:

> "Here, maybe it isn't nice to say, but I see it this way, as is said about evolution that a man comes from a monkey, and then we assume that God could make use of a body, of its layer, and then infuse Spirit into it, and since that time monkeys have gone their way, and men their way. Don't take this wrong, but it's that Jews had been around for some time, than Christ came, infused new Spirit and while some took the Spirit and became Christians, others remained believers of the God Jahveh, the rules of the Talmud and of the Old Testament."

Turning back to the complicated present situation, the priest put forward two remarks. The first that the notions of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are overused or misused and the second that generalization and stripping events from their further context is harmful, deceptive and leads to the escalation of deeply-rooted antagonisms. Regarding the first observation, he presented the concept of anti-Semitism as comfortable and too easy to use and employed always when it comes to criticism of Jews, although,

> "it is a totally different thing, to criticize, it is a different thing to evaluate, name evil and villainy by their true names, which doesn't mean this is anti-, because anti- implies hatred to a person."

As for the Holocaust, the priest mentioned the book by Norman Filkenstein, "The Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering", an extremely controversial publication based on the thesis that the tragedy of the Holocaust has become a lucrative business for many Jews and the Shoah itself, despite being very dramatic, should not be given any special role in mankind's history, since it was not the greatest genocide that has ever taken place. As far as the role of a further ranging context, generalization was labeled *"devilry"*, for it denotes that *"a part is treated as a whole"*, which is illogical. According to the priest, contextualization, that is seeing things in grey rather than in black and white, remains important no matter whether we touch upon less neuralgic issues such as the level of wealth or poverty among Christian and Jewish communities before the War or highly delicate, dark topics such as the Jedwabne massacre or denunciations, because all of the events are just continuations of previous actions and should not be perceived as separate cases, but placed on the continuum of history.

What is more, the priest's observations confirmed the findings gathered in the present research which were already analyzed or mentioned in former subsections.

1. In conversations with the priest, the oldest generation frequently underlines Jewish intelligence and cunningness, but they also complain about having been abused, especially on the grounds of price setting by the Jewish community.

2. Incoming pilgrims seem to be expansive and thoughtless about respecting the comfort of native residents:

"(…) It may sound funny, but one day I was going for a walk around Przysucha, next to the High School, and I remember, it may have been the first Friday of the month, it was a penitential day, and some singing was spreading, I thought to myself: our community must have partied, and it was Lent, I say when Sunday comes I will need to point that out, so that they will be more careful, because it isn't appropriate… And then, as I was approaching Wiejska street from Warszawska street, I saw coaches and I realized that the singing didn't come from our inhabitants, but from Jewish visitors at the cemetery."

3. Jewish history appears to be forgotten in Przysucha. One day during vacations in the mountains the priest was reading a local newspaper and to his surprise discovered that one of the most outstanding Rabbis in the history of Hassidism was born and taught in his town. The article referred to the history of Polish Jewry:

"(…) and I regret now I didn't take it with me, but I remembered and it was a surprise to me that this was our tzaddik, buried here in Przysucha, is the second, or the third, in the hierarchy of Jews in Poland. (…) And when I returned I looked at certain things differently, because this has not been touched upon before, there is authentically a kind of psychosis that has remained from the past. It has sunk into oblivion, psychological repression, as if it hadn't existed."

However, while discussing local ignorance of Jews from Przysucha, the priest emphasized this lack of knowledge is a consequence of tense relations from before the War as well as the politics of the Communist regime that encouraged atheism and embraced a different view on human dignity. Not only did communist authorities purposefully ignore Polish Jewry (for example through their educational system), they also gave full authorization to devastate sacred Jewish places (as a result, the territory of the Jewish cemetery in Przysucha served as a park where people relaxed as well as a pasture where farmers fed their cattle, whereas tombstones were desecrated by being used for practical building purposes). Thus, parents and grandparents of the generation born in free and democratic Poland were raised in an atmosphere of disrespect towards Jews and Jewish heritage. Obviously, Przysucha is no exception regarding this. As the priest stated:

"In my hometown it was the same. - Where are you going to play ball? - To the Jewish cemetery."

Finally, the fact that inhabitants continue to disrespect Jewish sacred places (visible during the classes of Physical Education) is correlated with a certain disregard for their culture as such. To support his point of view, the priest mentioned making use of the Catholic cemetery as a shortcut, where people *"eat ice-cream, smoke cigarettes or take a dog for a walk."*

4. There are few interactions between native residents and visiting pilgrims in Przysucha. During his service at the local parish the priest reported he had two opportunities to meet persons of the Jewish faith. Both encounters happened around two decades ago. The first person, who introduced himself as a Jewish genealogist, visited the local Church in order to check some metrical books, the second was a Holocaust survivor who originally came from Przysucha and visited the town to ask about his co-religionists, but as already reported, no Jews returned to settle in Przysucha after the War. Regarding the first encounter, the genealogist allegedly mentioned that Jewish documents he had seen included a flattering note saying that in the 17th century[54] excellent relations between the Jewish and Christian communities were observed. As for as the second meeting, the Jew shared the story of his survival, which, as the priest concluded, confirmed the extraordinary

> "sharp thinking and intelligence of representatives of this nation, that they can do things, their cleverness, composure, all these attributes that God gave them and still gives."

Having said that, the priest was asked what can be done to bring Christians and Jews together, to harmonize relations on a macro level and help relations arise on a micro level - in Przysucha? The priest advocates maintaining a dialog deprived of mutual accusations or ultimatums, since it is virtually impossible to weigh gains and losses on both sides, the War has its own rights and wrongs, and it was Germany, not Poland, which started all the tragedy. Secondly, there is a need for solid information on historical facts and the need to instill pride in locals, on the basis of which further actions, initiatives and financial investments could be encouraged. The order of actions is of utmost importance here. Without the first step, without spreading awareness among native residents as to how significant the Jewish heritage is both on the local, national, as well as international level nothing can be accomplished. Przysucha's new generations offer great hope for this, but they need a charismatic local leader, a person who would suggest and coordinate a strategy aimed at sustaining tradition, renovating monuments and reviving the town's history.

[54] The priest must have remembered incorrectly (or was given wrong information), since the Jewish settlement in Przysucha was established later, presumably between 1710-1776, i.e. in the 18th century. (See chapter 1)

The mayor

The analysis of the interview with the mayor of Przysucha will obviously require leaving behind spiritual and religious issues, but rather concentrating on the more mundane aspects such as finances, esthetics, regulations, acts of law, stature, institutionalization and formalization. It should be strongly emphasized that during the interview the mayor underlined the need to conduct actions on appropriate levels. His mere willingness to meet with me and discuss Christian-Jewish relations in the town indicates an openness to the matter. As repeatedly stated, the starost refused to dedicate any time to me for an interview.

The mayor's entire interview basically revolved around the umbrella statement put forward by the respondent at the beginning of the meeting:

> "Probably the most important thing for the whole situation is that after World War II, Jews from Przysucha, of course not of their own accord, but practically no Jews remained in Przysucha. There are no families, as far as I remember and know, I guess there are two cases that two persons from the Jewish nation remained, but they converted to Catholicism. I know their situation, they started families here, so traces of Jews living here have disappeared. As a result, it is difficult to talk about Jews or the community here taking care of memory and tradition."

As can be seen in his statement, there is a clear distinction: "us" vs. "them". The quotation above does not imply that a part of the community from Przysucha is gone and therefore the rest is in a way responsible for the preservation of their memory, but suggests that Jews should preserve the heritage of Jews, whereas Christians - the heritage of Christians. There is an obvious lack of acknowledgement that Jewish heritage and memory is in fact Polish, because it was built and developed on Polish soil by residents of Poland, as if Christianity was the single indicator that defined Polish nature.

It is helpful to scrutinize the reasons for such an attitude. First and foremost, in Przysucha there is either oblivion of Jewish memory resulting from the fact that witnesses of Christian-Jewish co-habitation are dying out or "*the palpable opinion*" of the town's residents of "*rather looking critically at everything*". What is worse, such oblivion is destined to grow even stronger (since the last generation of witnesses will soon pass away entirely), and young people will continue to have a lack of knowledge on the subject unless publications are issued or initiatives carried out (by generations which have no antagonisms towards Jews stemming

from pre-War proximity). As for as the negative attitudes among average residents, they are much more rabid than official relations would suggest. In other words, *"Christian-Jewish relations are better in an official sense than in reality"*. The research findings presented in the previous sub-section encourage reflection that the foundation for today's tensions lies in the oldest generation's feeling of being abused and deceived by Jews, an attitude they presumably pass on to those close to them.

So what is the role of the mayor as the host of the region in the situation of oblivion and aversion, according to the mayor himself? - *To respond to people's needs*.

> "As authorities, we are told: You are not supposed to build monuments, such efforts must arise from some initiative, organization or group, and if such an initiative arose (…) I am not against it, but to the contrary, I would provide any needed support. (…) I don't want to put forward anything that would meet with some kind of…*(objection)*".

Similar to the priest, the mayor is fully aware that in Przysucha today, most people are not ready or willing to welcome open preservation of Jewish memory in the form of monuments or commemorative plaques, not to mention renaming local streets with names of prominent Jews.

> "(…) We cannot change it *(tense Christian-Jewish relations)* by building a monument, so as to avoid such a situation that the authorities of Przysucha are founding a monument of Jewish memory and as a matter of fact we *(the inhabitants of Przysucha)* are not interested in it and if we are - it is rather with a more critical attitude."

We find initiatives for improvements in relations caught in a kind of vicious circle. The mayor will not step forward to help raise awareness, instill pride or spread such information among residents because clearly it is not what they would expect, need or want and the residents will never make such efforts on their own accord because of their lack of awareness, pride and even lack of basic information on the matter.

Nevertheless, about ten years ago, when the local police station was being extended, there was a golden, once in a lifetime opportunity to commemorate the exterminated Jewish community with the approval of local Christian residents. Matzevot that had been used by the Nazis to build the wall surrounding the station were recaptured and Czesław Bielecki, a famous Polish politician, former candidate for the position of the president of Warsaw and

architect who was raised in an assimilated Jewish family, offered full coordination of erecting a monument from the stolen and desecrated gravestones. The entire project was intended to be conducted by him free of any charge, pro publico bono. The opportunity, as the mayor admits, was extraordinary because

> "then there was a chance to easily explain to people that the memory of the dead had been slandered. It works the same, if from the Polish cemetery, Roman-Catholic, graves were desecrated in such a way… I think it was a good opportunity to explain it to people somehow. A good opportunity to start, a kind of seed corn of something."

Although the authorities of Przysucha guaranteed full support and any necessary help - the project fell through for unstated reasons.

Regarding actions from the Polish side to preserve the intellectual and physical heritage of Przysucha, the mayor mentioned numerous efforts which were made to obtain enough financial resources in order to renovate the deteriorating synagogue before care of the building was taken over by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, the efforts were not successful and in 2013, when the idea of the current thesis originated, the synagogue was still an appalling ruin. Today, the town no longer is responsible for the synagogue and the mayor is now only a passive observer who can monitor the progress, but has no word regarding decisions. For our discussion it should be underlined that both previous efforts as well as current monitoring has its roots in practical and esthetic needs:

> "I am worried as well *(about the condition of the synagogue and the territory around it)*, it is in town *(*meaning*: in the center)*, for sure we would feel differently as local authorities, but I guess inhabitants too, if there was a nice, stucco building standing, serving as something."

Or:

> "I know that at the moment the third block of endowment from the Ministry of Culture has been directed and I am very pleased as the mayor, because I wish in the center of the town instead of this stripped building without gutters there was a prettier building that would serve either Jewish culture or culture in general."

The mayor seemed to be highly alert. As he has much experience with investments and is well-informed about the financial input that both the Foundation for the Preservation of the Jewish Heritage in Poland as well as Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage had dedicated for the renovation of the synagogue (in 2014 when the interview took place 2 million zloty was allotted) he found the visible progress deeply unsatisfactory. He also appeared to be open to ideas and suggestions. During his travels he admitted to regularly searching for information on what purposes other synagogues around Poland serve. Finally, he preferred strict compliance with the rules, which was visible when representatives of the school from Israel wanted to organize Christian-Jewish gatherings in Przysucha.

It is worth discussing the situation in greater detail. As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, in Poland a certain change in thinking regarding Christian-Jewish relations has taken place . The mayor took notice of such changes on the micro level as well:

> "(…) Those relationships, they *(Jews)* came, and it was all done separately, but recently, last year, some *(initiative)* arose (…) those were representatives from a school in Israel who wanted to establish contact here with our youth (…)".

The meeting in question was intended to be organized (and eventually was) by David Chernobilsky, but apparently some problems arose with putting the whole event in an appropriate, formalized framework so as to keep the symmetry of all levels. According to the mayor, the official, highest level represented by himself and the starost should cooperate directly with its equivalent level from Israel. Respectively, school representatives from Israel should expect cooperation with local schools in Przysucha. As indicated by the mayor, the Israelis coming to town with the idea of intercultural gatherings either did not want or know how to maintain this symmetry:

> "I don't know what it is all for, because I think if it's supposed to have an official character, official contacts of Polish-Israeli youth, we should legalize it somehow. He should have come with a letter, let's say, from the Embassy of Israel in Poland, because he wants us to open doors of all institutions. No problem, I opened the door of the Community Center. I suggest, if a school comes, I want to meet with them, but they want to skip the level. Israeli school and the authorities of Przysucha (…) if it's Israeli school then our school, our high school can be a partner. (…) "

Fortunately, despite misunderstandings and initial reservations connected with the stature and formalizations of the gatherings they were successfully held three years in a row. Hopefully, having all the necessary information and the official stance on how they should be organized, the Christian-Israeli meetings will continue taking place with no legal obstacles.

There is one last issue that I discussed with the mayor, the issue especially close to me as a former resident of Wiejska street nearby where the synagogue and Jewish cemetery are located. The issue almost seems trivial, and would be easy to remedy, and yet it seems to represent the oblivion, aversion and ignorance towards Jews on the part of local residents (or rather authorities). My disappointment refers to the lack of road signs that would lead confused pilgrims (who come to Przysucha individually) to their sacred places, road signs whose lack in town the mayor decidedly acknowledged and promised to erect. Although the interview took place more than three years ago - the mayor has of yet not kept his word.

The manager of the Oskar Kolberg's Museum

The visit to the local museum in Przysucha posed a chance to look at Christian-Jewish relations from a perspective that combines both spiritual, legal and financial matters. The museum's manager talked about the topic drawing from her experience as a person whose job is to collect things, a person who has a special, extraordinary respect towards collected items, since they consist the foundation upon which she tells stories, explains processes, reaches conclusions and acts. The idea of such objects proved to be very important in our conversation and shed new light on what residents from Przysucha think and feel when they reflect upon their Jewish neighbors. The manager's focus on things seemed to shift our interests from words, discourse and complaints to more subtle, less obvious issues that require interpretation.

Needless to say, building a collection that could be turned into an exhibition is of utmost importance for museologists. In a town such as Przysucha, which had been inhabited by thousands of Jews before the War, it should be easy to source a variety of objects, however, despite numerous requests to hand in memorabilia from the Jewish community, the Christian residents claimed they possessed nothing they could contribute. Very often their explanation for the lack of objects stemmed from the 1980s, when the Jewish cemetery was being renovated and many Jews visited Przysucha and bought the objects in question. (Obviously, in accordance with this study's previous conclusions that for the Christian residents nothing

should be wasted and any source of income was a good source, the Jewish pilgrims were not *given* anything, but had to pay for the findings.) However, it happened that unexpectedly some people decided to bring items to the museum that had previously belonged to Jews:

> "(…) I look at people also from this perspective, they must have had contact with particular objects, not day-to-day, practical contact, but they might have been aware that there was something in their attic, that there is a *thing*. Relatively, not long ago we obtained many of such objects, which had been taken, kept and related to Jews, really a lot of such things. And it's visible those things must have been kept somewhere in an attic, in a dry, non humid room, their condition proves it and that they had been kept with an awareness those things were there. And those were objects brought by a person who had known for many years that we cared about them, and after a long time this person finally decided to bring them."

The interviewee suggested there could be a number of emotions that may have stopped people from admitting they had taken over Jewish possessions: fear, shame, or some hybrid feeling difficult to define, based on apprehension of what local people would think and how the decision to hand those objects in would be received. This is especially true today, when the Jewish topic is increasingly more discussed in Poland.

As far as the Jews who had lived in Przysucha before the War are concerned, the museum manager decidedly stated they have been forgotten indeed, despite all the efforts the institution has tried to put forth to prevent the complete oblivion of their memory. However, my interlocutor pointed to a special kind of being forgotten, that is when a group of people *is not important enough* to be remembered in everyday life. It is not the matter of not knowing their history, it is rather *a lack of desire to preserve memory* of the exterminated community. Unsurprisingly, it is easier for people who live in the area encompassing the former Jewish square today to recall Jews from the town, but due to certain contentious issues (for example, property claims) the topic is unwelcome. One may argue that on a daily basis it is very difficult reflect on Jewish faith, and it does not refer to Jews as such, but to any historical facts or figures. Nevertheless, for instance, Oskar Kolberg, whose achievements or life are probably not discussed or mentioned too often either, is eternalized in many ways in order to *inspire people to think about him*. Although some of the Jews from Przysucha were truly extraordinary and all had suffered unprecedented tragedy, none are honored with any commemoration.

So what does the museum do to contribute to the preservation of Jewish memory? First, it offers a regular, educational program that presents the history of the town, in which Jews have their due place. The course is interesting, because it is not a monotonous lecture, but makes use of other means of expression, such as a film, images, literature or various activities. It is available any time and directed to students of middle or high schools (ages 13-18), yet its popularity depends on the general syllabus (often subject to changes, prepared on the national level) as well as personal interests of teachers who can (but do not have to) bring young people to the museum**.** Regarding the turnout, the manager reported that generally once a year (or semester) museologists are asked to present the program and it is usually very well received (no anti-Semitic reactions have been registered). It needs to be emphasized that the lesson on Jews is far more frequently asked for than the course regarding Oskar Kolberg's life, which proves the existence of a certain degree of awareness among local teachers that the Jewish community posed an important part in the history of the town. Furthermore, occasionally there are some events or workshops in some way connected with the widely understood issue of Jewish culture, such as classes during which one may learn how to make Jewish-style cutouts, or an exhibition pertaining to a Jewish topic as presented in Polish folk art. It is worth mentioning that the museum continues to operate in the same way regardless of the ongoing renovation of the synagogue. No greater increase in interest regarding Jewish issues has been noticed as a result of the building's restoration. Nevertheless, although the events are organized, the educational programs are easily accessible, since they are optional (not obligatory) one needs to have an individual internal drive to participate in them. Teachers bear most responsibility for this. Chances are that taking students to the museum may result in raising importance of Jewish population in the settlement, in noticing that Przysucha is no ordinary town, that maybe the town was not prosperous in the past, but remains great and significant in beyond-financial aspects, thanks to its Hassidic leaders.

Besides the previously mentioned meetings, in Przysucha today, Christian-Jewish relations are basically non-existent, or frozen. In a way, they resemble times from before the War when Jews and Christians led separate lives. Today, the two communities remain isolated:

> "It is difficult to assess *(Christian-Jewish relations)*, because they don't exist here, there are no such situations, and if so, they arise very rarely. The fact that Jews come to visit the cemetery and the synagogue is obvious, but it happens in isolation from the town. Occasionally there are meetings like the one last year and this year as well and these

somehow hold promise for the future that maybe contacts will be closer, but those forms *(of meetings)* will be developed with time."

On the surface, residents seem to be impartial towards Jews, they are neither philo- nor anti-Semitic, although there are no circumstances that would push residents to express their opinions and take a stance on the matter. Furthermore, there is no organization that would unite Jews from Przysucha (i.e. all the Jews who are somehow connected with the town, whose ancestors were born there), no organization that would give them a framework to operate under, whose members would make certain Jewish memory is preserved in the form of a commemorative book or discussion panels and conferences or other means. The idea of such an association is not surreal - in the neighboring town of Opoczno, Jews have managed to develop such an organization.

As mentioned, Przysucha is visited by Jews who come to pray or to search for traces of their ancestors and is also visited by prominent figures who are either of Jewish descent or deeply interested in the history of Polish Jewry. To give some examples, the museum has been visited by the famous Polish ethnographer Alina Cała as well as a professor from Jerusalem whose family came from Przysucha. Although sometimes such visits happen unexpectedly, it is worth underlining the manager not only gives her guests a tour around the museum, but also dedicates her private time to show them the cemetery and the synagogue, both on the outside and inside. From these efforts we can discern a laudable, active attitude. As far as a cure for broken Christian-Jewish relations is concerned, the manager emphasizes the paramount importance of educating people regarding the issue. However, at the same time she underlines the significance of the source from which information on Polish Jewry is taken. It is sad to report, but television channels, radio stations and newspapers supervised by right-wing parties often tend to fuel anti-Semitism and distort historical facts. Unfortunately, Przysucha has always been a true bastion of right-wing politics and the Law and Justice Party, the current governing party in Poland, remains the undisputed leader and favorite among the residents.

The personal assistant of the starost

The authorities of Przysucha and the governing party mentioned above have somewhat of an undeniable connection which was explicitly manifested and proven. On July 1st 2017 one of the Law and Justice Party's most important political events, their annual congress took

place in Przysucha. A thousand prominent figures, including the Prime Minister, the party's president (the currently most influential person in Poland), ministers and other front-page politicians arrived in town, turning Przysucha into the most beleaguered little settlement in the country. Numerous policemen were stationed in sensitive spots to make certain the Law and Justice politicians could hold their conference without disturbances. Journalists from all Polish mass media outlets waited patiently for their chance to hear the latest decisions from the highest level. The caption: "Przysucha live" appeared on all television broadcasts. Since it was a special occasion, road signs in the shape of an arrow: "Congress" had been placed in advance (which only proves that erecting road signs is no trouble at all). Even the anti-Semitic and xenophobic inscription in the local park informing that residents from Przysucha "do not let Jews or Germans in" had been removed (3 years after it was sprayed there!). The host of the region - the starost, welcomed the guests and gave a short speech.

Obviously, it was an exceptional opportunity to promote the town, but for our discussion it is far more important to concentrate on the profile of the governing political party that visited Przysucha and remains in power today. Without going into detail, it can be stated that the party is nationalistic, Catholic-oriented and Euro-skeptic. The party's aim is to enhance traditional values that are deeply rooted in Christianity (Catholicism) as well as stand in strong opposition to admitting refugees to Poland. The party has also resumed the issue of demanding Germany pay reparations for the war. Keeping these facts in mind, it does not come as a surprise that the starost could not find time to discuss Christian-Jewish relations or preservation of common history. Instead, I took the opportunity to talk with his personal assistant.

The interview seems to be a perfect example of the respondent giving diplomatic and advisable answers, often without having arguments that would support them. For instance, having been asked if it is important to preserve the common Christian-Jewish heritage and if so, how it could be preserved the assistant responded:

> "In my opinion, yes. *(We should preserve the common past.)* The fact that in Przysucha a famous tzaddik was born and almost 60% of the community was Jewish, I think we should commemorate this fact. The synagogue has remained after the Jewish community and the cemetery (…) Przysucha was a town of three cultures: Jews, Poles and Germans lived here, and we take pride in this fact. We take pride in this fact and we place this

information in folders, promoting materials, informing about the county. And I think this fact is worth commemorating."

While it is true that the official webpage of Przysucha offers an outline of its history, including the presence of Jews in town, I found it inexplicable that the synagogue (whose importance as a monument cannot be overestimated, especially in Przysucha, where one can find very few monuments at all), has not even been marked on the town map! It is all the more striking that town maps, by definition, are developed for tourists and most tourists coming to Przysucha are of Jewish origin. To emphasize the matter even more, I should add that the map includes recent changes that have taken place in Przysucha, such as changes in street names. Omitting the synagogue (yet including the cemetery) seems either purposeful or highly unprofessional. In practice, the starost's assistant's words,

"We take pride in the synagogue, because it is one of the greatest in Poland and Europe (…)"

bear no significance whatsoever.

The fact that preservation of the common Christian-Jewish history is not considered an important issue to take care of is also confirmed by the lack of *any* other initiatives on the part of the starost's office. Apart from the mentioned promotional folders (that are issued on special occasions, such as the anniversary of the 200th birthday of Oskar Kolberg) the assistant admitted no other activities related to Jews have been undertaken as well as no commitment to the revitalization of the synagogue has been registered (even before its care was taken over by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland).

Nevertheless, the interviewee underlined the starost's readiness both to organize cultural events (inspired by the events organized in Łódź - a city of three cultures) or to erect a monument commemorating the Jewish residents who had been exterminated because,

"it is our history; I think it is the history for our descendants, both for contemporary residents and for descendants, it is worth conveying such information, commemorating the fact that Jews lived here. I think every resident should know about this."

It seems reasonable to conclude this was just another tactful, well thought-over declaration with no intention to carry out tangible effects in the future.

The police officer

The personal assistant of the starost admitted she had seen Jewish pilgrims who *"were just walking and residents observing".* In other words, she confirmed the findings this study already gathered - there are no Christian-Jewish relations in town. Despite the lack of any interaction between the groups, police officers are engaged in monitoring Jewish pilgrimages each time they come to Przysucha. One of the local policemen, who I had the pleasure to talk with, explained the procedure to me:

> "Each time we are informed by the voivodeship police station, that is the supervising entity, that such a group is coming, in proper advance, the hours are given, the number of people, and then prevention services are directed to the place nearby the synagogue where the group is coming, so as to secure order."

It needs to be clarified that policemen have no extraordinary responsibilities during such visits, they only remain close by (remaining in their cars), observe and are obliged to act should any disturbance of order be noticed. By the time of our interview (July 2014) no such cases had been reported.

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If we were to summarize the official stance of the authorities it could be looked at from a twofold perspective, like at every aspect that touches upon Polish Jewry and Christian-Jewish relations. Skeptics would certainly note that the authorities of Przysucha are basically passive, despite the fact that they are fully aware of the importance of the Jewish heritage that has remained in town. The authorities would prefer to delegate responsibility either to a local leader or residents who could unite as an association that puts forward initiatives aimed at promoting Christian-Jewish interactions. Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that the idea of reviving Christian-Jewish relations is relatively new. The original reluctance might also be a result of a lack of tools of how to manage incoming Jews who are now beginning to show interest in establishing contact with inhabitants (instead of making quick visits at the cemetery and the synagogue, on their way between other places of Jewish martyrdom) or even local residents who (like myself) have started to ask questions and struggle to acknowledge the role of Jews in the history of Przysucha. The most important observation is that the authorities are indeed relatively open, which is proven by the fact that the Christian-Jewish gathering has taken place again and is scheduled to be held next year as well. The gatherings'

initiator - David Chernobilsky is fully satisfied with cooperation both with the local high school principal and faculty as well as the authorities of the town, who, as he admits, were originally reserved and confused, but nevertheless, did not make any attempts to block any of his projects.

5. Conclusions

The present section attempts to assess the study's journey, a journey that is slowly coming to a close. An attempt will be made to analyze what the study has achieved, what knowledge has been constructed and what influence this new knowledge may exert on world opinion. Obviously, as stated, the criteria used in order to evaluate the quality of the provided grounded theory will be coherent with the interpretation suggested by Kathy Charmaz. All criteria, along with explanations they indicate, were enumerated in chapter 3 and will be revisited here.

It is believed that the provided grounded theory is credible as the data it has been based on are rich, logical and encompass a wide spectrum of aspects. As a native resident of Przysucha and having had the opportunity to stay as long as eight summer months in the settlement the research pertained to (not to mention numerous short stays during the whole period of the study), I made every attempt to keep my eyes wide open and held on to an incessant determination to know more. I firmly believe the approach allowed to reach a deep understanding of the town and the issue of past and contemporary Christian-Jewish interactions that have and continue to take place there. One may argue that the number of respondents that represent the oldest generation of inhabitants from Przysucha seems relatively small, but it should be underlined there were virtually *no other native informants still alive* who were mentally and physically capable of being interviewed. Furthermore, the number of the interviews conducted with them appears to be satisfactory also taking into consideration the fact that the analyzed categories were fully saturated, as no further recognizable properties came up. The credibility of findings gathered on the basis of in-depth interviews with the elderly were additionally confirmed by systematic observations carried out in town as well as the interviews that pose the core of the section touching upon contemporary Christian-Jewish interactions, i.e. interviews with the privileged actors. It cannot be denied that the theory encompasses a broad range of issues that make it deeply contextualized and logical (not only do the issues not exclude one another, but they are complementary). Last, but not least, to the furthest extent possible, both Christian and Jewish viewpoints were given coverage.

What is more, taking into account that the present thesis was written in a context that was dynamically changing, it may be regarded as a witness of numerous transformations, both in thinking about Polish Jews, Christian-Jewish proximity, Jewish heritage as well as tangible

changes, such as the makeover of the synagogue that transformed from an appalling, deteriorated ruin into a magnificent building, along with the Christian-Jewish gatherings that are now becoming an identification mark of the settlement. It is believed that following such an unprecedented process highlights the thesis' originality. Also findings provided such as: pre-War anti-Semitism among Christian children, or the discovery of the basic lack of Christian-Jewish interactions in Przysucha today seems to shed a new light on the analysis of Christian-Jewish relations. Revealing the connection between the past and present as well as between different aspects (legal, political, educational, spiritual, administrative, people's safety, etc.), expands existing knowledge and provides concrete solutions regarding how to harmonize relations between the two communities. Finally, the originality of the project stems from the fact that memories of many elderly residents from Przysucha were immortalized for the very first… and last time.

Concerning the thesis' resonance, the intention to develop categories that would portray the examined problem in its entirety accompanied me at all times, especially since the issues touched upon are highly neuralgic and stir strong emotions among people. I aspired to and made every attempt to create an analysis that would not be biased whatsoever, but that would picture a number of dimensions influencing the course of events: the peculiar character of life in the village, people's personal qualities and priorities, activities common within communities, historical events, legal issues, etc. As one could observe, both mundane, seemingly obvious aspects were covered, such as living conditions, food, infrastructure and employment as well as extreme events related to the War, among which the establishment of the ghetto and its eventual liquidation deserve the greatest deal of attention. What is more, the life of individuals both before the War and today was shown in reference to the communities they belong to and institutions that influence it, in order to reach a better understanding of the connection between one's individual will and the possibility to act. It is believed that all these considerations make it easier to understand the world and our position in it.

Finally, regarding the usefulness of the current research, below are listed a number of practical implications that have been discovered as a result of the current thesis, the employment of which may bring visible changes in Christian-Jewish relations. Taking into account the long lasting persistence of tensions between Christians and Jews, any positive work or progress in the matter may certainly be regarded as a valuable step in the never-ending struggle to create a better more understanding world.

5.1 Limitations of the study

Needless to say, the research study has some limitations. Regarding the juxtaposition of my being open and deprived of presuppositions connected with the fact I was born and raised in the town and my personal involvement in the project could be regarded as a drawback since I had some orientation concerning what my future respondents could tell me. However, my connection with the settlement could also be looked upon from a more positive perspective, as I was not a total stranger to the respondents, which in fact caused them to be more willing to agree to let me interview them.

Another limitation of the study is more universal and pertains to the general ability of people to properly listen, interpret and reach conclusions on the basis of what they hear. What is more, it refers to the general ability of people to accurately express what they feel and think. On one hand, the limitation seems serious, given that the core of the research posed in-depth interviews. On the other hand it consists of part of the mystery which is inherent to any deep human interaction.

The intricacy of a conversation was beautifully put into words by Bernard Werber:

> *"Between what I think, what I want to say, what I believe I say, what I say, what you want to hear, what you believe to hear, what you hear, what you want to understand, what you think you understand, what you understand… They are ten possibilities that we might have some problem communicating. But let's try anyway…"*

Regarding Weber's thoughts, I did try to do my best in order to minimize potential misunderstandings during the interviews as well as flaws in the analysis that followed.

5.2 Implications for future research

As far as the practical implications for future of Christian-Jewish interactions are concerned, as well as potential scientific research projects, there are a few suggestions to be made on the basis of the gathered data:

1. Taking into consideration that revival of Christian-Jewish relations and interest in the history of Polish Jewry as such is in its initial stages and residents of Przysucha

might not feel ready to welcome the erection of a monument or renaming a street with the name of a prominent Jewish tzaddik it seems reasonable to implement the strategy of "baby steps", which denotes slow, yet steady actions that would hopefully gradually open local inhabitants to the fact that Jews did pose an important part of the population of their hometown. Efforts such as placing a commemorative plaque in the site where collective murders of the Jews from Przysucha took place would play various roles: it would inform about a historical fact that by any means should be commemorated, it would imply the existence of numerous examples of Jewish presence in town, it would invite reflection on Jewish faith (as well as possibly compassion) and would be a tangible sign that Jews deserve to be remembered in Przysucha. The same roles could be played by another plaque, informing about the abode of the local tzaddik, even if the information that he lived in the given house (mentioned in chapter 2) has not been decidedly confirmed. (It is rumored that the plaque informing about the family house of Oskar Kolberg is also mistakenly placed, but due to the ethnographer's fame it has not been removed.) Finally, it seems that also information regarding where the Jewish ghetto was located should be well received (and considered interesting) by local residents.

2. Hopefully, in the more distant future a monument could be erected which would commemorate the youngest Jews that died in Treblinka, as has been done in Łódź, a larger city located around 100 km from Przysucha. There is no doubt that commemorating the extermination of Jewish children (not adults) would stand a greater chance to appeal to locals and could mark a first step towards other initiatives regarding preservation of memory of the entire exterminated population
3. It would also be advisable to make educational programs available in the local museum obligatory for the school curriculum, so that every class would have an opportunity to learn about the local history from a reliable source in a fascinating and diversified manner.
4. Accordingly, there appears to be a need to create a similar, educational program for younger pupils or even pre-school children so they could become oriented in the local history at an early age, which would certainly help facilitate establishing harmonious contacts with Jews in the future.
5. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to also prepare educational programs on the life and customs of Orthodox Jews (rather than solely the history of Polish Jews) who

continue to come to Przysucha in large numbers, but due to their beliefs are not willing to establish contact with goys (to put it mildly). Without education and understanding, the Hassidic custom of forceful reluctance to even slight integration with locals may lead to the creation of strong antagonistic feelings towards them.

6. Needless to say, in order to manifest basic respect towards incoming pilgrims, road signs should be placed around the town (next to the bus station and in the center) so as to make their experience in Przysucha as pleasant and trouble-free as possible. In addition, it should be a priority to include the synagogue in the town map and all physical education exercises in and around the Jewish cemetery should be strictly forbidden.
7. Since residents of Przysucha take pride in the amphitheater that stands in the center of the local park (and regularly serves as the stage for annual celebration of Oskar Kolberg's Days) it may be also used to promote multiculturalism in general as well as Jewish culture and music in particular. Lack of attractions that would fill local resident's spare time might result in their showing interest in the initiative in question.
8. Bearing in mind the initial hesitation and confusion demonstrated by the local authorities as well as their demands to place all the initiatives into some fixed framework (which may possibly discourage community leaders who care about tightening bonds between Christians and Jews) it seems advisable to suggest a more flexible attitude that would enable carrying out projects by those who want to do so. So far there has only been one person ready to dedicate private time and money to break existing patterns and show Israeli students the real face of Poland that would present it as much more than an enormous Jewish cemetery. All the more, we should truly appreciate such work and help facilitate it to every extent possible.
9. As for the magnificent synagogue which is still undergoing reconstruction and whose future use has not yet been decided upon, it offers much hope and opportunity. No matter what cause it may eventually serve, whether it will be a small hotel for Jewish pilgrims, or a museum with exhibitions regarding Jewish culture, or an information point, it certainly carries much potential to bring the two communities closer together. Examination of the synagogue's influence on future Christian-Jewish interactions in Przysucha appears to be interesting from a purely scientific viewpoint as well.

10. Last, but not least, providing a scientific examination of the influence of the Christian-Jewish initiatives conducted in Przysucha thus far seems intriguing. A comparative analysis of attitudes of Polish and Israeli students who have (and have not) been previously sensitized to the complicated and neuralgic aspects of Christian-Jewish history could be a logical continuation of the present dissertation.

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I would like to close my thesis with a question which seems to perfectly capture the experience that accompanied me while writing:

> *"Isn't it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back everything is different?"* (Lewis)

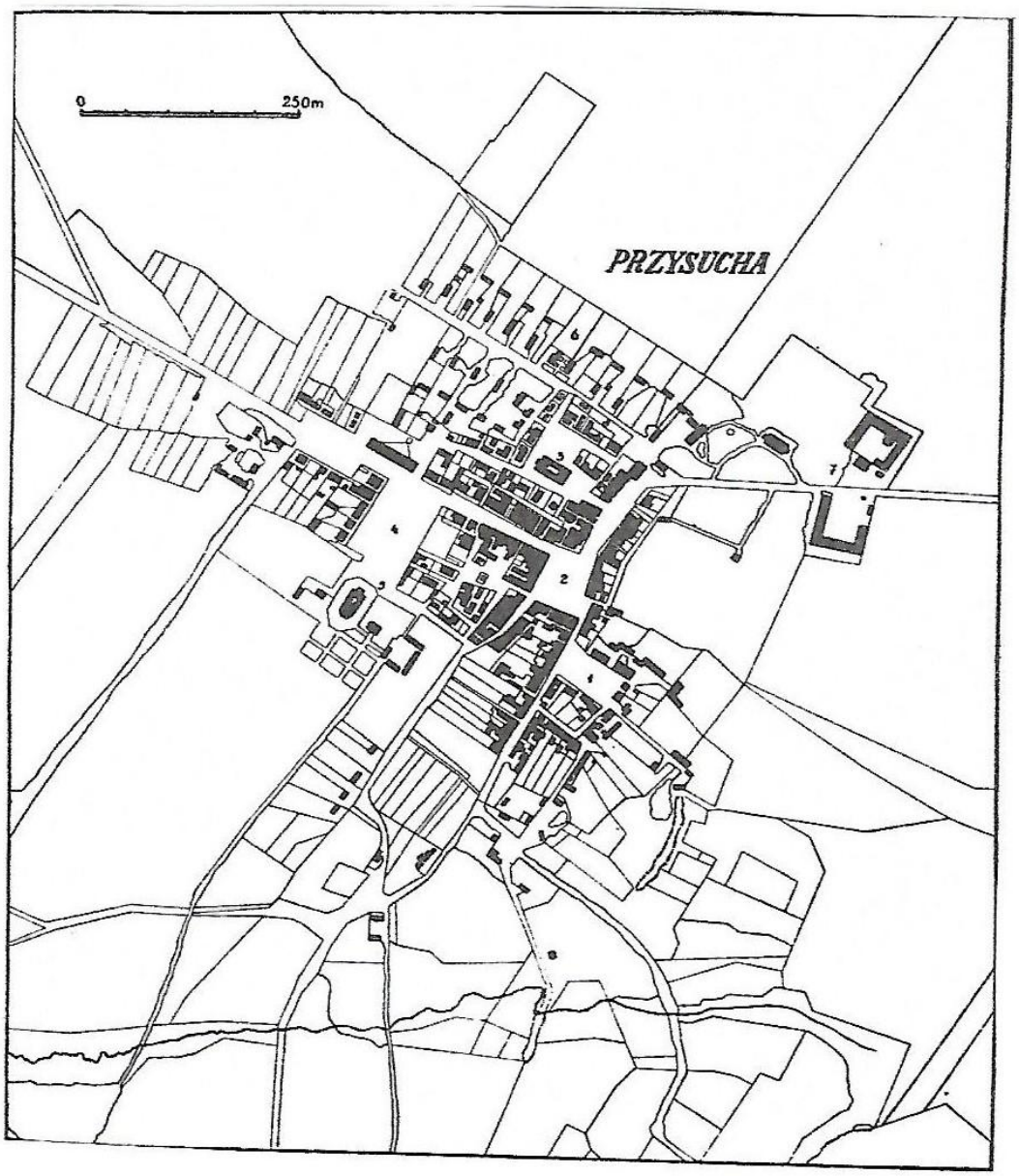
May this quotation leave us all with hope for slow, but steady changes, which will take us from a highly troubled past straight towards a bright future.

No.	*Fantasy name*	*Date of Birth*	*Place of Birth*	*Marital Status*	*Education*	*Occupation*	*Religion*
1.	Anne	07.06.1931	Przysucha	Widow	Primary	Dress-maker	Roman-Catholic
2.	Brian	19.10.1927	Przysucha	Married	Primary	Ambulance-Driver	Roman-Catholic
3.	Caroline	02.05.1931	Gwarek	Widow	Primary	Dress-maker	Roman-Catholic
4.	Charles	25.11.1922	Przysucha	Married	Primary	Locksmith	Roman-Catholic
5.	Christine	02.02.1933	Przysucha	Widow	Primary	Farmer	Roman-Catholic
6.	Thomas	15.07.1920	Przysucha	Married	Primary	Forester	Roman-Catholic
7.	Frank	27.03.1927	Gwarek	Married	Primary	Soldier (lieutenant)	Roman-Catholic
8.	George	18.01.1928	Przysucha	Widower	Primary	Bricklayer	Roman-Catholic
9.	Lucas	26.10.1931	Pomyków	Married	Vocational	Miner	Roman-Catholic
10.	Pauline	13.06.1926	Przysucha	Widow	Primary	Shop-assistant	Roman-Catholic
11.	Laura	29.07.1934	Pomyków	Married	Primary	Housewife	Roman-Catholic
12.	Joanne	24.02.1929	Pomyków	Widow	Vocational	Dress-maker	Roman-Catholic
13.	Peter	12.09.1930	Przysucha	Widower	Secondary	Clerk	Roman-Catholic
14.	Roxanne	02.03.1928	Przysucha	Widow	Primary	Housewife	Roman-Catholic
15.	Rose	16.04.1930	Przysucha	Widow	Primary	Shop-assistant	Roman-Catholic
16.	Timothy	24.07.1934	Przysucha	Widower	Vocational	Locksmith	Roman-Catholic
17.	Lorelei	11.11.1959	Los Angeles, USA	Married	Higher	Attorney	Jewish

Figure 12. A synthesis table of interviewees.

APPENDIX NO 1

Map of Przysucha from 1865



1- German square, 2- Jewish square, 3- the synagogue, 4- Polish square, 5- the Catholic Church, 6- the village Przysucha, 7- grange (Source: Trzebiński 1955, in ed. by Barancewicz)

APPENDIX NO 2

The Biala dynasty[55] is descended from Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowitz, the Holy Jew of Przysucha (Peshischa), who was a disciple of the Seer of Lublin. The Seer was a disciple of Rabbi Elimelech of Leżańsk (Lizensk), who was a disciple of the Maggid of Międzyrzecz (Mezritch), who was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism.

1. Grand Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Rabinowitz, the "Holy Jew" of Przysucha (Peshischa) (1766-13.10.1813), disciple of the Chozeh of Lublin.

2. Grand Rabbi Yerachmiel Rabinowitz of Peshischa (d. 1831), son of the Holy Jew.

3. Grand Rabbi Nathan David Rabinowitz of Szydłowiec (Shidlovtza) (d. 1865), son of Rebbe Yerachmiel.

4. Grand Rabbi Yitzchok Yaakov Rabinowitz of Biala**,** the author of Divrei Binah (d. 1905), youngest son of Rebbe Nathan David, son-in-law of Rebbe Yehoshua of Ostrowiec (Ostrovoh), author of Toldos Adam.

5. Grand Rabbi Yerachmiel Tzvi Rabinowitz of Biala-Shedlitz (d. 1906), son of Rabbi Yitzchok Yaakov Rabinowitz.

6. Grand Rabbi Yechiel Yehoshua Rabinowitz Biala Rebbe of Jerusalem (1900-1981), author of Chelkas Yehoshua and Seder HaYom.

7. Grand Rabbi David Matisyahu Rabinowitz (1928-1997), author of Lehavas Dovid, Biala Rebbe of Bnei Brak, son of Rebbe Yechiel Yehoshua.

8. Grand Rabbi Aharon Shlomo Chaim Eleazar Rabinowitz, Biala Rebbe, shlit"a, in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, NY, son of Rabbi David Matisyahu.

[55] http://www.bialarebbe.org/history.html

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IMAGES

1. The deteriorated synagogue in 2013. Source: Private collection.

2. The Hassidim at the Jewish cemetery in Przysucha in 2013. Source: Private collection.

3. The synagogue renovated on the outside in 2018. Source: Private collection.

4. Christian and Jewish students exploring maztevot at the Jewish cemetery in Przysucha during the gathering organized by David Chernobilsky in 2015. Source: Private collection.

5. Christian and Jewish students dancing at the local High School gym during the gathering organized by David Chernobilsky in 2017. Source: Private collection.

6. Christian High School students participating in the "School of Dialog" program (by Forum of Dialog Among Nations) during the final walk around the town open to all local residents in 2015. Author: Agnieszka Zarychta-Wójcicka.

Abstract

The present study examines both past as well as present relations between Christians and Jews inhabiting (or visiting) Przysucha, a small town situated in the center of Poland, a former shtetl where Jews constituted a significant number of residents before their extermination. Since Przysucha was a seat to the outstanding Hassidic leaders, such as the Holy Jew and Simcha Bunem, it is still regularly visited by Jewish pilgrims.

The past Christian-Jewish relations have been investigated mainly on the basis of in-depth interviews conducted with the last living Christian witnesses, whereas the present relations have been scrutinized with the employment of participant observation method as well as in-depth interviews with prominent figures of the town and Jewish visitors. The analysis of all the interviews, extant and elicited texts has been made using the Grounded Theory technique (Kathy Charmaz's constructivist version) and Symbolic Interactionism perspective as interpreted by Herbert Blumer.

The thesis demonstrates a prevailing ambivalent attitude of Christian residents to their Jewish neighbors, with frequent instances of anti-Semitic acts and a single case of forming an intercultural bond. It also proves a lack of interactions between contemporary inhabitants and incoming pilgrims along with a lack of enthusiasm to preserve common heritage.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Doktorarbeit untersucht sowohl das gegenwärtige als auch das zurückliegende Verhältnis zwischen den Christen und Juden, die in Przysucha lebten bzw. besuchten. Przysucha ist eine Kleinstadt in Zentralpolen und ein ehemaliges Schtetl, in dem Juden einen bedeutsamen prozentualen Anteil in der Einwohnerschaft ausmachten. Und weil Przysucha Sitz vieler namhafter chassidischer Führungspersönlichkeiten wie der Heilige Jude oder Simcha Bunem war, wird die Stadt weiterhin von jüdischen Pilgern besucht.

Die zurückliegenden christlich-jüdischen Beziehungen wurden mit Hilfe von Tiefeninterviews mit den letzten lebenden christlichen Zeugen und das derzeitige Verhältnis zwischen beiden Religionsgruppen mit Hilfe von teilnehmender Beobachtung sowie Tiefeninterviews mit in der Stadt heute lebenden Schlüsselpersönlichkeiten sowie mit jüdischen Besuchern untersucht. Die Analyse sämtlicher Interviews und Texte wurde mit Hilfe der Grounded Theory (konstruktivische Version von Kathy Charmaz) sowie des symbolischen Interaktionismus in der Interpretation von Herbert Blumer durchgeführt.

Die vorliegende Doktorarbeit belegt die ambivalente Haltung der christlichen Einwohner in der Vorkriegszeit in Bezug auf ihre jüdischen Nachbarn, zahlreiche antisemitische Vorkommnisse sowie in einem Fall auch das Entstehen einer zwischenkulturellen Beziehung. Sie weist zudem auf das Nichtvorhandensein von Interaktionen zwischen den heutigen Einwohnern und den Pilgern, die Przysucha besuchen, sowie den mangelnden Enthusiasmus beim Erhalt des gemeinsamen Erbes hin.

Declaration of Authorship

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