

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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The “Poor” in Biographical Sociology Classics— “The Others” or “People Just Like Us”?

Abstract: In this article, I aim to reflect on the relationships between the researchers and those whom they investigate, referring to examples provided by classical biographical texts pertaining to the issues of poverty and social exclusion, i.e.: “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki and “The Jack-Roller. A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story” by Clifford R. Shaw. Concepts of poverty or social exclusion are both “moral” and descriptive; therefore, research in the field is particularly susceptible to social valuing processes. This notion is extremely important in biographical research, where scholars thoroughly analyse the lives of informants. The scholar-informant relationships are inscribed in the frames of Othering and meeting the Other. These stances, replicated in later years, still resonate in sociological publications, in the dimensions of individual biographies, social relations between privileged and disadvantaged groups of social actors, and institutional solutions to social problems.

Keywords: othering, biographical sociology, meeting the Other, ethical dilemmas

All interactants, at various junctures in their moral careers, will be viewed as problematic and troublesome by their fellow interactants (Denzin 1974: 273).

Introduction

Anomie, social disintegration, marginalisation, social exclusion, as well as the processes and phenomena related to them, have been forming one of the most important fields in social sciences since sociology was established as a distinct science. These interests have been connected with the “quest for a better world.” Not only in the case of engaged sociology but also in critical qualitative research—with a more general reference to contemporaneity—that very clearly draws upon the rules of social justice (e.g. Denzin, Giardina 2010). Such an attitude is visible both in pre-sociological social thought, where reflecting on the need for social science was inseparable from the idea of social reforms and which had a close affinity to the reformist ideas of positivism (Szacki 2005). It is also noticeable in the works of the scholars of the first sociological institutions, established almost simultaneously in Europe (Bordeaux 1887) and the USA (Chicago 1892). In France, “the collapse of the Empire, the ignominious defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the Commune (...) left [the country] in

a state of social and moral confusion and with questions about ‘the order [that] had to be established’” (Alpert 1937: 311). Republicans believed in the ideas of social and national solidarity as a foundation of both the moral unity of the nation and secular democracy. The re-organisation of French society, including *la question sociale*, was meant to be attained by applying scientific methods. As Harry Alpert stated, Republicans followed the positivistic assumption that “social order can maintain itself only if it is founded in the nature of things; that it is necessary, therefore, to know first what that nature is (...). Sociology, duly constituted as a scientific discipline and stripped of all metaphysical straitjackets, is thus given an all-important role in the task of social and moral rehabilitation” (Alpert 1937: 311–312). Similarly, the academic Chicago sociology was initially connected with the movement of progressive social reform. This movement aimed at solving social problems—the outcomes of industrialisation, urbanisation, and migration processes, in keeping with the principle of “the duties of good citizenship and the values contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States” (Hałas 1994: 8–9, 15; see also: Czekał 2007; Sennett 2004).

Hence, the scholars who established academic sociology were not merely scientists but also active citizens of their times. In France, Louis Liard, who introduced the first course of social sciences at the Faculty of Letters at the provincial University of Bordeaux, was actively involved in the city’s municipal government (Alpert 1937; Deegan 1990). Emile Durkheim, employed in Bordeaux after his return from Germany,¹ devoted his first course to the question of social solidarity. He regarded science as an instrument of social action; thus, he concluded his lectures with demonstrations of sociological input into social practice. As Alpert (1937: 315) stated, Durkheim as a *Berufsmensch* “devoted himself unselfishly and unswervingly” to “[the] mission—to found a doctrine, to have disciples, to establish a true science of society and thus to play a role in the social reconstitution of France.” Durkheim taught his students that they are mutually interconnected active persons, fulfilling their roles in a society that was defined in terms of organic unity. And indeed, in the first decades of the 20th century, Durkheim’s school attracted the young, who were interested in “seeking a new formula for social reform” (Alpert 1937: 314–316; Durkheim 1888 cited in Alpert 1937; Szacki 2005). The first Chicago sociologists “wanted to heal society fractured by rapid social change, extremes of wealth and poverty, and alienated labour” (Deegan 1990: 71). Edward Bemis supported the labour movement, while Jane Addams—recognised as a preeminent sociologist but also “the founding mother” of social work, established Hull House, one of the most famous settlements of that era, along with Ellen Gates Starr. A resident of Hull House, Charles H. Henderson, a scholar Baptist minister, died prematurely from exhaustion due to his “untiring efforts to relieve the plight of the unemployed in Chicago” (Taylor, cited in Deegan 1990: 19). Meanwhile, George Herbert Mead and Robert E. Park became engaged in reformist movements (Deegan 1990; Hałas 1994). Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that the thesis that sociology, both in its functional and interactionist paradigms, has largely become institutionalised as applied and engaged sociology.

¹ Where he was observing works of the Psychological Laboratory founded by Wundt. Due to his analyses of the works of Schaeffle, Gumpłowicz, Fouillée, de Greef, and Spencer, the 29-year-old Durkheim was recognised as a mature scholar and “thinker of outstanding ability” (Alpert 1937).

This claim also applies to biographical sociology, largely practised by scholars interested in significant social problems. The history of biographical sociology commenced with a publication that is of key significance for this paper, i.e. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki. Later, the 1920s and 1930s bore fruit in sociology in the form of extensive monographs that investigated the set of issues related to groups subjected to the process of marginalisation due to the social changes that were occurring at that time in the USA. Their authors, first and foremost the Chicago sociologists, applied a strategy later defined as data triangulation (Denzin 1970). They made substantial use of life records, including life histories, personal documents (private letters and diaries), and official data, i.e., charities documents, courts records, or inquest records for criminal/suicidal cases (e.g. Canvan 1928; Shaw 1934/1966; Stonequist 1937; 2012; Shaw and Moore 1951; *The Professional Thief... 1937*). There were also researchers, such as Nels Anderson (1923/1967) exploring male homelessness with references to his own biographical experiences. Or Frances R. Donovan, a professional teacher, who based her works on covert participant observation. Donovan, who periodically took on simple semi-professionals, studied the social worlds of working women (e.g. Donovan 1920, 1929), as well as her own professional *milieu* (Donovan 1938). These works described the conditions of individual life courses, the functioning of social groups, and the institutional solutions applied to individuals and collectives who were situated on the fringes of social life (Riemann 2003; Kaźmierska 2012). Biographical sociology, partly interrelated with analyses of social disintegration, also developed in Poland. The newborn scientific institutions in Warsaw and Poznań announced competitions for diaries authored by unemployed people, although the results of these competitions were published only in part (*Pamiętniki bezrobotnych... 1933*).

The development of biographical research was interrupted by World War II. The beginning of its post-war revival dates back to the 1960s, when researchers collected biographical materials from migrants and refugees, psychoactive substance addicts, homeless and poverty-stricken people, and ex-residents of welfare and rehabilitation institutions and organisations. Part of the research was connected to the criticism of the oppressive institutions and systems of modern societies (cf. Golczyńska-Gronδας 2014). In the 1970s, Fritz Schütze introduced the narrative interview technique into sociology. It was, under his tuition, or inspired by the technique he (with co-workers) had proposed, that works analysing disorder and suffering as one of the central topics came into being (e.g. Riemann 1987; Hoffman-Riem 1990; Prins 2008). In subsequent years, new approaches rooted in this technique were elaborated by other authors. For example, Gabrielle Rosenthal and her followers developed the hermeneutic/biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1993; Rosenthal, Köttig 2009), while Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne proposed BNIM (Biographic-Narrative Inrepretative Method) (Kaźmierska 2012a; Wengraf 2003). The 1990s brought an interest in issues of inter-generational transmission of poverty (Bertaux 1995). Presently, we are dealing with a deluge of works based on biographical sources in all scientific disciplines with a social and humanistic profile, also in sociological research in communities threatened with penury and social exclusion.

Among a host of issues related to engaged, biographical sociology, I draw particular attention to the relationships between the researcher and the research participants investi-

gated in relation to experiencing poverty and the threat of social exclusion. The studies of these phenomena are classified as “difficult,” partly due to the marginal position of the interviewed individuals and groups, limited access to potential informants, or the “strangeness” of the explored social world (cf. Męcfal 2012). The aforementioned social phenomena are indeed particularly susceptible to social valuing. Concepts of poverty, penury, social exclusion, marginalisation, and marginality are both “moral” and descriptive in the public and academic discourses; hence, they should be considered with the reference to the axiological sphere (Spicker 2007; cf. Tarkowska 2013).

This text is therefore primarily addressed to scholars using (or planning to use) tools that require close, even intimate contact with their informants in the analysis of particularly difficult, ethically sensitive issues. My primary aim is to reflect on the relationship between socially unprivileged research participants and researchers, especially those who are involved in engaged/public sociology (i.a. Burawoy 2013). The key question here is whether, in their engagement in solving social problems, scholars are able to create relationships with research participants with sufficient ethical and interpersonal sensitivity. Therefore, I will refer to contrastive examples provided by *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki and *The Jack-Roller. A Delinquent Boy's Own Story* by Clifford R. Shaw. Obviously, they are not the only Chicago school texts which pertain to social disorganisation and re-organisation. However, among the multitude of Chicago publications based on (auto)biographical sources that address these issues, these two are still “particularly close to biographical researchers” (Kaźmierska 2019: 41). Both *The Polish Peasant...* and *The Jack Roller...* are still discussed and used as reference material during biographical method workshops. In both, the authors used commissioned autobiographical statements from informants, subsequently processed for research purposes. Thus, they imposed external interpretive frameworks on the lives of the subjects, although without extensive personal infiltration into the analysed social worlds, as was, for example, Donovan's or Anderson's method.

The choice of *The Polish Peasant...* was somewhat obvious, since it was this work that introduced biographical sources as sociology's essential empirical basis. At the same time, in this master-work, we will find surprisingly evaluative, stigmatizing statements concerning both the authors of the collection of peasant letters and Wlodek Wiśniewski's diary. In the case of “*The Jack Roller...*,” the analysis of this text was determined by the unique relationship between Shaw and Stanley, and above all, the researcher's unusually deep engagement with Stanley's social treatment. Hence, I inscribe these two models of researcher-research participant relationship in the conceptual frames of Othering and meeting the Other. These stances, replicated in later years, still resonate in numerous sociological publications today, in the dimensions of individual biographies, social relations between privileged and disadvantaged groups of social actors, and concrete institutional solutions to social problems (cf. Cheek 2010).

My decision to analyse the case of biographical classics also results from the assumptions present in modern biographical sociology. Among these assumptions, the most important are those relating to the symmetry between the researcher and the researched, conceptualized in terms of “creating a symmetrical situation (i.e., not dominated by the researcher) interaction” (Kaźmierska 2019: 54), the exceptional and particularly personal

nature of this relationship, the nature of which is, in a sense, overtly intimate (Każmierska 2018; Kaźmierska, Waniek 2020). Frequently, biographical scholars, particularly those who follow Schütze's, Rosenthal's or the BNIM approach, analyse the lives of the informants in a substantially more multidimensional and deeper manner than other researchers involved in social studies.² Such an in-depth understanding results from both the meticulous, analytical workshop and the properties of the empirical material (i.e., the interviews that depict "the entirety" of a narrator's biography). Therefore, in the main part of the text, I will refer to the notions of Meeting the Other and the issue of Othering in the research situation. Next, I will tackle examples of Othering (Thomas and Znaniecki's work) and Meeting the Other (Shaw's book). In the final part of the article, I will briefly consider the issues of bias in social/sociological research, scholars' self-awareness, and ethical awareness in relationships with research participants.

Meeting the Other vs Othering and Sociological Research on Poverty and Social Exclusion

Let me begin this paragraph with rather trivial notion that when a researcher investigates a problem, it is usually in the form of a meeting with The Other. I assume here that the research setting is founded on a series of interactions that are almost always, by definition, hierarchical. Howard Becker reminds us about it in the Introduction to *The Jack-Roller...*, elaborated in the mid-1960s. He followed David Riesman's notion of social science, which is, in part, "a conversation between the classes" (Riesman as quoted in Becker 1966: xiv). This implies that the scholar and the research participant, as individuals from different segments of the social structure, would never meet were it not for the research situation.³ Quoting Becker's notions, Katarzyna Waniek points that: "The life history, because it is the actor's 'own' story, is a living and vibrant message from 'down there,' telling us what it means to be a kind of a person we have never met face to face" (Becker 1966 cited in Waniek 2014: 61). In the research situation, a scientist acts both as a scholar, equipped with academic knowledge, and an ordinary participant of social life, arriving with their very individual worldviews, beliefs, or ideologies. These factors more probably influence his/her professional conceptualisations of examined processes and phenomena (cf. Golczyńska-Grondas 2019).

Reflection on the researcher-research participant relationship has been developing for over a century, which is reflected in (among others) changes in the terms used for the

² The analysis of the formal features of an interview refers to the linguistic layer of the text, and researchers are particularly interested in any irregularities in the course of the interview. As a result of applying these procedures, different aspects of narration, including those which the informants are not aware of, are also revealed. The two-part article by Fritz Schütze from 2009 may be regarded as a model of such an analytical procedure (Schütze 2009a and b; see also Kaźmierska 2004; Kaźmierska 2018; Kaźmierska, Waniek 2020; Björkenheim and Karvinen-Niinikoski 2009; Chase 2009).

³ Becker also quoted Johan Galtung, who stated that the paucity of interaction between the researcher and the research subject protects sociologists from the more intimate knowledge about people from other social strata: "the factor which maintains the image of the alienation of the working class is the alienation of the intellectual himself, with respect to his society in general and certainly with respect to the working class" (Galtung cited in Becker 1966: xv).

researched individuals in subsequent epochs of social sciences. The research objects of the past became, in turn, research subjects, informants, and interviewees, until finally, they obtained the status of research participants. We can track the early traits of this reflection in the beginnings of the Chicago school—namely in the continuing discussions on the status of Hull House, informally associated with the University of Chicago. In the late 1890s, Jane Addams and her co-workers protested against male sociologists treating the settlement as a sociological laboratory. According to the female sociologists and activists, such a standpoint objectified the beneficiaries of Hull House and contradicted the basic principles of the settlement, including the idea that people's needs should take precedence over the needs of scholars (Deegan 1990).⁴ Hence, even back then, the issue of the relationship between scholars and participants of the research process appeared to be one of the most important ethical and methodological questions in social sciences.

In the modern social sciences, these complicated issues are reflected in the multiple answers to the questions: “How to behave and how to write about the field?” (Irvin 2006: 159). Numerous methodological and ethical texts address the “old” problems of the (reverse) asymmetry between the scholar and informant who come from different socio-economic/cultural/national backgrounds and age cohorts (e.g. Swauger 2011; Kulendrarajah 2018). A new language of description evolves in discussions about the positionalities of the scholar and research participants, from Galtung's dialogic attitude and moving up to participatory research. Researchers' habits and reflexivities, the significance of their attitudes (e.g. external expert vs empathetic researcher carefully listening to the informants' voices) and biases are tackled. Some authors consider the tensions between the interactional intimacy proposed by, among others, feminist researchers and those involved in the interpretative perspective, and the “superficial” friendliness offered by others, as well as the possible exploitation of research participants (Irvin 2006; Moczydłowski 1988, 1990 cited in Męcfal 2012; Hunt 2010; Miller 2016).

The conceptualisations of “meeting the Other” in the research field that this text focuses on are also mirrored in models that explain poverty, as well as in paradigms and discourses of social exclusion. The former can be grouped into three vastly generalised categories: 1/ those in which poverty is generated from the individual attributes of the poor (deficiency model, genetic/racial inferiority model), 2/ models according to which poverty is caused by external factors (culture of poverty model), macrostructural changes (ravages of social change model), or unexpected, unfortunate life events (accidental model), 3/ models in which poverty is an immanent feature of social systems based on structural inequalities (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998; Wright 1994 and Vranken 1995, cited in Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998: 26–28). Michal Krumer-Nevo and Orly Benjamin pointed out that the traditional academic world mainly implemented this first category, which can be recognised in terms of the conservative moralistic discourse on social exclusion that focused on individual psychological attributes, moral features, and behaviours.

⁴ “I have always objected to the phrase ‘sociological laboratory’ applied to us, because Settlements should be something much more human and spontaneous than such a phrase connotes, and yet it is inevitable that the residents should know their own neighbourhoods more thoroughly than any other, and that their experience should affect their convictions” (Addams 1910, quoted after Deegan 1990: 35).

This kind of conceptualisation comprises elements of labelling and stigmatisation, and it is frequently articulated through divisive and discriminating descriptions (e.g. the underclass, dependency culture). Here, the excluded, with their different values and behaviours, are portrayed as culturally distinct from mainstream society (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin 2010).⁵ On the “opposite side,” we can situate the scholars—the proponents of the discourse that Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin designated the voice and action counter-narrative. According to this conceptualisation, the poor are highly regarded experts in poverty who, in social research, play the role of equal partners to the scholars. Ruth Lister is one such contemporary researcher and advocate of participatory action research on poverty and other social problems (Lister 2004; Tarkowska 2013a).

In research into poverty and social exclusion and in biographical research, the principle of the humanistic coefficient developed by Florian Znaniecki seems to be crucial. This principle says that objects of culture are always “somebody’s”; they “belong to the active experiences of people and are such as these active experiences make them” (Znaniecki 1934: 37, cited in Hałas, no date). According to Elżbieta Hałas: “the humanistic coefficient (...) contains the epistemological aspect, describing the specific cognitive situation of the investigator of culture, in which objects of his study are already given in somebody’s else experience or are somebody’s actions. Thus, the humanistic coefficient is at the same time the most general principle for telling how conceptions of cultural sciences, and sociology, in particular, should be constructed with regard to this specific cognitive situation” (Hałas no dated; Znaniecki cited in Hałas no dated). Antoni Sułek, in his work on historical sociology, emphasises that as far back as the 1930s, researchers investigating socially excluded collectivities, aware of the disparity occurring between “statistical descriptions and field case studies,” were guided by the idea of *einleben sich*, “living-in” in the investigated environment in a way that enabled scientific description that incorporated the informants’ perspective (Sułek 2011: 76). However, Elżbieta Tarkowska, an empathetic scholar, explains this methodological standpoint in her last book:

[W]e [scholars] do not know much about what people in poverty think and what they feel. How do they cope emotionally with the difficulties, how do they experience this situation? What attitudes towards poverty do they encounter every day? How do they react to what is said about them publicly? It seems that despite a large body of qualitative in-depth research, research oriented towards direct contact with the informants, some sphere of microscale of poverty—the sphere of interaction, subjectivity, attitudes, and emotions, including the feeling of spoiled dignity and of being treated as the Other—is not recognised (...). Omitting such issues proves that the portrait of both poverty and the poor is limited. It can be related to the traditional narrow conceptualisation of poverty (...), where there is no place for the subjectivity of the poor and their other needs, such as the need for dignity and respect, closeness, and understanding (Tarkowska 2013a: 53, trans. AGG).

Therefore, shaping their direct (interviews) and indirect (texts) relations with informants, social researchers may strive to get as close as they can to the axiological frame of the Buberian Meeting the Other, forming subjectivising relationships based on mutuality,

⁵ Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin also list two other academic discourses or narrations on poverty: 1/ the structure/context/counter-narrative (the limited capabilities of individuals result from uncertainty on the labour market, poor education, lack of political power—here the poor are described as passive victims), 2/ the agency/resistance counter-narrative—exposing activity, efficiency, everyday efforts of the poor, as well as their acts of resistance—described as functional activities. Other well-known categorisations of paradigms and discourses of social exclusion were elaborated on by Hillary Silver (1994) and Ruth Levitas (2005).

where the Other “is not a thing among things and does not consist of thing” (Buber 1992: 43, 45, 86). In such an encounter, the researcher recognises “autonomous otherness and the distinctiveness of the other person,”⁶ accepting him as a partner, even if the latter is not aware of such an attitude (Buber 1992). To travesty the thought of Paul Ricoeur, one can wonder whether it is possible to have a “sociology of the neighbour,” i.e. sociology of the Others seen as persons rather than their opinions, attitudes, or behaviours. A sociology in which the researcher goes beyond his or her social function and is ready for an encounter with the human being, which brings unexpected contents and perhaps experiences or emotions (Ricoeur 1991).⁷ Thus, an essential question arises: to what degree is it possible that the researcher will not be driven by knowledge, imagination, fantasies, or expectations in the frames of a deliberately set up research relationship? And in such a relationship, at least in the interactive dimension, can the scholar ignore an obvious fact so that the research activity, used as a means, not only leads to cognitive goals but also satisfies his/her personal needs?⁸

On the other hand, the relationship between the researcher and the researched may hugely depart from “meeting the Other.” This happens when the interaction between the informant and the scholar, both at the beginning and at the end of the research process, is defined by both parties as an encounter of strangers (Męcfal 2012). Conducting qualitative analyses that yield an outcome in the form of typologies, classifications, schemata, and models, in a sense potentially situates a meeting with the researched in the category of interactions that Denzin characterizes as a *labelling encounter*: “where one actor is defined in a new, novel, and typically deviant [i.e. referring to poverty and social exclusion] way (...). Labelling encounters describe those moments when one class of interactants exercise their authority and power over another class of social actors” (Denzin 1974: 271). The sociological connotations of the term “labelling” aside, the act of classifying may be recognised as, first and foremost, a cognitive act.

By contrast, the phenomenon described as “othering” is not a merely cognitive act. Ruth Lister draws attention to this phenomenon in her classical study on poverty. Othering results from social valuing and categorizing processes, and it is practised through language (socioyms, i.e. identity labels, stereotypes) and images. Othering is probably both the foundation as well as the result of social boundary-making between “us” and “them.” Othering excludes individual and collective social actors from society, locating them on the social margin, pointing out that they are a part of a larger group of others not entitled to (equal) social participation. Othering is the cornerstone of social constructs, hierarchies, and their naturalisations; it petrifies power relations.⁹ It has both a symbolic and utilitarian dimension—it serves the goals and interests of individuals and groups who “other” others. Othering, defined as the generic process together with subordinate adaptation, boundary

⁶ Retranslated from Polish by Maciej Czuchra.

⁷ The figure of the poor as the Other in contexts somewhat different from those discussed in this paper also appears in texts from other social sciences (Starego 2013; Jędrych 2019).

⁸ “Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated do encounters occur” (Buber 1992: 45).

⁹ “Stereotypes and socioyms reflect and order the worldview of the people and groups that reproduce them, shrouding their logics of action and argumentation in an aura of seemingly obvious, universal conclusions” (Joniak-Lüthi 2015: 93).

maintenance, and emotion management, sustains the reproduction of social inequalities. Lister, who treats poverty and social exclusion in terms of social relations, notices that othering the poor and the marginalised is traditionally inbuilt in the culture of European societies (Schwalbe et al. 2000; Lister 2004; Joniak-Lüthi 2015; Bourdieu 1991, cited in Joniak-Lüthi 2015).

Lister enumerates the modern “leading motives” or themes of othering. She states that the poor and the excluded can be classified as 1/ a source of moral contamination; 2/ a threat; 3/ an undeserving economic burden; 4/ an object of pity; 5/ an exotic species (Lister 2004). She emphasises that in this enumeration, we notice “left-overs” of 19th-century conceptualisations of the poor as dangerous and criminal classes, a threat to the social order, and a source of physical and moral filth and contamination. Lister also states that such a way of conceiving the poor enhances their objectification and justifies “domestic colonialism—middle-class explorers and missionaries entered the alien and unknown territory of poverty” (Lister 2004: 106). It seems that, in the psychological dimension, these conceptualisations and discourses serve to rationalize the sense of strangeness and fear. They also justify the unwillingness to interact with individuals who are treated as second-class citizens. We can consider Bauman’s statements that some parts of society want the poor to vanish into emptiness, as they are completely useless. Others tend to treat the issues of poverty and marginalisation in seemingly neutral terms, believing that good people should be protected from the threat emerging from the dumps, slums, ghettos, and other dark recesses inhabited by bums and hobos (Bauman 2002).

Therefore, in the next part of this text, I will attempt to answer Lister’s question: How do scholars (the authors of biographical sociology), as the more powerful “non-poor,” construct “their” poor and socially excluded informants as the Other? In keeping with the principle of comparing contrasting cases, I present concise deliberations on two ways to construct the Other in two recognized publications of the Chicago school, commencing this description with the first published master-work.

It is worth emphasising that the scientific activity of the authors of both publications was accompanied by their involvement in social activity for the benefit of individuals and groups threatened with social marginalisation. Thomas, Addam’s close friend, “had a long-term commitment to voluntary social reform groups concerned with social amelioration” and education, and he also supported the women’s rights movement (Deegan 1990: 128). Znaniecki held the position of director at Towarzystwo Opieki nad Wychodźcami [The Society for the Care of Émigrés] and was also an editor of the *Wychodźca polski* [Polish Émigré] magazine (Ferenc 2018). It is possible to assume that Znaniecki’s affiliation with the Polish intelligentsia signified his identification with the nobility-intelligentsia ethos, a substantial element of which was the tradition and precept to engage in public service (e.g. Smoczyński and Zarycki 2017). Meanwhile, Shaw lived in the immigrant community of Chicago in his early adulthood, and before embarking on his academic career, he had worked as a probation officer and a juvenile probation officer. He was also the Director of The Institute of Juvenile Research. As a scholar, he became involved in the Chicago Area Project, which aimed at improving the functioning of local communities (Bidner 2003).

Othing: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*

The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, published in five volumes between 1918 and 1920, is considered the key sociological work, although it is crucial also for (modern) studies on poverty and social exclusion (Tarkowska 2013). In particular, when reading the last three volumes, we encounter images of the destitution of peasants from the lowest social strata of the 19th century, migrating overseas “in search of bread.” Not only do the images depict penury, but they also clearly indicate the symptoms of social disintegration, partly related to deep rural indigence. Migrants in the USA usually engaged in low-paid employment, which could be lost from one day to the next. Earnings were irregular, sometimes outright dramatically low. Families, including those reconstructed many times, lived in appalling conditions. Alcoholism, and psychological, physical, and economic violence, were everyday experiences for some migrants. Discussions on the methodology of *The Polish Peasant*...have been ongoing for almost one hundred years. These debates enter the main circuit of sociological reflection both on occasions of anniversaries of the first edition of the book (also celebrated in 2018, on the centennial of the first edition),¹⁰ and in connection with “the dramatic expansion of qualitative sociology, with its use of people’s actual language, as taken *verbatim* in interviews or as written in letters and diaries” (Znaniecka-Łopata 1996: 44).

The decision to investigate the Polish peasantry was probably made by Thomas himself. He received fifty thousand dollars from Helen Culver, the donor of Hull House, and he set off for Europe to choose between Poles, Jews, and Italians to research new immigration. When justifying his choice of the researched community, Thomas, who had visited Poland many times and learned the Polish language to a degree that allowed him to become acquainted with empirical materials, formulated the following valuing statement: “The Poles are very repulsive people on the whole, but there had been a movement for ‘enlightenment’ and freedom that had developed many documents and masses of materials on the peasant, so I decided to bore there” (Thomas as cited in Fink 1997: 38; Ferenc 2018). In Herbert Blumer’s *An Appraisal of Thomas And Znaniecki’s The Polish Peasant in Europe And America*, published originally in 1939, Thomas wrote:

Another reason was their behavior in America. They were the most incomprehensible and perhaps the most disorganized of all the immigrant groups. This may be illustrated by what the American police call “Polish warfare.” A policeman might enter a saloon where there was a noisy crowd of Poles and say, “You men be quiet,” and they might subside immediately or one of them might draw a gun and kill him. This was due to the fact that the Pole in America has two attitudes toward authority. One of these reflects the old peasant subordination to authority... The other... reflects the conception that there are no limits to the boasted American “freedom.” (cited in Symmons-Symonowicz 1968: 16)

¹⁰ In connection with the centennial of the first edition of *Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, new texts were dedicated to the work. Among them, it is worth paying attention to the English language edition of *Przegląd Socjologiczny [The Sociological Review]* 2019 68(4), where, in addition to the texts referred to in this paper, the reader may find the following articles: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America and The Missing Ethnic Leaders* by Janusz Mucha, *How Biographical Studies and Social Experience of Migration Are Still Inspired by The Polish Peasant in Europe And America* by Catherine Delcroix; *Emotions in The Polish Peasant...Researcher’s Reminiscences Based on The Autobiography of Wladek* by Marek Nowak and Piotr Luczys; *Not Only The Polish Peasant. Znaniecki’s Poznań School of Sociology as A Sociological and A Research Issue* by Jacek Kubera and *Florian Znaniecki Heritage in The Context of Russian Discourse* by Victoria Semenova and Elena Rozhdestvenskaya.

Based on the Methodological Note and the main parts of Thomas and Znaniecki's analytic descriptions, one might think that *The Polish Peasant...* is an example of an unbiased, in-depth analysis of Polish peasantry conducted by external observers. However, as Helena Znaniecka-Łopata already indicated: "*The Polish Peasant's* focus on social disorganization, accentuated by commentators who neglected the reorganization sub-theme, distorted the reality of the Polish-American community and its people, neglecting the forces that have kept the community alive and vibrant for over a hundred years" (Znaniecka-Łopata 1996: 40). In the Note to "Life Record of an Immigrant," as well as in the footnotes to the migrants' letters in volumes I and II, we discover the class-centric point of view of the authors. There is evidence that Thomas, with his rural and Methodist background, and especially Znaniecki, who came from a family of wealthy landowners, were not merely prominent sociologists.¹¹ They were also typical members of the upper classes of mainstream society at the time.¹²

Seemingly neutral commentaries on a set of migrants' letters in "The Polish Peasant..." contain phrases that can indicate how the founding fathers of biographical sociology related to the peasantry, comparing them with savage tribes or an exotic species ("With the peasant, as with the savage, the whole of social intercourse, including language, is more rigorously ritualized than with ourselves" (Znaniecki & Thomas 1958, vol. I: 307). However, this species was devoid of the ability to feel certain emotions due to its intellectual and moral condition:

[Walery Wróblewski] is certainly not deterred by the remembrance of his first [late] wife, as such sentiments are absolutely strange to the peasant traditional nature (...) the sentimental and sexual elements [in his relation with step-daughter] were hardly absolutely lacking; these are almost always present in peasant marriages, even in men of a rather low level of intellectual and moral development, while Walery is certainly a peasant a little above the average. (Vol. I. 1958: 367)

Therefore, in reference to the cognitive competencies of the peasantry, we also find statements indicating that these competencies were assessed as limited compared to people from other social classes. It also seems that the authors situated themselves within the genetic or racial inferiority model of poverty, when they explained the laziness of the peasant's sons: "as the result of heredity. The children have inherited a weak organism from their consumptive mother. But this interpretation is never clearly realized by a peasant" (1958 Vol. I: 374)—perhaps because of "an intellectual dullness which hinders the person from becoming interested in the variety of situations which even the simplest life involves" (1958 Vol. I: 317).

The obviously valuing stance towards the informants is visible in the note and footnotes included in *Life Record of an Immigrant*. In the "Introduction" to the third volume, based on the memoirs commissioned by the authors from Władek and processed by them according to rules unknown to the reader, Thomas and Znaniecki declared:

¹¹ Yet, committing at that all the errors of the "common sense sociology" indicated by the authors in "The Polish Peasant..." (Kaźmierska 2019: 42–43, 49).

¹² If the picture of Thomas with "his tendency of letting the evidence and documents collected speak for themselves, showing a scarce inclination towards systemic interpretations" is to be believed, the authorship of the commentaries can be ascribed to Znaniecki, who "favoured the understanding of reality through complex and elaborate interpretative frames, as proved by much of his later publications" (Halas 2006; Gallino cited in Sinatti 2008: 4).

(...) for only the study of the commonplace man can make us understand why there are commonplace men. It will make us realize also that the greatest defect of our entire civilization has been precisely the existence of a culturally passive mass, that every non-creative personality is an educational failure. It will show the sources of such failures and thus open the way for a more successful social education in the future. (1919 Vol. III: 82)

According to the authors, the analysis of the record: “shows the disorganizing effect which the passage from an old to a new form of social organization has upon an individual if not consciously and rationally directed” (1919 Vol. III: 83–84).

In the memoirs of Władek, a vagabond migrating to the USA, an unemployed apprentice baker, the reader will come across numerous situations where the protagonist breaks social norms, commits offences, flirts with crime, and yet his mode of functioning may be interpreted in ways different from the authors. An example of such an interpretation can be found in the work of Katarzyna Waniek, who conducted a sequential analysis of Władek’s autobiography according to the narrative interview methodology. She states that Władek’s biography reflects his constant desire “to get out of the trap which was his parents’ repressive and discriminatory institutional normative model” and his “systematic and unsuccessful attempts to be free himself from family expectations” (Waniek 2019: 54–55, 56). Simultaneously, however, reading the entire volume may even persuade the reader to wonder if Thomas and Znaniecki “liked” Władek Wiśniewski, since the whole of Władek’s diary contains numerous deprecating comments that, as Kaźmierska (2019) indicated, would be considered politically incorrect today.

Characterising Władek’s childhood, Thomas and Znaniecki ascribed negative attributes to the entire social class. When Władek wrote about the beauty of the village where he had grown up, the authors stated:

To a boy of Władek’s class nature in Poland can have hardly any positive educational influence; it does not, as in wilder countries, force the development of energy and enterprise, and the enjoyment of its aesthetic side by Władek is evidently artificial, developed later under the influence of reading. (1919 Vol. III: 91)

The feelings disclosed by Władek were also evaluated from the class-centric point of view. The authors recognised Władek’s admiration of nature as having been shaped by popular novels, therefore not authentic. They explained his romantic vocabulary in early adulthood in the same way. On a conversation with a girl-friend quoted by Władek (“You have read the book Marino Marinelli, how he and Annunciata swore love to each other, under a cross, on St. Nicholas’ island?”—“How should I not have read it, since it was I who lent it to you”), they commented: “The conversation is typical for this class. The simple feelings are inadequately dressed in a verbiage imitated from novels” (1919 Vol. III: 143) and Władek himself “is of course as much capable of love as his intellectual and sentimental level permit” (1919 Vol. III: 204).

Many sequences in the diary pertain to the narrator’s placement in the structure of his family of origin (where Władek was in a sense situated between “black sheep” and “scapegoat”) and his complicated family relations—a source of his suffering (cf Waniek 2019). In the comments related to those issues, the narrator, as the Other, did not even become “an object of pity.” When Władek described the return from his wanderings, expressing his sense of regret in reaction to the sight of his relatives, whom he watched through the window, delaying his entry, Thomas and Znaniecki offered the following remark in their commentary:

The whole attitude toward his family—desire to show himself only in a decent state, expectation of being treated as a tramp, etc.,—shows a complete change in the character of the family (...). The individual attitude to which it corresponds is the desire for recognition, not the desire for response—vanity rather than sentiment. This is one of the manifestations of the degeneration of the traditional forms of social life. (1919 Vol. III: 241–242).¹³

Even the traumatising situations that Władek’s biography abounds in do not justify his anxiety or despair. It is visible in the description of desisting from the intention to cut off a finger which the teenage Władek came up with as a victim of his principal and co-apprentice’s violence, deprived of help from his parents (“at the last moment my courage left me”). Thomas and Znaniecki interpreted this behaviour as follows:

The essential fact is: painful situation—desire for social help — voluntary self-infliction or pretense of suffering, to attract pity. Typical for a weak person who tries to escape an unpleasant situation or induce a pleasant one by relying on social interference instead of his own activity, and prevalent in hysterical women (1919 Vol. III: 126:).¹⁴

Turning to the words of Blumer, it is possible to find that with all undeniable advantages and the timelessness of all five volumes of *The Polish Peasant...*, the authors “have shown surprising liberality in making generalizations—generalizations which seem to be very good, but for which there are few if any data in the materials” (Blumer 1939, cited in Symmons-Symonolewicz 1968: 24). Among other authors, Kaźmierska concurs with this stance, indicating that it is difficult to find the constations made by Thomas and Znaniecki to be analytically justified. This may, however, follow both from “the state of knowledge at that time and the state of peculiar social sensitivity,” whereby from a contemporary perspective, “certain phrases would be seen as prejudiced” (Kaźmierska 2019: 47–48). Simultaneously, in their interpretation, both authors applied othering to both the investigated community and its members. It seems that both authors were applying class-centric criteria derived from the Polish intelligentsia’s image of peasant culture that Znaniecki had brought with him from Poland (Znaniecka-Lopata 1996; Blumer 1939, cited in Znaniecka-Lopata 1996).

Towards Meeting the Other: Clifford Shaw’s *The Jack-Roller. A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story*

Another famous book of the Chicago school, *The Jack-Roller. A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story* ([1930] 1966), is evidence of the evolution of researchers’ sensitivity in their relationships with the research participants. The structure of this book, published ten years after the release of *The Polish Peasant...*, and much shorter than its predecessor, is similar to the structure of the 3rd volume of *The Polish Peasant...* in certain fragments. Yet, its content facilitates a significantly more in-depth insight into the research, analytical, and therapeutic processes conducted by the author.¹⁵ A single case of delinquency was selected from hundreds of similar stories of delinquent boys, each of whom was subjected

¹³ Cf. reasoning on this fragment in Katarzyna Waniek’s text (2019: 63–64).

¹⁴ Cf. an analysis of the same fragment in Kaja Kaźmierska (2019: 49–50).

¹⁵ See also Kaja Kaźmierska on the development of methodology and theoretical reflection in both works (Kaźmierska 2019).

to an identical research procedure.¹⁶ Stanley—Shaw’s Other—was a teenager from Polish migrant circles. His reconstructed family (based on the marriage of Stanley’s widowed father to his stepmother) would today be described as a multi-problem family. In the project, Stanley was first interviewed at the age of 16, when he already had a long story of child delinquency, such as escapes or jack-rolling (i.e. robbing a drunk or sleeping person), with episodes of institutionalisation (detention homes, correctional schools, prison).¹⁷ He spent another year in a correctional house after being interviewed by the researchers, who came back to him again after his release from the institution. It seems that Clifford R. Shaw’s attitude towards Stanley was characterised by deep empathy, even though the researcher and the boy were separated not only by social distance but also by age.

Indeed, the attributes of the researcher-informant relationship differed from that observed in *The Polish Peasant*.... It may simply have been a result of the direct interactions and prolonged relationships (which lasted about six years during the project that provided the foundation for the book), with the interviewee perceived as the Other who was deserving of understanding and support. Thirty-six years after the first edition of the book, addressing the issue of the distance between the researcher and the researched in the introduction to *The Jack-Roller*..., Howard Becker stated:

By providing this kind of voice from a culture and situation that are ordinarily not known to intellectuals generally, and to sociologists in particular, *The Jack-Roller* enables us to improve our theories at the most profound level: by putting ourselves in Stanley’s skin, we can feel and become aware of the deep biases about such people that ordinarily permeate our thinking and shape the kinds of problems we investigate. By truly entering into Stanley’s life we can begin to see what we take for granted (and ought not to) in designing our research—what kind of assumptions about delinquents, slums and Poles are embedded in the way we set the questions we study. Stanley’s story allows us (...) to begin to ask questions about delinquency from the point of view of the delinquent. (Becker 1966: xv)¹⁸

Perhaps Shaw’s stance resulted from his approach, different from the stance expressed by the authors of *The Polish Peasant*.... Thomas and Znaniecki, despite their close ties with social reformers, held that scholars should be guided by cognitive purposes in their work. Meanwhile, for Shaw, whose career included the role of professional helper, life histories were of both cognitive and practical value. Hence, *The Jack-Roller*... also illustrates the case of social treatment—attempts embarked on in order to change life strategies, the social environment, and the boy’s identity. Empirical data in this process were of “particular importance in the diagnosis and treatment of cases of delinquency,” and afforded “a basis for devising a plan of treatment adapted to the attitudes, interests and personality of the child” (Shaw 1966: 17).

¹⁶ A personal interview with a boy was conducted, followed by the analysis of official records (data gathered by courts, probation officers, police station, etc.) and supplementary interviews with important social actors involved in the case; next, based on these data, a register of the boy’s main problems was prepared, with a chronologically ordered history of his delinquency. This register was presented to the boy, who had to use it as a guide in writing his own story. He was instructed to give a detailed description of every situation, the course of events, and his experiences, emotions, and impressions. He was then urged to return to the story to further elaborate on it, to complete it; sometimes, completing a story required several attempts by its author (Shaw 1966).

¹⁷ Interviewed again in 1970, Stanley mentioned that he had got to know Shaw previously as a 12-year-old boy, when Shaw was “a settlement worker” (Snodgrass 1982: 25, 77).

¹⁸ In a sense, in this passage, we will find the methodological answer to Elżbieta Tarkowska’s comment on the traps in research on poverty mentioned above. And obviously, Tarkowska was one of the researchers devoted to biographical research herself.

The set of questions about the cultural and social setting formulated by the scientists was, first of all, aimed at understanding the delinquent behaviour. Shaw was aware that effective treatment needed in-depth knowledge of the boy, “secured only after painstaking study and prolonged contact.” Without such knowledge, intervention into the life of young delinquents would be reduced exclusively to “attempts to gain control and effect adjustment through threats of arrest and punishment” (Shaw 1966: 17–19, 33). Attitudes oriented towards contact with and understanding of the researched is visible in the initial fragments of the study, where Shaw stated: “It is in the personal document that the child reveals his feelings of inferiority and superiority, his fears and worries, his ideals and philosophy of life, his antagonisms and mental conflicts, his prejudices, and rationalizations” (Shaw 1966: 4). Such an attitude was consistently maintained towards Stanley, both in the studies and—judging from Stanley’s memories—in their direct relations. For example, Shaw adopted the perspective of the Other when he explained the boy’s attitude, describing the cruel actions of his step-mother who had given him “the beating of [his] life” and thrown him out of their house:

In the recent conversation with Stanley (...) he made the following significant statement (...): “I don’t believe that I exaggerated the faults of my stepmother, but if I did, I certainly didn’t exaggerate my feelings toward her.” This statement illustrates one of the primary assumptions of this volume, namely, that in the study and treatment of the delinquent child is essential to deal with his personal attitudes, his definition of the situation, although these may be exaggerations or even misinterpretations of the objective situation. Even if it were true that Stanley’s interpretation of the family situation were somewhat exaggerated, it cannot be doubted that he acted “as if” this interpretation were true. (Shaw 1966: 55)

Shaw also adopted the attitude of a careful diagnostician, since he took into consideration the significance of personal traits as an essential element resting at the basis of Stanley’s worldview and behaviour, distancing himself from a potential evaluation of the boy’s attitude:

This (...) paragraph is typical of Stanley’s self-justificatory attitude towards his own problems and situations. In this paragraph (...), he makes a rather definite attempt to place the responsibility for his misconduct upon fate, circumstances, and other persons, particularly his step-mother. Regardless of the justifiability of this attitude, it reflects a fundamental aspect of his personality. (Shaw 1966: 47)

It is similar when Shaw looked for reasons for failure in the existing corrective proceedings towards delinquent boys. Also invoking the case of Stanley, he indicated an error that involves not matching foster families’ characteristics to the delinquent teenagers’ personalities: “with too little regard for the attitudes, interests and social values of the child.” He also noted the social distance between the family and the child: “the discrepancy between the child’s cultural background and that of the foster-home” (Shaw 1966: 18).

An in-depth socio-psychological diagnosis of Stanley resulted in treatment—he was placed in a foster family with a status similar to that of the boy and characterised by “informal and sympathetic relations.” It guaranteed him vocational guidance and contact with a constructively functioning group of peers:

During the first two years of the treatment, we had personal contact with Stanley at least once a week. Through these contacts, it was possible to give him insight into his own mental process, and to assist him in solving many problems which necessarily arose during the course of his adjustment to the new cultural world in which he was placed. (Shaw 1966: 166–167)

Due to the researcher's efforts, which were grounded in the in-depth assessment, Stanley managed to attain relative normalisation for some years. After several failures, he succeeded in finding a job suited to his personality traits and he got married. Although *The Jack-Roller...* presents a "success story," it is worth adding that in the mid-1970s, Jon Snodgrass (1982), a North American criminologist, found Stanley and—in a way—closed the case.¹⁹ It follows from this study that Shaw's relationship with Stanley, who was by now entering adulthood, went beyond the sphere of professional interactions. Stanley and his wife would visit the Shaws, and he was also a frequent guest on the researcher's farm: "his children practically grew up with me and of course Mrs. Shaw always proved gracious and hospitable. It certainly would not be farfetched to state that the Shaws were my real parents" (Snodgrass 1982: 32). In a letter that was an answer to Snodgrass' invitation to participate in his research, Stanley wrote:

I have a fond and deep appreciation for not only Mr. Clifford R. Shaw, my dearest friend and his entire family, whom I knew intimately for over fifty years, but also to the many associates that I have encountered during these years, and found them, mostly, sincere and dedicated people that devoted their lives to studying the problems of the delinquent child. (Snodgrass 1982: 12)

Conclusions: Is there always a bias?

This brief insight into the classics of biographical sociology demonstrated two divergent categories of the stance researchers may adopt in their relationships with the researched in ethically sensitive research, which analyses of poverty and social exclusion are. Despite raising questions about the limits of engagement and separating the private and professional spheres, Shaw's stance may be indicated as an undeniable example of constructing a story of a researched individual social actor within the theoretical frames of explaining poverty and social issues in reference to macro-structural and situational factors. Simultaneously, the relationship between Shaw and Stanley is close to the "meeting with the Other" category. In a sense, the story given by the author of *The Jack-Roller...* is similar to voice-and-action counter-narrative discourses, thus situating Stanley in the role of the precursor of today's "research participants." However, in Thomas and Znaniecki's interpretations, phrases typical of moralistic discourse are visible. After all, they may also be classified as being representative of the deficiency model for providing explanations of poverty and social exclusion. Thomas and Znaniecki seem to be also expressly othering the authors of biographical materials discussed in the first three volumes of *The Polish Peasant...*, but that "othering" is not of such a radical nature. Obviously, in historical and present-day sociology, we can list numerous works whose authors go beyond merely objectifying the communities they investigate. An example is the studies of Charles Murray, whose evaluative attitude towards the individuals he classified as the underclass verges on contempt, in my opinion. Researchers' attitude towards the researched is, therefore, evident,

¹⁹ The Great Depression strongly influenced Stanley's life—he lost his job and tried to get by on card games. At the age of 23, he was imprisoned for robbery and the use of a weapon, then hospitalised in a psychiatric ward. He got divorced, lived the life of the vagabond, then returned to Chicago. He spent some time in Southern California, and remarried in 1975, but the second marriage collapsed too. In the late 1970s, after experiencing some problems, he lived a peaceful life; he retired, and enjoyed his time with friends, family, and books (Snodgrass 1982).

and it provokes a discussion not only in scientific circles but also among institutional actors, especially those related to the area of research and who are interested in the results it yields.

In 1967, Howard S. Becker published a text entitled “Whose side are we on?” It was a record of his presidential address delivered the year before at the annual meeting of The Society for the Study of Social Problems. In his speech, he considered “the problem of taking sides as it arises in the study of deviance and the possible impact of scholars’ bias on the research results and practice” (Becker 1967: 239). The text induces a reflection on the position of the researcher who stands—also morally—as if between individuals and collectives who are today labelled disadvantaged and the institutions appointed to manage social problems.²⁰ Both these systems operate in the hierarchical setting of socially negatively valuated subordinates (e.g., deviants, the poor, social security clients) and superordinates (e.g., formal authorities, experts, teachers). The latter have at their disposal a mandate—certified based on expert knowledge and social trust—which authorises them to treat, educate, and rehabilitate all troublemakers. Thereby, “credibility and the right to be heard are differentially distributed through the ranks of the [researched] system[s]” (Becker 1967: 240–241; see also Sennett, Cobb 1972). Lending a voice to the disadvantaged, who are deprived of representation and who are unorganised, sociologists encroach upon both the hierarchy of credibility and the hierarchy of statuses.²¹ Becker commented on refractory institutions that they “do not perform as society would like them to. Hospitals do not cure people; prisons do not rehabilitate prisoners, schools do not educate students.” Despite the passage of time, this still rings true, to a certain extent (Becker 1967: 243–244).

We should always bear in mind that the unique ways of conceptualising the researcher–research participant relationship and the representations of the related investigated groups and communities have real consequences. The problem here is not only the issue of the reliability and accuracy of scientific research, but also that in the research area under discussion, the results of analyses become an element of the political discourse and a basis of particular solutions, actions, and behaviours. The results include actions connected to the functioning of grant institutions that set the boundary conditions and that also represent specific values and attitudes (e.g. Cheek 2010). The addressees of a scientific message, including the participants of all parts of the research process, cannot be perceived as “empty vessels into which we pour our research-derived wisdom” (Cheek 2010: 104).

Undoubtedly, continuous development of ethical awareness, self-awareness, and the awareness of one’s attitudes and needs in the relationship with the researched can also be seen in the circle of social researchers. It is reflected in increasingly more in-depth questions being posed and the readiness to face the responses. Below are several such questions shared by author with other researchers (e.g. Cheek 2010; Krog 2010; Kaźmierska 2018; Kulendrarajah 2018; Gałęziowski 2019). Importantly, answering these questions, which are more of a self-diagnostic kit for researchers considering ethical issues, is still an open question:

²⁰ Despite representing “majorised spaces” (Cheek 2010: 102), hence the social worlds of the superordinates rather than the subordinates.

²¹ Becker asks perversely: “Why do we not accuse other sociologists who study youth of being biased in favour of adults? Most research on youth, after all, is clearly designed to find out why youth are so troublesome for adults, rather than asking the equally interesting sociological question: ‘Why do adults make so much trouble for the youth?’”

- What do we declare to our informants when asking them for informed consent, and what do we perform in reality, e.g. entering the analyzed biographies of the narrators extremely deeply?
- Are we really able to treat research participants as real partners—what is the influence of our beliefs on other cultures, social classes, etc., that we are hiding even from ourselves?
- Are we ready to recognise research participants as our partners, and even co-authors, in designing, processing, and publishing research results?
- To what degree are we prepared to get involved in supporting our research participants (is publishing the results a sufficient action, or will we also engage in direct assistance, as Clifford R. Shaw did)?
- Does in-depth understanding and adopting the perspective of the Other not, in a sense, “force” the researcher to take practical action?
- Are we aware that, on the one hand, the analyses and descriptions we construct, to a differing degree and in a different way, constitute material used by decision-makers in planning actions directed at investigated collectivities, while on the other hand, they penetrate the public discourse and influence how these collectivities are perceived by mainstream society?
- How do we cope with evaluative, class-centric, gender-centric, and ethnocentric approaches, especially ones deeply hidden in our texts?

The degree of difficulty in constructing the image of the Others encountered in the course of research to obtain an appropriate, reliable, and simultaneously non-discriminating picture of their biographies is attested to by the natural histories of research into poverty and social exclusion. The most famous among them is probably the story of Oscar Lewis, who, investigating marginalised Mexican families, made use of multiple autobiographies. Presenting himself as an emphatic, yet non-committed researcher,²² Lewis declared:

This method of multiple autobiographies (...) tends to reduce the element of investigator bias, because the accounts are not put through the sieve of middle-class North American mind but are given, in the words of the subjects. In this way, I believe, I have avoided the two most common hazards in the study of the poor, namely over-sentimentalization and brutalization. Finally, I hope that this method preserves for the reader the emotional satisfaction and understanding which the anthropologist experiences in working directly with his subjects but which is only rarely conveyed in the formal jargon of anthropological monographs. (Lewis 2011: 10–11)

Although Lewis gave a voice to the unheard, and it seems he approached his informants with commitment and respect,²³ the concept of the culture of poverty created based on his research was criticised as one whose author stigmatises and discriminates against the poor (Harvey and Reed 1996). The controversy surrounding such analysis is (it seems) partly due to the relationship that the researcher establishes with the respondents. Perhaps, following Gerhard Riemann’s proposal to analyse the stories of professional helpers and students of

²² Which constitutes another example of the researcher’s attitude towards the researched.

²³ “The stories of Manuel, Roberto, Consuelo, and Marta have a simplicity, sincerity, and directness which is characteristic of the spoken word, of oral literature in contrast to written literature. Despite their lack of formal training, these young people express themselves remarkably well, particularly Consuelo, who sometimes reaches poetic heights. Still in the midst of their unresolved problems and confusions, they have been able to convey enough of themselves to give us insight into their lives and to make us aware of their potentialities and wasted talents” (Lewis 2011: Introduction).

the helping professions, sociologists, especially biographical ones, should also reflect on researchers' stories about fieldwork and scholar-participant relationships (Riemann 2012: 831–837, 842). Then they should subject such data to critical exploration with all the analytical rigours that are applied to the autobiographical narrative interview method. The use of such a procedure would make it possible to uncover previously unknown aspects, including hidden ones, of the relationship between researchers and research participants.

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