

## Contact and Conflict: Polish-Jewish Contact Zone

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**Abstract:** The article suggests using the category of the contact zone adopted from postcolonial studies in research on borderland, which - in turn - allows researchers to describe the phenomenon of the frontier. According to Pratt, contact zone may be understood as the space of cooperation and competition, coexistence and antagonism, contact and conflict of groups. The aim of the article is to analyse the representations of borderland in Polish-Jewish prose of the 1930s (including the novels published in the mass-circulation press). We shall focus on the motives that stand behind the conflictive communication. It is worth noting that in the literary renditions, interactions between Poles and Jews easily transform into conflicts. Conflictive communication appears in various places (e.g. school, street, neighbourhood), forms (nicknames, arguments, pogrom cries) and functions (from initiating and escalating tensions to riots and murders). As a result, the contact zone transforms into a conflict zone.

**Keywords:** Polish-Jewish frontier, contact zone, Polish-Jewish prose, conflictive communication

### 1. Contact zone

As far as the reconceptualization of the category of borderline is concerned, I believe that the concept of contact zone adopted from the postcolonial studies is the most promising one. I have raised on several occasions<sup>1</sup> some arguments in favour of the application of this category in the research on the Polish-Jewish frontier, hence in what follows I shall summarize them. The category in question seems to be appropriate<sup>2</sup> for the

<sup>1</sup> E. Prokop-Janiec, "Kategoria pogranicza we współczesnych studiach żydowskich," in: *Na pograniczach literatury*, edited by J. Fazan, K. Ząjas, Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas," 2012, pp. 142–143; E. Prokop-Janiec *Pogranicze polsko-żydowskie. Topografie i teksty*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013, pp. 37–40, 52; E. Prokop-Janiec, "Wstęp," in: *Polacy – Żydzi. Kontakty kulturowe i literackie*, edited by E. Prokop-Janiec, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014, pp. 16–18.

<sup>2</sup> On the possibilities of the application of the *contact zone* category in the history of art, see: R. Piątkowska, "Studenci wyznania mojżeszowego w warszawskiej Akademii Sztuk Pięknych (1923-1939). Studia – debiuty – kariery," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 2015, No. 4, p. 665.

following reasons. Firstly, it draws attention to the new social and cultural space which is created as a result of the contact between the groups that were previously isolated and a tangle of complex relations that arise between them. Secondly, it may be applied both in the analysis of the territorial and aterritorial frontiers as well as in relation to physical and symbolic areas. Thirdly, it exposes a complex and ambivalent nature of the relations between groups and the processes taking place in the borderland.

According to Mary Luise Pratt, the contact zone is, on the one hand, the sphere of coexistence, interaction, transculturation and, on the other hand, the sphere of inequality, compulsion and conflict. Not only do individuals and groups meeting here shape one other by mutual relations, “coexistence, [...] understanding and actions overlapping with each other,” but they also have a sense of distinctiveness, they manage conflicts and experience submission. Complex daily interactions, such as exchange, cooperation, negotiations, conflicts, confrontation and violence represented in heterogeneous and heteroglossic stories are all the elements of the contact zone. The differences between the groups<sup>3</sup> may be observed when they are to meet, the bond is present “within the diametrically opposed force relations.”<sup>4</sup> While describing the relations evolving in contact zones, James Clifford<sup>5</sup> stresses not only such aspects as contact and dependence, but also compulsion and exploitation.

Generally speaking, forming contact zone as the analytical and interpretative category allows us to explore fully the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomena connected with borderland. Moreover, we may acknowledge that there are tensions, conflicts or ambivalence. On the one hand, we do not idealize and glorify the phenomenon of borderlands; on the other hand, we are not inclined to present only its negative aspects, thus dramatic historical events taking place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century do not shape our perception of the Polish-Jewish past. I want to stress that this perspective differs from the one according to which borderlands are understood as the conflict zone in the agonistic sense, where creative elements and positive processes play an important role.<sup>6</sup>

As far as the operational aspect of the contact zone category in the research on borderlands is concerned, the tangle of relations and conflicts exposed in the descriptions of the contact zone is a matter of interest to contemporary ethnic and sociological studies devoted to the relations

<sup>3</sup> See: M. Currie, *Difference*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> M.L. Pratt, *Imperialne spojrzenie. Pisarstwo podróżnicze a transkultuacja [Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation]*, translated into Polish by E. Nowakowska, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> J. Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” in: idem, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Such a perspective is proposed by Ewa Domańska who stresses that she abstains from glorifying “the utopian ideas of reconciliation.” E. Domańska, “Epistemologie pograniczy,” in: *Na pograniczach literatury*, p. 91.

between groups. It is fitting to add that the analyses of the tangle in question were presented in the 1930s by Florian Znaniecki who stressed the importance of the “social contact” factor for the experience of individuals or groups as being the others. As a result of the contact in question, antagonistic relations arise. Znaniecki defines such relations as a situation when “a human object, who while encountering a human subject is experienced by him as the other, evokes emotions which are negative, not positive and not neutral; that means that the experience of otherness is accompanied by a tendency to influence the other in a negative way.”<sup>7</sup> It is worth adding that the notions of antagonism and conflict are similar in Polish, as both are neutrally-loaded and have a broad meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Having considered the establishment of antagonistic relations, Znaniecki took into account the importance of the differences observed between the groups. It was the issues connected with contact, differences and conflict that were brought to the forefront in the contemporary discussions on social and ethnic conflicts. For some researchers – e.g. in Morton Deutsch’s works – contact and the presence of visible differences are treated as preconditions (although insufficient on their own) of causing the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Given that contact and conflict are types of interaction,<sup>10</sup> we need to remember that every interactive contact is potentially conflictive, whereas isolation eliminates the possibility of collision. Among the factors triggering conflicts we may discuss tensions resulting from cooperation and rivalry,<sup>11</sup> and the conflict itself is defined as a critical stage of tensions.<sup>12</sup> It is assumed that the sources of lasting conflicts are deeply ingrained in the incompatibility of value systems, and – in particular – in the pursuit of meeting such indi-

<sup>7</sup> F. Znaniecki, “Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych,” *Kwartalnik Socjologiczny* 1930/1931, No. 2–4, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> On the closeness of the notions of antagonism and conflict, see: A. Gomóła, “Waśnie, zatargi, konflikty – rekonesans leksykalny,” in: *Zatargi, waśnie, konflikty. W perspektywie historycznej i kulturowej*, edited by K. Łeńska-Bąk, Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2015, p. 21. The author’s analyses prove that the vocabulary used with reference to various kinds of conflicts is rich and diverse in Polish. The word *conflict* is a recent borrowing whose assimilation preceded the adoption of such internationalisms as *confrontation* and *controversy* (pp. 26–27). On the vocabulary referring to conflict, see: M. Danielewiczowa, “Spierać się kłócić, być w konflikcie,” in: *Współczesne dyskursy konfliktu. Literatura – język – kultura*, edited by W. Bolecki, W. Soliński, M. Gorczyński, Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN. Wydawnictwo, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> M. Deutsch, “Subjective Features of Conflict Resolution: Psychological, Social and Cultural Influences,” in: *New Directions in Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation*, edited by R. Väyrynen, London: SAGE Publications, London 1991.

<sup>10</sup> It is another perspective than the one according to which conflict is not a kind of relation, but the violation of the relation. On the meaning of the term *conflict* in Polish see: A. Gomóła, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> M. Deutsch, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> An instructive review of the views on the nature and sources of the conflicts between groups, see: A. Adediji, *The Politization of Ethnicity as Source of Conflict. The Nigerian Case*, Köln: Springer, 2015.

vidual and group needs as the need for identity security, or recognition.<sup>13</sup> If we fail to meet these needs satisfactorily, the tensions connected with this feeling may never be definitely laid to rest, thus they lie dormant until they are given voice in critical circumstances.

Literature may be treated as a special source of research on conflicts, because not only does it articulate and represent the experience, but it also conveys “the richest piece of information on the conflictive nature of social discourse.”<sup>14</sup> Being based on this point of view, this article is devoted to the interwar Polish-Jewish prose<sup>15</sup> which is particularly connected with the contact zone, because it constitutes its part as a symbolic area, on which we may observe the processes of transculturation, selection and the adaptation of the patterns interwoven and intertwined in the new cultural ties. Furthermore, it is also a space in which other places belonging to contact zone may be represented and interpreted. Therefore, on the one hand, I am going to discuss how the places in question are represented in literature; on the other hand, I am going to focus on a set of categories that writers use when describing and commenting on the differences and tensions arising here. I am also going to focus on pictures of everyday life in the *contact zone*: pictures of conflicts in the borderlands occurring during the war register a state of emergency in the contact zone, and – above all – they use external forces as an important element of its functioning.

The point of view represented in Polish-Jewish prose is one of the options of how we may perceive the interwar Polish-Jewish contact zone, which is mainly conditioned by cultural factors.<sup>16</sup> If we were to study Polish or Yiddish prose, we would have to modify both the map of the drawn zone and the contexts of its interpretation. For example, the economic and political aspects of the contact play an important role in the Polish perspective, and the points of the zone are, among others, a shop or a place where political or conspiratorial organizations would meet.

The interwar Polish-Jewish prose found in different literary circulations undertakes the task of mapping the contact zone. Panoramic pictures of contact zones are particularly frequent in popular novels, whose construction is based on the space diversity kaleidoscopic rule. Given the narrative directives of contrast and the dichotomy of the depicted world, such texts exploit the motifs of confrontation, controversy and collision. As far as the characters representing Polish and Jewish sides are concerned, there are

<sup>13</sup> See: *ibid.*, pp.194–195.

<sup>14</sup> See: “Od Redaktorów,” in: *Współczesne dyskursy konfliktu. Literatura – język – kultura*, edited by W. Bolecki, W. Soliński, M. Gorczyński, Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Wydawnictwo, 2015, p. 9. All the quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Agnieszka Grząsko, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> On the understanding of Polish-Jewish literature of the interwar period, see: E. Prokop-Janiec, *Międzywojenna literatura polsko-żydowska jako zjawisko kulturowe i artystyczne*, Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 1992, pp. 17–21.

<sup>16</sup> See: M. Czermińska, “‘Punkt widzenia’ jako kategoria antropologiczna i narracyjna w prozie niefabularnej,” in: *Opowiadanie w perspektywie badań porównawczych*, edited by Z. Mitosek, Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004.

people involved in both cooperation and rivalry between groups, experiencing not only ties but also conflicts of the social worlds. In romance plots the authors match people from such distant backgrounds as the Orthodox Jewish families and Polish landowners or ideologically different circles, such as anti-Semites, Zionists and communists. Dramatic family, social or national conflicts are perceived as being exceptionally attractive for readers as they trigger intense emotions, thus they are often foregrounded in press advertisements.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Mapping of the contact zone

The interwar Polish-Jewish prose maps, by and large, new places belonging to a modern public space shared by both Jews and Poles. There is a classroom, a university lecture hall, a café, a dance hall, a theatre, concert or cinema hall, a skating rink, a railway carriage, a hotel or a boarding house and a city street.

The classroom is one of the most important and – simultaneously – the most conflictual contact areas.<sup>18</sup> In Jakub Appenzlak's novel titled *Piętra* [Floors], the school period in the character's biography is restricted only to his memories concerning conflicts and persecution. Particularly prevalent are the scenes of quarrels and anti-Jewish verbal aggression. The character explains that the latter at first results from his low position in his class hierarchy: as "a weak and not very nimble at playing games and sport, too [...] poor to go out with his friends, sons of rich landowners and industrialists, too poor to revel, to go to the cinema or a revue performance, [...] he can't impress his friends with an elegant flat, his social-class or sartorial elegance."<sup>19</sup> He cannot help but notice that there is a connection between aggression and a nationalistic attitude, and that the insults demarcate the boundary, or – in fact – "the gap that separates him from his friends" (p.18). It turns out that conflict is the basic means of communication between Poles and Jews in *Piętra*. From the linguistic perspective, impoliteness is treated as part of linguistic competence; this kind of behaviour is acquired in a similar way to linguistic politeness, thus it is subjected to special conventions. Language users are equipped with figures of speech and a set

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<sup>17</sup> Advertisement, *5-ta Rano*, 1937, No. 88. Advertisements of popular novels emphasised the narrative meaning of conflicts. Take, for example, Józef Walder's novel *Grzech* published in the daily newspaper *5-ta Rano*. It was announced as a work in which "The author unfolded the pictures of the surrounding reality emphasizing the social conflict and a failure in life before the readers' eyes [...]. [...] A number of other conflicts meshed with the female character's major tragedy."

<sup>18</sup> See: E. Prokop-Janiec, "Klasa szkolna jako polsko-żydowska strefa kontaktu," in: eadem, *Pogranicze polsko-żydowskie. Topografie i teksty*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> J. Appenzlak, *Piętra, Piętra*, Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1933, p. 18.

of rules which should be employed in conflictive situations. Anti-Semitic insults and invectives belong to the repertoire of the Polish language, and the ways of using them constitute an important element of the process of socialization. Children may easily make use of them, for example when they argue at school. Verbal aggression has communicative and social functions.<sup>20</sup> If the aim of linguistic politeness is to maintain social harmony and agreement, then impoliteness is associated with disagreement; it gives voice to disharmony, confrontation and collision.<sup>21</sup> Both types of linguistic behaviour may also be connected with power: politeness/impoliteness reveals the positions of interlocutors. For Appenzlak the dominance and subordination system expressing the imbalance between the Polish and Jewish sides is the fundamental legitimization of impoliteness.

Another important public space is the streets of towns or cities, where accidental and short contact between anonymous strangers may take place. In the short story titled *Żydóweczko, chodź na bez* from the volume *Ludzie, którzy jeszcze żyją* by Czesław Halicz (Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa)<sup>22</sup> it is precisely a town's street that becomes a place where Christian and Jewish groups of children going to school meet. It is worth noting that the confronted national and religious differences overlap here with the difference between the sexes. "Christian boys" (p. 129) "singing, or rather screaming out loud" various phrases about "Jewesses" (p. 130) accost Jewish girls passing by. Rosenbatt quotes genuine and even familiar Polish songs,<sup>23</sup> children's poems and rhymes.<sup>24</sup> The phrases themselves – despite their satiric and parodistic features – are perceived by the female protagonist as "not very insulting" (p. 130). However, they acquire a strong negatively-loaded sense when used in public.<sup>25</sup> Even if we do not intend to brutally discriminate a given person, the

<sup>20</sup> See: J. Grębowiec, "Grzeczność z konfliktem w tle. Rekonesans pragmatyngwistyczny," in: *Zatargi, waśnie, konflikty. W perspektywie historycznej i kulturowej*, edited by K. Leńska-Bąk, Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> G. Leech, *The Pragmatics of Politeness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> On Czesława Endelman-Rosenblatt, see: Z. Kołodziejka, "Czesława Rosenblattowa's Work as Example of Women's Integrationist Literature," *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 28, Oxford 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Rosenbatt alludes in the text to a few well-known songs, but mainly to the one which begins with the following words: "Jewess, let's go to gather some lilac," known as a parodistic song. It is sometimes treated as a Jewish folk song titled "Jewish girl."

<sup>24</sup> Polish texts quoted by Rosenbatt have not lost their popularity. They may be easily found on the internet websites containing the repertoire of well-known folk bands (*Żydóweczko, chodź na bez*), on websites for parents (the phrase "Za nim biegły Żydóweczki/Gubiąc swoje patyneczki" is part of the rhyme *Jedzie, jedzie pan*, see osesek.pl: *Rymowanki i zabawianki przekazywane z pokolenia na pokolenie*) and in the anti-Semitic comments (*Żydóweczka Chajka*, see wirtualnapolonia.com, comments from 18.10.2012). There are a few versions of the rhyme *Żydóweczka Chajka*; it may be a rhyme for children (gazeta.pl, Fotoforum) and a vulgar anti-Semitic song.

<sup>25</sup> Linguists think that "the recipient's honour and the sense of being hurt" are the conditions under which we may talk about the offence. See: M. Sarnowski, *Przestrzeń komunikacji negatywnej w języku polskim i rosyjskim. Klótnia jako specyficzna sytuacja komunikacji werbalnej*, Wrocław 1994, p. 41.

aim of such a speech act is to indicate and mark the otherness. Referring to Znaniecki's analyses, such behaviour results from "the aspiration to perform the actions, whose expected results are negative for someone."<sup>26</sup> A comic quality is never a neutral means when describing other people.<sup>27</sup> The female character experiences "the insulting intention" of a song (p. 131), she takes it as a type of verbal violence and suffers its stigmatizing effects. Her identity is stigmatized and regarded as something worse, it is treated as a kind of "disability" (p.131), something shameful, a "painfully disparaging"<sup>28</sup> feature. Stigma is connected with the social valuation and hierarchy, marginalization and exclusion. Public stigmatization reveals, maintains and retains the status of the stigmatized person.

The growing importunity of adolescents encourages the character to defend herself. Thus, when one of the boys ritually greets her with a song about a "A little Jewess" invited to gather lilacs but – at the same time – being afraid of breaking the Sabbath, she decides to "accept" the invitation and forces the boy to pick flowers with her. Thereby, in a subversive way, the song's lyrics are staged. She takes the role of a Jewess only to reject it and radically change the ascribed scenario of behaviour. The transformation of traditional relations is the most important element here: the female protagonist stops being silent, she takes the initiative and imposes the mode of action. The Jewish girl "takes over" the Polish text and then "performs" it in a transformed form. In the new, arranged version we can see a new character acting against the fixed stereotype of a religious Jewish girl from a little town. Her surprising, unconventional and unpredictable behaviour destroys the Polish-Jewish traditional scheme of interaction. Such an "interception" and reversal of gender and ethnic roles schemata has further consequences, because Polish common knowledge and perception of Jews is undermined. The stereotypical understanding of otherness is questioned and dismantled. The Polish boy is concerned over the inadequacy of his knowledge, thus he will begin to verify other components of the image of the Jew.

Interestingly, Rosenblatt uses here a solution characteristic for Polish literature, introducing the anti-Semitic discourse elements as other people's speech, namely the commoners' voice or *vox populi*. The character will quote anti-Semitic notions and he will dissociate himself from them; they will function as overheard, somebody else's comments:

– Listen, but don't take offence, because I only want to ask you about something. Is it true what Stasiowa the washerwoman says that all Jewesses have mycosis?

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<sup>26</sup> F. Znaniecki, "Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych," *Kwartalnik Socjologiczny* 1930/1931, No. 2–4, pp. 28–29.

<sup>27</sup> See: K. Żygulski, *Wspólnota śmiechu. Studium socjologiczne komizmu*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985, especially the chapter titled "Wspólnota etniczna i komizm".

<sup>28</sup> E. Goffman, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości* [*Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*], translated into Polish by A. Dzierżyńska, Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2005, p. 33.

– How dare you say something like this – yelled Hanusia and showing him her short cut hair added – Look, can you see mycosis or any worms on my head... none of the girls I know has got it. That's a gross slander!

– No, Hanusia, don't be angry at me. It is not me saying that, it was Stasiowa. I'm only asking.<sup>29</sup>

The dialogue reveals the basic mechanism of the anti-Semitic discourse: it shows how patterns of perception and knowledge of the reality are suggested by that discourse; how it imposes the ways in which the world should be perceived and described. The boy knows, because other people know, he says what others say, he repeats what he hears. A scenario of a conversation provides yet another basic way of reacting to insults: the offended person attempts to correct the reality.<sup>30</sup>

The process of calling the common knowledge into question, of undermining the cultural patterns and of a revision of the social *imaginarium* begins with contact and conflict. Deconstruction of a stereotype – being part of a group tradition – is carried out through gaining individual experience. The culturally solidified image of the other, popular generalisations, or common opinions become invalidated when a concrete individual is encountered.<sup>31</sup> Once an accidental anonymous contact is replaced with a conscious interaction, the hostile attitude is superseded by the dialogue and the reproduction of the stereotype by its revision.

Rosenblatt introduces a characteristic contrast between a group behaviour and an individual behaviour, when the Polish boy is alone, he is likely to change his behaviour and beliefs. However, he does not want to reveal it in front of others and thus while being in a group he displays, at the most, a kind of reserved neutrality. He is not ready to break openly and radically with the accepted patterns of social behaviour, but he is no longer completely subordinated to them.

Yet another Polish-Jewish public space may also be the one shared by neighbours. However, it does not have to be tightly connected with the community's neighbourhood. "There were no Polish and Jewish districts in our town. Jews and Christians lived side by side, sometimes even in one house, although they did not share the bonds of friendship and rarely were there any neighbourly relations"<sup>32</sup> – says the narrator of another Rosenblatt's short story. Even though the groups have intermingled, the neighbourhood is still a rare, uncertain and impermanent social space. Ewa Domańska claims that a neighbour is one of the positive notions "defining the strategic points"<sup>33</sup> of the frontier which runs counter to the negatively-loaded notion

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<sup>29</sup> C. Halicz, *Żydóweczko...*, p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> M. Sarnowski, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Zbigniew Bokszański's research proves that using stereotypes when talking about individual experiences and contacts with people from ethnic groups is usually significantly restricted.

<sup>32</sup> C. Halicz, "Paskudne kobiety," in: idem, *Ludzie, którzy jeszcze żyją*, Warszawa: Rój, 1934, p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> E. Domańska, op. cit., p. 91.



of the other. Such radical delimitations are not clear-cut and unquestionable. The neighbour may also be regarded as someone close and a “familiar stranger,” and the neighbourhood interpenetrates with otherness.

The kind of neighbourhood connected with the spacial closeness and social distance is introduced in Rosenblatt’s *Kuczka melameda i koza zakrystiana* [Melamed’s Sukkah and Sacristan’s Goat] in which the melamed’s Jewish family and the sacristan’s Polish family live next to each other. They live peacefully although one can hardly say that they are on very familiar terms with each other:

You cannot say that these two neighbours, the melamed’s and the sacristan’s wives, were like sisters, because what could they have in common, but there was no hostility between them either. Quite the contrary, it often happened that they lent each other a washtub or a bucket, some tea, sugar or salt, as it usually happens between neighbours. Their children even played with one another on the streets, or on the pavement next to the well, because both houses shared one well.<sup>34</sup>

These restricted relations are destroyed by mutual prejudices and mistrust. It is a coincidence that gives rise to the conflict, however, in the energy that fuels it we may discern deeply rooted tensions and aversion. The story of confrontation is based on gradation: consecutive incidents signal the growing hostility and aggression whose effects turn out to be dangerous for both sides. All members of the family gradually start to take part in the arguments, “gossips, insults” (p. 234), invectives or curses. Women, men, and – finally – children act with impunity, because their “parents are happy to see [...] their cruel pranks” (p. 236). Hurling abuse at one another, children repeat what they hear at home and their aggressive behaviour imitates adults’ model of behaviour:

- Spawn of the Jew!
- And you are the spawn of a drunkard.<sup>35</sup>

In such atmosphere the trivial rivalry between the boys causes an argument which turns into a fight that has disastrous, life-threatening consequences. It is a miracle that saves the children from drowning in the well. They are saved by a mysterious wanderer who is seen by the town dwellers as an envoy from the heavens – the Angel of Reconciliation.

### 3. Conflictive communication

As it may be observed, the conflictive communication<sup>36</sup> may accompany accidental or regular contacts between Poles and Jews in many places. Conflictive register of the utterance is important on account of its illocu-

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<sup>34</sup> C. Halicz, “Kuczka melameda i koza zakrystiana,” in: C. Halicz, *Ludzie, którzy jeszcze żyją*, p. 230.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>36</sup> On conflictive communication see: M. Sarnowski, *op. cit.*

tionary aim – socially unaccepted malignancy or insulting an interlocutor.<sup>37</sup> The paradox of the conflictive inter-ethnic communication relies on the fact that the insult hurled at the other is allowed and legitimised by the group. Verbal aggression is tightly linked with expressing, supporting and defending group identity. Linguists prove that conflictive communication may have a direct or indirect nature: one can insult literally or by means of an allusion, metaphor or irony.<sup>38</sup> In ethnic conflicts indirect means are less frequent than brutal invective, insult or a rude name. This function is often served by an insulting ethnonym evoking a negatively-loaded stereotype.<sup>39</sup>

In Polish-Jewish prose we may observe that conversations held by Poles and Jews are easily transferred to the conflictive plane and they are focused on pinpointing the borders and differences between the groups - on defining identities and on their positioning. That phenomenon is most striking in love subplots.<sup>40</sup> A flirtatious conversation or a dialogue conducted by lovers form part of a broader social and cultural framework established – to a large extent – by the irremovable inter-group tensions which may either exist in a latent form or come to the fore. This mechanism seems to be highlighted by the commentary which accompanies a love affair between a Jewess with a Pole in Józef Walder's novel titled *Grzech* [A Sin]:

[Rachela] did not doubt that she was dealing with a Christian, Jan Orlicz also knew that his new friend was a Jewess. They didn't pay much attention to it then.<sup>41</sup>

The existence of differences and borders is obvious and undeniable, although their significance and effect can be temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, at any time, something that is collective, religious and national may infiltrate into something private, personal and intimate. Oscillating between these dimensions makes a praise have conflictive overtones and a compliment interweave with an unintentionally revealed prejudice:

- I live in Nalewki. I don't know if this place meets your expectations.
- Even in a garbage dump one may find a diamond.

<sup>37</sup> J. Grębowiec, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Krystyna Pisarkowa understands the notion of a national stereotype in the following way: K. Pisarkowa, "Konotacja semantyczna nazw narodowości," *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, 1976, issue 1. On the functions of ethnonyms in this role, see R. Brandstaetter's commentary "Żydki, Żydki!," *5-ta Rano* 1936, No. 164. On the insulting ethnonyms Jew and Mosiek see: J. Zimnowoda, "Wyzwisko – specyficzny rodzaj form adresatywnych (o uniwersalności negatywnych zdarzeń komunikacyjnych)," in: *Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze*, edited by A. Dąbrowska, A. Nowakowska, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2005, p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> Numerous cases of the conflictive communication may be found in the crime and sensational plots, whose characters are involved in squabbles, disputes and arguments during which insults are thrown and threats are made. See, e.g. J. Walder, "Pożoga zmysłów. Powieść emocjonująca z życia sfer towarzyskich," *5-ta Rano* 1937, No. 93.

<sup>41</sup> J. Walder, "Grzech. Powieść fascynująca z życia Warszawy," *5-ta Rano* 1937, No. 93. Such a comment is usually a kind of introduction to the romantic Polish-Jewish theme: see also C. Halicz, "Esterka ze Żgowa," in: idem, *Ludzie, którzy jeszcze żyją*, pp. 59–60.

– Am I supposed to be the diamond? [...] And my parents and other Jews are the garbage dump, right.

– I didn't say that.

– All in all, I can say you're not a friend of Jews.<sup>42</sup>

While listening to the rejoinder the man is not sure whether he should admire the woman who is so “brave and frank”, or maybe he should associate her straightforwardness with what “was said in his circle about the Jews' insolence.”<sup>43</sup>

In the dialogues of Polish-Jewish couples such collisions seem to be unavoidable; love is a step away from the ethnic confrontation. Not only do disappointment, resentment and anger towards the partner release the prejudice, but – above all – they release and stimulate the repertoire of insults and invectives functioning as the forms of address. This is how the argument of a Polish-Jewish couple comes to an end in another Walder's novel titled *Podrzutek [A Foundling]*.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from the religious and national differences, popular prose of the 1930s often deals with racial differences. The Polish-Jewish couple have to believe that “The racial difference cannot predominate in love [...]. [...] one cannot pay heed to the race or descent,”<sup>45</sup> thus we may say that racial categorization is for them as real, obvious and meaningful as those of a national and social nature. They are not able to think of themselves without any references to the group and their collective identity, defining themselves as Poles and Jews, Christians and Jews, Aryans and not-Aryans.

Conflictive communication also involves the mechanisms of banal anti-Semitism. On the basis of the category of banal nationalism, banal anti-Semitism may be defined as everyday usage of anti-Semitic figures dispersed but still present in the colloquial language, reminding of the Manichean division of the world into two spheres, namely Jewish and non-Jewish.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes this type of colloquial expressions is confronted with the ideological and political use of discourse. In Walder's novel *Grzech* the scene of students' rally is composed as a series of speeches of the radical national students' party leader supporting and justifying *numerus clausus* which allows the reader to get acquainted with a kind of popular repertoire of anti-Semitic figures. In fact, there are a number of cases in which the assimilated adopt the figures of the banal anti-Semitic discourse which

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<sup>42</sup> J. Walder, “Grzech. Powieść fascynująca z życia Warszawy,” *5-ta Rano* 1937, No. 94.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> J. Walder, “Podrzutek,” *5-ta Rano* 1935, No. 89. Similar scenes may be found in other novels in which abuse is hurled at women during the arguments: “Podrzutek,” *5-ta Rano* 1935, No. 135; J. Klinger, “Przekleństwo nocy,” *5-ta Rano* 1932, No. 327.

<sup>45</sup> J. Walder, “Podrzutek,” *5-ta Rano* 1935, No. 89.

<sup>46</sup> This is how, according to Michael Billig, the discourse of banal nationalism works: see: M. Billig, *Banalny nacjonalizm [Banal Nationalism]*, translated into Polish by M. Sekerdej, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2008. On the Manichean division in the anti-Semitic image of the world see: L. Poljakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, translated by E. Howard, London-Edinburgh 1974.

proves that these linguistic and cultural mechanisms are powerful and common.<sup>47</sup> Attempts to distance oneself from those mechanisms, made by those who have discovered their Jewish descent, prove how powerful and persistent they are.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. Pogrom cries

Conflictive communication may be a prelude to an attack and an accidental meeting on the street may end up with an outburst of physical aggression. Such scenes may be found in the novels from the 1930s, for example in Walder's *Podrzutek*, where the streets of Warsaw are presented as a place of the anti-Semitic aggression directed towards Jewish passers-by. Pogrom cries are an integral part of these scenes. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir divides pogrom cries into declarations, slogans and battle cries. Declarations may be defined as individual observations, complaints and cries of indignation, whereas slogans and battle cries have the form of a collective apostrophe that has an impact on crowds.<sup>49</sup>

The main function of cries is to define group identities. A physical assault is accompanied by incitement and approval of aggression which sets the group borders:

Suddenly there was a crowd on the street. A group of well-dressed sturdy boys holding thick cudgels in their hands ran out of the gates screaming out loud:

– “Get out of here, Jews! - Hit Jews!”

There was an old Jew crossing the street. Not suspecting anything terrible to happen and holding a small bundle under his armpit, he was going lost in thought when suddenly the boys attacked him. The enraged mob threw him on the ground bashing him from all sides. [...]

The passers-by [...] saw it, but there was no one who would even consider it appropriate to stand up for the man. Indeed, there was some young woman with a child passing the crowd [...], but she stopped only to watch it [and] incite the Jew-eaters with a smile of contentment on her face.

– “Don't take pity on him, lads, let him know he's a Jew!”<sup>50</sup>

The borderline between Poles and Jews set in the female's utterance is the borderline between those who hit and those who are hit; between the aggressors and the victims.

There is yet another episode in the novel which records the preparation for the mob action on the woman coming to the village before Easter. There was a rumour about her and a potential ritual murder:

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<sup>47</sup> J. Walder, “Kobieta bez twarzy,” *5-ta Rano* 1935, No. 278.

<sup>48</sup> The motif of the character's mixed “racial” descent, uncovering his “racial” secret and the discussions on the “pure race” are all parts of the convention of a popular Polish-Jewish novel (J. Walder, “Kobieta bez twarzy,” *5-ta Rano*, 1935, No. 278).

<sup>49</sup> J. Tokarska-Bakir, “Okrzyki pogromowe,” in: eadem, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski lat 1939–1945*, Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2012, pp. 144–145.

<sup>50</sup> J. Walder, “Podrzutek,” *5-ta Rano*, 1935, No. 216.

– [...] Jewish Easter is coming and Jews need to have Christian blood for making matzah. So that witch came here to kidnap one of our children. [...]

– “Why are you standing there – called one of the bunch – let’s go to the tavern! We’ll show her some blood for matzah!”<sup>51</sup>

The episode reconstructs the general mechanism of how “legends of blood”<sup>52</sup> work: peasants move quickly from suspicion to certainty and they are ready to swear that they caught the Jewess red-handed – just the moment she was kidnapping and killing a Christian child.

Conflictive communication as a factor which may lead to aggression, assault and – last but not least – the pogrom is presented in the works depicting Polish-Jewish relations in the borderlands during the wartime and revolution. In Emil Tenenbaum’s novel titled *Tła* [Backgrounds], a multi-ethnic community lives peacefully in the Austrian-Russian borderlands in times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when people “every day assure [one another] – we are the others, we respect this otherness.”<sup>53</sup> This order based on the coexistence of the differences is destroyed by the outbreak of the war and the post-war chaos, when – let me quote – “Even pronouns are fighting. ‘I’ and ‘you’, ‘mine’ and ‘yours’. They grow into ‘we’ and ‘you’, ‘ours’ and ‘yours’. They split and differentiate into I and You, I and They, I and All.”<sup>54</sup> In short, when differentiation manifests its dark energy of negation, it will strengthen the divisions between people and cause tensions and conflicts.<sup>55</sup>

Political instability and a changeable line-up in the ethnic triangle Jews-Ukrainians-Poles stand behind the pogrom that is to break out in the post-war and post-revolutionary chaos. Interestingly, it is the argument of two women, one of many short quarrels at the town’s market that gives rise to the bloody events. A direct impulse to the slaughter is a Ukrainian woman’s cry “*Żydy, szczo wy robite zi mnoju,*” perceived as an “anguished female’s” (p. 89) voice, which becomes a pogrom cry. Understood as a cry for help and a sign that “Jews beat ours” (p. 91), it makes Ukrainian soldiers gather together, and “when there is heat emanating from the crowd, there is going to be fire” (p. 91). If ethnic relations are politicized, a petty private feud and a conflictive communication connected with it immediately turn into a serious group conflict and a bloody slaughter.

## 5. Conclusions

In the analysed here literary representations, the Polish-Jewish contact zone may at any time turn into a conflict zone. All places have conflictive

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<sup>51</sup> J. Walder, “Podrzutek,” *5-ta Rano*, 1935, No. 150.

<sup>52</sup> J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi: antropologia przęsądu*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2008.

<sup>53</sup> E. Tenenbaum, *Tła*, Lviv, 1935, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> E. Tenenbaum, *Tła*, Lviv, 1935, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> B. Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009, p. 109.

potential, and the conflict itself seems to be one of the most basic forms of experience present in everyday local interactions. Even a brief, accidental contact, such as a meeting on the street, may lead to a conflict, and – especially – to verbal violence. Such conflicts arise from differences – both those experienced, visible, observable and those conceivable, ingrained in the stereotypes and prejudices. Ethnic, religious and racial differences delineate the main lines of division.

In linguistic research on the vocabulary employed in Polish with reference to various types of conflict, we may distinguish two semantic polar opposites of this semantic field: a reference to destruction of the unity, division and denial of the community<sup>56</sup> and to opposition, otherness and difference.<sup>57</sup> Exposing irremovable oppositions and contradictions, the literary depictions of Polish-Jewish conflicts seem to be closer to the latter pole.

Translated by Agnieszka Grząsko

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<sup>56</sup> M. Danielewiczowa, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> M. Sarnowski, op. cit., 1994, p. 41.

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