

WHEN A HISTORIAN MEETS VULNERABILITY
METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS
OF RESEARCH ON SENSITIVE TOPICS AND WITH PEOPLE
AFFECTED BY DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

JAKUB GAŁĘZIOWSKI

Several years of research¹ on the fate of Polish children born of war (CBOW)² have inspired me to attempt a thoughtful assessment of the vulnerability of both this study group and the researcher. Such a perspective is far from being obvious, because usually if a vulnerability is mentioned, it is supposed to only concern research participants. It is no different in the case of historical research conducted

JAKUB GAŁĘZIOWSKI – researcher, University of Warsaw, Institute of Art History, Faculty of Culture and Arts. E-mail: jakub.galeziowski@gmail.com. ORCID 0000-0003-1595-4598.

¹ The research has been conducted within the framework of my doctoral project, carried out simultaneously at the University of Augsburg and the University of Warsaw under a *co-tutelle* agreement as a part of the International Training Network (ITN) funded by the European Commission (EC) within the Horizon 2020 programme. More information about the *Children Born of War – Past, Present, and Future* (CHIBOW) project can be found on www.chibow.org. These reflections/findings – described here for the first time – were presented at the ESSHC Conference in Belfast (2018); they are also included in my dissertation. I use two abbreviations in the text: one for the name of the group of children under investigation (CBOW), the other being the official acronym of the project (CHIBOW).

² CBOW are considered to be individuals whose one parent, usually, the mother, was a member of the invaded (occupied) local community and one, usually, the father was one of the invaders, occupiers, simply enemies. Fathers could be also members of allies' forces or peacekeeping troops. For more information about this transnational phenomenon see: Lee 2017; Mochmann 2017. For the purpose of my research carried out in Poland, I have adopted a slightly broader definition of the group, encompassing both children who were born in situations marked by war, occupation, forced labor and captivity, when the parents belonged to two enemy/ally sides, and children who, as a result of being CBOW, were never born. Previously only Maren Röger analyzed fates of children fathered by German occupiers in Poland and born to Polish mothers. See: Röger 2011, 2017; Röger and Seegers 2016.

by historians³. There exists a common belief that historical research focuses on past events, most often distant, and with the common perception of historians as objective scholars who, in an emotionless way, acquire archival material and then subject it to analysis in order to create a historical narrative. In Poland, this approach also stems from the specific attitude of the historians' ethical stance. Ethical issues in historical research most often come to the fore in the context of politically and ideologically controversial topics, which stirs up much debate and boils down to the enforcing of the perspective of one of the parties in the dispute (Gałęziowski and Urbanek 2017, 13)⁴. Although in 2012, Marta Kurkowska-Budzan wrote about the need for an "in-depth reflection" on the ethics of a historian's activities (Kurkowska-Budzan 2012, 314),⁵ Polish scholars are yet to develop their own ethical toolbox following the example of the codes of ethics applied in the western countries⁶. There are no binding criteria for evaluating historical research. The lack of screening procedures for scholarly activities, or procedures that check their compliance with ethical standards

³ Qualitative research in social sciences and humanities have for years been accompanied by reflection on emotions involved in the research process, but its significance was relatively small. The topic was addressed in the journal *Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne* focusing on the theory of history and historiography, providing many bibliographical references on this issue (Rossi and Aarnio 2012). For most historians, this meta-dimension of historical research does not seem to be of much interest. In this article, I discuss possible reasons for such an attitude.

⁴ In the text, we mostly addressed the debate which took place at the Institute of History at the University of Warsaw in 2016 as part of the Modern History Scholars' Forum. The debate was recorded, and it is accessible online. Website of *Polish Historians Association* (Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, PTH). Accessed [28.07.2020]. <http://pth.net.pl/aktualnosci/200>.

⁵ Her historical research practice includes self-reflection, as she indicated in her critical reflexivity-informed work on Jedwabne, where she assumed the perspective of an "anthropologizing historian" originating from the community under study. See also: Kurkowska-Budzan 2008.

⁶ A Committee on Historian's Code of Ethics was set up in the autumn of 2019 r. by the PTH, with the mission to design such document, which as Krzysztof Zamorski stated, could "determine what is a mark of professionalism in dealing with the past". "Prawda musi być prawdą, obiektywną i rzetelną". Website of *TOK FM*. Accessed [28.07.2020]. <https://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,103085,25249064,prawda-musi-byc-prawda-obiektywna-i-rzetelna-powstaje-kodeks.html>. Such perspective caused the document to be too general, and focused on rules and procedures in "professionalized" historical research, while the "human" aspect, i.e. issues related to sensitive, personal information in sources, both written and oral, have been sidelined. The PTH website informs that the Code has been already approved by the General Board on March 2021, and will be ratified by Association's General Assembly in September 2021. Website of *PTH*. Accessed [30.06.2021]. <http://pth.net.pl/aktualnosci/263>. The document is also available on-line. Website of *PTH*. Accessed [30.06.2021]. http://pth.net.pl/uploads/Kodeks_etyki.pdf

(ethical process), is partly compensated by archival rules and regulations, which are in place to protect, among other things, the reputation of people who might still be alive but were participants in the events under study. This mechanism only applies to written sources collected in the archives.

Reflection on the ethical aspects of research has appeared among Polish oral historians, who, inspired by the experience of oral history researchers and practitioners from other countries, have created a list of best practices for their field⁷. Generally, oral historians have been the avant-garde in terms of reflection on ethical practices in the social sciences and humanities⁸. Along with the increasing popularity of oral history, mainly since the late 1970s, questions also emerged about working with people whose memories were being recorded, analyzed, archived, and often published, and how to deal with their accounts. However, it has taken some time for the interviewers to take center stage. At first, oral historians assigned most value to what their interview partner wished to communicate; otherwise, to his or her story or testimony. Only with the so-called narrative turn and the work of oral historians in Italy (Passerini 1979; 1987; 1988a; 1988b; 1996; Portelli 1979; 1981; 1991; 1997; 2003; 2018), in the USA (Frisch 1990; Grele 1975) or Australia (Thomson 2011a, 2011b), has there come to be a shift in the oral history paradigm⁹. Thanks to these and other scholars representing, e.g., the feminist movement, the role of dialogue in oral

⁷ “Ethical Guidelines”. Website of *Polish Oral History Association* (Polskie Towarzystwo Historii Mówionej, PTHM). Accessed [30.06.2021]. <http://pthm.pl/en/ethics/>. Before the “Ethical Guidelines” were approved at the meeting of PTHM in Lublin in 2018, there were two-panel discussions that took place in 2016 and 2018 at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw and one workshop in the Depot History Centre in Wrocław (in 2017) focusing on trauma-affected research participants. Recommendations for interviewers during the Covid-19 pandemic following an online debate were also prepared in Spring 2020. Covid-19 guidelines <http://pthm.pl/en/covid-19-and-oral-history/>. Website of *Polish Oral History Association* (Polskie Towarzystwo Historii Mówionej, PTHM). Accessed [30.06.2021].

⁸ This is manifest not only in theoretical texts but also in codified rules of ethical practices. See: “Principles and Best Practices for Oral History”. Website of *Oral History Association*. Accessed [28.07.2020]. <https://www.oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/>; “Is Your Oral History Legal and Ethical?” Website of *Oral History Society*. Accessed [28.07.2020]. <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/>.

⁹ It is important to note that in oral history this issue becomes especially important, as opposed to social sciences, where the researcher’s role has been perceived rather as “technical” and seen as irrelevant for the research process and the analysis of the research material. Concerning autobiographic narrative interview see: Gałęziowski 2019, 82–83. Biographical researchers, however, mainly due to changes in common academic practice and “professionalization” of ethics in science, noticed the need to deepen reflection on ethical aspects of their research activities, and partly they are inspired by oral history (see: Kaźmierska 2014; 2018; 2020).

history and the importance of the relationship between the narrator and the researcher, as well as mutual influences between interview partners, have been appreciated (Yow 1997; Gluck and Patai 1991; Armitage, Hart, and Weathermon 2001; K'Meyer and Crothers 2007). It is noteworthy that the most significant attention of oral historians was then aroused by ordinary people whom most "ordinary" historians had simply ignored before ("history from below") or by groups previously marginalized, discriminated, or entirely invisible ("hidden populations"). In line with the *Belmont Report* (The National Commission... 1979), many of them were qualified as vulnerable populations requiring special protection as research subjects. CBOW, who are exposed to stigmatization and/or discrimination not only because of their origin but also due to a large number of other simultaneous factors, have also been classified (by researchers and social activists) into the category of vulnerable populations. For this reason, the European Commission not only required that all Ph.D. students within the CHIBOW network were obliged to obtain clearance from the ethics committees at the institution at which they were affiliated – this was mandatory when working "with human beings, regardless of nature or topic [of research]," including for "interviews" and "secondary use of information provided for other purposes"¹⁰ – but also ordered them to undergo training relevant to their work at hand.

Before going further, however, I would like to take a closer look at the meaning of the word "vulnerable" itself, which has its origins in Latin (*vulnerabilis*) and has its equivalents in other languages (e.g., Romance languages, English, and German). In this article, I refer to its English dictionary definitions and then go beyond these definitions. The multiple-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*, in its last edition (1991), tells us that "vulnerable" means both "having the power to wound" and "that may be wounded" in terms of physical injury and injury of a nonphysical nature. Examples given in the case of the latter include raillery, criticism, calumny, etc. (Simpson and Weiner 1991, 786). The word "vulnerable" is also used in military terminology, which falls outside the scope of my research. The latest, compact version of the dictionary includes an abbreviated version of the definition: "The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally" (Stevenson 2007, 2375). The *Cambridge Dictionary* adds, "emotionally, or mentally hurt, influenced, or attacked" (McIntosh 2013, 1756). Lisa A. Davenport and Joanne M. Hall, looking for English synonyms for the word "vulnera-

¹⁰ Horizon 2020 Programme Guidance: "How to complete your ethics self-assessment", European Commission Directorate-General for Research & Innovation. Website of *European Commission*. Access [28, 07, 2020] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf.

ble,” noted that they were all pejorative. According to the authors, “this negative connotation often linked to vulnerability places a stigma of shame and disgrace on those persons who are vulnerable” (Davenport and Hall 2011, 181)¹¹.

Worthy of note, however, is the fact that the English word “vulnerable” also appears in very different contexts, in the broadly defined culture, as well as in everyday life as part of human relations. Such a broad view on the concept in question sheds even more light on the wealth of its meanings and, at the same time, makes it possible to refer it to oneself. Although the negative connotation of the term “vulnerable,” associated with weakness (who would like to be perceived as weak?), seems common, it is, nevertheless, worth finding in this trait aspects that could be of value in our lives. I suggest, therefore, for us to look attentively at the dictionary-based characteristic of vulnerability as being exposed to the possibility of being harmed, especially mentally or emotionally as well as its more colloquial use, especially in everyday language, where vulnerability is the closest equivalent of sensitivity. The first approach would apply to more ourselves, to our fragile condition as human beings; the second would be focused on “the Other” in full openness to his or her otherness. Davenport and Hall, tracing the origin of vulnerability to the Latin “*vulnus*,” i.e., “a wound,” pointed to an opportunity that the vulnerability can offer by intrinsically linking with “opening,” and thus giving it a positive meaning (Davenport and Hall 2011, 181)¹².

English-Polish dictionaries only repeat the above descriptive meanings of the word “vulnerable,” which serves as the basis for categorizing vulnerable groups (Linde-Usiekiewicz and Beręsewicz 2002, 1319). The word itself, however, seems to be untranslatable into Polish. It isn’t easy to find an equivalent term that expresses all the dimensions of the meaning that the original term activates. However, one can find such attempts, for example, by its polonisation¹³.

¹¹ The authors attempted to define vulnerability by referencing its synonyms: susceptible, weak, insecure, defenseless, open, threatened and compromising.

¹² Judith Butler in her reflections on vulnerability pointed out the ambivalence of the notion (Butler 2016, quoted from: Świerkosz 2018, 73–76).

¹³ On the one hand, and this is the most common solution, authors use the descriptive manner (e.g. *podatność na zranienie*), leaving the original version of the word in brackets or a footnote. E.g. translators of the “Declaration of Helsinki” discussed this problem, quoting the original term in an explanatory footnote on page 3. “Declaration of Helsinki”. Website of *Naczelna Izba Lekarska (NIL)*. Accessed [28.07.2020]. https://nil.org.pl/uploaded_images/1575631646_deklaracja-helsinki-wma.pdf. On the second hand, but rather occasionally, they use neologisms: *wulnerabilność* and *wulnerabilny* (usually in Academia in various fields, but most often in the literary field) (see: Tomczok 2017; Michalak 2018). It can be met also in religious discourse: Łangowski 2016. Organizers of the international conference on vulnerabilities held in Silesian Museum (Katowice) entitled in Polish “Wul-

Perhaps, poetry can come to the rescue. In the poems of Czesław Miłosz, the word *ranliwy* may refer to the human body (Miłosz 1997, 2000)¹⁴, but it is equally possible to imagine that the expression describes a state of mind and/or psyche¹⁵. Jan Miodek, a Polish linguist, explained in his essay that the adjective *ranliwy*, formed by the suffix *-liwy* from the verb base *ranić*, manifests, like other words of this kind, a “disposition to.” He also noted that, although difficult to find this word in dictionaries today, it appeared in the 19th-century *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, published in Vilnius (the birthplace of Miłosz) and edited by Maurycy Orgelbrand (Miodek 2000, 50). Possibly, therefore, the words *ranliwy/ranliwość* could function in Polish as a literal translation of the words “vulnerable”/ “vulnerability,” and with time, also be adopted in everyday communication. The question remains, however, if this Polish notion will fit each situation in which the English word could be used (especially in the “everyday usage” mentioned above). This can be verified only through its social acceptance and common practice.

As stated at the beginning, the vulnerability in the context of academic research is most often mentioned only when it involves vulnerable individuals or communities as research subjects. In his cross-disciplinary article on the vulnerability of researchers, Amos Laar noted that this was due to the widely held conviction that “only research participants can be vulnerable” within the power relations between the researchers and research participants (Laar 2014, 742). According to the scholars he quoted (who expressed a common belief), power lies with the researcher, and research “subjects” are always somehow dependent and “hence need to be protected throughout the research process” (Laar 2014, 738)¹⁶. However, neither the *Belmont Report* nor any other legal

nerabilność”. “Wulnerabilność. Międzynarodowa Konferencja Naukowa”. Website of *Silesian Museum*. Accessed [2.03.2021]. <https://muzeumslaskie.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wulnerabilnosc-miedzynarodowa-konferencja-naukowa/>.

¹⁴ It appeared in the poem *Argument* in poetry book: *Piesek przydrożny* (1997), and in the poem *Ogrodnik* (The Gardner) in poetry book: *To* (2000).

¹⁵ I would like to thank my wife Maria Gałęziowska for indicating this example from Miłosz’s poetry. Then I found references to this neologism in Renata Blicharz’ blog, where she noted that the word “*ranliwy*” may refer also to “a mind, soul and psyche”. “Piękne słowo”. Website of Renata Blicharz. Accessed [2.03.2021]. <https://reniabllicharz.wordpress.com/tag/jan-miodek/?fbclid=IwAR08gb5XCXY6p87-3Hnck1vVr4JOYjY-6usZD2t2u7-CCU-GMH0TpiIAQWI>. These notions (*ranliwość/ ranliwy*) is used also by other poets (Przyboś 1971, 594; Międzyrzecki 2011, 102) and very rarely by academics (Świerkosz 2018; Grzywacz 2019).

¹⁶ Such “power-relations” are, however, not always the case. Kurkowska-Budzan described an inversed situation (Kurkowska-Budzan 2008, 21–22). A gripping description of “power struggle” in the interview situation was provided by K’Meyer and Crothers 2007.

texts define vulnerability but merely list the groups that are affected by this “quality.”¹⁷ Such an approach, although universally held as valid in Academia, and so far unchallenged, has been critiqued over the decades by many of those who perceived it as a mechanism for stereotyping and stigmatizing individual groups by applying fixed labels to them (Levine *et al.* 2004; Fineman 2008)¹⁸. According to this view, this type of categorization ultimately did more harm than good to affected groups and individuals, but there was no alternative except to reject it altogether.

Calling this generally applicable approach “a metaphor of labels,” Florencia Luna, a bioethicist from Argentina, pointed out that it is the most straightforward approach and one that does not solve the complicated problem of discrimination or helplessness. She came up with a constructive suggestion. In her view, different vulnerabilities, relational as they are, depending on a given individual’s situation and broader context. They can overlap, which is why Luna proposes a more nuanced concept based on “layers of vulnerability” and constituting a positive response to the “labeling approach.” However, “layers of vulnerability” can not only intersect but can also be removed one by one. This approach is also less strict and provides for more flexibility in applying it to different groups whose circumstances might vary (Luna 2009, 128–130)¹⁹.

Based on my research findings, I see this concept as relevant concerning my interview partners and other Polish children born of war that I learned about from written sources. I believe that Luna’s suggestion can be adapted to describe complex phenomena, such as CBOW, in all their multidimensionality and under different contexts. The subtle differentiation of cases prevents the temptation of making a value-judgment because of a given factor (e.g., the fact of being the child of an enemy soldier) which may indeed be a problem in one situation but may be irrelevant in another. At the same time, if the circumstances of a person’s life change, it may turn out that a given layer of vulnerability is also lost. Thus,

¹⁷ As Margaret M. Lange, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds wrote, “vulnerability has been a core concept in research ethics dating back to the first formal research ethics codes”. They referred to “The Nuremberg Code” from 1947, which “has an implicit assumption that all research participants are vulnerable, rooted in the vulnerability of patients to their physicians” (Lange, Rogers, and Dodds 2013, 334).

¹⁸ A practical aspect of applying fixed labels is pointed out by Lourdes Peroni and Alexandra Timmer in their detailed analysis of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (Peroni and Timmer 2013). We should bear them in mind when referring to various groups as vulnerable. In Polish it can be translated as *grupy zmarginalizowane czy grupy podatne na wykluczenie* (Świerkosz 2918, 73).

¹⁹ This concept has been subject to critique, see e.g. Lange, Rogers, and Dodds (2013); Bracken-Roche *et al.* (2017).

the concept presented by Luna does not involve the classification of someone as vulnerable but noticing what in a given situation makes people vulnerable. This approach is contrary to the arbitrary belief that – if I may refer to the example from my research field – if someone is a child born of war, his or her “membership” in the group makes them vulnerable. However, the fact of being a CBOW is not always the cause of someone’s vulnerability, as it may be caused by various factors, e.g., a missing father, some dysfunction affecting their mother or community, and many other issues²⁰. Sabine Lee is right when she writes that the difficulties encountered by CBOW in their life may also be affecting other children whose life situation is different (Lee 2017, 68). Ingvill C. Mochmann also mentioned such a possibility, postulating a series of comparative studies to verify this hypothesis (Mochmann 2017, 340). However, the fact is that for the CBOW, negative factors and circumstances sometimes coincide, making their childhood particularly difficult (Lee 2017, 68).

Research on Polish CBOW has led me to further reflect on the notion of vulnerability. The vulnerability has become an essential aspect of my study on the problem in question, the research process, and me as someone involved in this research process coping with my feelings and emotions. During this particular study, I found myself vulnerable as a researcher (but also simply as a human – a man, a husband, and a father) who is hardly prepared to deal neither with one’s difficult memories and traumas nor with the extreme and the drastic content of some archival documents (like for instance the testimonies of sexual violence). But also vulnerable in the way of being exposed to the “unexpected”

²⁰ Some of my interviewees felt discriminated against in their childhood not because of being a CBOW (they were not aware of this category), but because, e.g. they came from the areas incorporated by the Nazis into the Third Reich, or because their mothers belonged to national minorities (i.e. they were Silesian, Kashubian, Warmian or Mazurian) and as such, they had signed the *Deutsche Volksliste*. In this context, the example of a man born as a result of a rape by a Soviet soldier on a woman from Gdańsk is significant. In the interview, he mentioned that his friends born in the same circumstances were following the war subject to discrimination by Polish newcomers to the city not because they were “Soviet rape” offspring (enemy or illegitimate children), but because they were identified as Germans, who were the majority in pre-war Gdansk and during the occupation. Discrimination manifested in the use of pejorative terms such as “Frycek” or “Szwabek”. In most cases, they were “betrayed” by their appearance: light complexion and blond or red hair. My interview partner avoided this kind of humiliation due to his unusual appearance, because – as he said – he did not fit the image of a typical German. He was called “Black” or “Gypsy” by his friends, but these terms were not, in his opinion, offensive. They only indicated a darker skin colour and black hair, which he had to inherit from his biological father, probably of Georgian origin. At the same time, he emphasized that otherness was sometimes an asset, e.g. in his relations with women, as they were attracted to him. Interview with FK conducted in Gdynia on October 9, 2017. The recording held by the author.

(through empathy to be open to being wounded) because a meeting with “the Other” is always, to some extent, unpredictable. This has been the first project in which I have not only experienced so many strong emotions, but I have also acknowledged them, and I have observed them with fascination, wondering how they might influence me and my research, my interviewees as well as other individuals, for example, the members of my family or even people I share my project findings with. Therefore, apart from looking for a valid conceptualization of CBOW as a vulnerable group, I was also interested in relating this concept to the researcher. I had a good reason for that, as scholars such as Gail E. Henderson, Arlene M. Davis, and Nancy M. P. King had already noted that vulnerability is, by definition, relational, “and that one is always vulnerable to something, or someone’s influence” (Henderson, Davis, and King 2004, quoted from Laar 2014, 739). The primary relationship in this relationality model is between the researcher and the research participant. Such a model requires the examination of their mutual influences. Amos Laar, who took up this topic, did not, however, study it in much depth, focusing on indicating the potential situations where the problem has been diagnosed (also affecting other subjects), noting that it may concern representatives of almost every academic field²¹. These vulnerabilities are covered in the following contexts: international collaborative research relationships, government-sanctioned research, research assistants, study coordinators, and student researchers (Laar, 2014, 740–742). At the same time, he noted that the concept of the “vulnerability of researcher” requires further reflection and elaboration²². This, indeed, is my goal in this text, where I wish to address the work of a historian working both with people (oral history) and with archival sources, which are mostly written.

That is why understandings of the notion of vulnerability mentioned above provide for a predisposition to being vulnerable, which, however, is not a sign of weakness but rather the strength of people who are empathic and dare to protect themselves by seeing the possibility of being wounded and taking the proper steps to minimize these wounds. Both approaches, in my opinion, stem

²¹ These covered vulnerabilities in the following contexts: international collaborative research relationships, government-sanctioned research, research assistants, study coordinators and student researchers (Laar 2014, 740–742).

²² So far this phenomenon has been understudied, usually only addressed in medical and social sciences (especially related to social care), e.g. focusing on nurses by Davenport and Hall 2011. The issue of their own vulnerability was also raised by scholars – activists involved in sensitive research, such as that on violence against women (Pio and Singh 2016). In both cases, as well as in Laar’s paper, silencing of this aspect of research is being emphasized. Davenport and Hall (2011, 180) defined it as “professional vulnerability”. Thus, if we see that even scholars and activists in these fields fall prey to an “elephant in the room” approach, we can only imagine the pressure on historians.

merely from the fact that we are human beings. Yet, we are afraid of risking being vulnerable and being later sorry for making ourselves “exposed.” Cliff Mayotte, Education Program Director of the “Voice of Witness,” an American organization advancing human rights employing oral history, wrote about this disposition in his blog entry (Mayotte 2015). This can be an invitation to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, and also despite criticism, soon it will turn out that – as Levine *et al.* warn – we all carry this trait, and using the term will be groundless (Levine *et al.* 2004, 47). In this context, Luna’s concept of “layers of vulnerability” goes beyond these concerns (Luna 2009, 128). I presume, without overinterpreting her idea, everyone would find a place in it, only and precisely because we are human because we have feelings and emotions, it is easy to hurt us, no matter how resilient we think we are.

How does this concept fit in with my research? At first, I would like to refer to oral history and interviews, without which it would be difficult to understand the specificity of the Polish CBOW. These accounts harmonize with written sources, which provide essential background for them and help explain many phenomena on an institutional or social level. I have conducted sixteen interviews, and each of these encounters was a challenge for me, not only in terms of the conversations and their contents as such but, above all, everything that was “off the record.”²³ Each of the sixteen meetings had its special dynamics and was unique. Obviously, I did not establish an identical relationship with all of the research participants. Still, each of them left a mark on me, and in each of them, I saw some fragility, a certain kind of vulnerability, and expectation not to be hurt again (Gałęziowski 2019, 94).

To illustrate it, I would like to mention four different examples from the field. One of my narrators lived in a completely ruined flat without running water, with a broken toilet cistern, with objects strewn everywhere, towers of plates, books, leftovers, and she sat at her desk with her laptop and tried to solve the puzzle of why her mother left her in 1946 and who her biological father, a Wehrmacht soldier, was. Another of my interviewees was obsessed with being eavesdropped on and watched. Before the interview, she invited me to her bathroom to inform me that the recording will take place in the kitchen with the radio on and the blinds pulled down. She believed that all the troubles in her life stem from the fact that she was the daughter of a German soldier with whom her mother had an affair. The third one, born as a result of rape by a Red Army soldier, was unable to use the word “rape”; his story was completely inconsis-

²³ Using this expression, I refer to the publication devoted to the inside story of the work of oral historians by Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013.

ent. Then I learned from his daughter that he had a drinking problem and that she did not even know whether he would be sober during our meeting. She wanted him to open up and finally say “something,” believing that it will be possible with “a stranger.” Yet the last of them, who was also an alcoholic, did not agree to talk to me in the end, but his wife came to the appointment instead of him and told me about her life with a man who had wronged her many times and whom she could not understand. Yet, she believed deeply that a lot could be explained if she found information about her husband’s biological father, a German soldier. His father had passed through with the army through his hometown in 1944. Therefore, she wanted to figure out this secret at all costs. These are only some of the images from encounters, which will remain with me forever and haunt me because they have required me to decide what I will do with these stories as a historian and a human being.

Therefore, the solution lies beyond the power-relations paradigm in the relationship between the researcher and researched person as they must be put on the same footing. Sharing authority is one of the main qualities (and goals) of oral history. It is based on the promise that comes from one’s expectations as a response to the expectations of the other person. Out of such a meeting of expectations, a dialogue is born, which on the one hand is a tie (a relationship) and a life story on the other²⁴. Here the dialogue assumes equality (or maybe more adequately striving for equality of both sides) despite all differences that are between them, which manifests itself in “shared authority” and collaboration (Frisch 1990). Oral history is the “art of a dialogue,” says Alessandro Portelli, and he calls an interview an “experiment in equality” (Portelli 1991, 19–44). He wrote predominantly about the relational character of oral history, placing the encounter with another person in the center of this approach (Portelli 2018, 239)²⁵. Only then can we face each other as equals, in dialogue and with an open appreciation of our vulnerabilities. It is necessary to be aware, however, that in some cases, it is the responsibility of the researcher to limit the interaction and sometimes even stop the research when it does more harm than good²⁶.

²⁴ About the role of mutual expectations and oral historian’s promise to the narrator see: Gałęziowski (2019, 91–94).

²⁵ In Polish see texts of Marta Kurkowska-Budzan who wrote extensively about a dialogical character of oral history (Kurkowska-Budzan 2009; 2011).

²⁶ The only such (recorded) case known to me relates to the already mentioned research in Jedwabne. Kurkowska-Budzan decided to publish her results exclusively in English, reducing the content of interviews to a bare minimum. She also decided not to write a book based on the collected interviews, justifying her decision by stating the impossibility of “keeping the distance” from the “object/subject of this research” and “violent emotions” expressed in the interviews, as well as her responsibility as a trusted “native”. Here, it is

Positioning within a philosophical framework could help and support such choices. Thus, I grant the convictions of some social scientists and psychologists referring to the philosophy of critical realism, that special attention should be given when people facing traumatic experiences and therefore being particularly vulnerable to wounds are involved in the research²⁷. Looking at critical realism from an oral historian's angle allows me to see many analogies and show how oral history can benefit from this philosophical view. Using "practical wisdom" (Gr. *phronesis*), the critical realists opt for a research approach in which the research participants take center-stage, whose account of their experience should be taken "with a mixture of credulousness and skepticism" (Patel and Pilgrim 2018, 178). According to clinical psychologists Nimisha Patel and David Pilgrim, such a practice, based on deep reflection, also involves collaboration with the researcher in interpreting his or her experiences, leading to a "shared understanding." In the concept presented in this way, I see a similarity (bearing in mind, of course, the context of work done by the authors quoted above) to the approach proposed by oral history understood as a dialogue between an interviewer and an interviewee, underpinned by the concept of "shared authority." In other words, both approaches assume the wellbeing of the research participant and the preservation of his or her own personal integrity to be a key, and the research goals can never "justify" the means leading to their attainment. In practice, this translates into avoiding "diagnoses" in favor of "psychological formulations," as postulated by Patel and Pilgrim in their work with asylum seekers who have been victims of torture²⁸, or into avoidance of value-judgments while analyzing the narratives of people who have had challenging experiences.

In the project focusing on the Polish CBOW, it was necessary to adopt an analytical stance that was empirically grounded, being a direct result of my encounters with narrators and confrontation with their mental dispositions and expectations both towards the research and towards me as a researcher. This

noteworthy that the historian considered her decision and attitude as a "research failure", her only comfort being that, at least, she "did not cross the ethical line in the research, and the experience itself was [...] [for her] a valuable, practical lesson for the future" (Kurkowska-Budzan 2008, 25).

²⁷ Roy Bhaskar is considered to be the creator and main theoretician of critical realism. He attempted to reformulate social sciences theory to overcome the opposition between the positivist and anti-positivist way of thinking about humanities and social sciences. His successors include Margaret Archer, Andrew Collier and Andrew Sayer, among others (Archer *et al.* 1998). Cf a critical review in Polish: Soin, 2013.

²⁸ This practice consists of formulating all important facts that influenced the state of mind and general life situation of the patient, as opposed to a diagnosis, it is based on a detailed case study (Patel and Pilgrim 2018, 181).

approach seems to be an acceptable form of implementing the oral history mission, giving voice to ordinary people, especially those who have so far been overlooked in the master narratives of history (“voiceless”). The practice involves the sharing of power, which in my case was the power wielded by the historian, who decides to include the interpretations of his interviewee partners in the narratives he creates. At the same time, however, this technique often forms the basis for the refusal of oral history as an academic discipline by researchers confined to their exclusive domains of expertise. I believe it to be yet another aspect that oral historians share with critical realists. Both come up against the critique charging them with excessive empowerment of their “research subject” (even though in research involving human beings, this is entirely understandable), making them unable to accomplish critical case studies. However, if individual wellbeing is at the heart of our preoccupations, as well as a researcher’s role and conditioning (instead of accusations of subjectivity and bias), testifies to the conviction shared by representatives of both of these fields that researchers is obligate to keep ethical code of conduct (Domańska 2012, 176).

In his blog post, Cliff Mayotte refers to words by Alessandro Portelli, who believes that a good interview is one in which “mutual sighting” between the interviewer and the narrator takes place²⁹. Mayotte goes on to write that “to see or be seen, one must be willing to be vulnerable, both as a narrator and interviewer” (Mayotte 2015). Such willingness requires us to enter into someone’s space, both literally and metaphorically, because it often happens by becoming a guest at the home of the narrators, who decide to let us into their domain, thus showing us how they live. But this is also a willingness to listen to the narrators’ story without any assumptions and preconceptions, letting the narrators tell their biography and provide their own interpretations of their life and place in history. Mayotte writes: “It’s challenging to be an audience for someone else’s story – staying open, desirous of learning, actively listening, and suspending judgment regardless of the story’s content,” but concludes that “the benefits of experiencing what I can only describe as ‘human moments’ are pretty extraordinary” (Mayotte 2015). That is how empathy for “the Other” is expressed, an attitude that all scholars dealing with both human past and present should – in my view – share. It is a very optimistic approach, one we could only wish for ourselves as oral historians. However, it seems that encounters with the inter-

²⁹ Portelli in one of his last texts reflects on this particular meaning of the word *inter/view* pointing out that “an inter/view is an exchange of gazes, persons both seeing and listening to each other” (Portelli 2018, 239). He also notes there, that *inter/view* “also induces the interviewer to look not only at the interviewee but also inside him- or herself” (Portelli 2018, 242).

viewees do not always bring “connection, astonishment, and joy” (Mayotte 2015), as the author I have quoted would like. Sometimes the pain can be so intense that nothing can soothe it. The interview itself changes nothing in the narrator’s life situation and may also harm the narrator’s wellbeing. Do we always experience positive emotions, leaving our interview partner after the interview? Everything we can see and hear permeates our thoughts and determines our feelings and relationships with those around us. It also happens that “the experience of being ‘moved’ by another’s ‘pain’ in response to another’s vulnerability to some degree reveals one’s potential for vulnerability” (Davenport and Hall 2011, 184) – an experience that we need to include in our reflection on our professional practice.

Does this apply only to oral historians? There are no doubts, reading traditional historical sources – with the benefit of an inventory – recordings of tragic events, descriptions of brutal, violent behaviors, or traumatic experiences also impact us. How much extreme content can we bear? What is the limit of our mental strength? What are the consequences for our psyche, our relationships, finally, our subsequent interpretation of these texts? I can state that as research progressed, I noticed that I was much more devastated by reading documents that included disturbing descriptions of sexual violence or the brutalizing of children than by my encounters with the CBOW. When working on my project, I spent hundreds of hours in archives, browsing through tens of thousands of pages, for example, depositions of more than a hundred women violated by Red Army soldiers and were seeking abortion permits or the personal documents of war orphans. After a day of reading testimonies of rapes or the suffering of children raised in an orphanage in 1944–1946, I understood that my mental health stretched to its limits. Then, in the end, I realized that my mind could absorb no more such content and that I needed to talk to someone about it. I knew, however, that I could not burden my wife with these stories, and this was the moment when I decided to get help from a psychotherapist (a one-off event so far). I wanted to look at my own emotions, locate the cause of specific reactions of my body, and, through talking about them, ease the tension that had built up over the months of work. Seen from today’s perspective, I am convinced it was a good decision, and this kind of experience should be extended to all researchers who need this kind of professional support. Crucial in this process was that thanks to participation in the CHIBOW network, I was aware of this dimension of the research process. All early-stage researchers (ESR) were offered the chance to reflect on personal resilience when working in fragile circumstances and with traumatized people during specialized training. This was also a formal requirement. The European Commission expects that all Ph.D. students are provided with additional steps to be undertaken when dealing with potentially vulnerable

groups, as well as personal or sensitive topics, which might induce psychological stress, anxiety, humiliation, or embarrassment³⁰.

For me, researching within the ITN on this particular topic has also become an opportunity for an in-depth reflection on the historian's role in the research process: how historians position themselves concerning both the "objects" and "subjects" of their research and to what extent they influence the course of the research process and the results, and what impact their research has had on them. What meaning do they ascribe to their professed values and the emotions that emerge in them during analysis? Finally, what role does the historian's sensitivity play in their research? In her essay *Historia jako fetysz* [History as Fetish], Joanna Tokarska-Bakir warned historians against "disconnecting from the feeling" (pol. "wyłączenie czucia") in research and against an expressly understood reliability, which she calls, following Gadamer, "the illusion of cognitive neutrality" (Tokarska-Bakir 2004, 109, 111)³¹. Collision with my own limits of mental endurance, resulting from exposure to extreme emotions, made me aware of my vulnerability as a researcher – something that, as researchers, we usually do not expect and find difficult to talk about it. I think that what Tokarska-Bakir said about the "principle of discretion" practiced by historians indeed has a lot of truth in it. Historians tend only very rarely to admit being moved and psychologically affected by historical sources³². Following Dominic La Capra, she

³⁰ In the first months of the project, all ESRs took specialist training in Psychotrauma Centre South Netherlands in s-Hertogenbosch where they learned how to deal with vulnerable populations – their stigma, discrimination and trauma, as well as vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress of researchers. They reflected also on the ethical aspects of the research on CBOW. For me, as a member of the team, it was a significant step in understanding challenges in my research and ways of dealing with them. The presence of an external ethics advisor was also of great importance.

³¹ In this essay, in the context of the debate on Gross's *Neighbors* among the Polish historians, the author diagnosed their condition by referring to Hayden White's statement that professional historians are "an extreme example of suppressed sensitivity". The creation of taboos is then one of the consequences of such a stance (Tokarska-Bakir 2004, 108).

³² "As part of that principle, admitting that the events the scholar describe make an impression – move, terrify, haunt, make him or her want to give up on the topic, or (Heaven forbid!) to change methodology – is largely unimaginable. It may fit sociologists or women because the sociologist in comparison with a historian is like a woman in comparison to a man" (Tokarska-Bakir 2004, 112). This view corresponds to a conviction widely held by the academic community that "emotions are not part of good scholarly behaviour – neither expressed nor spoken about". Rossi and Aarnio write about "invisible code" the researchers follow and connect it with gender and "malestream" where emotions are linked with femininity and weakness. According to them a sometimes expressive person may be stigmatized by the academic community as "womanish and thus incompetent". They also list other reasons for historians' silence about their feelings like attempts of imitating natural scientists

explains this kind of anti-reflective stance as the fear of trauma (Tokarska-Bakir 2004, 109; compare: LaCapra 2000, 40).

I agree with Ewa Domańska that when discussing honesty in historical research, she stated that “besides reliability, hard work, intellectual courage, openness, critical awareness, moderation, and responsibility – it is a historian’s duty.”³³ I am convinced that admitting that I have felt emotions while doing research does not diminish the importance of the study and in no way affects its validity. At the same time, I distinguish between sharing feelings and emotion-driven interpretations and value judgments. The latter may indicate that one is not ready to work on a given research topic. Entering the field, encountering “the Other,” engaging in a dialogue, and reading the historical sources all leave a mark on us. That’s why historians need to consider the impact of their decisions and be aware that they may be interpreting their sources being guided by their own emotions while evoked potential biases. However, “it is not the avoidance of emotions that necessarily provides for high-quality research. Rather it is an awareness and intelligent use of our emotions that benefit the research process” (Gilbert 2001, 11, quoted from Davenport and Hall 2011, 184).

What have I learned from the experiences I have described above? First of all, I have had the opportunity to meet the narrators in the course of their “biographical work,” who was unable to achieve closure due to numerous gaps in their biographies, which sometimes led them to great suffering³⁴. It required empathy and respect for all of my narrators. But especially for those of them who were brave enough to contact me, who told me their stories, and then decided to withdraw from the project, as the psychological cost they had to bear was too high (there were twice as many such cases). I learned what it means to be an empathic researcher in practice. The concept of “layers of vulnerability” allowed me to look at the group in question differently and thus gain a deeper understanding of their specificity, but also to see it as more common (or “less unique”).

Secondly, I have learned a lot about myself: I am also a vulnerable one. I was working through those issues, but that was something that I did not need to do independently. I shared my emotions with my loved ones and my trusted colleagues-researchers. However, I can open to get professional help from someone

and thus persuading the acceptance of colleagues, difficulties with converting one’s feelings into words, denying and repressing them, and others (Rossi and Aarnio 2012, 172–173).

³³ She also stated that intellectual integrity, in itself a virtue, “becomes the principle of a historian’s work, more important than the pursuit of truth, as it constitutes its prerequisite” (Domańska 2012, 177).

³⁴ The term “biographic work” was developed by Fritz Schütze, author of the autobiographic narrative interview method (Schütze 1984; 2012). In Polish translation (Każmierska 2021, 141–278).

who is not from around my surroundings (and outside of the system), which allows me to talk with him or her without embarrassment and self-censorship about my emotions and what causes them.

And finally, I concluded that at the university, as a future historian, I wasn't given any academic tools to study sensitive topics and any practical strategies to deal with the vicarious trauma or minimizing its influence on my mental health. I am convinced that even as a student, I was not aware that this could be useful in my future work. In my opinion, it needs to be amended. First of all, historical (or perhaps, more broadly, all humanistic) curricula in Poland should include, as part of methodological courses, topics associated with emotions generally and ways of dealing with complicated feelings (as well as their impact on the interpretation of sources). This ought to be discussed openly at seminars – not as just of the so-called corridor talks (Yow 1997, 55) – in the context of both oral history and the analysis of written sources, accompanied by a broader reflection on the research process itself and the role of the researcher. Emotions, feelings, and sentiments shouldn't be associated in Academia (and not only there) with gender but acknowledged as something deeply human. Finally, the support of mental health professionals and regular supervision needs to be available for every researcher carrying out projects concerning sensitive topics. Using this type of support shouldn't be anything to embarrass but constitute a part of the whole process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Archer, Margaret, Bhaskar, Roy, Collier, Andrew, Lawson, Tony, and Alan Norrie, eds. 1998. *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Armitage, Susan H., Hart, Patricia, and Karen Weathermon, eds. 2002. *Women's Oral History: The "Frontiers" Reader*. Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Bracken-Roche, Dearbhail, Bell, Emily, Macdonald, Mary Ellen, and Eric Racine. 2017. "The Concept of 'Vulnerability' in Research Ethics: An In-Depth Analysis of Policies and Guidelines." *Health Research Policy and Systems* 15 (8): 1–18.
- Butler, Judith. 2016. "Re-thinking Vulnerability and Resistance." In *Vulnerability and Resistance*, eds. J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, and L. Sabsay, 12–27. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. 1985. "Managing Chronic Illness at Home: Three Lines of Work." *Qualitative Sociology* 8: 224–247.
- Davenport, Lisa A., and Joanne M. Hall. 2011. "To Cry or Not to Cry. Analyzing the Dimensions of Professional Vulnerability." *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 29 (3): 180–188.

- Domańska, Ewa. 2012. *Historia egzystencjalna: krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Frisch, Michael. 1990. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gałęziowski, Jakub, and Joanna Urbanek. 2017. "‘Etyczny zwrot’ w polskiej historii mówionej." *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej* 7: 7–34.
- Gałęziowski, Jakub. 2019. "Oral History and Biographical Method. Common Framework and Distinctions Resulting from Different Research Perspectives." *Przeгляд Socjologii Jakościowej* 15 (2): 76–103.
- Gilbert, Kathleen R, ed. 2001. *The Emotional Nature of Qualitative Research*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Gluck, Sherna Berger, and Daphne Patai, eds. 1991. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Grele, Ronald J. 1975. *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. Chicago: Precedent.
- Grzywacz, Robert. 2019. "Ranliwość jako sposób istnienia człowieka – inspiracje (nie tylko) Ricoeurowskie." *Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein* 21–22: 287–297.
- Henderson, Gail E., Davis, Arlene M., and Nancy M.P. King. 2004. "Vulnerability to Influence: A Two-Way Street." *The American Journal of Bioethics* 4 (3): 50–52.
- Każmierska, Kaja, ed. 2012. *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*. Kraków: Nomos.
- Każmierska, Kaja. 2014. "Autobiograficzny wywiad narracyjny – kwestie etyczne i metodologiczne w kontekście archiwizacji danych." *Studia Socjologiczne* 3: 221–238.
- Każmierska, Kaja. 2018. "Doing Biographical Research – Ethical Concerns in Changing Social Contexts." *Polish Sociological Review* 3: 393–411.
- Każmierska, Kaja. 2020. "Ethical Aspects of Social Research: Old Concerns in the Face of New Challenges and Paradoxes. A Reflection from the Field of Biographical Method." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 16 (3): 118–135.
- K'Meyer, Tracy E., and Glenn A. Crothers. 2007. "‘If I See Some of This in Writing, I’m Going to Shoot You’: Reluctant Narrators, Taboo Topics, and the Ethical Dilemmas of the Oral Historian." *The Oral History Review* 34 (1): 71–93.
- Kurkowska-Budzan, Marta. 2008. "Badacz–tubylec. O emocjach, władzy i tożsamości w badaniach ‘oral history’ miasteczka Jedwabne." In *Obserwacja uczestnicząca w badaniach historycznych*, eds. B. Wagner and T. Wiślicz, 17–25. Zabrze: Inforteditions.
- Kurkowska-Budzan, Marta. 2009. *Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne na Białostoczczyźnie: analiza współczesnej symbolizacji przeszłości*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Historia Jagellonika.
- Kurkowska-Budzan, Marta. 2011. "Informator, świadek historii, narrator – kilka wątków epistemologicznych i etycznych oral history." *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej* 1: 9–34.
- Kurkowska-Budzan, Marta. 2012. "Skrawki bez pointy i morału." *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 2: 314–316.
- Laar, Amos. 2014. "Researcher Vulnerability: An Overlooked Issue in Vulnerability Discourses." *Scientific Research and Essays* 9 (16): 737–743.

- LaCapra, Dominick. 2000. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lange, Margaret Meek, Rogers, Wendy, and Susan Dodds. 2013. "Vulnerability in Research Ethics: A Way Forward." *Bioethics* 27 (6): 333–340.
- Levine, Carol, Grady, Christine, Sugarman, Jeremy, Henderson, Gail E., Davis, Arlene M., and Nancy M.P. King. 2004. "The Limitations of 'Vulnerability' as a Protection for Human Research Participants." *The American Journal of Bioethics* 4 (3): 44–49.
- Lee, Sabine. 2017. *Children Born of War in the Twentieth Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Linde-Usiekiewicz, Jadwiga, and Piotr Beręsewicz, eds. 2002. *Wielki słownik angielsko-polski* [English-Polish Dictionary]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Luna, Florencia. 2009. "Elucidating the Concept of Vulnerability: Layers Not Labels." *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 2 (1): 121–139.
- Łangowski, Marek. 2016. "Wulnerabilność w życiu i filozofii Emmanuela Mouniera." *Studia Pelplińskie* 49: 215–228.
- Mayotte, Cliff. 2015. "Oral History and Vulnerability." Website of *Voice of the Witness*. Access [28.07.2020]. <http://voiceofwitness.org/oral-history-and-vulnerability/>.
- McIntosh, Colin, ed. 2013. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Michalak, Anna. 2018. "Wulnerabilność Doroty Masłowskiej w obliczu 'syndromu drugiej powieści' jako temat 'Pawia królowej'." *Kultura Współczesna* 4 (103): 211–224.
- Międzyrzecki, Artur. 2011. "Z notatnika." Ed. J. Hartwig. *Kwartalnik Artystyczny. Kujawy i Pomorze* 3 (71): 91–104.
- Miłosz, Czesław. 1997. *Piesek przydrożny*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Miłosz, Czesław. 2000. *To*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Miodek, Jan. 2000. "Miłoszowe 'ranliwe ciało'." *Wiedza i Życie* 12: 50.
- Mochmann, Ingvill C. 2017. "Children Born of War – A Decade of International and Interdisciplinary Research." *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 42 (1): 320–346.
- Passerini, Luisa. 1979. "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism." *History Workshop Journal* 8 (1): 82–108.
- Passerini, Luisa. 1987. *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*. Transl. R. Lumley and J. Bloomfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Passerini, Luisa. 1988a. *Storia e soggettività. Le fonti orali, la memoria*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Passerini, Luisa. 1988b. "Oral History in Italy after the Second World War: From Populism to Subjectivity." *International Journal of Oral History* 9 (2): 114–124.
- Passerini, Luisa. 1996. *Autobiography of a Generation. Italy 1968*. Transl. L. Erdberg. Hannover–London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Patel, Nimisha, and David Pilgrim. 2018. "Psychologists and Torture: Critical Realism as a Resource for Analysis and Training." *Journal of Critical Realism* 17 (2): 176–191.
- Peroni, Lourdes, and Alexandra Timmer. 2013. "Vulnerable Groups: The Promise of an Emerging Concept in European Human Rights Convention Law." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 11 (4): 1056–1085.

- Pio, Edwina, and Smita Singh. 2016. "Vulnerability and Resilience: Critical Reflexivity in Gendered Violence Research." *Third World Quarterly* 37 (2): 227–244.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 1979. "Sulla specificità della storia orale." *Primo Maggio* 1979 13: 54–60.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 1981. "The Peculiarities of Oral History." *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1): 96–107.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 1991. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 1997. *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 2003. *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 2018. "Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience." *The Oral History Review* 45 (2): 239–248.
- Przyboś, Julian. 1971. *Utwory poetyckie. Zbiór*. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Röger, Maren. 2011. "Children of German Soldiers in Poland, 1939–1945." In *The Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Poland, and Occupied Soviet Karelia. Children of Foreign Soldiers in Finland 1940–1948*, ed. L. Westerlund, 261–272. Vol. 2. Helsinki: Nord Print.
- Röger, Maren. 2017. "Besatzungskinder in Polen." *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 65 (1): 26–51.
- Röger, Maren, and Lu Seegers. 2016. "Ojcowie, których zabrakło. Doświadczenia i wspomnienia polskich sierot wojennych i polsko-niemieckich 'Children Born of War.'" *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 6: 229–250.
- Schütze, Fritz. 1984. "Kognitiven Figuren des autobiographischen Stegreiferzählens." In *Biographie und Sozial Wirklichkeit. Neue Beiträge und Forschungsperspektiven*, eds. M. Kohli and R. Günther, 78–117. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Schütze, Fritz. 2012. "Analiza biograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne." In *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, ed. K. Kaźmierska, 141–278. Kraków: Nomos.
- Sheffel, Anna, and Stacey Zembrzycki, eds. 2013. *Oral History off the Record. Toward an Ethnography of Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Simpson, John A., and Edmund C. Weiner, eds. 1991. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Vol. 19. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Soin, Maciej. 2013. "'Krytyczny realizm' w naukach społecznych." *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 58: 339–356.
- Stevenson, Angus, ed. 2007. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: On historical principles*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Świerkosz, Monika. 2018. "Ciała podatne na zranienie: Judith Bulter, samozniszczenie i radykalne akty oporu." *Etyka* 57: 69–86.
- The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research. 1979. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Washington, DC.

- Thomson, Alistair. 2011a. *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women Across Two Countries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Thomson, Alistair. 2011b. "Moving Stories, Women's Lives: Sharing Authority in Oral History." *Oral History* 39 (2): 73–82.
- Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. 2004. *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia*. Sejny: Pogranicze.
- Tomczok, Marta. "Wulnerabilność. Zwierzęta, ludzie i Śląsk w twórczości Izabeli Czajki-Stachowicz i Teofila Ociepki." In *Polityki relacji w literaturze kobiet po 1945 roku*, eds. A. Grzemska and I. Iwasiów, 43–56. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.
- Yow, Valerie R. 1997. "'Do I Like Them Too Much?': Interview Effects of the Oral History on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa." *The Oral History Review* 24 (1): 55–79.

WHEN A HISTORIAN MEETS VULNERABILITY.

METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF RESEARCH ON SENSITIVE TOPICS AND WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

SUMMARY

Oral historians often work with the so-called vulnerable populations. They frequently deal with people who experienced both natural and artificial disasters: poverty, war, and violence. These can also be discriminated against communities as well as those that, for various reasons, have limited possibilities of defending their rights and need to be protected. Children born of war (CBOW) are individuals whose one parent, usually the mother, was a member of the invaded (occupied) local community. One, usually, the father, was one of the invaders, occupiers, have been classified as vulnerable. This qualification has been a starting point for considering the concept of vulnerability (with a suggestion of Polish translation of this notion taken from poetry). Not only concerning the studied group but also in terms of vulnerability of the researcher. The latter, however, has been relatively ignored in Academia, especially in humanities and social science. Researchers are not willing to talk about their emotions challenging the studies they do. The article discusses strategies of dealing with vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress in the context of oral history or the other sorts of documentary analysis and postulates, including emotions, feelings, and sentiments to academic curricula, as part of an ethical research approach.

Keywords: vulnerability of researcher, vulnerable populations, layers of vulnerability, oral history, historical research, reflexivity in research, ethics in research, critical realism