

## Forward

The evolutionary processes of stereotypes amongst generations born after World War II, along with the subjective and objective influences upon them, are matters of extreme significance and worthy of consideration. This volume is aimed at portraying them as central themes, taking into account the factor of time, the intensification of mutual contacts, the mutual deepening of knowledge of each other's history and culture, the acquiring of personal experiences and assessment of the processes, which occur in the mutual perception of self by both nations – Jewish and Polish.

The concept of “nation” has, alongside others, a cultural dimension and connects within it elements peculiar to it alone, simultaneously setting its identity. This means that a national grouping consolidates its unity around certain types of values which, together, create a specific spirituality for the group (sensed and experienced values). They formulate a relevant ethos for a given community by which it is recognisable by others, but also by which it believes that it differentiates itself from others. In the formation of national identities, actually all fields of culture, appropriate to the circumstances, play a part, creating a situation where one of those fields may constitute a focus for the acceptance of a set of values. Belonging to a nation, when considered within subjective categories, can be expressed by one's own will, by one's own choice, by sympathies, and the like, towards a defined nation. The concept of nation, including national identity, is subject to a mythologisation and is strengthened in the collective memory by works of art, literature, journalism, as well as stories passed on from generation to generation. Faced with the processes of globalisation, we are more frequently confronted with the issue of, or we are awaiting an answer from others on the issue of: “I am a Pole because ....” or “I am a Jew because ...”. The identity of individual nations has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Both these dimensions have significant meaning in the shaping of interpersonal relationships, both local and international. Elements of tradition, as well as judgements about people and nations which (often unwittingly) shape the views of ourselves and influence, in a meaningful manner, the way nations interact with each other.

The tendency to simplify the perception of a group of people has a universal character, and that observation has a subjective view of reality. In the buzzing chaos of the external world, we distinguish what our culture has already formulated for us and we are prone to accept what we choose from amongst forms stereotyped by it. We often give an opinion about the world before we have come to know it. We imagine many things before we experience them. The stereotype, as a court of evaluation, is an image coloured with beliefs and emotions which makes more difficult the shaping of an objective evaluation of reality. It leads to the magnification of the flaws and virtues of other nations. Stereotypes can take on rigid and long-lasting cognitive patterns, especially when they are instilled in an individual in early childhood.

The recognition of the positive and negative functions of stereotypes in public life can neutralise possible prejudices towards others nations, at the same time neutralising conflicts which are often born in our minds due to a lack of a sufficient knowledge of issues relating to an individual or a nation.

Individual sections of this book analyse forms of mutual perception, within the consciousness of both nations, Polish and Jewish, the processes of intercultural education based on respect for “others”, as well as the multicultural aspects of the city of Częstochowa. Important components of this book are the papers by members of two generations born after the Holocaust, citizens of the United States, emotionally tied to their ancestors, Częstochowa Jews.

This, the third publication dedicated to multicultural Częstochowa, is the result of meetings of several generations of Częstochowa Poles and Jews, whom fate has strewn over different parts of the world. This, however, does not detract from the richness of the subject matter. It adds an important cognitive element, bringing both nations closer together and building bridges between them.

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