



TELLING THE GREAT CHANGE

EDITED BY
KAJA KAŹMIERSKA
KATARZYNA WANIEK

THE PROCESS OF THE SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION
IN POLAND IN BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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WYDAWNICTWO
UNIWERSYTETU
ŁÓDZKIEGO

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The book has received funding from the National Science Center, Poland under grant agreement No. UMO-2013/09/B/HS6/03100 “Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective”

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Published by Łódź University Press

First edition. W.09081.19.0.K

Publisher's sheets 45.0; printing sheets 40.75

ISBN 978-83-8142-455-4

e-ISBN 978-83-8142-456-1

<https://doi.org/10.18778/8142-455-4>

For Professor Fritz Schütze

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
<i>Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska</i>	
PART 1. Introduction: “Telling the Great Change...”	13
<i>Kaja Kaźmierska</i>	
CHAPTER I. Methodological note	33
<i>Kaja Kaźmierska</i>	
CHAPTER II. Winners and losers of the process of transformation as an etic category versus an emic biographical perspective	49
<i>Piotr Filipkowski</i>	
CHAPTER III. Narrative agency and structural chaos. A biographical-narrative case study	79
<i>Joanna Wygnańska</i>	
PART 2. From PPR to systemic transformation	103
<i>Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek</i>	
CHAPTER IV. The experience of systemic transformation in contemporary biographical narratives of older Poles	115
<i>Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas</i>	
CHAPTER V. Social innovators in coping with social problems – PPR, systemic transformation, and new Poland	143
<i>Renata Dopierala</i>	
CHAPTER VI. Life of things from the perspective of the Polish systemic transformation	171
<i>Kaja Kaźmierska</i>	
CHAPTER VII. Paradoxes of ideological privileges – a case study of a female textile worker from Łódź	195

<i>Katarzyna Waniek</i> Chapter VIII. The process of acquiring and developing a critical attitude towards the socialist regime in Poland	229
<i>Joanna Wygnańska</i> Chapter IX. A new logic of power, old biographical patterns of action. Case study of Weronika's life history	251
<i>Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Katarzyna Waniek</i> PART 3. Transforming opportunity structures: biographical chances, hopes, illusions, and dead-ends	281
<i>Katarzyna Waniek</i> CHAPTER X. Biographical traps of the transformation process – cohort 1980. The potentials of disorder and suffering in the experiences of young Polish women entering social worlds of art, medicine, and academia	297
<i>Jacek Burski</i> CHAPTER XI. Transformation and the biographical experiences of healthcare workers	349
<i>Jacek Burski, Katarzyna Waniek</i> CHAPTER XII. “Twist of fate”: declining and rising lines of occupational career in the biographical experiences of two engineers	385
<i>Kaja Kaźmierska</i> PART 4. Biographical resources: family and social networks	425
<i>Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Małgorzata Potoczna</i> CHAPTER XIII. A trap of systemic changes – Pola's biographical drift ..	443
<i>Joanna Wygnańska</i> CHAPTER XIV. Narratives rooted in family <i>milieu</i> . Case studies of Agnieszka and Paweł focused on the family thread as the biographical resource and main story-line	475
<i>Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska</i> CHAPTER XV. A biographical experience of the yard as a symbolic biographical resource	523

<i>Kaja Kaźmierska</i>	
CHAPTER XVI. (Re)creating bonds in the local environment – a contrastive comparison of two life strategies	563
<i>Kaja Kaźmierska, Katarzyna Waniek</i>	
CONCLUSIONS – Understanding transformation as a social change stretched in time and space	589
References	601
Appendix	633
Transcription Notation	633
List of narrators	635
Notes about the Authors	641
Index	645

In analyzing the experiences and attitudes of an individual we always reach data and elementary facts which are not exclusively limited to this individual's personality but can be treated as mere instances of more or less general classes of data or facts, and can thus be used for the determination of laws of social becoming. Whether we draw our materials for sociological analysis from detailed life-records of concrete individuals or from the observation of mass-phenomena, the problems of sociological analysis are the same. But even when we are searching for abstract laws life-records of concrete personalities have a marked superiority over any other kind of materials.

(Thomas, Znaniecki 1919: 6).

FOREWORD

The book presents results of the research project titled: *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective* funded by the National Science Center in Poland (No. UMO-2013/09/B/HS6/03100). The project was conducted in the Department of Sociology of Culture (University of Łódź) in 2014–2019. The research team included: Kaja Kaźmierska (principal investigator), Katarzyna Waniek, Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska (from the University of Łódź), Piotr Filipkowski (IFiS PAN) and Maciej Melon.

The publication is a result of many years of collecting and studying the empirical material and developing our reflection on the issue of the great systemic transformation that we have intended to know from the perspective of individuals and analyze their biographical experiences told in autobiographical renderings. Its content is based on analysis of huge biographical data collected in 90 autobiographical narrative interviews. Thus we would like to thank our interlocutors for the effort of sharing with us their life histories. We were listening to them carefully in the hope that we could reconstruct the socio-biographical process of “the Great Change” from individual experiences. As a result we have got many biographical accounts from different parts of Poland in which the systemic transformation could be seen from various, but always bottom up, perspectives. As it happened in our other projects, the social process was more recognized in individuals’ life strategies, decisions, motivation than presented straightforwardly by articulating attitudes towards, evaluation of, referring to the process of the systemic transformation. Thus we aim here at presenting a wide spectrum of issues and phenomena that during the process of analysis attracted our attention. For sure we have not figured the problem out. On the contrary, we feel like just touching a complex matter. However, we hope that the findings presented in the book will complement and enrich the universe of the sociological, political and public discourse.

The majority of the applied material and chapters are based on the project implementation. Nevertheless, in order to fill in the gaps and show the multidimensionality of the process under investigation, we sometimes refer to collections of interviews gathered by our team members in other projects. We especially have in mind two of them: *Biography and National Identity* based on life stories of Poles who experienced WWII and the project *The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in Memory and Biographical*

*Experiences of People Born between 1945–1955. Sociological comparison based on the biographical comparison.*¹ As a result of these projects, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century, beginning with the oldest narrator born in 1909 and the youngest in 1988. This rich empirical material, in relation to the past two projects, is used in the book only episodically, but it provides us with important empirical data and the analytical and theoretical inspirations that accompanied us as background knowledge while working on this book. Another project which we also refer to, but in a slightly narrower way, is *Euro Identities – the evolution of European identity: using biographical methods to study the development of European identity.*²

We also invited other authors who, using a biographical approach, studied these aspects of social reality that could very well complement the complex picture of transformation processes. Thus we invited Renata Dopierała whose text is based on the project materials, Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas who contributed to the analysis of “pre”-transformation period, Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek implementing, so importantly for us, time and generation perspective and last but not least Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas and Małgorzata Potoczna who, referring to other biographical research and data, focused on the issue of poverty and lower class as these kind of data, what we regret, were not that easy to be collected in our project. Thus the authors of two texts analyze different materials yet representing biographical data. Our motivation to include these analyses did not stem from the desire to “fill” the book – which is very thick anyway – but from the idea of showing the most multi-threaded view of the transformations from a biographical research perspective. In our analysis we consequently try to apply the approach to biographical materials, which is based on the methodological and theoretical concept of autobiographical narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze. Nevertheless, we left the invited authors free-hand to present their analytical approaches as we find it as one of the main assumptions in the process of analysis, believing that “the researcher is solely responsible for his or her own product, when acquiring descriptive writing

¹ The first research was conducted in the early 90s. The department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996, Dopierała, Waniek ed. 2016) and the second project was financed by the Polish-German Scientific Foundation (PNFN 2012-03) implemented in 2012–2015 by the Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science (Każmierska, Schütze 2013).

² The project (2008–2011) was implemented as part of the 7th Research Framework Program of the European Commission (Nr 213998). Polish team: Andrzej Piotrowski, Kaja Każmierska, Katarzyna Waniek (Miller, Gray eds. 2012).

skills and developing one's own style of description" (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 9). In other words, he or she has a right to speak his/her own voice and we do not treat this as a kind of methodological inconsequence.

The book consists of four parts: the first one plays the role of introduction both to the project theoretical and methodological assumptions and the social background of described phenomena and processes. The second presents social and historical background and it is based on the conviction that the main character of social process is an emergent overlapping of phenomena and constant change, which assumes an evolutionary rather than revolutionary change of form. The third part examines different aspects and interpretation of opportunity structures that have appeared due to the systemic change in Poland. The fourth part refers to biographical resources which can be considered as stable, traditional, social frames. We intended to show if, how, and in what direction they have changed.

How to read the book? We are aware that it is a very extensive monograph – the following parts are subordinated to the logic of a holistic concept showing, first of all, the process-oriented approach to social phenomena. Thus we would be very satisfied if the reader would read the whole book. At the same time, we realize that he/she may be interested in some of its parts, threads, or themes. It is one of the reasons why we decided to precede each part with a preface, in which its main ideas coming from material analysis and its theoretical conceptualization are outlined. We also offer short introductory remarks to chapters included in each part of the book.

We would like to express our acknowledgements to many people. First of all once more we are grateful to our narrators. Since the biographical research demand seminar and workshop work over the last few years we invited many scholars experienced in qualitative research studies and biographical research in particular. We would like to thank here: Fritz Schütze, Gerhard Riemann, Lena Inowlocki, Anja Wildhagen, Markieta Domecka, Adam Mrozowicki, Mateusz Karolak, Rafael Mrówczyński, Ina Alber, Andrzej Piotrowski, Marcin Gońda, Kamila Biały, Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Patrycja Kruczkowska and Jakub Gałęziowski for their valuable criticism, inspiring comments, interesting reflections and any other kind of scientific support.

Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska

PART 1

INTRODUCTION: “TELLING THE GREAT CHANGE...”

N(arrator): I came of age in 1987, so it was the decline of the system, but there was still a system, and then the whole issue of the systemic, socio-economic transformation, er, which on the one hand I missed as far as Polish ground is concerned, on the other, I became its kind of beneficiary because, because there were opportunities to go abroad and study and generally to pursue a career abroad. These days ... if I was to look at it, then... er... everything looks less optimistic than solely the question of my personal case, but/ but again, you know, considering the age group I belong to/

I(nterviewer): Ahem.

N: Well, 'cause in our generation it was quite easy in my opinion to be optimistic. And there was, there was this optimism at the beginning of the 1990s, it was such an enthusiasm for this new reality, that it often seemed to us that with entering, for example, with the enlargement of the European Union, that it was such a fulfilment, and here you are – history has mocked us and we are living in very turbulent times, and nothing is certain, I do not know if we are returning to the starting point.¹

Introductory remarks

At the beginning of our reflection, we quoted the above fragment of one of the interviews collected in our project. The narrator, Marcel,² in this passage of his biography indicates several dimensions of his biographical experience

¹ For transcription notation see: Appendix.

² The interview was conducted in 2016. The narrator, born in 1969, comes from an intellectual family. He has experience of living and working abroad connected with his career course (he is a researcher in the field of humanities). At the time of recording the interview, he had been living with his wife and son abroad for three years. What's important, at the moment of the interview he is looking for a job and in his narrative,

related to the social processes involved in the dynamics of economic, social, and cultural changes which happened in Poland after the year 1989. Therefore, the reference framework for the threads discussed in the above fragment is, on the one hand, the process of the economic and political change in Poland. On the other, it also refers to the process of Poland's integration with the European Union, presented from the perspective of the opportunities which it opened for the representatives of, among others, Marcel's generation.

In this short quote, we can also hear references to the phenomenon of transition from socialism to capitalism and to the democratization process, which in Marcel's argument were associated with optimism and waiting for the final shape of the changes initiated with the fall of socialism. Finally, the narrator also refers to the processes characteristic of late modernity. The quoted passage also resonates with a certain duality of Marcel's biographical experience. Placing himself on the one hand as the beneficiary of the transformation process, he sees a palette of opportunities which the changes taking place in Poland in the 1990s and 2000s created for the formation of his biographical identity. However, at the same time, he points to, as he says, a kind of trap of history and the troubling reality of modern times. He then shows the difficulty of considering the transformation process in Poland without referring to this period from the contemporary perspective. From the biographical "now" and with this comparative reference it is possible to see the influence of the great change which happened in Poland on the individual biographical experience. Thus, with the reference to the contemporary reflection, Marcel is asking himself, in terms of our study, an important question concerning the dynamics of the transformational and post-transformational processes. Therefore, this short fragment touches the issues of the wider perspective connected with the social processes, as well as the phenomena allocated in contemporary social realities. Going beyond Marcel's words, we can indicate here the social phenomena as the globalization process, the development of capitalism and the neoliberal way of thinking.

Thus, we quoted this fragment of the interview with Marcel also in order to briefly outline the possibilities of connecting the individual biographical experience with the collective mechanisms of impact, which is an important assumption of the biographical methodology used in our study. Even such a short passage from an autobiographical narrative interview allows us to capture many threads in which the narrator's biography is involved. It also

he's also taking up the reflection on his life regarding the situation where he sees himself as the "product" of those chances given to Polish society after 1989. At the same time, despite being well educated and experienced he still cannot feel the stability on the current labor market. So, those "turbulent times" he is talking about in the quoted fragment are also the frame for his current (time of the interview) situation.

enables us to reconstruct the way one is talking about the great change and the attitudes towards it presented in collected biographies. In Marcel's case, from this short quote from his autobiographical narrative and in relation to his whole story, we can see that his narration is "rooted in history."³ This means that when referring to, interpreting, and reconstructing his biographical experience, he often relates it to specific phenomena within a broader historical and social context. In such a narrative, thus, the descriptions of the interlocutor's experiences appear "in relation to argumentative structures of a historical nature (but also macro-social or ideological)" (Piotrowski 2016: 241). To support this assumption and to bring to this short discussion of the quoted fragment of Marcel's interview, one more context is worth mentioning that in his biography he presents a long story of his grandfather who was born at the end of the 19th century. Thus, he experienced both the First and Second World War and the period of communism. From Marcel's perspective, it is an extremely important thread for shaping his biographical identity.

However, returning to the quoted passage, it shows many aspects of our perception of the transformation process in Poland. As researchers analyzing the biographical experience of that time, like Marcel in the cited piece of his life story, we wonder whether the transformational and post-transformational reality can be treated as a separate time frame. We assume that the analysis of the biographical experience of the transformation process does not overlap with certain more or less specific temporal caesuras. In other words, besides the conventional date of the year 1989, our reflection concerns the course of the transformation reconstructed and interpreted in the biographical experiences of our narrators. Additionally, the study of the 90⁴ collected interviews point to the analysis of the time of transformation in relation to the contemporary perspective and the perspective of the experience of the Polish People's

³ The other type of analytical category is called: "rootedness in *milieu*," where more important for building one's biographical narrative are comments and argumentative constructions which are referring to the local community and local environment context in which the narrator is framing his or her biographical experience (Piotrowski 2016). We decided to translate a Polish word "zakorzenie" as "rooted" rather than "embedded" since we refer here to existing tradition of thinking still alive in the Department of Sociology of Culture, University of Łódź. For instance, the title of Antonina Kłoskowska's book *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* was translated into English as *National Cultures at the Grass-root Level*. We believe that defining "rooted in *milieu*" or "rooted in history" as "developed from..." and "strongly influenced by" (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/rooted>) either *milieu* or history better reflects our way of reasoning.

⁴ See *Methodological note* (Chapter I).

Republic socialistic reality.⁵ Those mentioned social realities are important for understanding the multifacetedness of our approach to telling the great change.

Marcel also speaks about "living in turbulent times" and refers here to a very current, as we can say post-transformational perspective. Yet, his considerations about "going back to the starting point" evoke the past perspectives as well. In this optics, our analysis aims to reconstruct the links between telling the end of one era (socialist one) and the beginning of a new political, economic, and cultural social reality from the bottom-up perspective of individual biographical experiences and their interplay with collective processes (Schütze 1989, 1992a: 192), not from the top-down point of view or a normative perspective in which people act determined by their social "equipment" acquired in the socialization process and their position within the division of labor manifesting itself in their roles and statuses (Piotrowski 1998: 132). Moreover, what should be stressed at the beginning of this book, not each of our narrators used the terms: "systemic transformation," "political transformation," "economic transformation," or "social transformation" when they were telling us their biographical experiences. To the contrary, the majority of them were referring to the general concepts, such as "change" or "transformation" (or have not referred to them at all), being less specific, yet much more described by their biographical experiences and this also influenced our understanding of this phenomenon.

We would like to refer at this point to the distinction functioning in social sciences, which refers to the division into *emic* and *etic* categories (Pike 1967).⁶ We treat the former as generated by the narrators themselves, derived from their experience and based on their knowledge. The latter would have external character and as such would be "imposed" on the individuals. In this sense, an analysis of the transformation from *etic* positions would generate a specific understanding of its course and an assessment of its effects. For the introduction, we will try to reconstruct this "etic" history of the transformation to a limited extent.

First, let us start from 1989 and the first partially free elections on June 4. One could go back to the Martial Law or the founding of "Solidarity," but it was only at the end of the 1980s that the last breakthrough took place. While the detailed direction of the changes was still unknown at that time, the 1990s became a period in which a specific vision of political and economic order prevailed. In this period, the main role was played by the mission to implement

⁵ See the chapters in the second part of the book, *From PPR to systemic transformation*.

⁶ We use Kenneth Pike's terms, well-established in contemporary anthropological, as well as sociological reflection: "etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system," while the "emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system" (Pike 1967: 37) also see Chapter II.

free-market economy, the main symbol of which was the so-called Balcerowicz Plan. While the Plan itself was a package of privatization laws, it entered the public debate as a symbol of choosing the path of social and economic transformation.

While at the macroeconomic level, the success of the reforms of the 1990s should be recognised (e.g., curbing inflation and stabilising the budget), the enormous social cost of their introduction needs to be emphasized as well. The first decade of functioning of the Third Republic of Poland was primarily a rapid increase in unemployment (up to 20% at the end of the decade), but also a collapse of other sectors of industry (e.g., textile industry in the case of Łódź).

The political closure of the 1990s was an attempt at the second wave of reforms, the so-called four reforms of Jerzy Buzek's government. They focused on the following fields of social life: education (e.g., introduction of junior high schools), pensions (e.g., introduction of open pension funds), administration (reducing the number of voivodeships from 49 to 16) and health (new organization of the system, i.e., implementation of health insurance funds). Leaving aside a detailed description of all the changes, it should be stressed that they were not only introduced partially, but often suspended or abandoned and those concerning health care, education, and the pension system did not bring the expected results. In the following years, they were modified many times in the course of legislative work and changes in the government, that they stopped providing a sense of stability or personal security. The dissatisfaction with the process of the implemented reforms and the still unstable economic situation of the majority of society had become the reason for re-assuming the power by SLD, the post-PPR party. The paradox was that, in contrast to the previous period when SLD ruled (1993–1997), this leftist party was implementing the most free market program in the history of the Polish transformation. It should also be emphasized that the nostalgia for the PPR era felt by part of the Polish society and expressed through their electoral preferences was not an isolated reaction. In fact, in all the post-communist countries of Europe which entered the path of economic reforms the post-communist parties came to power in a relatively short time, that is, not so much (not only) of a leftist character, but built on the basis of human resources and assets rooted in the old system.

Definitely, the most important political event affecting all aspects of social life of the Polish society was the accession to the European Union in 2004, which was connected, among others, with the opening of labor markets (at the beginning of only a part of the Community countries) for Polish citizens, which in turn resulted in massive economic emigration, often visible in biographical materials. Again, due to the lack of space, we will not analyze here the different achievements and failures of the sixteen years in the EU structures. It should be

stressed, however, that a significant part of this period coincided with two other issues. Firstly, in the years 2008–2013, Poland, like the rest of the world, faced an economic crisis and like a few countries in the EU went through it relatively well (referring, of course, first of all, to macroeconomic indicators, including the GDP growth). What is interesting, this period was also a period of political stabilization of the country governed by the coalition of the Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party. The political and symbolic end of this phase would be the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2015, which were won by the majority of the Law and Justice party. The results of the election were a big surprise for the Polish establishment, and their evaluation often entailed a return to the debate on the end and the costs of the transformation. Some analysts pointed out that the success of Jarosław Kaczyński's party was possible thanks to the use of the voice of those who never felt they were the winners of the transformation.⁷

Thus, we decided to study the process of the transformation within the frame of the emic categories derived from our collected material. However, we do not intend to remain only on the level of meanings and interpretations of the narrators themselves. To put it differently – following Alfred Schütz (1976b) – one may say that the analytical layer of our considerations does not stop on the level of first-order constructs, but goes further “towards empirical relationships expressed in qualitative categories and towards theoretical models and assumptions” (Piotrowski 1998: 125). As a result, we are focused on following the social processes and opportunity structures⁸ that are organizing the biographical experience of our narrators. Moreover, in relation to macro-structural, collective mechanisms of impact and public discourse rhetorical figures we concentrate on the reconstruction of the process of the transformation in a way people are talking about it in their biographies.

As we can see in the above-quoted passage from Marcel's interview when one tells the whole of her/his life history from the biographical narrative can stimulate the self-reflection of the narrators. However, this is not the case of each autobiographical narrative. It is evident in a few of the cases analyzed in our study that people telling their biographical experience sometimes are not able to take up certain self-reflections. Therefore, in this book, we also look at such biographies, showing the reasons behind the difficulties understood in this way.

What's important in our analyses attempt is to show the essence of the biographical experience of the process of the transformation in Poland by

⁷ For more about winners and losers see Chapter II by Kaja Kaźmierska.

⁸ *Transforming opportunity structures: biographical chances, hopes, illusions, and dead-ends* in Part 3.

reconstructing the experiences of the ordinary people Schütz (1946).⁹ The ways they are dealing with talking about this systemic transition symbolically located in the year 1989 are rooted in both the transformational and post-transformational realities. The studied biographical experiences are thus, in the wider perspective, intertwined with the processes of the intensive modernization, Europeanization and those characteristic for the late modernity. Research, understood in such a way, inscribes the following book's deliberations into the analyses of the orientation schemes and cognitive schemes of talking about the great change in the Polish context. The conducted study is thus held in relation to the individual biographical experiences of our narrators and macrostructural perspective of the social reality/realities they are interpreting and acting towards them in their biographies.

The overview of the approaches of studying the Polish transformation in recent years

Before we present our approach and structure of this book in a much deeper way, it is important to locate our analysis on the wide map of sociological studies on the topic of the transformation in Poland. In this part of the text, we would like to present a review of sociological literature on this subject. It is not our attempt to reconstruct the public debate on the course of the transformation or its evaluation. Rather, we are trying to refer to those works which are part of the academic debate on the transformation in both quantitative and qualitative approaches which touch upon collective and individual social perceptions at that time.

Therefore, we are aware that the overview of various theoretical and empirical positions listed here may not be complete. Our criterion was not to present the most influential or ground-breaking works related to this subject. We rather try to list here those texts and scientific positions which, in our opinion, clearly accompanied the phenomena and processes characteristic for the time of the transformation in Poland. We also refer here to the works written from the post-transformational perspective, which are the attempts of showing the costs of this process and its impact on contemporary Polish reality. We treat the texts mentioned here as important ones for the formation of a scientific discourse on the transformation phenomenon. In other words, in this part of the text, we focus on presenting a certain analytical background for our deliberations, which is necessary to understand how our approach differs from the aforementioned, varied analyses on the subject of the great change in Poland.

⁹ See *Methodological note* (Chapter I).

There is an almost continuous discussion and disputes over the course and consequences of Polish systemic change which occurred three decades ago (Pisz 2000: 101–102). Despite the time which has passed, the discussion has continued up to now and of course from the very beginning the Polish transformation has been carefully studied by sociologists. Until the mid-1990s, researchers dealt with the change as such, describing the essence of crucial institutional reforms and only then dealing with the social consequences of the systemic change (Kolasa-Nowak 2010: 52). Even then most of the researchers concentrated mainly on the changes perceived from the macro-social level. For instance, Henryk Domański (1996, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008) pondered (relying on long-term quantitative research) the changes in the social structure, the creation of the middle class or the changes in the hierarchy of prestige. Mirosława Marody, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, or Andrzej Rychard (1996, 2004) focused on the process of institutionalization, the changing of social capital, the cultural dimension of the social transition, and the way social bonds were shaped after 1989. Sociologists, using profoundly quantitative research, began to describe individual ways of coping with the systemic change and developing adaptation strategies (e.g., Rychard 2005, Marody 2000). In regards to this it's also important to mention works of Juliusz Gardawski (1992, 1996, 2009, 2011) who analyzed the individual economic awareness¹⁰ of the workers during the time of transformation and also the systemic changes from the perspective of economics and sociology of work.

In the studies of the transformation times in Poland sociologists were also interested in the reconstruction of this period in terms of analyzing the common perceptions of Polish society (e.g., Krzemiński, Śpiewak 2001). Other researchers were involved in studying the changes in the mentality of Poles after 1989 concerning the times of socialism (e.g., Koralewicz, Ziółkowski 2010). Some texts discussed the cultural heritage of socialism and the old patterns of action vivid in Polish society during the 1990s (e.g., Świda-Zięba 1997, Mach 1998, Marody 2010). Moreover, it's worth mentioning here the analyses on the attributes of the great change and its costs in the case of Polish society (Sztompka 2000, 2005, 2008). Those deliberations describe the reality in which Polish trauma was created and precisely define its symptoms and situations in which it manifested itself.

It is also worth mentioning here the book *Oswajanie wielkiej zmiany*, which is an anthology of texts concerning the most important aspects of the Polish transformation from the point of view of the various theoretical and empirical statements (Krzemiński, Raciborski 2007). In this publication, we can find, inter alia, the reflections on the world of values and attitudes in the declining

¹⁰ In Polish "indywidualna świadomość ekonomiczna."

period of real socialism (i.a. Marody 2007), as well as the studies about the changes in the logic of power in terms of state and economic reforms, value transitions, and ideological and political issues. This book also shows the conclusions of the Polish cultural heritage in terms of changes in the Polish mentality during those times.

Another anthology which we would like to point to is the book *Wymiary życia społecznego. Polska na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* (Marody 2009). This collection of texts is a comprehensive picture of the changes taking place in Poland since the late 1980s. The book is of an interdisciplinary character and deals with issues traditionally included in social sciences. The authors of this volume write about the main directions of the changes in Poland, for example, the changes in the field of education and the labor market. They also touch upon such problems as unemployment and the issues of rural environments in the face of the great change. Consideration is also given to the transformation of the Polish family in relation to the social system, reproductive strategies and the dilemmas of young Poles. The book also focuses on the changes in Polish religiosity and morality. Finally, it touches upon the reflections on the Polish transformation in the light of the processes of globalization and Europeanization, as well as on the issues of post-modernity.

The third notable anthology including the reflections of the Polish sociologists on the subject of transformation is titled *Wielka transformacja. Zmiany ustroju w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Krzemiński 2011). Those texts are focused on various aspects of this process in Poland: from discussions on the fall of the socialist system and studies about the social atmosphere of the first years of the 1990s to academic questions of paradigms of research on transformation and ability to determine if and when we can say this process ended (e.g., Giza-Poleszczuk, Krzemiński, Mach, Marody, Rychard, Sułek, Śpiewak, Ziółkowski 2011).

Another book which we would like to list here is the anthology of texts *Polska po 20 latach wolności* (Bucholc, Mandes, Szawiel, Wawrzyniak 2014), which includes 30 dissertations following a scientific conference organized by the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw in May 2009 on the twentieth anniversary of the political breakthrough in our country. The book shows the wide (and theoretically deepened) social panorama of contemporary Poland and its situation in the post-transformational reality. The texts are focused on the problems of the democratization and institutionalization processes, values and identity transitions, gender studies, and changes in the remembrance policy (e.g., Polish ideological disputes about the recent memory [Śpiewak 2014]).

One can find a more critical approach towards the transformation in the works of Dunn (2007), Sosnowska (1996), Baer (2009), Kennedy (2002) or Verdery (1996). There is not enough space to refer to all the mentioned authors,

however, it should be underlined that a sceptic reflection often came from the foreign thinkers. Somehow in the counterweight to the subordinated attitude towards a new economic regime which was quite frequent among the Polish scientific elite (Woźniak 2014, Buchowski 2018). The latter fulfilled a role in legitimizing the implementation of the capitalist logic into social life:

The triumph of the meritocratic approach to social mobility and technocratic attitude to policy-making grants a special position to the well-educated elite in the process of setting up the public agenda, and hence prescribing the legitimacy and importance of certain themes. It is also visible that the language and discursive practices used by the most prominent and recognized members of the elite via mass-media become dominant in the public sphere (Woźniak 2014: 172).

The critical voice was focused on a general understanding of the process underlining several consequences of non-alternative following the neoliberal direction (Kennedy 2002). However, socio-economic deprivation, which follows the political decisions of the early 1990s, had an enormous impact on the everyday life of Polish society. Concentrating on these aspects of the change was the main characteristic of the Polish-based sociological approach which could be understood as an internal critique of the transformation. The preceding paragraphs cover the main fields of interest of research initiatives devoted to the empirical-based, bottom-up funded exploration of the social, economic, and cultural consequences of the analyzed process.

In regards to the above, another field of research on the broadly understood processes of the transformation in Polish sociology has been marked by the works of authors such as Maria Jarosz (2005, 2007, 2008), Elżbieta Tarkowska (2000), Elżbieta Tarkowska, Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Kazimiera Wódz (2003), Hanna Palska (2002) to name a few, who dealt with the rich/poor, winners/losers of the transformation, or those included in or excluded from the elite. These studies were based on qualitative research, thematically oriented phenomena and a classic use of the sociological interview as empirical material providing knowledge about social facts.

Another group of studies represents the research (there are not as many studies as the quantitative ones) which has been based on a biographical approach; in-depth, most often, biographical and narrative interviews. The most recognized studies relate to the problem of poverty and the sphere of work.

Concerning the first-mentioned field:

[s]ince 1990, the sociologists from the University of Łódź have been conducting multidimensional analyses of poverty and social exclusion. In 1997–1999, within the framework of two projects: *The Social Cost of Economic Transformation in Central Europe. Social History of Poverty in Central Europe and Forms of Poverty*

and *Social Risks and Their Spatial Distribution in Łódź*, family life histories of 3 generations of the families supported by social welfare agencies were collected (Golczyńska-Grondas, Potoczna 2013: 9).¹¹

The qualitative material included narrative interviews, in-depth biographical interviews, and family life histories. In the first project between 1998 and 1999, 90 interviews were conducted, involving at least two generations of 40 families in which a member of the middle generation was a client of social work. In the second one, 90 people – members of 49 families were interviewed (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2001).

Today, apart from the analytical input, the materials collected in the 1990s constitute a valuable source of data and record of social history processes experienced from the perspective of individuals, their biographies and families affected by poverty.¹²

The second mentioned field – the sphere of work – has been studied from at least a few approaches. The research conducted by Adam Mrozowicki and Markieta Domecka (Mrozowicki, Domecka 2008, Domecka 2014, 2016, Mrozowicki 2010, 2011) within the projects: *Coping with Social Change. Life Strategies of Workers in Poland and the End of State Socialism and Negotiating Capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe* and *Between Marginalization and Revitalization of Organized Labor* have been focused on various aspects of work subject to systemic changes. The documentary effects of both pieces of research include, among other things, a collection of about 200 autobiographical narrative interviews with workers and engineers from the largest industrial plants in Silesia (Dolny, Górny, Cieszyński, and Opolski). It is worth mentioning that the experiences of the systemic transformation in West Pomerania were discussed on the basis of over 400 life histories collected by Magdalena Fiternicka-Gorzko (2020).

One more project recently led by Adam Mrozowicki and focusing on work-related sphere (PREWORK – *Young precarious workers in Poland and Germany: a comparative sociological study on working and living conditions, social consciousness, and civic engagement* funded by the National Science Center in Poland and the

¹¹ The most important results can be found in the following publications: *Życ i pracować w enklawach biedy* (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998 [2001]); *(Żyć) Na marginesie wielkiego miasta* (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1999); *Mężczyźni z enklaw biedy. Rekonstrukcja pełnionych ról społecznych* (Golczyńska-Grondas 2004); *Kobiety z łódzkich enklaw biedy. Bieda w cyklu życia i międzypokoleniowym przekazie* (Potoczna, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009); *Mieszkańcy łódzkich enklaw biedy 10 lat później* (Jankowski, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2010); *Ciągłość i zmiana w łódzkich enklawach biedy* (Jankowski, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2013).

¹² Chapter XIII by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas and Małgorzata Potoczna is based on this research.

German Research Foundation) has been devoted to the problem of precarious young people in Poland and Germany and their life strategies influenced by the labor market (Mrozowicki, Karolak, and Krasowska 2018; Mrozowicki and Karolak 2017; Mrozowicki 2016 and Mrozowicki, Trappmann, Seehaus, Kajta 2019; Mrozowicki and Czarzasty 2020).

Another researcher who uses biographical-narrative interviews and has been focused on the sphere of work is Joanna Wawrzyniak, who has recently conducted two research projects: *Privatization as a Biographical Experience. Long-term Effects of Business Ownership Changes in Industrial Plants from the Perspective of Individual Lives* (funded by the National Science Center) (Mikołajewska, Wawrzyniak 2016, Gospodarczyk, Leyk 2012), and is currently working on another project: *From a Socialistic Factory to Multinational Corporation. An Archive Collection of Biographical Narrative Interviews with Industrial Workers* (funded by NPRH) (Jastrząb, Wawrzyniak 2017). The analyses conducted within these studies are focused on collective and biographical memory of the past created from a contemporary perspective. Recently, the author, in cooperation with Aleksandra Leyk, published the collection of oral histories of employees and workers of companies that were privatized in Poland in the 1990s and became the property of international corporations titled "Cięcica. Mówiona historia transformacji" (2020).

One more project: *Poles in the world of late capitalism: transformations of biographical processes in the aspect of professional careers, social bonds, and identity during the transformation period in Poland* (funded by NCN) focused on the reconstruction of the varieties and dynamics of biographical experiences of three cohorts of Polish society entering the labor market during (and after) the political transformation in the sphere of 1) professional careers, 2) social bonds, and 3) individual, social, and cultural identity (Biały 2015a, 2015b, Kordasiewicz 2016, Haratyk, Biały, Gońda 2017, Haratyk, Biały 2018, Piotrowski, Biały, Rosińska, Gońda, Haratyk 2019).

This introduction should also include references to literature based on biographical research on the individual and social dimensions of transformation studied in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, such as a book *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies* (Humphrey, Miller and Zdravomyslova 2003), *Theory of cultural trauma and its application to explain Estonians' Soviet-time mentality based on the biographical method* (Aareleid-Tart 2010), or the works of German biographers such as, for example, Peter Alheit (1991, 1994, 1995, 2004, 2006, 2011, 2015). Apart from the research of Joanna Wawrzyniak mentioned above, there is also a rich literature on oral history and anthropology of transformation, focusing not only on Poland, but also on the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, associated with names such as Chris Hann (2002), David A. Kideckel (1987, 1995), Sarah Ashwin (1998, 1999a, b), Don Kalb (2009), who questions the

transitological and macro-systemic view dominating the research on change and is therefore related to the analyses presented in this book.

An interesting research proposal also presents texts devoted to the study of the transformation process within the framework of the methodology of discourse analysis.¹³ This approach was characterized by methodological and empirical criticism of the changes taking place in Poland. Andrzej Piotrowski already in the late 1990s noticed that: “the political changes in Poland initiated in the end of the 1980s under the slogan of returning to political and economic normality were patterned after the Western world’s model of institutions” (1997: 328). Such values as: “the rational free-market, democracy, freedom from political influences, and freedom of expressing ones” national belongings were just copied from the West and put into practice without any reflection or criticism. Subsequently, “some hopeful thought pattern saying that the very process of overcoming the chaos brings about or restores order was petrified” (1997: 329).

Another position – apart from the above cited *Rytualny chaos. Studium dyskursu publicznego* (Czyżewski, Kowalski, Piotrowski 1997, 2009) coming from this circle of reflection was *Cudze problemy. O ważności tego, co nieważne. Analiza dyskursu publicznego w Polsce* (Czyżewski, Dunin, Piotrowski 1991, 2009). The authors of the texts refer to the problem of sepiation¹⁴ of some topics from the public discourse arena and attempt to reconstruct the reasons for such discursive practices. It is also worth mentioning here the reflections of Marek Czyżewski about the changes in Poland with reference to the implementation of neoliberal ideology, a new type of economy, and “economizing” rhetoric (Czyżewski 2009).¹⁵

Another book which can be recalled here is the result of an interdisciplinary research project¹⁶ focused on the issue of public communication in Poland titled:

¹³ To see other references to discourse analysis in the book see Chapter X by Katarzyna Waniek.

¹⁴ The term ‘sep’ means *somebody else’s problem*, in other words, it means a silenced matter, considered to be someone else’s problem. Here it means “a kind of experience in which memory is erased, pushed into the background when categorizing resources are obfuscated” (Czyżewski, Dunin, Piotrowski 1991: 12). Additionally: “The sep procedures, consisting of silencing or active annulment, are opposed [...] by counter-sep procedures undertaken by other discourse participants, which comprise of validating, disclosing, publicizing, and making the subject of interest of what others considered unimportant. In this way, the issues subject to sepping move from the sphere of formal properties of all acts of communication into the field of empirical social processes, into the sphere of political struggle and public disputes” (Czyżewski, Dunin, Piotrowski 1991: 7).

¹⁵ More references to those issues can be found in Chapter IX by Joanna Wygnańska and Chapter X by Katarzyna Waniek.

¹⁶ The project was called: *Komunikowanie publiczne w Polsce – ujęcie inter- i multidyscyplinarne* (NPRH nr 0114/NPRH2/H11/81/2013) conducted in the years 2013–2017. The head of the project was Marek Czyżewski (University of Łódź).

Polskie sprawy 1945–2015 (Czyżewski, Horolets, Podemski, Rancew-Sikora 2017). This publication focused, on the one hand, on the changes in socio-cultural and political-state issues in the frame of reference concerning the analyzed problems as important for the whole Polish society (due to social or symbolic elites statements) and the specific social environment, certain social groups or a certain worldview orientation, on the other. The authors of the analyses notice the qualitative change which took place in public communication in Poland in the years 1989–1990. They also focus on showing and reconstructing the mechanisms of concealment and exclusion of particular topics or voices in the public debate which, as they conclude, relate not only to the PPR period in Poland.

Another publication worth mentioning is a collective work entitled *Discourse and transformation in Central and Eastern Europe* edited by Aleksandra Galasińska and Michał Krzyżanowski (2009). It is a collection of texts undertaking the reconstruction of discourses related to the transformation in the Polish context and in relation to the experience of this process in other former socialist republics. An important resource of these articles is the thread of the relationship between control and power in public and semi-public discourse in the post-communist times.

In recent years a lot of works devoted to studying the discourse of transformation in Poland in the perspective of the theory of social time and the theory of modernization (Lewicki 2018) and within the approach embedded in the theory of reflexive modernization, providing a review of the forms of justifying the policies that dominated the political shape of Polish transformation (Kubala 2019) have been published.

All the mentioned efforts show how important and complex the topic of the transformation is in the Polish public and scientific debate. However, still, not everything has been explored and said about that phenomenon. There is still a need to follow both micro and macro levels of changes occurring after the symbolic year of 1989 in Poland. Especially, when we look at the broader context of the transformation. The local mechanisms of change could be bound with global shifts in politics, economy and social and cultural background. On the other hand, focusing on the micro-level of social reality could show us the aspects of the transformation which thus far have not been recognized. We leave it to the reader’s assessment if we were able to encompass both mentioned perspectives in the book.

Approach towards the transformation presented in this book

Although it is problematic to do so, in the case of the transformation, we should try to outline at least its scope. To complete this task, it will be helpful to refer to Magda Szcześniak’s book *Normy widzialności. Tożsamość w czasach*

transformacji (2016). The author stresses the impossibility of a concrete definition of the beginning and the end of the process. Even the reconstruction of the economic thread of the change – theoretically, one of the easiest paths to reconstruct – poses a lot of difficulties. The liberalization of the economy started before 1989 – that is, in 1988, when the authorities implemented Wilczek's Law which legalized private entrepreneurship.¹⁷ The issue gets more complicated by switching to social and cultural analysis. Although some researchers already claimed in 2004 that the transformation was over (Marody 2004), our perspective is rather based on the opposite approach. While the processes of modernization of the country itself in its various dimensions were time- and spatially differentiated, in the biographical materials the described social change continues to exist without a clear caesura.

It is worth mentioning that the books and articles listed in the previous section could be recognized as voices in public debate on the process of the transformation, its costs, and successes. Some of them, especially the names of distinguished sociologists of the new era like Sztopka or Domański, can be treated as an element of transitional sociology (Sosnowska 1996). This approach would be characterized by understanding the transformation not only as a social change as such, but as a process of becoming like the states and societies of the West.

"This kind of procedure causes fabrication of the dominating vision of «normality» defined according to European standards and ignores that Poland is a peripheral country developing in a different context than the Western countries" (Szcześniak 2016: 18). Szcześniak tries to "run away" from the trap of determining the transformation by using Michael Kennedy's term "culture of transformation" which is understood as the concept of an imposed "narration" (Szcześniak 2016:19) interpreting the occurring change and defining its direction.¹⁸

However, in the case of our project, we needed to establish our own understanding of the transformation process which would allow us to grasp all the potentials of using the biographical method in collecting and analyzing the

¹⁷ Wilczek's Law was proposed in 1988 by the Minister of Industry Mieczysław Wilczek and Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski. Enacted by the Sejm in 1989 allowed the legalization and running of private companies by Polish citizens.

¹⁸ It should be stressed that problems of systemic transformation in Poland have become the subject of interest of many foreign researchers. It may be a paradox that they often looked much more critically at the social consequences of the systemic change. It can be said that they used the privilege of Schütz's stranger position, who looks from the side, sees more – has a comparative perspective. The etic approach in this case added a certain amount of objectivity to the analysis (e.g. Burawoy, Verdery 1999, Dunn 2004, Eylan et al. 1998, Horn, Kenney 2004, Kenney 2003, 2006, Ost 2006, Pollert 2000, Poznanski 1997, Stenning 2003).

material. We see the transformation as a process which requires reconstructing its natural history (which according to one of the basic terms of the Chicago School of Sociology means a certain series of events that, especially from the point of view of an actor, was impetuous and uncontrollable, but at the same time – particularly from the researcher's point of view – predictable and governed by certain regularities [Szacki 1981: 649]). So we see two perspectives of processuality here: macro- and micro-social. The former allows us to look at the natural history of the transformation with its intrinsic logic and, above all, with the conviction that it has been going on for a long time before 1989 and that it also affects the present through the social consequences of the great change. Therefore, we have found it necessary to turn to sources of the process which can be traced to biographical experiences of the socio-historical epoch of socialism.¹⁹ The micro perspective, on the other hand, allows us to capture how social processes shape biographical processes and how the transformation is interpreted from the perspective of individual experiences by people who at different stages of their life cycle have become subject to it.

A more detailed project description can be found in the next chapter of the book, however here, it should be stressed that the criteria for the selection of interviewees assumed that the researchers were looking for an "ordinary man" who had not been engaged directly into the political course of action during the systemic change. In that sense, our project is inscribed into the biographical research tradition of establishing a bottom-up perspective. We treat it as an important voice in the scientific debate on the meaning of the transformation for the whole society.

Not without significance is also the fact that during the analysis our main attention was focused on the emic categories, generated by the interviewees themselves or resulting from what appeared in their interviews. This is also how the structure of the book was built, which we discuss in the next part of this chapter.

From this point of view, the intention of the conducted biographical study is then to complement the existing research on the phenomenon and process of the transformation in Poland with the approach to seek the structures and mechanisms shaping one's biographical experience. This kind of analysis gives us an opportunity to combine the phases of biographies of our narrators with the social process framing their biographical experiences and by which those processes are formed, modified, or transformed. Our aim here is, thus, to "pay attention to how macro-historical processes and their involved social

¹⁹ See the second part of the book: *From PPR to the systemic transformation* which includes texts showing the links between the PPR and transformation time biographical patterns of actions and attitudes towards the system.

processes and mechanisms are personally experienced and interpreted by persons involved in them” (Schütze 2014: 227). Such a scientific attitude enables us to see what kind of collective and social processes or events the narrators include in their biographical experiences. And, on the other hand, how they tell and interpret those biographical experiences. In this perspective, our aim to tell the great change means to analyze the autobiographical narratives to grasp the relations between what’s individual and what’s collective in one’s biography. Thus, this kind of approach tries to catch the variety of experiences and interpretations of their dynamics, turning points, and historical, economic, and political complexity of the process of the transformation.

At the end of this brief description, we would like to share some reflections on the value of the following research study. Perhaps, one of the most important advantages of using the biographical approach in exploring social change (understood here as a collective process) is the opportunity to present its complexity and density. For those who have experience in using the biographical methodology in social research (especially the autobiographical narrative interview) its strengths should be apparent. Among others, it is connected to accessing a unique level of detail of social phenomena. Simultaneously, the challenge emerging ahead of the researcher – not to lose the goal to find general categorization which would allow him/her to implement the original interpretation into the public and scientific debate.

Transformation is a subject which is still alive in Polish public debate – while becoming an increasingly abstract theme for younger generations. A greater responsibility lies with the researchers undertaking to face it, regardless of whether they do so as part of an anthropological, economic, or sociological approach. With our book we want to add a voice that is important from our point of view, taking into account the biographical experience of individuals from different parts of the country, occupying different social positions, and having a different history of the last thirty years. Being aware that we are not in a position to fill all the gaps in the debate on the transformation, we hope that at least partly we will expand the knowledge on social change, which is crucial for the contemporary condition of our society.

Line-up of the book

The assumption of the processual character of the transformation and the decision to use the methodology of the autobiographical narrative interview has an impact on the shape of this publication. First of all, the collection of the 90 interviews became a serious challenge when it came to analyzing and generating more universal categories. The vastness of the material required meticulous work during internal seminars and workshops with experts in

the field. However, it allowed us to compile different topics regarding various phenomena and processes of the transformation.

The logic of the book is planned with the intention of presenting to the reader the main themes that emerged during the analysis of the material. We decided to divide its content into four main parts: introduction, then the section including the texts focused on reconstructing the links between the pre-transformation period and the transformation time in Poland, next the analysis of opportunity structures which had emerged after 1989 and as the fourth part includes the study of the topic of biographical resources which can be understood as material, social, and emotional support for individuals coping with the systemic change. Conclusions cover the main argumentation and include general remarks resulting from the analysis of the material.

In the first part of the book, as has already been presented in the chapter, we mainly focus on the introduction regarding the socio-historic context of the transformation, its impact on public debate in Poland. Additionally, we describe the methodological and theoretical background of our analysis. In the second part, we aim at recreating the biographical experience of two social realities separated by the symbolic date of the year 1989. Applying biographical methodology the authors in this part try to grasp the relationship between the individual perspective and the macro-structural processes connected with the ending of one historic era and the succession of another one.

The next part of the book – focused on the topic of opportunity structures – follows different mechanisms impacting the life courses (and narratives) of our interviewees. The reflections in the included chapters touch issues such as the myth of education, the process of marketization of the public sector, the individual strategies of coping with systemic change, the progressive corporatization of the workplace and apparently form an eclectic juxtaposition of threads, the problem of poverty and precarity. However, all of these mechanisms connect in interviewees' narrations where individuals present their biographical strategies of coping with the change (Mrozowicki 2011, Mrozowicki, Karolak 2018, Burski 2019).

The fourth part of the book is concentrated on biographical resources used by our narrators. The biographical topics studied here include firstly, the reference to the category of the family as an important context in shaping individual life stories. Secondly, we are focusing on the issue of growing up reconstructed in the biographies of our narrators (born in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s) in relation to the time before and after the year 1989 told from their past and contemporary experience. Here, the most important structure of reference used by the narrators is their memory of the backyard. This place of their memory is seen in various social contexts and is considered as the frame of reference showing the changes in patterns and approaches to bringing up children. The

last chapter presents the case studies of the life stories rooted in '*milieu*'. Here we attempt to show the biographical experience of the transformation process from the perspective of the inhabitants of small communities and the role this local context plays in the organization of one's life history.

In the concluding remarks, our main attempt is to discuss the conducted research study and to present the scientific self-reflection in relation to our analysis. We try to summarize our research findings by referring to the research question: how far were the personal everyday events and biographical experiences of the narrators presented as more or less shaped by the historical and social context of the time of the transformation in Poland? In conclusion, we also undertake a certain integrated description of the variety of the biographical experience of the transformation process captured in our research. At the end of deliberations, we also reflect on other comparative fields which may be a reference framework and inspiration for further inference.

Kaja Kaźmierska

CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Main methodological and theoretical assumptions

The theoretical and methodological perspectives proposed in our book to study the great change in Poland are based on the linguistically grounded analysis of autobiographical accounts of ordinary people. The method including a technique of gathering data, its meticulous analysis, and theory building finds its roots in interpretative sociology, sociolinguistic conversation analysis, grounded theory, and – last but not least, in biographical research. Using Herbert Blumer’s words it is: “[...] a down-to-earth approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct. Its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It lodges its problems in this natural world, conducts its studies in it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies” (Blumer 1969: 47). According to the biographical approach, a biographical analysis serves to reconstruct collective processes through the experiences of individuals. Thus, theoretically and methodologically we have applied a bottom-up approach in order to grasp the mutual influence between individual experiences and the macro socio-cultural processes of collective change and transformation. Such a bottom-up approach could be adequately accomplished by the use of the data-collection and data-analysis method of the autobiographical narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze, (Schütze 1983, 1995, 2008a, b, Riemann, Schütze 1991, Riemann 2006, Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996, Kaźmierska 1999, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, Kaźmierska 2012a, Waniek 2012, 2019).

As it has been pointed out in the *Introduction*, the main aim of our research focuses on the analysis of the experience of transformation of the Polish political and social system in an individual biographical perspective. We have already defined *transformation* as a process of social changes, for which the year 1989 has been symbolically set and accepted in the public discourse as the turning point for the political, social, and economic transition. Having in mind other studies

on this topic, mainly based on quantitative analysis, we decided to explore the bottom-up biographical perspective of ordinary people experiencing social reality before and after 1989. Thus, the main point of our interest focuses on the so-called 'ordinary man' or 'man on the street' to use Alfred Schütz's (1946) term. Based upon his own experience, the ordinary man is "the wide-awake, fully-functioning adult in the natural attitude." The 'man on the street' operates according to his (or her) set of naive relevances, for which 'recipe knowledge' is adequate. The ordinary person acting in the world is in a biographically-determined situation doing what he or she does according to the system of relevances, which enables him or her to select from the environment, and from the interactions with others, those elements which make sense for the purpose at hand. "The man on the street has a working knowledge of many fields which are not necessarily coherent with one another. His is a knowledge of recipes indicating how to bring forth in typical situations typical results by typical means. The recipes indicate procedures which can be trusted even though they are not clearly understood. By following the prescription as if it were a ritual, the desired result can be attained without questioning why the single procedural steps have to be taken and taken exactly in the sequence prescribed. This knowledge in all its vagueness is still sufficiently precise for the practical purpose at hand. In all matters not connected with such practical purposes of immediate concern, the man on the street accepts his sentiments and passions as guides. Under their influence, he establishes a set of convictions and unclarified views which he simply relies upon as long as they do not interfere with his pursuit of happiness" (Schütz 1970: 240). Adopting this perspective we did not interview well-known people whose voice is present in the public discourse.¹

The research has been based on the methodology of the autobiographical narrative interview and followed by the conviction that narratives gave an empirical base for reconstructing not only the social and political images of the reality of individuals, but also enabled us to grasp analytically their social reality constructed by them as social actors (Berger, Luckmann 1991). Additionally, sociologists analyzing an interview get not only an opportunity to seize and reconstruct meaningful features and mechanisms of biographical experiences, but also to understand one's biographical entanglement. They also get a chance to see the narrator's biographical work undertaken in the span of their biography, that is, in a processual perspective. Since we should understand transformation as a long, time-spread, multi-aspect process of transition, the autobiographical narrative interview gave a chance to grasp this process both in an individual

¹ Namely, we were not focused on, according to Schütz's concept, "the well-informed citizens" or "the experts" (1946).

and collective perspective. We used it as a tool enabling a description of the process of social change and transformation assuming after Fritz Schütze that social processes can be revealed, described and analyzed on the empirical basis of autobiographical narratives. Schütze argues that the interview format gives us an in-depth insight into “collective social processes in which biographical experiences and dynamics of identity development or impediments are prominent (e.g., social movements)” (Schütze 2008b: 6). Further, he adds that “social reality more basically consists of social processes and less importantly of stable social structures since they are products of social processes and changing permanently” and “analyzing individuals life histories [...] is a promising avenue to social reality” (Schütze 2008b: 2).

Since the method allows the showing of both past and present ways of interpretation of biographical experiences and social processes, we were able to analyze how and in what way they changed as a result of the transition. Showing this passage helps to understand the process of transformation from the perspective of ‘the man on the street’ and explain the real meaning of socio-historical circumstances influencing biographical choices and adaptive strategies in the new democratic reality.

Understanding *transformation* as a process, as we have already pointed out in the *Introduction*, requires reconstructing its dynamics, its natural history with its two perspectives of processuality: macro- and micro-social. The former allows us to look at the natural history of the transformation with its intrinsic logic and, above all, with the conviction that it has been going on for a long time before 1989 and that it also affects the present through the social consequences of the great change. Therefore, we have found it necessary to turn to sources of the process which can be traced to biographical experiences of the socio-historical epoch of socialism.² The micro perspective, on the other hand, allows us to capture how social processes shape biographical processes and how the transformation is interpreted from the perspective of individual experiences by people who at different stages of their life cycle have become subject to it.

The research sample

Following these assumptions, in order to get access to different aspects of the process, we conducted 90 autobiographical narrative interviews with informants belonging to three age groups (30 interviews in each), that is, people born in the following years: 1960–1970, 1970–1980, 1980–1989.³

² See the following Part 2.

³ All interviews were collected between 2014–2016 and transcribed. Additionally 20 of them were translated into English.

The criteria were obviously arbitrary. Their main framework was to gather the widest possible spectrum of biographical experiences "dispersed" in different social environments, by which, once again, we most generally understand the social strata and different social spaces, also identified in a geographical sense and the different phases of the life cycle. In other words, we did not want to focus our sample on, for example, certain professional, social groups or classes. We have decided to search for interviewees born in these decades, firstly in order to continue collecting life narratives to complement the existing collection of biographical materials.⁴ Secondly, we have decided to check whether people born in three decades would be willing to see their biographical experiences as a generational experience, framed by systemic transformation. As a starting point to our way of thinking, not even assumptions, was the expectation that the different time of being socialized in educational institutions could be the crucial experience diversifying those groups. Thus belonging to the first decade studied, from the perspective of the informants – means that they experienced their whole socialization in educational institutions, as well as some part of their adult life in the People's Republic of Poland; the second decade comprises of those who started their education in the 1980s, but (particularly in the case of students) graduated after 1989 and gained professional experience in the 1990s; the last group consists of those people who could hardly have had any encounter with the People's Republic of Poland.

As a result, we have identified three groups differentiated by various ways of social rootedness of their biographical experiences. The educational criterion is to some extent conventional and arbitrary, but it enabled us to create a starting point for interpretative frames unveiling a diversity of experiences of the people within the study. Thus, the informants belonging to the first group were subjected to still ideologized education (e.g., history school books, compulsory Russian language course, etc.), and at the same time, they were brought up in the spirit of stability of occupational career, clear rules on the labor market. They faced 1989 with biographical baggage of experience of the socialist reality internalized in their childhood and adolescence. The second group is an in-between cohort, some people particularly at the level of secondary and higher education benefited from the transition in terms of unideologized curricula, but at the same time, they were still brought up in the expectation of stability on the labor market, which appeared to be more and more difficult. Although they entered their adulthood after the symbolic moment of transition, their memory and understanding of reality before this passage are still biographically

⁴ As we mentioned in the Foreword, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes now of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century

grounded by individual experiences. The third group was socialized in a totally new reality (younger people from this group – born in 1987–1989 have also experienced the reform of the educational system in Poland), people from this group do not remember socialism and most of them have been mentally prepared for if not the instability of their occupational career, for sure readiness to be flexible and adapt to changing labor market rules. Sometimes they are called the ‘89 generation (similarly to Germany where this group is described as the *Mauerfallgeneration*). When planning the research we assumed that incorporating this cohort could help to capture a new, interesting image of the transition and this expectation was positively verified in the collected narratives. It should be added that the representatives of the first group were approximately 29 years old in 1989 (so generally they were either about to start an adult life or they had already been working for a couple of years), while those from the third group were about the same age at the time of research which gave additional generational context for comparison.

The autobiographical narrative interviews were recorded and transcribed in detail (i.e., considering paralinguistic phenomena).⁵ They lasted from 1 to 3 hours. The 90 collected autobiographical interviews provided extensive and rich empirical data. All the transcriptions were anonymized – the narrators’ names were changed, as well as some details of their biography (e.g., names of appearing characters, places, sometimes institutions), yet the changes in the names of cities, towns or villages, social environments, study fields, et cetera were introduced in a way that reflects the real context of the interviewee biographical experience. We present some cases in the book.⁶

We did not consciously specify other criteria of choice since we wanted to concentrate on investigating and presenting the diversity of biographical experiences of the transformation. Thus we wanted to know and analyze the biographies of the mentioned cohorts concerning the diversity of their economic, social, or occupational status, their social and family background, education, place of living, et cetera. We assumed that this strategy – offered by grounded theory – of entering the research field without clearly defined assumptions would enable us to see the dynamic of social change related to 1989 not only in a much wider context, but also from the hierarchy of importance of an experiencing individual. The narratives concentrated on the whole biography of the informants, which enabled us to analyze the dynamic of the social, historical, and political processes inscribed in the biographies of the ordinary people. Following our interest in “the man on the street” we searched

⁵ For detailed transcription notation see: Appendix.

⁶ The list of the interviews together with short characteristics of the interviewees can be found at the end of the book (see: Appendix).

for the interviewees in the periphery, and not in the centers understood here literally as the main centers of dynamic processes of social transformation seen in the framework of development and progress and catching up with the lag of civilization with Warsaw at the forefront. We conducted our research in Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, Poznań, or Gliwice, and for logistical reasons often in Łódź (admittedly until recently the second largest, but in many respects the peripheral city). We were also in the Lublin region, Podlasie, in the mountain villages of Lesser Poland or in the province of Central Poland. We also tried to reach representatives of different classes and environments, namely middle class members, as well as those who perhaps should belong to it, but the effects of transformation processes either forced their peripherality (e.g., in the professional dimension), or resulted in strategies that distance themselves from contemporary reality. Unfortunately, we did not manage to fully implement this assumption. Reaching people without education, unemployed, socially excluded turned out to be very difficult. An ex-post analysis of the reason for this failure can be concluded that the interviewee search in the biographical approach is usually carried out by building specific networks of relationships initiated by one's own contacts and developed using the snowball method. Entering new networks of relationships takes time and is a socially complex process. Our research sample was very extensive by the standards of biographical research. It is not easy to collect 90 narrative interviews over two years if we assume sample diversification and if we take into account that in order to find contrastive cases we must first transcribe a number of interviews, analyze them, and describe their content and basic formal features. Each interview consists of: searching for an interviewee, persuading him/her to participate in the study, setting a date, conducting an interview. These seemingly trivial activities take a lot of time. We do not regard these explanations as a naïve argument, but rather as a kind of self-criticism, because, as experienced researchers, we have not been able to overcome the difficulties that were foreseeable and that could probably be overcome. Additionally, when we managed to collect a number of interviews with less educated, lower-ranking people in the social structure, it happened at the end of the project and we did not have enough time to analyze the material systematically enough to be included in this book. Fortunately, one of the advantages of the biographical approach is the never-ending analytical potential of the collected material. So we will be able to use these cases for further work.

Research Objective

Following that perspective, the research has been focused on the biographical experiences of the transformation and the reconstruction of this process in autobiographical accounts. We wanted to: (1) grasp and analyze

the dynamics of the transformation process in the perspective of a biography; (2) focus on the sociological analysis of the everyday-life experience and the biographical reconstruction of the transformation process before and after the year 1989: its basic features and mechanisms; (3) find out how various socio-biographical circumstances (education, occupation, social status, place of origin, political orientation and engagement, etc.) influenced the adaptive strategies while experiencing the transformation and how their interpretation changes over time; (4) compare and show the mutual relationship between the widespread, (usually) simplified schemes of interpretation and the evaluation of the process of the transformation in the public discourse and its diversity in biographical experiences; (5) get insight into collective phenomena and social processes in which biographical experiences appear prominent; (6) show the passage between social history before and after the year 1989 and portray the real significance of the social-historical impact on biographical choices and adaptive strategies in the new democratic reality; (7) reconstruct the variety of frames of interpretations, adaptive strategies, ways of narrating, as well as different relationships between biographical and collective ways of constructing social reality.

Thus a starting point for us was the perspective which William Thomas expressed when formulating the definition of a situation: “if people define situations as real they are real in their consequences” (1928: 584), which implies a variety of social worlds which should be interpreted from different (individual) perspectives. Therefore, we did not limit ourselves to the level of events. We searched for deeper socio-historical processes which the interviewees were not frequently fully aware of, which could constitute frames for their biographical experiences.

Relating both to events and their interpretations we were especially interested in getting answers to two basic questions: *what* informants incorporate into their biographical experiences and in *what way* they speak about them, thus *how* they interpret them (Helling 1990).

When referring to the first group of problems we posed the following questions: what events, collective phenomena, and individual experiences are mentioned in the collected autobiographies? Do the informants incorporate, as a background, the descriptions of everyday life situations and life routines (e.g., work, housekeeping, children upbringing, travel, living conditions, etc.) into their life story and/or do they allude in their biographical work to the collective-historical constellations of events, institutional structures and cultural patterns related to the experience of the transformation? Do they describe, in the case of the first and probably the second cohort, the time of the People’s Republic of Poland? Do they relate to the events of that time, especially those considered as the turning points in the Polish social history? To what extent

will their individual experiences be presented against the background of the time of socialism? Do they directly relate to important historical events in their life story connected both with the time of socialism and the transformation? Or, on the contrary, do those events appear only as very general, blurred frames of orientation? Briefly speaking, we looked for an answer to the question: to what extent are the individual events of everyday life and the biographical experiences of the narrators from each cohort presented as shaped by the socio-historical background in which their biographies are enrooted and does it differentiate their narration about the process of the transformation? In the case of the first group, did the narrators point to the moment of transition as being biographically important? And if so, in what biographical constellations (e.g., loss of work, permanent unemployment, new possibilities, opening of new educational challenges, etc.)? Did they generally place and interpret their life in the prism of the transition processes? As we will see in the following chapters it is very difficult to give clear answers. They rather require an analysis of sometimes quite complicated constellations of biographical experiences, attitudes, and social frames.

In the case of the second question of *how*, we were interested in the following issues: how various biographical circumstances (e.g., education, occupation, social status, political involvement, etc.) influenced the adaptive strategies when experiencing the process of the transformation and how are they interpreted in the narration? Are there any common (for the three mentioned groups) patterns of biographical narratives related to the interpretations of the transformation, auto presentation, giving meaning to certain activities, et cetera.? In what way did the experience of communism (in the case of the older narrators) influence their experience of the transformation? Did the narratives of the younger group differ significantly in the form and structure, the ways of self-presentation, implementing life strategies? How did the narrators deal with the problem of a lack of ready-made narrative schemes about this period? Or, to the contrary, did they find culturally grounded patterns of narratives about the transformation? How did the narrators from the older cohort present and rationalize, from their biographical perspectives, a possible nostalgia for socialism?

It is important to note that Schütze's method finds its roots in the research strategy of grounded theory, as developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (Glaser, Strauss 1967, Corbin, Strauss 1990, 1997), in which hypotheses emerge from the collected empirical data. The authors highlight that grounded theory, which unlike theories generated by means of logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Glaser, Strauss 1997: 3), is not based on a preconceived theoretical framework to test or verify the already established categories, concepts, and hypotheses (Glaser, Strauss 1967: 45).

To the contrary, the research process starts with open formulations of sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954⁷) concerning the theme to be studied and emphasis is placed on the theoretical structuring to be followed by a constant comparative analysis of the collected data that then shapes further investigation and leads to the generation of initial categories and hypotheses. Isabelle Baszanger stresses: “In sharp contrast with other research approaches [...] grounded theory considers research to be a process in which empirical and theoretical work are linked in a constant reciprocal dialog” (Baszanger 1998: 254). It is also worth stressing that even “closed” research process is open to further confrontation with new empirical data. Emerged categories, hypotheses and theories can be thus “controlled, differentiated, backed up, or put in doubt” (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 64). This means that the “whole model is constantly being respecified, is becoming denser, and moving towards ‘theoretical saturation’ (to use the term of Glaser and Strauss again)” (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 64). That is why in Conclusions we do not formulate clear and undisputed propositions and outcomes, but rather systematically discuss our findings asking additional questions to be investigated.

Application of linguistically based analysis of autobiographical narrative interview

In the autobiographical narrative interview an interviewee spontaneously (extempore) recollects in the presence of a hitherto unknown listener the sequences of events in the course of life and his or her attitude towards the narrated events and experiences. Thus, interviews begin with a single eliciting question designed to encourage the informants to tell the story of their life without prompts. Crucially, the narrators are told that they will not be interrupted, as the interviewer provides only limited, mostly non-verbal responses, and they may take as long as they wish to tell their story. The stimulus question is deliberately formulated in an open way and may be articulated in the following form: *Could you please tell me the story of your life starting with your earliest memories up to today?* Once the narration finishes

⁷ Blumer claims that: “A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks [...] A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or benchmarks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954: 7).

with a 'coda', such as "That was it" or "This is my life so far," the interview moves to the second stage. In this part, additional narration-eliciting questions are asked (i.e., questions that may explain ambiguities and vagueness, clarify incomprehension, or complete unfinished threads and plots). Finally, in the third stage, the researcher asks explicit questions on the issues relating to inner and outer perspectives on the research topic. Yet, these "outer" questions are asked only if the narrator does not refer to them spontaneously within the narration scheme (e.g., because he felt distanced towards them or because it seemed too complex in the off-the-cuff recapitulation of events). Thus we did not have a set of questions by the team that would be answered at the end of each interview, regardless of what it was about. Each narrative was a separate "author's" construction, which consisted of an interviewee story and questions asked by the researcher and sometimes mistakes made by him or her, for example, not asking a question that resulted from the story a researcher had just heard. These mistakes at work may happen also in the case of experienced researchers and they become a part of the research situation (see: Kaźmierska, Waniek 2020).

The research procedure⁸ related to the analysis of the narrative starts with the single case analysis consisting of 3 steps:

(1) text sort analysis that aims at a description of the features of the on-going interaction in the interview situation and the communicative schemes of narration, description, and argumentation. It should be stressed that the scheme of narration is the most important point of reference in the analysis of the autobiographical narrative interview. Therefore, we should always ask what role they play towards narration.

(2) structural analysis (i.e., a formal sequential analysis enabling identification of specific modes of experiencing one's life: (a) different kinds of biographical action schemes, (b) institutional patterns of the life course (phenomena of life and family cycles, career patterns, etc.), (c) metamorphoses (unexpected and surprising development of creativity), and (d) biographical trajectories (extended processes of suffering and losing control over one's life).

Basic forms of biographical experiences and attitudes towards one's own life (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 2008a, Prawda 1989, Kaźmierska 2016) are expressed in four structural processes. Accordingly, we deal with institutional expectation patterns, biographical action schemes, trajectories of suffering and biographical metamorphoses.

⁸ The detailed description of the procedures is presented by many English, Polish, and of course German texts well-disseminated in the context of Polish biographical research (e.g., Schütze 2004, 2008a, b, 2012, 2014, 2016). Therefore we just briefly recapitulate the main analytical steps.

Institutional expectation patterns (institutional life patterns) reveal a principle of the narrator's orientation towards normative institutional expectations. It refers to life organization and biographical attitudes in which individuals follow the scenarios written by their parents or significant others and the scripts set by the education system, career paths in various types of institutions, social worlds or their place in a given social system (Schütze 1981: 67–70). They are expected to adjust their identity to the requirements of institutional models assigned to them.

Biographical action plans are ways of experiencing events in life that have their source in the inner spontaneity of individuals and are connected with the intentional principle of action. This implies making autonomous long-term plans, independent implementation of one's desires, but sometimes also careful ways of getting out of biographical traps. They are associated with emotional and physical involvement, as well as vivid expectations and attitude towards the future. This comprises their consideration, often consultations with significant others or even experts, ratification, implementation, and eventually, evaluation both in terms of their impact on the personal identity and the entire biography.

Biographical metamorphoses are unexpected positive changes in the biography carriers' life. However, despite involving their creative development, individuals are not always able to handle them, at least initially. Thus, as in biographical action plans – the change has its source in the inner sphere of the spontaneity of an individual, similarly to the trajectory of suffering (described below) – it unexpectedly introduces disorder and a sense of self-alienation into the individual's life. The change is often associated with a sense of overpowering, an intriguing mystery, the impossibility of dealing with a surprising definition of oneself and inability to find categories to describe their experiences.

The trajectory of suffering means a systematic “erosion of social and biographical order” (Treichel, Schwelling 2003: 131); all these experiences in which people realise the fragility of the everyday world of existence and have a sense of losing control over their lives. The dynamic of the trajectory is associated with an acute sense of being subject to external overwhelming circumstances that condition the individual's ways of action and give him a sense of growing alienation from the world of life and himself. The suffering person (Betroffene) has the feeling of being trapped or facing the wall (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012b). Being a structural process of growing disorder, the trajectory of suffering is usually paradoxically ordered – phased from the accumulation of trajectory potential through the inability to act intentionally and conditioned response to external circumstances, attempts to regain control over one's own life, giving a sense of precarious balance, to the total breakdown of self-orientation, to the theoretical and practical going through suffering and its acceptance (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]). Not all of these

stages and not always in this order appear in an individual course of suffering people. Not always events that would be sensitively inclined to be interpreted as a trajectory are experienced in this way and vice versa: sometimes seemingly "normal," trivial biographical episodes or their sequences are treated by the biographer as an overpowering fate. This is because of individual and subjective experience of suffering, which in the narrative interview is given not so much by its content, but primarily in the characteristic activities of linguistic representation (cf., Schütze 2012: 172–173), which very often express "complicated, difficult, subtle socio-biographical experiences only quite indirectly, symptomatically and incompletely, since the latter might be ambivalent, cognitively or emotionally, painful, shameful, or simply incomprehensible" (Schütze 2008a: 171).

However, it must be remembered that, firstly, all process structures do not appear in all life histories, and, secondly, that in each biography they create various configurations (specific for a given case). They may not only follow one another, but also compete with one another, mutually reinforce, weaken, accelerate, delay, or even annihilate one another; finally, they can have a dominant, stabilizing, or recessive character. These combinations of biographical processes and their repositioning in the framework of social, cultural, and political processes allow us to indicate both unique features of a given life history and typical (i.e., common to many cases) properties of a particular process and thus enable us to reconstruct an overall organization of the narrator's biography.⁹

(3) analytical abstraction, on the one hand, allows one to find essentially unique and distinctive for the case features, mechanism, and (configurations of) processes; and, on the other, to identify those that can be traced within other cases. In other words, we take into account both: "self-historical *Gestalt*" of the case and its general, common, theoretically remarkable features.

What is crucial for our project is that the analytical abstraction also deals with mutual feedback of biographical processes proper and other collective phenomena and social processes included in the interview. For instance, it allows one to see the relationship between the rapid introduction of the capitalist economy and individual experiences of disorder caused by everyday experiences.

⁹ Structural analysis also focuses on identifying background constructions which deal with chaotic pieces of biographical experience and argumentative commentaries (Schütze 2004). The narrator inserts a background construction (i.e., chronologically earlier experiences) into the main storyline of his/her narrative presentation as some sort of elaborate self-correction device. This may happen when the course of events is very dense and complicated that it cannot be recapitulated simultaneously or when the course of events is too painful, too devastating, or too shameful that the narrator doesn't want to go back to them at all costs. In the latter, we deal with the fading-out phenomena. There are also other phenomena like code and split code, theoretical self-commentaries. If needed they are explained in the following chapters.

In the autobiographical narrative interview method the researchers rely on the informant's accounts, his or her own presentation of the flux of events and their interpretation; nonetheless, very restricted ways of data collection and narrative constraints (naturally occurring obligations to condense, to go into detail, to close the narrative form), as well as carefully worked out rules and stages of data analysis enable "quality" control (Schütze 2008a, Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977).

After a couple of single cases analyzed, comparative analysis proceeds according to the principle of minimal and maximal contrast. The elaborated hypotheses and theories are open to modifications and supplementing up to the point when any new single case does not change the architecture and decisive content of the theoretical model anymore, that is, the theoretical saturation is reached (Schütze 2008b: 72). After collecting and scrutinizing a sufficient number of cases with their diverse variables the build-up of a theoretical model can be carried out.

The final move in the sequence of research steps is building a theoretical model. In our research we tried to get an insight into the informants' experience of the socio-cultural changes, orientation horizons, pivotal reference groups, frames of reference in the terminology of Alfred Schütz (1990), assessment criteria, and opportunity structures, as well as social worlds arenas of the discourse they are involved in (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). Basic strategies for constructing theoretical models within methodological and theoretical perspective according to Schütze and Riemann enable one to reflect on the following thematic blocks: models on structural processes of one's life course, rational models on attitudes of the biographical incumbent towards their life course, models on development, or changes of social worlds, social *milieus*, or social movements (Riemann, Schütze 1987: 65). What we focused on were ways of describing and understanding the reality of everyday life, as well as ways of accounting for (modes of argumentation) certain experiences in one's life story.

On the basis of the meticulous analysis, we show several dimensions in which the perspective of biographical experiences is interrelated with collective phenomena and social processes triggered by transformation. One of the most general formative frameworks for storytelling experiences are the differently shaped structures of opportunity. As the collected narratives show, their change does not always mean a change in the interpretation of both biographical experiences and social processes. Moreover, the same opportunity structures for some open new potentials, whereas for others become a biographical trap. In the following chapters, which show our analysis, we argue that it does not depend solely (and sometimes to some extent does not depend at all) on the attitudes of individuals, but a complex constellation of

personal experiences and socially designed processes. In other words, a mere change in the opportunity structures does not guarantee a certain change in the biographical processes.

Summing up: a careful and in-depth study of autobiographical narrative interviews gathered in cohorts born in the 1960's, 1970's, and the 1980's basically verified binary and schematic images and allowed the capturing of paradoxes, tensions, ambivalences, and biographical traps, which often resulted from a more or less conscious inability to deal with the expectations which people had to face while dealing with rapid and comprehensive changes new after 1989.

Single case analysis

In the following book's chapters, we present the results of our research, based largely on the analysis of individual narrative cases and contrast comparison. Less often we start with a presentation of a problem that is analytically abstracted from the empirical material and illustrated by narrations.¹⁰ The implementation of such a strategy is the result of two circumstances. The first can be called contextual, the second analytical. Let us start with the first one. The adoption of such a broad selection criteria, aimed at the diversity of biographical experiences rooted in different parts of Poland, different social environments, professional groups, et cetera, resulted in an incredibly rich and diverse collection of narrations. It is therefore difficult to speak of a theoretical saturation which is the effect of comparative analysis proceeded according to the principle of minimal and maximal contrast. The elaborated hypotheses and theories are open to modifications and supplementing up to the point when any new single case does not change the architecture and decisive content of the theoretical model anymore, that is, the theoretical saturation is reached. (Schütze nd: 4). We correctly assumed that the planned 90 autobiographical interviews would provide an extensive and rich database, yet they appeared to be so diverse that it was difficult to reach theoretical saturation (Glaser, Strauss 1967; Corbin, Strauss 2008: 263). Even more surprising was the fact that we approached the theoretical saturation of the youngest group of informants born in the 1980s, where it seemed to be the most difficult to find common analytical dimensions in the face of (post)modern dispersed social patterns. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to find in the collected narratives common ways of experiencing and culturally rooted, shared ways of coping with the process of transformation. On the contrary, certain common

¹⁰ See, for example, *Chapter VI. The life of things from the perspective of the Polish systemic transformation* by Renata Dopierała.

analytical dimensions can be found. In order to show them, we choose (moving to the analytical dimension) to a large extent the presentation of single case analysis.

The applied mode of methodological conduct is based on the abductive logic of research introduced and elaborated by Charles Pierce (1965). This type of reasoning consists of continual moving between inductive and deductive thinking and constant verification of the emerging theory with new data. Schütze explains that the researcher adhering to the abductive logic of reasoning must freely step back and forth among different stages of the analytical process (see also Apitzsch, Inowlocky 2000: 66). He writes:

Abductive inquiry within qualitative biography research aims at the exploration of hitherto unknown or at least unnoticed mechanisms of social and biographical processes by careful analysis of single cases. It works at the explication of these mechanisms, their analytical connection, and their systematic integration within a theoretical model on the basis of contrastive comparisons of single-case analyses' outcomes. Moreover, it attempts to understand and explain the working principles and systematic interplays of structural processes operating within the unfolding of newly approached single cases – the single cases analyzed on the preliminary base of theoretical models generated beforehand. They, in turn, undergo the processes of differentiation and specification in the course of their application on additional single cases (Schütze, nd: 2).

We mainly applied the strategy of *portrait chapters* presentation that is the final stage of the contrastive comparison. Their task is to present and discuss the exemplary cases (the “cornerstones”) made by the analysis to illustrate the basic biographical and social processes. According to such perspective, “an individual case is studied and considered to have the characteristics of a social logic or a symbolic collective process that affects thousands or even millions of people at the same time” (Bertaux [2010] 2012: 311). While sharing the first part of the quoted sentence, we hesitate about the second part, which is a very categorical and objective statement. In our research, we rather followed the approach of Howard Becker, who writes that even if a single case study does not necessarily lead to decisive results (Becker 1966: xvii) it shows biographical experiences and social processes in a context that is difficult to grasp using other research methods.

In this part, we present two chapters exploring the maladjustment of transformation discourses (in different ways) to the biographical experiences of social actors. This gap often results from imposing the ready-made rationalizations and macro-analyses on the micro-experiences of an individual's level.

In *Winners and losers of the process of transformation as an etic category versus an emic biographical perspective*, Kaja Kaźmierska discusses the categorization of

winners and losers as not only simplifying the description of social reality, but also difficult to be easily biographically justified, since the *etic* categorization is not relevant to the *emic* perspective.

Piotr Filipkowski, in *Narrative agency and structural chaos. A biographical-narrative case study*, presents a case study where a life path turns out to be an unintended, dynamic journey between different professions, social worlds, and structural positions. This creates a complicated and ambiguous biographical model, which arranges itself neither in the socio-economic advancement of the "winner" nor in the degradation of the "lost" transformation.

The core frame of both texts is the methodological approach to the narratives. The author intends to show the power of the analysis applied in this book, related to exploring these aspects of biographical experiences that are very difficult to be grasped by other analytical approaches.

Kaja Kaźmierska

CHAPTER II

WINNERS AND LOSERS OF THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION AS AN ETIC CATEGORY VERSUS AN EMIC BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE¹

Issues related to the great transformation change of the social system in relation to all aspects of social life (economic, political, cultural) over the last three decades have become the subject of interest of sociologists, economists, historians, lawyers, and other representatives of social sciences. No wonder, since Polish society as one of many and, at the same time, the largest in Central and Eastern Europe has undergone a radical change in the political and economic system. The dynamics of research on this process have been subordinated to the specific time frame and attempts to define when the transformation processes came to an end. As far as the first point of time reference is concerned, it was determined by anniversaries celebrated from 1989, which (also to some extent conventionally, because changes in the economic system started earlier) is symbolically described as a turning point and the beginning of a great change. Thus, we had to deal with publications analyzing the effects of transformation, for example, after 10 or 20 years (just to name a few examples: Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000, Marody 2000a, Kochanowicz, Marody 2010, Kozłowski, Domański 2010).

It turned out to be much more difficult to define the end of the transition process. It is difficult to set a specific date here, although some scholars believe that Poland's accession to the European Union may be considered as another great opening for social processes related more to modernization than the already achieved transition from the old to the new political system. For example, Mirosława Marody suggested (2004: 9), "We assumed that 14 years after the introduction of fundamental political reforms, the work of systemic transformation could be considered completed, while the foreground is the question of the direction and pace of civilization changes."

¹ The original version of this chapter was published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 238–266. Retrieved December, 2019 (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.11>.

On the other hand, four years earlier, Andrzej Rychard (2000: 11) wrote, "when one sometimes hears voices that the transformation has in fact ended, one can only agree with them in the sense that a certain stage of political and institutional transformations has ended. Whereas social transformation – in fact, social change – continues because it is a continuous process and runs according to a different chronology than a political one." Such perspective is much closer to the biographical approach presented here, where macro social processes are reflected in the life experiences of individuals, who, on the one hand, become their subjects and, on the other hand, by giving meaning to their actions, are interpreters and creators of social reality. In this respect, we can still analyze, even after 30 years, social results of transformation.

The starting point for the analyses presented below is my understanding of a more complex meaning of transformation as a process that cannot be definitively closed within a defined time frame. In other words, if other criteria, such as the transition to the capitalist and democratic systems, are taken into account, these changes can be placed in the period 1989–2004, whereas the transformation "continues" through the biographical consequences for the actors who have experienced it in the perspective of the individual life cycle. These were the assumptions of the research project *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective* in which we conducted autobiographical narrative interviews with people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. One may say that those born in the 1980s have nothing in common with the process, yet, in the research project, we try to show the sequential processual transition of social reality which consequences on different levels can be identified in individual biographies.

In this chapter, I would like to discuss just one issue related to the question how we may describe the process of dealing with the transformation changes by individuals. The query of how people cope with this big social change involves the desire to estimate whether they managed the new social, political, and economic conditions successfully or they experienced failures. As a result of such thinking two terms – *winner* and *loser* – of transformation appeared both in the scientific and public discourse. We cannot forget that the process of systemic transformation from the very beginning has become the topic of not only scientific research, but also public, media, and political discourses. Due to the limited space of this text, I do not analyze how, when, and by whom winner/loser categories have been used in the public and, especially, political discourse. Thus, I do not intend to analyze the complicated field where great and rapid economy and social changes have been discussed, evaluated, and still remain a token in political discourses concentrated on the effects of once chosen economy solutions, what we could observe in contemporary political discussions.

My point in this chapter is that these are *etic* categories used to describe and interpret individual and group ways of dealing with systemic transformation. Analysis of biographical narrative interviews with people who experienced the time of the big change at different phases of life and coming from various social environments and *milieus* shows that the winner/loser categorization is not necessarily the *emic* perspective when understanding strategies of individuals coping with the new reality. I use Kenneth Pike's (1967: 37) terms well-established in contemporary anthropological, as well as sociological reflection: "etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system," while the "emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system."

I begin the text by referring to the sense and meaning of terms winners and losers which appear in some Polish research. Then, I am going to present a case study – a biographical narrative interview with a woman anonymized as Róża. This analysis is divided into two sections. In the first section, her life history will be described; in the second one, Róża's life story. I use here "an analysis concept where the distinction between life story and life history (i.e., between the narrated personal life as related in conversation or written in the present time and the lived-through life) plays a central role" (Rosenthal 2004: 49). The life history based on lived-through life enables reconstructing the past – the dynamic of events experienced by an individual, while the life story allows us to show the past and present interpretations of these experiences. I will try to show that concentrating only on the life history aspect of the analyzed narrative can be misleading in the process of interpretation and can easily legitimize using *etic* thus imposed categories like, for instance, winners or losers. In conclusions, I show both methodological and analytical aspects of the presented study.

Winners and losers as etic categories

One of the common and schematic descriptions in the perspective of the 1989 breakthrough are two ways of dealing with it by people who are respectively called winners or losers of transformation. Differentiation between beneficiaries and victims is another way of describing the social and biographical situation of individuals representing certain social groups. It is not easy to discuss these characteristics in neutral language since both dyads are evaluative as such and, additionally, they are usually used in relation to specific frames of interpretation deeply rooted in different discourses.

The first dyad – *beneficiaries* and *victims* – highlights more the role of external opportunity structures.² According to Zdzisław Pisz (2000: 112–113),

² See Part 3. *Transforming opportunity structures: biographical chances, hopes, illusions, and dead-ends.*

"Beneficiaries are individuals who have been enabled to advance, sometimes rapidly, socially, and economically, by the transformation program and its implementation. The victims, on the other hand, are individuals and social groups whose professional and social careers were interrupted or clearly delayed by the transformation process in relation to potential opportunities stemming from the adjustment capital." According to the author, politically and economically designed circumstances have made some individuals and/or social groups to be put in privileged positions – they could take advantage of the transformation. At the same time, other people, due to the same processes, have been excluded from access to differently defined goods and paid huge biographical and social costs. Moreover, they have been subjected to processes they could hardly control or influence. This way of describing social phenomena and processes may be considered as a normative one. Its supporters usually focus on social injustice and such design of macro structural frames that neglected people's abilities and possibilities to cope with the new economic deal. Those who are beneficiaries have taken advantages thanks to positions as members of politically, socially, or economically privileged groups. Those who are victims have paid the costs of transformation like losing social position, means for leaving, which has resulted in an increased feeling of insecurity and awareness of new divisions and inequalities in society.³

When examining different Polish sociological publications devoted to the process of transformation, especially from the time of the first two decades, we may observe that many authors focused on broadly understood social costs of transformation, social exclusion, developing inequalities, and dangers generated by social and economic change, as well as on indicating the empowerment of neoliberal discourse (e.g., Tarkowska 2000, Bugaj 2010, Pańków 2010, Sadowski 2010, Czyżewski 2013, Stachowiak 2013, Warczok, Zarycki 2014). What is interesting, in my opinion, is that these critical voices were rather hardly heard in public and media discourses. One example is the research on urban poverty carried out by sociologists in Łódź since 1992. They undertook research on communities threatened with social exclusion as a result of pauperization processes. Łódź has become a natural area of research. Over twenty years of research practice has led to the establishment of the Łódź School for Research on Poverty and Social Welfare (Golczyńska-Grondas, Potoczna 2016: 384).⁴

³ This kind of rhetoric is used by socially left oriented perspectives, especially in political discourse. Paradoxically enough, it is also used by contemporary right wing parties, as well as PiS (Law and Justice).

⁴ Although this research gained recognition in the sociological community, it was difficult for it to reach the local authorities, which even blamed the researchers for "promoting" Łódź as a city of poverty.

Social change has more frequently been introduced as a challenging, difficult, yet commonly profitable process. A lot of prominent social researchers promoted this approach consequently supporting the dynamic of social change and more or less consciously adapting the neoliberal perspective of social reality interpretation. We can see it in published studies and, moreover, learn from contemporary voices of researchers and intellectualists who took an active part in creating, maintaining, and legitimating a certain type of this discourse which we can generally characterize as neoliberal (e.g., Król 2015, Giza-Poleszczuk 2018).

According to Giza-Poleszczuk (2018), “We [sociologists] believed that it was our obvious duty not only to describe modernization, but also to actively support it, as “Solidarity” was previously advocated. Therefore, as sociologists, we were one of the most committed promoters of the new Central European order. All these Western ideas – such as meritocracy, post-industrialism, and development theories – were then uncritically accepted by us, because they came to us from a different, better world. They were an obvious counterbalance to socialism, so they had to be good.” The consequence of such thinking could be the application of winners/losers categorization in order to describe the dynamics of social change and people’s activities: “There was a venturesome middle class and “marauders,” that is, farmers from state-owned farms (so-called PGRs) or large industrial plants. The latter were treated in a careless way, in terms of clumsy people who, having supplied the rod, could not use it rationally. Instead of being blamed for the aggressive transformation, all the blame was placed on those who simply exceeded the limits of the transformation” (Giza-Poleszczuk 2018). This diagnosis of a (self) sociologist way of thinking expressed in the interview from 2018 can be easily recognized in researcher’s works.

Winner/loser category was very supportive in this context. First of all, if we compare winners/losers categorization with beneficiaries/victims, the first one is focused more on an individual agency – those who win or lose are defined as actors of the *game*, whether it be the labor market, the project of one’s professional career, or generally – biography. So, implicitly, when this categorization is used, some dose of responsibility is being taken into account. In other words, both winners and losers are considered as individuals who *did* something or *resigned* to do anything in order to find themselves in a new social and economic system.

We may recognize this categorization in many works as a straightforwardly or implicitly used tool to describe social reality. At this point, it is not my aim to provide the reader with a full review of literature and authors. I have chosen these few examples because, in my opinion, these authors can be identified as important and opinion-forming voices in the discussion about transformation. Their work was a synthesis of empirical research and theory building on

transformation as a social change. An additional argument in favor of referring to the research is the confrontation with the current critical voice of the already quoted Giza-Poleszczuk (2018). So, just to give the example – winner/loser categorization can be found in the study from 2000 where the authors (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000) try to nuance the typology⁵ by showing that there is a wide gap between winners and losers, which is filled by those who, due to certain circumstances, may in the future find themselves in one or the other group. Their distinction is possible due to the introduction of two criteria: possessing (or lacking) resources, as well as knowledge and/or ignorance of the rules, that is, the degree of rationality. In this way, apart from clearly defined categories of winners and losers, the authors introduce additional ones: those who do not have resources and know that they cannot win and those who do have them, but do not know that they can use them, that is, win. The latter group is interesting in particular, because they are people who are not aware of the capitalization of their resources. In other words, as the authors point out, such groups of people may feel discomfort because it is difficult for them to determine whether they have benefited or lost from the system change (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000: 37–38). This interesting and sophisticated analysis is anyway based on the assumption that the category of winners and losers can objectively describe individual attitudes and ways of dealing with the new system, and although the authors suggest that they do not intend to use normative terms, in fact they do.⁶

Five years later, the categorization of winners or losers was even more legitimated by using it in a book title. In 2005, Maria Jarosz edited the book entitled *Winners and losers of Polish transformation*. The very book cover deserves commentary. It is a piece of Canaletto painting presenting an aristocratic woman in a carriage and people belonging to other, certainly lower, classes in the background. I do not know what was the key for the cover, but if understood straightforwardly – the synonym of winner is the person who is well-off and keeps a privileged position in society.

⁵ I consciously use the term typology because the authors smoothly change the winners/losers categorization into typology by developing its subtypes.

⁶ It is interesting that also in 2000 in another publication Mirosława Marody (2000b: 77) wrote, "in the case of categories defining basic social groups, the dimension that synthesizes the most fundamental transformations within the meanings associated with them, and at the same time pointing to the most strongly experienced element of ongoing social change, seems to be the division into winners and losers." But, just on the next page she decides to abandon these categories as not describing social mechanisms because they cannot be understood by individual actions, rather by people's motivations, which moves scientific reasoning towards psychological and not sociological analysis.

Even more intriguing are comments in the introduction where Jarosz used the terms winner, losers, and beneficiaries. She rather avoided the word victims. Let me quote some small excerpts, for example, “Cost of reforms for different groups is unbearable. It involved different reactions: not only passiveness and despondence, but also a desperate attempt to defend one’s affairs” (Jarosz 2005: 12);⁷ “Passiveness, a sense of injustice, and the lack of fulfillment of claims [not needs] are not simply functions of poverty, but rather the result of systemic transformation that destroys the previous order which was considered as known, normal, and long-lasting” (Jarosz 2005: 2–13); “We should remember that the stereotype, so widely spread in common language, of the **poor and passive, because disadvantaged**⁸ by an unfair market economy is not only a handy tool for political proponents of the losers, but it also is *dangerous for the social order* and losers themselves. Silent approval for such explanation of the reasons for passiveness, as well as forbearance for poorly justified claims and social promises *and attempts to extend welfare activities*, more or less straining on public finances – all this may lead to the “petrification of passivity and escalation of claims” (Jarosz 2005: 15).

The language of scientific description is accompanied here by normative statements with a very clearly expressed neoliberal perspective. As I said in the beginning, it is not easy to describe big social change in neutral language, yet I was quite astonished to read this introduction describing social reality in such an evaluative manner. But, if we could find it in scientific language let alone it has been widely used in political, as well as media and everyday discourses. Thus, stereotypical characteristics have not only become the tool to draw the general image of effects of the transition, but have been also absorbed by engaged political discourses such as, for instance, neoliberal thinking. As we know, it promotes individual independence “measured” by such items as creativity, self-development, effectiveness, innovation, self/permanent education, flexibility, agency, self-control, and responsibility, et cetera, and it also evaluates those who are considered as not successful, non-creative at all, or enough, having no abilities to deal with challenging situations, being too passive, et cetera. All these items are framed by one more aspect of neoliberal discourse, that is, the perspective of modernization and patterns of contemporary postmodern reality built in the contrast to traditional/modern society and its values. Although “neoliberal language meets the criteria of quasi-religious rhetoric, it is staged as a result of scientific analyses of organization

⁷ Ten years earlier, Piotr Sztompka (1993, 1995) had clearly pointed out the division between those who, by achieving certain civilizational competences, will become winners and losers who will stop at the socialist habitus.

⁸ Expressions originally bolded in the book. In italics I marked phrases that I intend to expose.

and management, PR, and marketing" (Czyżewski 2009: 93). I will come back to this topic in the conclusions.

When presenting in critical mode the above chosen examples of using winners/losers categories, I do not mean that the intuition of researchers is totally incorrect. Social imagination and sensibility, as well as observation prompt that there are people who have taken advantage and others who, to the contrary, have had big difficulties in dealing with the new reality. We could also show the dynamic of this process, especially considering the exclusion of thousands of people from the labor market in the 1990s and the contemporary common phenomenon of precarity, especially in the case of young people.

My critical point is that such discourses not only are evaluative, may be excluding, and they simplify the interpretation of the transformation processes, but they also may invalidate other, more complex ways of understanding how individuals managed to deal with the new reality and if, how, in what way they had to reorient themselves in order to adjust to the new economy. Such a point of view justifies my presentation of the above perspective of description of the transformational reality. I have used the texts of the *in statu nascendi*, that is, the apogee of the transformational processes of the 1990s, to show not only, in my opinion, one of the dominant options of diagnosing social reality, but also to indicate in what circumstances categorization of winners and losers has been shaped. Moreover, I believe that these categories have become so catchy that if they have not dominated, they have certainly framed one of the mainstream ways of thinking about transformation.

Thus, I would like to discuss how, from the perspective of an individual, so-called Alfred Schütz's (1990) *man on the street*, the categorization of winners and losers not only simplifies the description of social reality, but also it is difficult to be easily biographically justified because the *etic* perspective is not relevant to the *emic* one.

I would like to present a biographical narrative interview with a 44-year-old woman living in a small rural commune in Eastern Poland where the unemployment rate in the first decade of 2000 fluctuated between 14 and 20%;⁹ thus, was much higher and chances for professional development were far more limited than in other parts of the country.

The autobiographical narrative interview was conducted in 2016 in the interviewee's house and lasted about 2 hours. I chose this case not to make it "representative"¹⁰ of a particular social group or strata, or to show a biography

⁹ Data according to Statistics Poland. See: <https://stat.gov.pl/en/>. Retrieved October 18, 2019.

¹⁰ I am not referring, of course, to statistical representativeness, but to a situation where a case exemplifies certain patterns of experience and biographical strategies in a specific social group.

of a woman from a local community that could be considered a kind of periphery. The choice of this case is dictated by the following issues. First of all, on the example of the analysis of this interview, I intend to show how it could be treated as an illustration for the category of winners and losers by referring to literature and adapting a specific analytical perspective, even though these categories do not fit here. Secondly, at first glance, the inclusion of Róža's biography in the transformation process may seem to be an over-interpretation, since her professional career begins to crystallize after 2005. I will try to show, in accordance with the logic of biographical experiences, "a narrative '*Gestalt*' that must be envisioned as an ordered sequence of personal experiences, and that orderliness implies the inner identity development of the biography incumbent" (Schütze 2008a: 168), showing the continuity between the earlier and the present phases of biography. Thirdly, in the analyzed case, we will probably find unexpected solutions in terms of sources to build social capital by the interviewee. I come back to this case once more in Chapter XVI.

In the case of Róža, her entry into the labor market in 1995 and a kind of moratorium, that is, safe, although by nature precarious, work in an environment of high unemployment risk, allowed her to prepare for later experiences, although this preparation was not fully planned.

The interview is analyzed according to autobiographical narrative interview procedures developed by Fritz Schütze (2008a). First, I will reconstruct Róža's life history – chronologically ordered biographical facts and experiences that appear in the narrative. All the data come straightforwardly from the transcription of the interview. In the part of life history, my intention is not to interpret them, but rather to focus on the narrated facts and experiences. Then, I present Róža's life story, that is, the way she talks about her life experiences and how she interprets them. This part of work is based on the interview interpretation. As I am going to explain in the next section, this is the analytical division and both aspects are equally important to build the *Gestalt*. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this chapter, they are characterized separately. It is possible that the reader may get a feeling that some content is repeated in the following two sections, yet, I could not find a better way of clear presentation of both aspects. If done together, it may appear quite complicated to read.

Róža's life history Reconstructed from her narrative

Róža was born in 1975 in a small rural commune (about 6,000 inhabitants) in Eastern Poland. She was an only child, partly brought up by her grandmother when both of her parents worked. Her father was a farmer and her mother worked in the post office. Róža's grandmother was a very important significant other for her. After her death in 1991, Róža was 16 years old, her family ties

were limited to mother and father relationships. This was the reason she had always dreamed about a big family and, in the future, she wanted to have many children. Róza tried to compensate for the lack of siblings by having a big group of peers, so she could never feel alone. She was a very active member of school and church youth organizations. Thus, she was quickly recognized as a very dynamic person. She was also a good student.

In the third form of secondary school, Róza got to know her future husband. In 1994, in the twelfth grade, she got pregnant, got married, and managed to pass her matriculation exam just before the delivery of her daughter. Considering her new family life situation and the lack of help from her mother who was still working, Róza was not able to continue her education. She decided to postpone her studies to the next year and took care of her baby. She planned to study Polish philology and become a teacher. However, in 1995, she got the offer of her first work and she gave up the idea of studying.

Róza became a dental assistant and started working in the dentist's office placed in her secondary school. The dentist woman who hired Róza is in the narrative consequently called as "my Mrs. Doctor" and "a model of a boss." Róza had worked there for ten years up to 2005.

After half a year since Róza had started this job, her first son was born, so she had the second child in 1996. She came back to work and, in the meantime, started training related to her work in the field of stomatology and healthcare, as well as she started evening education in postsecondary librarian college. The librarianship study lasted for two and a half years. She undertook the librarian education because of her friend who planned to become a librarian, so Róza simply joined her.

In 2000, her third child (the second son) was born. After a while Róza came back to work in the dentist's office and at the same time started looking for finance resources for individual projects because, in the future, she planned to have an agritourism business. She realized that one could apply for such funding and searched for the opportunities to take part in training on the Internet. She had some capital: a piece of land, ponds, and she wanted to build a house. For four years she had attended various training sessions according to the rule: taking part in training enables writing a project, a business plan, and applying for ir reclaimable funding. According to her observation, about 50% of participants won the project. She was never successful, yet she was determined to be persistent.

At the beginning of 2000, when Róza did not work due to the delivery of her son, she had no money.¹¹ As she said, "I didn't have enough money to buy

¹¹ It is not clear in her story, but we may conclude that her job as a dental assistant was not based on a permanent contract and it was poorly paid. From the field notes we know that each year her contract was renewed when the doctor got new funding

milk for my child,” she started making floral decorations and sold them with her husband in front of the church. She also said that in 2000 her husband was buying milk for the dairy company. So she also had three cows and, “I had to milk those cows in the morning, help my husband pour the milk, prepare children for kindergarten, and drive them to the kindergarten, and arrive to work at eight.”

In 2004, her third son, as the fourth of her children, was born. She planned to act according to the well-known pattern – come back to work after some time would pass from the delivery. Yet, her plans had to be changed. In 2005, her employer “Mrs. Doctor” decided to leave for Great Britain on the wave of post-accession migration. She represented the educated group of Polish migrants (mainly medical professions or engineers) who had a chance to get well-paid jobs and immediately improve their economic status. Róża presented her perspective: the dentists’ couple rented a small apartment in a block of flats, could raise just one child, had poor perspectives to improve their status. This event may direct our attention to the processes of change initiated by Poland’s accession to the European Union. The professional career of Róża is significantly accelerating, although, as we will see, it is difficult to talk about the planned, controlled development at the beginning. It should be emphasized that the departure of dentists’ couple is, of course, possible thanks to the use of new opportunity structures by opening the British labor market, but, at the same time, as Róża’s narrative shows, the departure is forced by the post-transformation situation of this occupational group, when professional activity was not combined with ensuring an appropriate economic status and, to put it bluntly, it did not give the possibility to satisfy economic needs defined as basic ones.¹²

Having four children, Róża was unemployed and her husband had only odd jobs working as a builder, a carpenter, or a postman. However, she quickly managed to find a job in a mushroom farm. It was the only company offering any jobs in the region. Her baby boy was just one month old. She says: “It was some employment without agreement, although perhaps I was hired part-time or something like that,” what suggests that she worked without any contract

to run the school dentist office. By the way, we may assume that it was still exceptional that the dentist could have an office in the school building as the majority of school offices were closed in Poland at the beginning of 2000. The new regulations since September 2019 obliged school masters to establish a dentist’s office.

¹² The common-sense thinking about educated people and especially from the field of medical work presents this group as economically privileged. Yet, as materials collected in the mentioned project (see: Waniek 2016), as well as in other research contexts show (Kaźmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2012), the transformation, especially at the turn of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s (i.e., when Róża worked in a dentist’s office), was for many professional groups an experience related to the loss of economic status or job at all.

and insurance or she was hired for a fixed-term contract just part-time and worked more than full time, so the biggest part of her work was done as illegal employment, thus not reported, enabling the avoidance of security costs. It was exhaustive work, sometimes lasting 12 hours, requiring flexibility when growing mushrooms had to be picked on time. However, this time she could leave her baby because her mother had already retired and could take care of her grandson, which was a real relief for Róża. She worked there for one year, and being falsely accused of saying bad words about the boss, she got irritated and dropped the job immediately.

At the same time she got the internship at school as a cleaner. After a month, when a new opportunity appeared, Róża took a one month leave and she went to Norway for a month, where she earned some money to invest in agritourism – she could buy a piece of land nearby her house. This part of her story is not clear enough. It is difficult to understand if she got an internship still working in a mushroom company. When she quit the mushroom farm, she was unemployed for just a week.

After a week Róża got a call from the library master. One of the librarians went on maternity leave and Róża was asked to replace her, starting the next day. She was expected to work only for the time of maternity leave, but because the librarian extended the leave, she had worked in the library for more than 2 years from 2007 up to the beginning of 2010. Róża developed different social activities in the library treating it also as the culture and leisure center for the local community. During this time she got a bachelor degree (two years of postsecondary librarian education were accepted as part of bachelor studies) and she wrote a Master's thesis, getting her M.A. This extramural studies at the University of Warsaw gave her the opportunity to meet people from different parts of Poland working in institutions of culture. The network of colleagues she had built appeared to be very fruitful in the coming future.

In 2010, just after finishing working in the community library, she was employed in the school library for a year as the substitute because a woman who worked in the library took a one year leave. Róża got this work being recognized as an active person when she successfully tried to introduce scouting in the school. It was her own initiative. Being fascinated with the idea of European scouting (thanks to a girl scout she met on a train during her travel to Warsaw University), she proposed the school master organizing scouting. The scenario from the past two years was repeated: the library became a lively cultural center for the whole school. Róża was very respected and appreciated by the school master, yet she had to leave after a year in January 2011, as the person she was substituting came back to work.

On the last day of her work in the school library, she got an email that she won the project for establishing agritourism. She registered her business, built

the house, and had her first tourists. According to the rules, for the first year, she had health and pension insurance paid by the state. After a year she deregistered the company. It was September 2011, and she was jobless again. She got just two paid hours a week at school to work with scouts.

As we could see up to this time Róża had completed her education, got experience in running her own business, learned how to apply for a job; thus, she sent lots of applications with her professional curriculum vitae to different places. In the meantime, she got an offer to substitute a librarian in the neighboring town. The offer was for a year, and she obviously accepted it. But, on the same day, Róża got a phone call from the mayor (who read her CV) with an offer of a permanent job as a director of the newly built Culture Center. At the beginning she was hesitant as she had no experience in managing human resources, but after having discussed the issue with her family, she accepted the job and was appointed to the position of the director on the 1st of January 2012. Since then Róża has been working successfully in the Culture Center. She had to organize work, get all administration documents for the new institution, and develop its activity. This was the time when she used the network of relations built during her studies in Warsaw.

Róża has been recognized as a very good animator and manager. She is respected in her community, awarded for her work. The Center is a very lively place focused on social and cultural needs of the local community members, promoting folk and higher culture. Róża is also personally involved in many social activities; she often acts in the field of social care and charity as she finds her local social welfare center as not effective enough. Up to now she also makes floral decorations and sells them. She is no longer desperate for money, but she simply likes it.

Of course, Róża's life history can be filled with many other details connected with her family relationships, her husband's professional career, and a short description of her children's biographies, but I do not have the space to develop these topics. Some of them will be developed in Chapter XV. To sum up the presented characteristic, we can say that so far Róża, being 44, has been active on the labor market for 25 years, she developed her education by achieving an MA degree, and she is permanently taking part in courses, training, and workshops, some of them she organizes herself in the Culture Center. Her professional CV is very rich: she worked in the healthcare system (dental assistant), as an unskilled worker (cleaner, mushroom picker, florist in Norway), as a librarian and culture animator (in a public library and at school also in school day rooms), she runs her own private business and developed the idea of agritourism, she is the director of the Culture Center.

If we analyze these facts of her biography in the context of social circumstances and *milieu*, we should consider that she is the inhabitant of

a respectively small rural community where agriculture is the main source of living. The majority of inhabitants have their own small farms and they mainly grow fruits or vegetables. Thus, although in, for example, 2004, according to the statistics, the unemployment rate of 13% was lower in comparison with the whole region (about 18%), at the same time the figures do not reflect the real social problem of unemployment when the majority of households having the status of farms were not able to maintain just from farming. Róza's story about searching for work and the status of jobs she got shows that it was very difficult to get a stable position and most of her jobs had the status of fixed-term contracts of employment, renewed many times instead of being replaced by a permanent contract.¹³ It is enough to say that Róza has worked for 10 years without a permanent contract of employment in the dentist office, and she probably did not have any contract in the mushroom farm. Also, her husband was in the same situation. From this perspective, we can say that, for the main part of her work time, she was in a precarious situation, also including the jobs she did substituting librarians.

At the same time, when we look at Róza's professional curriculum vitae and the strategies she undertook to get out of trouble, we can describe her career using the rich vocabulary of contemporary neoliberal language. We can characterize Róza as: a person who actively searches for a job; who is flexible and ready to face difficulties even if she must work in underqualified positions; she permanently develops her skills, knowledge, and competences; is a very good example of life-long education; she is very creative and has the ability to animate the environment; she finds solutions and never gives up; she has a master plan for her life; she is open and not only easily develops relationships and networks, but she also knows how to use them in the future; she is very efficient in using opportunity structures like different state and European funding, workshops, projects; she is very flexible and has the ability to adjust to certain circumstances; she is a real leader in her community, deeply engaged in its life; she develops civil society organizations.

To conclude, she can be a very good example of a person who successfully dealt with the changes, a beneficiary who can be put as a positive example, or even a perfect model to follow. Here, we could finish our description with the conclusion that, even in difficult life circumstances (early pregnancy), fix-term/no contracts, precarious situations, and difficult labor markets, Róza could

¹³ In the Polish language, they started to be called *junk contracts* as it gave the illusion of real work agreement; up to January 2016 the employer was not obliged to pay pension funds for fixed-term contracts. Reducing costs of work had been treated as one of the strategies to lower unemployment, but from the perspective of the employee, it was a precarious situation generating neither stable prospects for the future nor pension or even health insurance.

manage thanks to all the enumerated virtues of her character and she could be qualified as not only a winner of the transformation time, but also a beneficiary of EU opportunity structures. I do not claim that it would be a false image of her biography. Yet, we should also look at her life story – the way she tells her life, the language she uses to describe and interpret her life experiences.

Róza's life story

Having in mind the described chronology of Róza's biographical experiences, I will show now how the narrator presents them in her story. Again, I will focus mainly on her professional career. Thus, I will present these excerpts of her main narrative part related to turning points in her activity on the labor market.¹⁴ As I mentioned, I must, to some extent, come back to some already presented episodes, which can arouse a feeling of repetition, but I would like to show how the same episode is interpreted by the narrator. In such a way, we may say that in the life history section, I presented the etic perspective – reconstructed Róza's life, whereas now, by explaining the contexts of her experiences and the meaning she gives them, I will try to present the emic perspective.

Her first job in the dentist office lasted for 10 years. Róza started it being 20 years old, yet with the experience of motherhood. The language she uses to describe her boss resembles a mother-daughter relationship.

I had a wonderful woman doctor, who claimed I didn't need any experience, she would explain everything to me. I needed to take a few courses and they wanted to hire a dental assistant... My doctor was wonderful, she was only six years older than me. Incredible, she has just left for England, we're still in touch. We write letters, she always visits me when she comes here, she simply showed me a model of a boss. She has this personality, I never felt stressed when going to work. She was always clear, direct. When I came to work the first day, she explained everything to me. And later she never double checked me, never. Be it sanitary inspection, control, or something else, I took everything on my shoulders. And she knew she could simply trust me. That's why it was so encouraging, I simply knew that I do well and the control of sanitary inspection was OK.

When describing the attitude towards her boss, Róza is focused on personal, almost family ties, she distances from the language of professional, institutional relationships typical for a work environment. It is not the language used by persons focused on their professional career and development. Róza tries to be a devoted

¹⁴ All the fragments come from the first, main part of the narrative interview when Róza spontaneously talks about her life without any interviewer's questions.

worker and the relationship is built on mutual trust and not on professional procedures. Referring to the classical typology by Ferdinand Tönnies (1988), we may say that Róza frames her work in *Gemeinschaft*, which can be observed based on spontaneous arousal of emotions and expressions of sentiment.

We may assume that during the first ten years of her work in the dentist's office Róza gained experience and maturity. In the meantime, she had three more children; she completed post-secondary librarian college. At the same time, it should be noticed that librarianship was not her own biographical plan. It was undertaken due to two reasons: firstly, her mother insisted that Róza continue her education after breaking her plans due to the first early pregnancy; secondly, she followed her friend because she did not want to study alone. Again, her agency is framed not by neoliberal standards of individual, planned, independent biography, but by well-known and tested *Gemeinschaft* patterns – family ties and friendship.

We can also say that although Róza undertook different initiatives during her first ten years of work (besides those aforementioned she took part in training and applied for funding to start a private business), first of all, she appreciated the stable position of her work and particular family relationship with Mrs. Doctor. She never complains in the interview that for ten years she did not have a regular permanent contract, it was renewed each year as each year the dentist was receiving a new contract and funding to run the dentist office at school. So, although it was a precarious situation and probably not a well-paid job, its guarantee was defined not in frames of institutional management, but a "face-to-face" trust relationship.

The next few years, which can be described as difficult yet a successful development of Róza's professional career, are presented by the narrator in a totally different mood. We can point here to at least three threads: the risk of trajectory of suffering; finding the solution in local community trust – relations, as well as family ties; looking for external help or intervention. All these three threads merge, but they should be analytically distinguished.

From the life history description we can imagine that, although Róza lost or ended her jobs a few times, she could immediately find a new one. This may create the illusion that it was not only her openness and flexibility, but also open possibilities on the local labor market that enabled her to find a new job. However, when we see how Róza describes these moments in her narrative, it appears that they were connected with the experience of a trajectory of suffering.¹⁵ Its strong potential could be stopped by getting new jobs, but its

¹⁵ Trajectory of suffering is the process structure experienced when an individual is suppressed by circumstances that take control of one's life course (Riemann and Schütze 1991), see Chapter I.

danger was experienced very deeply. Below I present a part of her narrative divided into three fragments in order to show how she develops her story and what kind of interpretation stands behind it.

When Róża learns that she could no longer work in the dentist's office, she says:

So, Janek was born and I intended to come back to work. I am about to go and tell the doctor I want to come back in a month, and my doctor let me know that, unfortunately, I can't return to work. I simply had **tears in my eyes, I don't know what's going on, how did I deserve it.**¹⁶ Mrs. Doctor says nothing has really happened, she says they got a contract in England. Her husband was a dentist and says there are just way better prospects there, you know. They packed up and left for England, even more understandable that they had one child and better money there. **I was in despair.** I was left stranded with four children, without a job. My husband took odd jobs, he made coffins, he's a carpenter and a builder, err he was working as a postman too. Simply all professions, he took all jobs, but every job was temporary. And, I say, what will I do, for me it was a **total disaster.**

Róża wanted to continue her biographical plan to work for "the good master," but when she was informed that her contract could not be prolonged, the first interpretation that came to her mind was self-accusation about having done something wrong. It is a very interesting language construction – "how did I deserve [to be fired]." It shows not only a very personal relationship with her boss, but also the interpretation of her situation in terms of liegeman-master relation. This language of dependence is built on the basis of trust and ego-centric relationship, and it cannot be recognized as modern work relations. From other parts of this quotation we can learn about the social frame of the situation. Róża appears to be privileged, having a stable position (although, objectively, each time it was just a one-year contract with the promise of renewal), whereas her husband's situation is very unstable. As I wrote earlier, this part of Poland was endangered by high unemployment and official figures did not illustrate the real phenomenon as those who had small properties, like one hectare, were qualified as farmers (and were not included in the statistics of the labor market), although they had no chance to make a living from farming on such a small piece of land. Róża was in a similar situation, although her work at the dentist office, framed by a good relationship with her master doctor, gave her the illusion of stability. In fact, it was also a precarious situation. On the other hand, in comparison with her husband, she described it as safe and stable. In Róża's story, the year 2005 was the first time she felt insecure and had to fight for the solutions to maintain the family. The words like "total despair," "disaster,"

¹⁶ In bold I mark expressions exposing trajectory experience.

"tears in my eyes" express the experience that the potential of a trajectory of suffering had just been opened. As we could see when analyzing further parts of her story, she reports her experiences in the mode of building-up the trajectory potential (Riemann and Schütze 1991: 349). This potential in Róža's story approaches and withdraws a few times. She continues her narration:

But, when Janek was one month old at the most and there's a mushroom farm nearby, so I went and asked if they would hire me. And they hired me for a trial week. As I was working fast, they hired me at once. It was some employment without agreement, although, perhaps, I was hired part-time or something like that. And I was working on that mushroom farm for a year. Sometimes my heart ached because we were supposed to work for eight hours, let's say, and there were lots of mushrooms and we could come back home after twelve hours. The child was small, my breasts hurt, this job was a painful experience. (.) 'Cause they wouldn't let us go home for a while, but I had to express the milk, all I earned, my mum here was taking care of Janek 'cause she had retired already. So, thank God, I had a safe haven of sorts at home 'cause mum would look after the children. So, I, you know, needed to earn for milk for children, right?

This fragment goes just after the previous quotation. We may say that, actually, the trajectory did not develop or even start. But, if we analyze the language she uses and the situation she is put in, we can easily recognize the trajectory potential. We see that Róža reacted immediately, she revised her plans and found a new job. Probably, if she could have continued her work at the dentist office, she would not have come back to work just after a month from the delivery. The new unstable situation made her react as soon as possible, what can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the trajectory. Again, this situation can be interpreted from two perspectives: it can be treated as Róža's ability to react and act in difficulties. She can be presented as a creative person with agency, having the ability to deal with difficult situations and adapting to the needs of the labor market. This interpretation stops at the level of facts and acts, but, if we consider how Róža presents her new work and what she exposes, the image is more complicated. First of all, as already noticed, we can assume that Róža had not planned such a quick return to work. Yet, when she lost her stable position, she was in despair about the possibility of staying jobless and compulsorily looked for a new job. Secondly, compared to a dental assistant, the new job was not a social advancement – on the contrary, it was a degradation. Róža started working as an unskilled laborer in, as we know from the contextual knowledge, the only workplace offering any kind of employment. Thus, both the decision to take up this job quickly and its nature show that Róža saw her situation as extremely difficult. Finding this job only to a certain extent made it possible to control the trajectory risk, because, as the description shows, the work itself was

very hard, entailed the necessity of working overtime, and the lack of stability of employment. At this time, Róža was balancing between an “intentional and conditional state of mind” (Riemann and Schütze 1991: 349).

Thus, taking into account the analysis of the narrative, it is difficult to expose the agency and subjectivity – Róža had to adapt to difficult external circumstances, which put her in the position of a victim in this respect. The only favorable context turns out to be her family capital – her mother/grandmother retired and could take care of Róža’s children.¹⁷ She continues:

And I was working for a year. Then, I was accused of verbally abusing my boss. Somebody did it and they heard it and they said the voice was similar to mine. And they accused me that it was probably my voice, it was me. My workmates say that Róža doesn’t swear, all right, but the voice sounded similar. So, it was probably the right stimulus at the right time. So, I took off the apron, took off those rubber boots which one wears while picking mushrooms and said: “If Ms. boss thinks that I did it, so I’d like to thank you for this job and quit.” They apologized to me later, I say, pay me out my wage, please, and that’s it. I came back home, **was in despair for a week and then suddenly the library boss rings** me and says that my workmate left for maternity leave and she needs someone. I say: “When? I graduated from librarianship study. When? From tomorrow.” I remember I was vacuuming then, I dropped it and couldn’t wait for tomorrow. That the madam from the library rang me at home is quite amazing, told me to come to work. **I say, beloved God, it must be some, I don’t know, God’s intervention.** And I went to that work.

The above fragment confirms the earlier description – the work on the mushroom farm was very hard and, what is more important for Róža, not based on the relationship of trust. All this causes the impulse-driven quitting of the job – in a literal and metaphorical sense – she took off the apron and left. Taking into account Róža’s care for the protection of her family, at the same time we can imagine that working on the mushroom farm must have been beyond her physical and mental strength. She decided to take a desperate step, which, again, brought the potential of the trajectory closer and caused a feeling of despair. Fortunately, it only lasted for a week. A picturesque and detailed reconstruction of the scene of answering the phone with a job offer shows how important this event was. At this particular moment, in Róža’s life, the trajectory potential was stopped once again. It appeared also to be a turning point in the perspective of further biography, when Róža started to develop her professional activity, which will eventually lead her to the moment when she is telling her life story.

¹⁷ It is worth noting here, by the way, that we are dealing with a reproduction of family relations models – Róža herself was raised, to a large extent, by her grandmother, because her mother worked.

In this fragment, appear two more threads to be considered. First of all, we find here a reference to transcendence. Here, and in the following passages, Róza does not speak about the coincidence or agency in relation to her own competence, but of God's intervention. As it turns out from all the self-presentation in the interview, these are not only rhetorical phrases, but a sincere conviction resulting from the narrator's religiosity. Róza is a strong believer and she interprets her life within the frame of her faith and God's agency. I will return to this thread again. Secondly, an important element determining the chances of Róza on the labor market is the mutual relations between local *milieu* and the labor market. Róza replaces her colleague at work. From a further fragment of the narrative we learn that this position was originally intended for the cousin of the mayor. However, the cousin was not interested enough in it, nor did she have any qualifications. Demonstrating her high competence, Róza soon gained the recognition of the mayor and was employed legally.¹⁸

As we know from Róza's life history, she managed to work as a replacement for more than two years. Then she got the opportunity to work in the school library as a replacement. Here comes the next fragment when she describes her situation after a year of work as a school librarian:

Five years ago, in 2009, that's right, it was six years ago already. The headmaster came up himself and says: "Róza, you should stay here." **However, unfortunately, my agreement was only for a year, my colleague returned. And I simply, I was crying,** the deputy headmistress was crying, 'cause I just found myself there. But, unfortunately, **it's a normal course of events, I had to leave.** (.) So, what then, I say, I remember I finished on the tenth, err my agreement came to an end on the tenth of January, the agreement was signed and it was **simply a great despair on the last day of work.** And I'm sitting in the library in front of a computer, it's over, I need to leave. And I open my email and I read I won a project, forty thousand for an agritourist business. **And I simply really don't know if there you are God and protecting me.** So, there was just no break. My agreement came to an end, I set up my company right away, agritourist business, it was obligatory to lead this for a year. So, I got forty thousand, we built a house/ it wasn't enough to build, but

¹⁸ For a while the library master was informing the mayor that Róza worked as a volunteer, although she was somehow paid for her work. In this short description of relationships, we see that positions in the local *milieu* are delegated through the mixture of networks and competences. Between the lines, Róza sometimes suggests that in such a local community mutual relations and influences are important and tensions may arise. It should be stressed, however, that from the perspective of her biographical experience, these issues are invalidated by her. In other words, her narrative is not devoted to the character of social relationships typical for or specific to the local community. Róza's story is devoted to her biographical experiences inscribed in the reality of this community.

at least enough for the roof and furniture, so I was leading that activity for a year. I had to be self-employed, it's closed now, but I'd like to do it in the future. (.) So, social security premiums were paid for another year, I had no break from work, 'cause I finished work at school I started my business activity.

In this fragment, the trajectory potential is hidden – Róża does not have to wait for another chance as she smoothly moves from one job to another. However, there are a few issues worth considering. First of all, the trajectory threat, although eliminated, does exist. The narrator again uses the same language: “It was **simply a great despair on the last day of work.**” Secondly, the human relationship is again in the foreground. Róża's story suggests that she was a more active worker, better at fulfilling her tasks than the person she replaced. The logic of the neoliberal labor market would suggest the dismissal of the previous librarian and the continuation of cooperation with Róża. However, this is not her post, it belongs to a person on a one-year leave. Relationships of work, trust, and responsibility are more important than the competence and creativity of an individual. Thirdly, once again, there is a reference to God's intervention. Several attempts to apply for a small business grant had failed – the fact that Róża received it at the moment she desperately needed support could not be described by her as just a fortunate coincidence.

Let me quote another fragment of the story in which Róża refers to the last turning point in her professional biography. After running her business for one year, when security premiums were paid by the state, she closed the company because she could not afford paying security premiums by herself.

And what, another year passed by. And again, they stopped paying social security premiums, closed my company, and what, nothing again, and what. (.) I was in church in September, yes. Children were going, my scouts, all were going to the opening of the school year, **the mass on the opening of the school year, all are going. I remember clearly I was standing with tears in my eyes near the organs, everybody is going to work, and I put so much heart into this profession and I don't have a job again.** I remember I was the last one to go down the stairs in church and nothing. And again with those scouts, as I had, I was meeting them once a week, and, but the headmaster says go to the mayor, he should assign you some hours. And the mayor assigned me two hours at school, total madness, two hours a week isn't much. Anyway, I was happy even with it, 'cause I was doing whatever I could with scouts. And my headmaster says: “Listen, in D. [small village in Southeast Poland] some librarian is going on maternity leave again.”

Further on, Róża reconstructs in great detail the conversation with the library director and with the mayor, who offers her the job of a director of the culture center. Róża accepts it after two days of reflection – as she says,

she had no experience in human resources management. The family convinced her that this was an opportunity for her and for the whole family – for the first time it was possible to stabilize the professional career and life situation of the whole family. From that time she has taken up the post until today – she has been working as the director of the cultural center. This fragment (if we take it as a whole, including also its not quoted part) is rich in detailed descriptions of conversations and interactive scenes, what indicates the significance of the sequence of events and their experience in the life of the narrator. But, let me go back to the quoted excerpt. Here, too, we are dealing with a meticulous reconstruction of the scene, the consequence of which is not a sudden turn of events (as it happened in the described “vacuuming” scene when Róża answered the phone with a job offer), but its aim is to recreate the emotions accompanying the narrator. This is another moment of suffering connected with inability to take up the work that the narrator has all the competences to perform. Not without significance for the whole narrative is the fact that Róża invokes a scene in a church, during a mass – again, we have here a reference to transcendence and, although Róża does not say it directly at this point, the interpretative framework that she gives to her whole story requires us to interpret this fragment as another call for God’s intervention.

What can we learn from this single case study?

In Róża’s life story, it is difficult to look for a planned, rational project of her life. The main theme of her narrative, expressed literally in the coda, is the conviction, “so I think it should work out somehow.” It is based on a deep religiousness and a sincere trust in people. Using William James’ (2017) statement, she has *the will to believe* both in terms of religious convictions and one’s ability to accomplish tasks that require confidence. The key to understanding her biographical experiences is trust at different levels: in God, people, the local community.

The conviction of the presence of God in the form of his intervention in difficult situations is the consequence of Róża’s deep and sincere religiousness. It is related to belonging to a local community (this part of Poland is characterized by a high degree of religiousness) and is, at the same time, a living religion, practiced from childhood through various activities such as participation in the school choirs, leading prayer groups, youth camps organized by the priest, pilgrimages to Częstochowa. Róża does not emanate her religiousness in an interview, but includes it naturally in the course of events and experiences, considering it as something normal and obvious. She also blurs the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, which overlaps with the division into the private and public spheres. Her description of relations at work is very significant.

I mean, I'm extremely pleased with my work. I manage a nice crew, I hired my employees myself. It wasn't like I came here and started managing a group, which was created. But, I just selected my team members, some of them had an internship here before, some sent applications directly to me. And I made a very nice group at work. We also joined a foundation Orszak Trzech Króli.¹⁹ I have organized a parade in Z. (small country town in Southeast Poland) twice and they also have such err sort of challenged everyone who belongs, that it was possible to join them and pray the Angelus at noon. So, we always set our alarm clocks in the office, everyone at work knows they go on the carpet in the director's office at noon and pray the Angelus. So, it's very inspiring for us/ and no one from outside knows about our secret. They don't even know about it, but it's just our, our professional secret. We meet there in my office for some five minutes, pray the Angelus and disperse. I guess that we'll handle it somehow.

As we can see, Róża smoothly moves from the context of a public institution to the sphere of religious activities and vice versa. In her story, they are inseparable, whereas the strict division of these two spheres is characteristic to modern society. Very interesting here are rhetorical phrases usually used in the context of institutional relations in the world of work, for example, "they go on the carpet in the director's office" – this term is used with a distance to the commonly understood "to be called on the carpet," which usually means difficult confrontation with the boss, where the relations of power are revealed. On the other hand, the term "our professional secret," which usually describes the accumulation of professional competences here, is transferred to the sphere of non-professional (but highly bond-forming) activities.

Trust in people is revealed in various dimensions of biographical experiences, from the described relationship between Róża and her grandmother, then with Mrs. Doctor, through building a network of relations in youth work or with employees of cultural institutions scattered all over Poland, with whom Róża studied in Warsaw and now uses these contacts in her work (for more about this see Chapter XVI). In each of these dimensions, she is a meaning resource; how to deal with relationships and trust relations shapes her attitude to other people, thus her experience is both formed and based on the tradition of doing social relations. This trust in people is supported by and at the same time builds the trust of the local community. In this context, Róża turned out to be a master of social work in terms of symbolic interactionism.²⁰ All that she does is not supported by some kind of her individual plan – the power of doing

¹⁹ The name of this Foundation is connected with Epiphany – Three Kings' Day. It is organizing a "nativity play" in many cities, towns, and villages in Poland.

²⁰ In the narrative, Róża gives many examples of her activity in the field of social work and charity. They are undertaken with family members and local inhabitants. She does it apart from her professional activity.

social innovation comes from culture and community. At the same time, she has the ability to construct new opportunity structures for the local community.

Although Róża has always been reconciled with her life, trusting that "somehow it should be worked out" has allowed her to take on new challenges that are not formulated in the biographical action scheme. They *just* happen, but, as a result, lead her to a metamorphosis²¹ – a radical positive change in her life. She experiences a social upgrade in an objective and subjective sense: she has a prestigious position in her local community and she can fulfill her dream of working with people:

It was my dream to be a teacher, to start with, I was the youngest, I mean, in this part of R. (small village in Southeast Poland) to lead kids to May prayers, I was always gathering a group for church services and I was sort of a leader. (.) So, a spirit of leadership and guardianship was always running in my blood, therefore I wanted to be a teacher. And I was thinking a lot about Polish philology.

She has not become a teacher, but she achieved much more gaining the ability of being a "fulltime" leader. What is more interesting, the metamorphosis mode becomes, in a way, a constant pattern of her action. We can even describe it as a metamorphosis potential²² which, in a way, eliminates the trajectory potential. It is undertaken in the fashion of happening events that she meets on her way, not in the mode of expectations and biographical plans. Such an attitude is possible because her main biographical resource is a trust relationship.

So, we are dealing with a life story rooted in *milieu* and community oriented, but, at the same time, strongly individualized, characterized by resourcefulness. I refer here to the analytical dimensions developed in the research *Biography and National Identity*, where rootedness in *milieu* is described as "placing one's own biographical and interbiographical processes (e.g., family processes) in the local microenvironmental plan" (Czyżewski 2016: 74). In the case of Róża, although her story shows some, so to speak, universal features of a social activist and leader, it is also clear that they gain biographical significance in the local *milieu*. It is not a question of saying that Róża would not be able to develop elsewhere, but of exposing the symbiosis of her biographical experiences and the process of giving them meaning by including them in the local community.

²¹ Metamorphosis is the process structure of an unexpected, positive change in one's life which makes it possible to discover new possibilities that may lead to a radical change of one's life (Schütze 2008a, see Chapter I).

²² I would like to thank the reviewer of the first version of the text (see footnote 1), whose name I do not know, for suggesting the idea of a potential metamorphosis and cultural resilience.

In the mentioned research, resourcefulness was defined as “coping with the requirements of a micro-social situation characterized by dominant macro-historical conditions” (Czyżewski 2016: 74) and diagnosed as one of the characteristics of the Polish society’s cultural resources. This is very visible in Róža’s narrative. The belief that “it should work out somehow” is connected with active searching for solutions and coping with crisis situations. Researchers in the commented project enumerated two dimensions of resourcefulness: as dealing with trajectories of suffering and as a feature of an autonomous action plan (Czyżewski 1997). Róža’s narrative shows that resourcefulness can also be associated with a metamorphosis leading to a significant, positive change in life. Undoubtedly, the presented case is an example of launching the culturally rooted resources of the symbolic universe characteristic of Polish society. We can also notice that an individual usually tries to control trajectory potential by introducing a biographical action scheme. In Róža’s case, it is rather metamorphosis due to her ability to attach readiness to accept appearing solutions.

One can also try to relate Róža’s narrative to another notion of resilience, recently used in social sciences. It is a concept quite widely used in psychology, educational sciences (where it has been successfully applied to both children and adults capable of overcoming unfavorable life conditions), and in community/ecological systems studies, where it has been used in research on natural and man-made disasters. Such studies show that resilience is at the same time the process of, capacity for, and outcome of, successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, Best, Garnezy 1990, Williams 2008, Endress 2015). Many models and theories of resilience, which so far have been developed in the social sciences, tend to refer to resilience, to put it generally, in terms of the capacity of an individual, a community, or an ecological system to return to its *original* shape *after* cessation of, or overcoming, stressful and disturbing circumstances. In such a context, resilience is defined as the ability of an individual, a family, a community, a region, or a country to withstand, adapt, and recover from stresses and shocks caused by crises and disasters. The role of the community and local community, in particular, could be vital for surviving a crisis (Chaskin 2008). The narratives of resilience appear as normative constructions of an understanding of “good coping,” like particular expectations of community members to be able to adapt to the situation of crisis and, which in an opposite case of inability to adapt, might lead to stigmatization of individuals and whole communities (Harrison 2012).

This concept was somehow reintroduced into the scientific discourse during the last crisis in 2008. The crisis in the sphere of finance was quickly transferred into social problems, for example, increased unemployment, especially among young people, loss of trust in public institutions, et cetera. As I noticed, resilience aims at returning to the state before the crisis. It can be said

that Róża's activity may be characterized by resilience, she has the ability to find solutions and act quickly in crisis situations in order to return to the previous state. Yet, it is a specific kind of resilience that may be called *cultural resilience*. Róża successfully uses "old" values in the "new" world. Whenever she finds herself in a new situation, she adapts to new opportunities, but in traditional frames. So we can notice a paradox here. The transformation process assumed a change without the intention of returning to the previous state. Meanwhile, Róża implements transformational changes through resourcefulness, but also through resilience. In fact, the point is that nothing should change in the field of the construction of social life and the traditional hierarchy of values. In a sense, it is about the return/maintenance of the status quo.²³

Thus, Róża's case exemplifies the main paradox – the merging of modernity and traditional society values. She uses both in order to give meaning to her biographical experiences, as well as be an active actor in the process of local community development. She is an example of a leader who moves effectively in the contemporary reality of a modernized society and metamorphosis potential in her biography can be well-attached to the expectation of a neoliberal system where the individual is "an 'entrepreneur of himself,' who constitutes capital for him-/herself and who becomes a producer of him-/herself" (Czyżewski 2009: 91). But, we can hardly find such auto presentation in Róża's narrative. To the contrary, what we find is that the interpretation of her life story requires references to a language that characterizes society with traditional values. Thus, in the presented case, the transformational changes do not follow the model of a complete modernization of social life if we understand them as a unidirectional process with clearly identifiable characteristics (Joas 2016). The example of such a perspective can be seen in Giza-Poleszczuk's critical statement. "Religiousness of Poles is presented [in media discourse] as the main barrier blocking us from modernity. Hence, the great enthusiasm for all the statistics showing the progress of our secularization. And yet religion is not a slavery that hinders progress, but an ethical attitude that is supposed to be a testimony to such values as love of neighbor, kindness, or compassion. Religion is therefore an essential 'social glue' that allows people to be generous to themselves. Without such generosity, all human relationships are reduced to a commercial system. Society then ceases to exist. That is why the theory of modernization applied here, in which the traditional society with its values is a barrier to modernity, was absurd" (Giza-Poleszczuk 2018).

²³ It is not, of course, about the issues of systemic change in the political dimension and the dream to come back to the political system before 1989. Such resentments are also part of some kind of nostalgic thinking, but it is a completely different problem that I do not discuss in this chapter.

The quote describes the mechanism of creating the mainstream vision of social change – we are able to build a common world with others, only then we exclude the Other – strangers to such an extent that we have the right to despise them. The case of Róża is problematic for such a perspective: her activity in the professional and social sphere is possible to be carried out successfully since it is based on traditional values, and the local community will develop on the basis of them and not in contrast to them, for example, in relation to a neoliberal social project. Thus, the conservative and traditional Róża, cultivating family, religious, and community values has at the same time become a carrier of the values of civil society and makes effective use of modern opportunity structures. What is more, these features become a social glue that integrates and does not exclude in the local community. This conclusion can be valid not only for those in favor of modernization who consider that secularization should be a condition of modernization, but also for the orthodox rhetoric of the Church. Especially that the symbolism of oppression, sacrifice, and survival remains an important resource for building the sense of superiority and inferiority (Piotrowski 2006).

Thus, the analysis of this case shows the ineffectiveness of schematic rationalizations, questions the unidirectionality of the social change process (in the social and cultural dimension), shows to what extent the effects of transformation on the dimension of macro-social level can influence social change in the local and individual dimension.

Conclusions

One may say that the main part of the chapter has nothing in common with the winner/loser categorization. It was exactly my argumentation in this text. The presented analysis can be concluded from different perspectives. I would like to pay attention to two of them: the methodological and interpretative ones. In the analytical context, they merge. I intended to show what kind of conclusions can be derived from the material when it is analyzed at the level of facts presented in the life history and at the level of the narrator's interpretations presented in the life story. We can apply here the concept of the subject, distinguishing between "biography as a theme" and "biography as a means." In the first case, biography is treated as an issue in itself, the researcher's interest is directed at the structure (narrative/biography) and expressed in the question *how* is the narrative constructed; *how* do the interactive conditions of its production shape the story; *how* does the biographical reconstruction of the life course take place, et cetera. In the case of "biography as a means," the question of *what* comes to the fore. *What* is told enables gathering biographical information to answer typical sociological questions (e.g., social structure, strategies on the

labor market) (Helling 1990: 16). The life story corresponds with "biography as a theme," whereas the life history with "biography as a means." Very often the second approach is supported by the etic perspective, whose aim is to describe an individual's experiences with the help of categories not grounded in the empirical material, but imposed by the researcher. As I intended to show by the analyzed case, Róza's life history could be a very good empirical material to illustrate a successful development of competences that lead her to the position of the winner. We could also say that Róza has become a beneficiary of social change when she effectively uses opportunity structures, for example, state and European funding to develop various social activities, on the one hand, and to continue self-education and developing a private business, on the other hand. Of course, we cannot say that it is a false interpretation – Róza can be considered as an example of a successful person and her achievements result from her hard work and determination to achieve goals (to describe her biography in neoliberal language). But, finishing the analysis at this level, we miss the most crucial items of her biographical experiences. They could be studied on the level of her life story that enables seeing the emic perspective and the way an individual gives meaning to his/her experiences.

It should be stressed that life history and life story are not contradictory stories – to the contrary. "Being truthful to our experiences, we cannot invent the life-story as pure fiction, but depend on our life history... What I have been through, my life as I lived it, the communication with my fellow humans and its relevance... all goes into my life story" (Fisher-Rosenthal 2000: 116). So, we should be very careful when going from the level of life history to life story and vice versa. As I noticed in the analyzed case, we could see that, when at the level of life history, the categories of winners-losers would fit with Róza's image of life based on presented facts and she could be smoothly presented as the winner. Moreover, she could be a model example of a self-made woman, developing her skills and not surrendering to difficulties. Whereas if we consider her life story, it appears that her success is not the result of activities that could be analyzed by a winners-losers dichotomy and all the described normative categorizations, but rather by motives and relations belonging to completely different social resources.

It does not mean that winners-losers categorization is totally out of context. For sure, it describes, to some extent, opportunity structures that put some people in advantageous positions and some others not. Yet, it is symptomatic that in our collection of 90 interviews only one person used this category as the self-description.²⁴

²⁴ In the third part of a biographical narrative interview, when the researcher is entitled to pose theoretical questions related to the studied problem, we never asked interviewees about winners/losers categories.

Narrator: And my old folks, who had been working for several decades, err in the former epoch didn't get absolutely anything, apart from the fact that they get some pensions, which enable them to get by err better or worse. Therefore, from the perspective of those, those changes which took place, well, I can be perceived as a beneficiary.

Researcher: In scientific jargon, it's called "winners and losers of the transformation."

N: [chuckling] So, I rather belong to the former.

The quotation comes from an interview with a man three years older working in banking in one of the big Polish cities.²⁵ We can assume, and it can be seen in his life story, that a neoliberal way of thinking and acting is not just the adapted ideological language, but his perspective, especially in the frames of professional career. As I noticed, it is the only example of using this category. Perhaps if we asked our interviewees, "Do you feel a loser or a winner?" some of them would try to attach to one of these categories, what still would not prove that they truly identify with them. Giza-Poleszczuk described this type of reasoning in a very critical way: "We [sociologists] have not anticipated any of the important changes of the last 30 years, because we have lost the ability of a true sociological analysis. True, that is, holistic, with a broader context, and not just using Western cliché. The mechanism of 'public opinion washing' is also extremely harmful. It is that we ourselves create public discourse by imposing certain labels in order to convince people that this is what they think. We analyzed this with a group of colleagues in 2009, when we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Round Table. In the media, one side was talking about a 'social contract,' the other about a 'collusion of elites.' In the midst of this media storm, the CBOS asked the citizens a question: 'In your opinion, was the Round Table (a) a social contract; (b) a collusion of elites?' This is what I call the 'opinion washing' mechanism. First, we create a narrative, then we publicize it, and then we tell people that these are their own opinions" (Giza-Poleszczuk 2018). I think that the same mechanism has worked in the case of winners/losers categorization as a "created narrative" to be imposed on people's ways of dealing with social change.

Róża uses neither of these categories nor this perspective. To describe her experience we need different language. Thus, these two different levels of analysis can bring various results and the etic level could perhaps illustrate some social process, but it would be very difficult to understand them from an individual perspective. This could be the reason for the misunderstanding of people's motives and, for example, political choices, but also social phenomena and processes that stand behind them.

²⁵ For the analysis of this case see Chapter XI.

Piotr Filipkowski

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE AGENCY AND STRUCTURAL CHAOS. A BIOGRAPHICAL-NARRATIVE CASE STUDY¹

The protagonists of the well-known documentary film *Talking Heads* of Krzysztof Kieślowski from 1980 answer several seemingly simple questions: Who are you? What would you like? What is most important for you? The interlocutors are forty-four people born between 1880 and 1979. They are of different age, gender, occupation, social background, and “class” affiliation, attitude towards the world in general and the political system (then) in particular. Regardless of these differences, almost all the protagonists seem to take the task extremely seriously. Although each of the talking heads appears on the screen only for a short time, we can see how the participants of this short movie survey ponder the answers, looking for the best justifications. Perhaps the film director, who did not have to worry about any sociological or psychological representativeness of his sample, wanted to include only such most reflective statements from among the many recorded during the realization of the film. The method of filming and editing further strengthens this individualizing interpretation. Thus, *Talking Heads* can be read – at the most basic, existential level – as a film about the orientations of the modern man in the world of values and ideas, but also in the context of social structure. However, when it was shown in 1980, it was read rather as a record of civil hopes for political and moral change (Hendrykowska 2015). The emergence of the trade union “Solidarność” may have seemed to be a spectacular fulfillment of some of these hopes, though very short-lived, as it turned out.

One of the protagonists of the film, a man born in 1934 (45-year-old at the time of filming), begins his answer with such a declaration: “Since I changed my profession from a humanist to a taxi driver, I have been feeling a much freer man.”

¹ The text was originally published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 268–290. Retrieved December 2019 (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.12>

After which he immediately adds: "But, at the same time, I have understood that a sense of personal freedom is not enough. For a man to feel truly free and at ease, he must live in conditions of democracy and a sense of security. This personal freedom, a sense of personal freedom, however, is not enough." Humanist-taxi driver is sociologically the most exceptional "talking head" among Kieślowski's protagonists. All others' structural embedding in socialist society, to put it technically, looks very stable. It raises no doubt either. In other words – professionally and socially, everyone else is as if in his/her right place: children have dreams, youth have (un) real plans, adults have stable family and professional roles, the oldest reflectively look back on their lives. Even the current biographical experiences cited by several interviewees to a minor degree make this static image more dynamic. What is really important, for the characters, but maybe even more so for the filmmaker, takes place in the existential and axiological aspect, and allusively, the political one. The sociological dimension, understood as looking at a man through the social roles he or she plays, though so clear, sometimes almost exemplary (the cook is filmed in the kitchen, a worker in a factory, a sculptor in his studio, a mountaineer in a "highlander" sweater, a professor in a smoky study full of books...) is of least importance here. In this "spiritually" disconcerting, but sociologically very stable, almost static company, the intellectual taxi driver seems to be a rather special, structurally least obvious figure.

I start with this extensive reference to the famous documentary by Krzysztof Kieślowski, in a strong conviction, it has something important in common with the biographical-sociological approach this book is about. Here and there people are portrayed as individuals, whose names we might not know, but whose existential uniqueness is evident to us. Here and there they (are invited to) give us holistic self-images of their "whole lives." Though these images are constructed there and here from very different angles and by hardly comparable means.

The film works with artistic short-cuts: close face portraits and a couple of essential words should be sufficient to grasp key characteristics of a person's life – his or her crucial concerns and messages. Which, presented one after another, gives an image of something more general – up to "people" or "society" at a concrete historical moment.

Biographical-narrative research uses a much different method to achieve similar goals. It needs an extensive story of one's life – a live story – that gives insight into all important personal experiences and facts, into life history. These experiences and facts – and their always unique constellation – help us not only answer the question, who our protagonists are right now, at the moment of the interview. They also make us understand biographical, social, and historical processes that brought the person whose story we learned, to the point, where he or she is standing right now.

Thus, it is clear that biographical-narrative sociological analysis depends fully, if not entirely, on successful passage from the narrated life story – to the experienced life history; from representation – to reality; from spoken and written word – to social and historical world. This passage is crucial for our research, but it is not an easy one. Biographical sociology has developed a variety of analytical strategies to cope with this uneasiness and to make this passage possible and reliable. The most important methodological and theoretical inspirations of our research are presented in the opening chapter. In this chapter I want to present a life story, a “case,” which shows how difficult and intriguing this passage from story to history might still remain – though all methodological conditions of successful biographical-narrative sociological analysis are fulfilled.

My interviewee² was born thirty years later than the protagonist of Kieslowski’s film I mentioned above. Like him he worked as a taxi driver when we met for the interview. And like him, he used to work as a “humanist,” an academic philosopher to be more precise. This activity took place roughly three decades ago, on the threshold of what we call system transformation in Poland. In the years between, he did many different jobs, usually on his own account, structurally being through all these years a (very) “small businessman.” All of these jobs and professional engagements – except the first and the last – were new ones. That is they did not exist before 1989 being products of new social-economic reality of transformation. Or they were rather, when seen from an individual’s perspective, windows of new biographical opportunities dynamically opening (and closing) in those years.

Biographical “what” of this biography provokes interesting questions about individual agency and freedom (to use this sociologically suspicious word not only in a movie quote above), happening in the context of radical structural reconfiguration. The latter understood here as a dynamic process of the disappearance of some and the emergence of new patterns of action, lifestyles, social roles, and, what follows, the frameworks, or only attachment points, of biographical orientation. And these questions relate not only to the diachronic, temporal dimension of these processes, to replacement of some patterns with others. They refer also to their synchronic dimensions: the multiplication and overlapping of these patterns, and the related biographical (im)balance. We clearly see here that some engagements, commitments, social roles occur stable and long-lasting – others only fleeting; some important and with significant biographical

² The interview was recorded over several meetings in autumn 2016 and spring 2017 during the implementation of another research project. Then, by a joint decision of the research group, we included it in the pool of interviews analyzed in the project *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on a Biographical Perspective*.

consequences – others rather insignificant; some reinforcing one another – others conflicting. Thus this “case” can be treated as a good example of dynamic de- and re-composition of life orientation frameworks and biographical scenarios.

What is crucial for interpretation of this biographical “case,” these multiple scenarios cannot be easily summarized here neither to the story of biographical “upgrade,” nor “downgrade” or fall. Thus we cannot categorize our narrator neither to “winners,” nor to “losers” of the transformation. And, not because of missing indicators of his objective position within the social structure of Polish society. No, we get good enough biographical data to make such generalizations and judgement possible. They are possible and might be sociologically valid – but subjectively seemingly irrelevant in the narrators’ structures of meaning.

The narrator / biographer of this “case” – his own case – imposes such a meaning structure on his numerous and diverse life experiences, that keeps all of them (though with a significant exception, as we will see further) in a kind of narrative ironic distance. This irony does not make decisions and happenings of his biography less serious, but introduces a reflexive meta-level from which they are perceived as “life adventures.” The protagonist of this story is a very active social actor, who uses his agency and sense of freedom, to realize different biographical scenarios, that appear possible to him in a dynamic context of economic and social transformation. But, the narrator of this story is aware of structural and existential limits of this – his own – illusionary omnipotence. The gap between these two figures of the same person – the protagonist and the narrator – complicates the relationship between life history and life story, biographical “*what*” and “*how*” of this “case.” And makes sociological-biographical analysis difficult. But, the very same gap reveals the narrator’s self-reflexivity and a kind of life wisdom, which I suggest to call *narrative agency*. This narrative agency is a freedom of self-interpretation of one’s life. However not reducible to this very function, it can be seen as one more strategy of biographical coping with radical changes of transformation, a kind of stabilizing self-protection against its contingency and chaos.

Let’s come closer to the narrative of Leszek³ in the following pages, to explore how this *narrative agency* works and what kind of biographical (self)portrait it brings. And, to see spectacular life experiences of systemic transformation behind it.

Narrative exposition – episodic family history

The request to tell one’s life (story), which is usually how the transcription of the biographical-narrative interview begins, fits into the broader communication situation between the researcher and the narrator. In the minimal version,

³ The name of the narrator has been changed.

it is a brief explanation of the research objectives and plan; in the maximum version, it is a long-term, private acquaintance. I met Leszek while I was looking for (using the so-called snowball technique) contacts to former employees of the Gdynia shipyard, which I had been investigating as part of another research project using the oral history method. He was recommended to me less as a “shipyard worker,” that is, an interview candidate, but as a potential informant, having contacts to other interlocutors and a good orientation in the topic that was of my interest. It was already during the first conversation that we redefined this communication situation. Leszek began to tell his family story, and I – switching on the recorder – asked him to tell *his* biographical story. I did not think at the time what research project this interview could be included in, or even what specific topic (or topics) will be the leading ones, or which would be most interesting for me from a research perspective. The starting point here was simply an interesting, engaging biographical story. Both formally, linguistically, narratively, and in terms of content, to say so – meaning the constellation of life experiences, commitments, choices, rooted in a specific historical reality. History is, in fact, a strong background to Leszek’s biographical story from the first sentences. However, not in the sense which sociologists from Łódź wrote about years ago – the embedding of biography in history, contrasting it with inrooting biography in *milieu* (Piotrowski 2016). Here, history is not simply the course of events, which had been happening on a macro scale, above people’s heads. Events, which people had an insignificant impact on while bearing the radical biographical consequences of these situations, experiencing trajectory (in the strict sociological sense – as this biographical “process structure” in which an individual under the pressure of external circumstances is thrust out of current practices, routines, structures, and loses control of their own life [Schütze 2012, Riemann, Schütze 1991]). From the very beginning, in the story of Leszek, history is treated as a moving stage for a biographical drama. And this drama has its own dynamics – it can be a tragedy, a comedy, or even a farce – as if independent, or at any rate not dependent on the movement of the stage. And it takes place at the level of individual biographies of the family members who were included in the story. The story, over a dozen pages long in transcription, about his own family history is extremely convoluted. Despite repeated reading, I could not fully understand it. Perhaps because the narrator’s purpose is not to narratively build the family tree, but to highlight the most grotesque characters and family situations embedded in the “big” history.

It [my life – P.F.] began in Wrzeszcz and, like almost all Gdańsk residents, I was born on Kliniczna, which is on the border of the shipbuilding district. About three hundred meters from the shipyard’s borders. I think North street is closest there. And I was born there, and at home, I had a grandfather who worked in the foundry, right? It was not his only job, because it was another picturesque figure

in this flat in which I spent my childhood, because in the year 1939 he was an uhlán of the Greater Poland Cavalry Brigade. And there, at Bzura river he did something, right? Well, it wasn't such an uhlán from the first line who would charge at tanks, he was a corporal in the communications platoon... And together with this Brigade there near Bzura he would be pulling a wire somewhere to the positions, right? And he would run away, trying not to let the Germans kill him. He tried sometimes/ I mean, it was not his duty to kill the Germans on the battlefield, but to ensure communication with the command post. And when it turned out that these command posts are not getting the hang of it, they gave the order that everyone should save oneself on their own, and so they dispersed. He ran away for two weeks, right, to Poznań, so as not to get caught and locked up in Oflag, right? He succeeded, along the way killed the only German in his life, which he would tell every time... It was one of his standard stories.

The most important message the narrator conveys here is not really about the grandfather's involvement (as it will turn out later, he was not his biological grandfather, but his mother's stepfather) in the defensive war of 1939, but his ability to *disentangle* himself from dangerous and too risky stories. History – this big one, written with a capital letter – gets people entangled in historical circumstances. The narrator will choose those characters from the family saga who were able to transform History into individual small stories – and to disentangle themselves efficiently, somehow take command of one's fate – even if the spectrum of agency was very narrow in the given circumstances. Using one's own reason, cleverness, resourcefulness, craftiness, courage. But also, by a lucky accident. If there is any heroism here, it is very private. The almost caricatured image of uhláns charging at tanks emphasizes the narrator's distance to national historical myths. Myths, to clarify here, understood not necessarily as mere "untruths," but as fixed images and narratives fulfilling the binding, community-forming function, as specific historical "super-truths" (Niznik 1978).

This applies not only to the heroic myths, but also to those demonized ones. The narrator's biological grandfather was in the Waffen-SS, which we will find out about shortly.

I once talked to my aunt, who is an ethnic German, because I have such people in my family too, be prepared for the worst, right? [Laughs] My second grandfather was in the SS, the original one, right? And he was at Stalingrad... And this aunt, who also lived ninety years, wrote in her diary that he was in the SS, just like Grass, right? Only that as for the Grasses, they made a big thing about it, right? Almost, practically. That he volunteered, they dragged his name through the mire. And in my aunt's diary, there is such a feminine and purely pragmatic explanation, right? They/ She expressed it in one sentence. "Adolf," because that was his name, "went to the SS like all the *Volksdeutsche*." The Germans simply conscripted the

Volksdeutsch automatically to the SS. And who was *Volksdeutsch*? It was a German from outside the Reich... And the free city of Gdańsk was just such a state. So, the citizens of the free city were sent to the SS automatically.

The grandfather survived the battle of Stalingrad. Suffering from jaundice, he was evacuated for treatment near Hamburg, where he lived to see the end of the war. After the war, he did not return to Gdańsk and to grandmother, but started a new family in Germany (and then another one). All this is told in an adventurous, almost absurd convention. History entangles the protagonist – and he, here with a happy coincidence of tragic circumstances, disentangles himself from it, telling his individual biographical story. No wonder that we often find here a reference (the above is only one of several) to the German writer Günter Grass. It is not only about the similarity of the fate of some members of the German-Polish narrator's family with the fate of this famous writer from Gdańsk (and the fate of thousands of other Germans of his generation). It is more about the way of constructing the narrative – here biographical, there fictional, but in both cases, immersed in the colloquial and colloquial oral tale, in the element of orality, storytelling (Janion 2001). Behind this formal resemblance lies, I suppose, a similar philosophy of history and the philosophy of individual human life. And of survival in extremely hostile conditions. Ethical questions seem somewhat inadequate here. Not because of “fading out of awareness” or “repression,” but simply because we know nothing about the course of the (biological) grandfather's service in the Waffen-SS. And since we do not know, we do not judge him for this with a collective historical responsibility. An ordinary man is too weak to resist the power of historical events and overwhelming historical forces. What he can do, if he is lucky, is to try to disentangle himself from the historical matrix – before it is too late.

Another protagonist of this family saga, the foster grandfather of the narrator (with the biological one, despite efforts, he did not manage to meet), came from Podlasie, but before the war he lived in the western part of the country. In 1939, also his biographical events gained tremendous dynamics:

And when the Germans came, then snatch! Take them to Stutthof, right? And there, him alone, a sixteen-year-old, of course, those from Stutthof were sent to work somewhere in the fields near Krynica, Stegna, and they were working there, in the field. And one time he said that he would just run away. And so he did, ran away and made his way back to Lublin area. So this is the next story which/ And later, because it was somewhere at the beginning of the war when he was a sixteen-year-old and later when the war ended, he was twenty-something, the Russians came and took him to the ISC, the Internal Security Corps, and he went to Bieszczady [mountains], under [general] Świerczewski, he fought against Ukrainian bands. What he would tell of it...

The fate of this grandfather turns out to be no less complicated than the life events of the "German" one – although, from a historical perspective, there is nothing extraordinary about them. He manages to get himself out of one big History, but he becomes entangled – or perhaps entangles himself – in another. To what extent he exercises his agency in this, and to what extent he is tuning in to the new historical and biographical situation and thus to the new "system" – this we do not know. We only get a suggestion that with time, he was able to transform these experiences into a suggestive story. Perhaps, by imposing *narrative agency* where its real impact on the course of events was very limited. The briefly outlined further professional path of the foster grandfather – working in the militia, and then many years of working in the shipyard – suggests adaptation to external institutional or "systemic" conditions rather than any biographical rebellion. Well, not every History can be efficiently disentangled from – but each one can be told (or at least attempted) as an interesting story of individual life events. If only there is sufficient self-critical reflexivity and narrative skill.

To break this male-centric perspective, let us stop for a moment at the female heroines of these family stories. The narrator's grandmother clearly resembles the Kashubian grandmother of Grass's novel, who – in every historical turmoil – "has her own mind." She also has strength, which seems to be greater than men's, to develop her own counter-history (Grass 1994).

Grandmother lived the entire war in Gdańsk. I mean, she was Polish, but she was a maid at the home of such wealthy Gdańsk residents, also of Polish origin, but in some past generation they got uprooted. They came from the Swiecie area, but they switched to German and it was believed they had some incredible real-estates, tenement houses, plots of land, and securities.

Although during the war, the grandmother's employers were successively losing this property at the Sopot casino, so that in 1945, "when the Russians came and began seizing it, they actually had nothing to take," it was probably impossible to get a better job during the occupation.

In turn, the narrator's mother ends up doing "forced labor" at that time. Very peculiar, indeed. Her grandfather, the grandmother's father, is saved from Stutthof ("they locked him up because he openly confessed that he was Polish. And he spoke Polish, he taught Polish to children and did not want to be German") thanks to the intervention of his front friend from the First World War world – currently an SS general – and relegated to the management of a several-hundred-hectare property. Working there, he brought his grandchildren, among them the mother of the narrator.

My mother did not have any siblings, all the cousins, everyone spent the occupation there, right?...And when it was over, they were like butterballs.

Because there was everything – molasses, ducks, geese, dry sausage. My mother remembers the occupation as such a paradise land of happy childhood.

These are just short excerpts from the narrator's family war story. There are many more references to Polish History, and many more surprising individual counter-stories. These random experiences of family members supported by their causative action (more often consisting of disentangling from History or rather avoiding being swept by the current than implementing some individual life plans) make up a gripping family tragicomedy, full of surprising, situational, and consequently biographical turns. However, it is the task of the listener/reader to build an understandable plot out of them – the narrator merely tells episodes from the lives of the characters, his own ancestors, which are diffused, though interrelated. To understand them, one needs to have a grasp of Polish 20th-century history, and a minimum of openness to its possible biographical implications and complications.

Feature accumulation – autobiography of the time of “system transformation”

The narrator does not become the protagonist of this story until “in due time.” Its shape is determined not by chronological, but by narrative order and binding events into a web understandable to the recipient (or at least by the narrator's attempts of such binding). Somewhere at the very beginning, he emphasizes his attachment to Gdańsk, Wrzeszcz, to be precise – not only declaratively, but also recalling a specific biographical episode (sightseeing his city by following the footsteps of the writer Günter Grass).

However, he appears in the main role as late as in the story of a trip to Germany in 1991, which unfolds the story of grandfather Adolf evacuated from Stalingrad, whose family the author meets there, and tries to meet with him, though unsuccessfully. However, this addition (in the terminology of the narrative analysis of Fritz Schütze, we would speak about narrative drive and constraint [Schütze 1983]) turns out to be an independent narrative whole – yet another family story which, this time, takes us not to the times of war, but transformation.

We went to Germany together because [a friend – P.F.] had a prepayment for a large Fiat, then there was a prepayment system. Well, but because there were few of these cars still, the Rakowski government or someone invented that those who had a prepayment can bring a car from abroad and will not pay the duty, right, duty exemption. And because my friend emigrated to Germany at that time, he noticed immediately, whether right after the first or the second trip, he said that he found

in...near Frankfurt there is an American military base. And there's a Jew from Poland who sells to these Negroes, right, those who have to do military service for two years, the Polonez, Polish cars. He advertizes them as large, heavy, typically American, right? He had such a special leaflet, I regret that it got lost somewhere, but there were slogans that really...depicted this Polonez so descriptively, as a car that has all the features that Americans care about when they decide on a car. And these American soldiers bought these Polonez cars, right? They were ridiculously cheap, right, they cost four thousand marks there, I think. It was then terribly cheap/ the conversion rate for a mark was six thousand probably, so this car cost twenty-four million. And almost everyone from this base bought these Polonez cars. And when they finished their service after two years, they sold them back to this trader. This trader repaired them there and sold to Poles. We bought one, only it was supposedly unused. Although I doubt it, it seems to me that/ [You bought a Polonez in Germany, second-hand, from US Army soldiers!?] I mean just, supposedly unused, because it was on white plates, we brought it on white plates.

Times have changed, but the way the main protagonist experiences the world – now being the same as the narrator (whether also in a stronger sense postulated by biographical analysis, which, after all, is looking for, in various ways, the correspondence between the narrative *here* and *now* and the experiential *there* and *then* – let us leave aside this question for the time being) – remained as if intact. The History (with a capital "H") is again changed into minor episodes of interpersonal comedy (although, perhaps, it would be more accurate to speak of a grotesque or farce here). Inter-human, but here built on vernacular, bottom-up anthropology of things. The most important, most efficient actor (or in a newer sociological terminology – *actant*) of this story is, after all, the Polonez car. The object which is really strongly and, at the same time, ambiguously and surprisingly symbolically cast, which cannot be reduced to the last oddity of the Polish automotive industry of the PRL⁴ times, nor to the object of desire, and the ultra-detailed amateur historical and technical studies of retro-automotive fans. Polonez is here yet another comedian, who in the symbolic vortex of "breakthrough time" can change masks and roles, depending on the needs, and even more on the imagination of buyers, sellers, and various intermediaries. Everyone is rational here – and yet the whole scene is grotesque. It reveals the "absurdities" of the late PRL, but also the unobvious agency and resourcefulness of all the actors involved in it. It is even more credible because shown on the occasion of telling the story about the life events of the German part of the family and meeting them after many years.

However, let us finally recreate the chronology of the main life events of the narrator-protagonist. It takes on clear contours only during the second meeting,

⁴ Polish People's Republic.

after several hours of narrative and conversation. Yet, it does not cover the “whole” life – the years of childhood and early youth are blurred in the literary pictures of Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz (this is spoken literature, but, as we have already seen, strongly and explicitly inspired by canonical written works, at least for Gdańsk). However, in place of these (un)told experiences of the family home, the narrator offers an interpretative frame for his entire autobiography. The more important because it appears as early as in the first sentences of the interview.

Unlike most of his peers, my father did not work “the Japanese way,” that is, in one place all the time, doing such an employee, ant career, but he changed jobs seven times. And this for me/ I mean, a man learns by imitating, just like animals. Well, because he was an alpha-male in my home, so I started doing the same, right? I mean, even not really planning this intentionally, it just happened to me that life turned out so that I had to change jobs every now and then. Whether I want it or not/ I mean, I usually want to, right, because it just stops engaging me, and then kind of accidentally it also stops bringing satisfactory income. And I have to look for something else. And so it goes on.

It is not a binding or sufficient interpretation for us, but it is worth – and in line with the spirit of humanistic sociology – taking seriously this initial self-reflection of the narrator. The forecast fluctuation and instability of the life course gain a simple psychological or psychoanalytical explanation. We do not have to question it (succumbing to the fears of many sociologists about “psychologization”) in order to search for, on a slightly shallower biographical level, other than deeply psychological determinants, or rather the conditions of the narrator’s course of life. Anyway, his initial self-reflection also encourages it, revealing the hesitation between translating the biographical turns with his own “wanting” – and with situational extortion, between autonomous choice – and fate, explained by the metaphor of *the course of life*. When in a moment this autobiographical story will begin to manifest more content of event and experience nature, aligning itself with the historical context of transformation, it will turn out that this initial self-reflection of the narrator about the unintentional imitation of his father does not shed, but rather poses the question about his individual agency – about its scope, conditions, and restrictions.

The choice of secondary school in 1978 is the proper beginning of a relatively chronologically ordered autobiographical narrative.

And so I went to this high school according to his wishes, to this technical college. And there I started my adventure with shipyards.

Although the decisions are made by his father (whose professional career seems to be much more stable than we could gather from the introduction, and

is firmly rooted in state institutions connected first with the sea and then with agriculture), the narrator agrees with his reasoning at that time. The prestigious Technical Secondary School of Shipbuilding in Gdańsk, commonly known as Conradinum,⁵ which he attends, is a place that allows one to reasonably count on sound education, good professional preparation, and the prospect of stable work in the developing shipbuilding industry – then treated as the avant-garde of the modernizing country. The proof that it turned out to be quite accurate is the career of his close friend (and later my interviewee in the shipyard project), who, after this school, graduated from the Shipbuilding Department of the Gdańsk University of Technology, after which he started working as an engineer in the Paris Commune Shipyard, later transformed into the Gdynia Shipyard. After its fall in 2009, he easily found satisfactory employment in one of the private shipbuilding companies operating in the Tri-City. The example of the friend illustrates the *possible* direction in which, in a typical scenario, the narrator's professional life could have unfolded – regardless of transformational changes with the accompanying "collapse of Polish industry." After graduating from secondary school in the late 1980s, the narrator studies philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin. He justifies this firstly with the need to escape from his father's domination: "but, at some point, I thought that it was under his influence that I made this decision [about technical education – P.F.], so now it's time to make my own." However, a moment later he shows the biographical basis of these decisions, emphasizing the attitude that has distinguished him since his youth, distancing him from reality, from commitment, also from the political one, demonstrated by his peers.

Eighteen years old, I was still wearing a Shetland polo-neck sweater, herringbone jacket, I would take an umbrella and a pipe with amphora and set off down the avenues. There, my friends were running, I mean, they were running away, because there wasn't even a need to do anything. It was enough when there was a group of young people wearing jackets and chanting slogans, they would immediately start chasing them, or shooting, or something. And I was calmly walking through these avenues in this outfit with an umbrella and a pipe. Nobody just dared to approach me... And I liked that, right? The fact that thanks to this I am, in some sense, untouchable. I mean, I'm neutral and I'm not getting one look or another. The more so that my father would always convince me that you always have to look for the other party's arguments. And even though he would listen to Free Europe [radio] for days, he never let me uncritically repeat what was broadcast there, right? He always had an answer to the arguments that Free Europe provided. And

⁵ Conradinum is a colloquial term for the oldest, prestigious secondary school in Gdańsk with over two hundred years of tradition, educating specialists in "ship" professions to this day. Its current name is Conradinum Ship and General Schools. Its graduate was, among others, Günter Grass.

it wasn't just a simple answer. So no, no, he didn't paste it with quotes from the People's Tribune. He just said it wasn't quite right or not quite so. Because they tell you something else and this is an obvious exaggeration, but the truth probably needs to be looked for somewhere in-between. And so he accidentally produced a philosopher.

Again, a long piece of argument to justify the distinction and singularity of the narrator, who persuades the listener to his individual "third way" between the extremes of "communism" and an active "fight against communism." It is easy to interpret this fragment as a narrative dodge, setting aside the question of one's own commitment to "Solidarity" and even justifying its lack. The birth of this mass, spectacular social movement and its "carnival," radically ended by the imposition of Martial Law at the end of 1981, coincided with the last years of the narrator's education at the Gdańsk technical school. So he was very close to the center of those important events that made the big, national history. However, the context of this statement and the further biographical story suggest a different interpretative trail than a desire to justify. The narrator has no problems with his own "maladaptation" to historical patterns – on the contrary, he derives some sense of pride from this separateness. He also shows that when entering adulthood, he not only wanted to free himself from his father, but also to run away from History – into his own biographical stories. Although the narrator is well-aware that none of these escapes can be fully successful (in short, the father is still acting "at the bottom" and the historical process is "at the top"), since that moment, he focuses his story on this intermediate level, where he can reveal his individual agency. Not some total or subversive anti-structural, but – to refer to the theory of Margaret Archer (2013a) – real and realizable in the subjective band of possibilities of a specific, reflective man (Domecka 2013).

Along with his wife, whom he met at the university, they return to the Tri-City. The first employment after obtaining a diploma is at the Student Work Cooperative "Technoserwis." We have several snapshots from this short period of pre-official work. One is cleaning the dry dock after sandblasting the hull, the other, much more lively, is cleaning the workers' hotel belonging to the Gdynia shipyard, which includes, among others, clearing a clogged sewage system: "And also, women's panties, bras, and other things were taken out. Most often such items of clothing were the cause of these clogs."

I am extracting this particular picture from many, not for the sake of the vivid anecdote itself, but to show from what position the narrator is observing reality here – in this case, the turn of 1980/1990. Although he returned to the shipyard to work for which the technical school prepared him, he returned as a "philosopher" and not a shipyard worker. Structurally, he is there as a short-term laborer, well-paid for the exhausting and dirty tasks ("the salary that I got

in hand then was twice as high as the salary in the first official job I took after studies"). Mentally, he is outside this shipbuilding world – he is distant to his role, interpreting it "from the bottom" or "from the margins." In almost literary stories, extracting the "structural" paradoxes of large-scale socialism in its declining phase along the way.

The first permanent job at the Marine Fisheries Institute as a senior editor does not change much in this respect, although the narrator's observations are now carried out from the center of the microcosm in which he is functioning. This institutional microcosm (represented rather than experienced) becomes an inter-world. "Structurally" belonging to the old institutional and bureaucratic order, "functionally" adapting efficiently to the new market rules of the game organizing the life activity of many people even before the symbolic breakthrough of 1989.

There were several such institutional periodicals. In addition, they, books of these researchers, all publications. So everything that was devoted to the industry in which they worked... So, you know, it was a bit absurd, because I, for example/ they had their duties, right, such a ritual. And such an article, such a professor dealt with "factors affecting the population of the Baltic cod." And she had to, it resulted from some regulations, she had to write such an article every year. Well, what to write here, we know what these factors are... Well, she just submitted year after year the same piece of text and added tables with some measurements... And we published it, and everyone had work.

This story about bureaucratic stability (much more extensive in the interview: unfilled vacancies, a kiosk next to the institute to which they "threw" attractive goods, view of the sea from the window...), is not an introduction to the story of stagnation or implementation of the institutional pattern of action, but about initiating individual agency.

Everyone was happy, and at the same time it was possible to do extra jobs on the side. Because thanks to the fact that this manager was influential, we had a photocomposition program... it was called digitset. And it was a program which allowed the typesetting of newspapers and big books, right?... The manager trained everyone, right? They were carefully trained. Young, twenty-something-year olds. More or less my peers, I think. And after two months, two of them ran away to England. And this one [who stayed – P.F.] was obviously the least brainy. And he broke/ that is, accidentally formatted the hard disk in that computer on which there were most of these photographic programs... And, of course, there was a computer specialist employed full-time, and he started saving this data, and I was assisting him. And I learned so much from this assistance that after a month the manager decided that he would make me the manager of computer photocomposition... Theoretically, my job was to manage a team. There were

two, three, or four people employed. Well, but after some time, we were about to take over the administration of the tenement house. I mean, I took steps to take over this administration, so it was quite absorbing. You had to go here and there, write letters, deliver them. Well, I convinced my boss to create a second shift and I would start work at two [o'clock – P.F.]. And my subordinates finished at three. So I had an hour to settle their tasks, delegate work for the next day. And then, I had seven hours to myself. Nobody controlled me because no one was there anymore, only the security guards came from the company that was guarding the building, and we would gossip. And I also took the opportunity and was learning this photocomposition program. Or, I was doing some side job. Or, I was doing some work that really had to be done and no one but me could do it. And so I was bluffing there until at some point the manager said that the market for offset plates collapsed.

The scientific state institution resembles a revolving door mounted between completely different realities. Both are operated by the same machines (by the way, we get here a micro-insight into the computer revolution of the early nineties) and, in part, by the same people for whom the full-time employment of the old-times turns out to be the “base” for implementing completely new ideas and biographical scenarios. These ideas are not invented here, planned, or dreamed, and the scripts are not waiting to be played by the actors.

The narrator's presented world as a dynamic, shimmering world, is open to sudden and frequent change. At the same time, it is not about “accepting fate” or some adaptive adjustment to it. No, here the change coming from the outside – from the world, from the “system transformation” – meets the active operation of the protagonist, who grabs it, integrates it in his actions, and thus changes the direction in which his (professional) biography unfolds. This evokes associations with the theory of chaos, which describes complex, intertwined systems, susceptible to unexpected, non-linear, holistic changes, caused by single micro-causes (Smith 2007: 1–6, Byrne, Callaghan 2013). Random, from the point of view of the disturbed system, although having their own logic, their causes, and effects. With such an addition, however, that in this biography of the “breakthrough time,” it is difficult to catch longer periods of stabilization of the biographical “system.” From the narrative retrospective, rather emerges a picture of continuous biographical dribbling, constant reconfiguration of the points and the framework of life orientation. And almost every such change is constructed as a result of unexpected external circumstances and an active, efficient, and subjective response to them. Not passive adaptation, but the active use of emerging and perceived options – within the limits of individual biographical possibilities. In short, the world of the protagonist in the period of transformation (and, by the way, of youth) is a potential world, full of new opportunities, an open world *in favor of*. However, these possibilities are

arranged horizontally rather than vertically – their implementation does not add up to the path of social promotion or the path of "career."

Additionally, for a long time, as it is clearly seen in the passage cited above and as confirmed by numerous further fragments, the narrator implements several parallel biographical scenarios. Not only in the sense obvious to a modern society that he plays many relatively independent social roles – a husband, a father, an employee, or an employer, et cetera – but also in the stronger sense that his professional, and thus social, identity is hardly perceptible. In the above quote, he is at the same time the editor of a scientific journal and a self-taught IT specialist. And also, as a consequence of marriage, the administrator of the tenement house recovered by the heirs of the former owners (including his wife). At the end of the interview – during the next meeting – we will learn that at the same time he undertook extramural doctoral studies at the Catholic University of Lublin (which he had not finished), and a little later he taught logic at the University of Gdańsk. Such multitasking (sometimes leading to crises) would not be possible without the acceptance of the social environment of the narrator. The ease with which he negotiates the flexibility of his employment may testify to the universality of such multi-layered biographical occupational scenarios at that time. In fact, he will confirm it elsewhere.

A lot of people at the university were in a situation like mine. Anyway, working at the University of Gdańsk at that time was something completely different from what I had expected when I went there. It was not an academic life. You just popped in to tick off the class. And then, everyone hopped in the car, or rushed for the train to get to the next job.

This can legitimately be seen as the degradation of the crumbling system (or its specific subsystems, for example, the academic one), but also as its openness to structural changes – and then a kind of contribution to the dynamically reconfiguring reality.

The collapse of the offset plate market, where the penultimate quote stopped, is my arbitrary cut – somewhere you have to finish the already long quotation. This destabilizing impulse, in line with the biographical reconfiguration pattern outlined above, initiates new action plans. The narrator sets up a private company with a friend ("It was an already registered business. Because then everyone, there was terrible pressure, such pressure, right? To open a business") and imports offset plates from Germany. This business did not last long, but smoothly turned into the sale of reagents for their development and, in parallel, the distribution of floppy disks (at that time popular data carriers), and then various computer accessories. The next step – and the answer to the technological "transformation" (the whole interview clearly shows how much it overlapped with the "systemic" transformation) – was the provision of Internet access services.

At this point, it seems that the narrator's professional biography has stabilized around "small entrepreneurship," so characteristic of the transformation period, especially its early, transitional phase, from before the market dominance of large corporations and the forced popularity of running one's own franchise business (although many small companies have survived and today operate on a completely different market). This stabilization turns out to be an illusion.

Talking about the subsequent reconfigurations of his small business, the narrator suddenly inserts a short sentence completely out of tune with his thus far narrative: "And then the Internet came about and I started to deal with the Internet, but in the meantime, I had an accident in which my wife died." Such short, as if involuntary, digression refers to the experience unlike any previously cited, to a random tragic event whose detailed circumstances we are to learn in a moment. Traffic accident statistics do not leave the impression that this was an absurd, "causeless" case. It was rather a nexus of incidents – not only the death of the wife, but the survival of other passengers, including the narrator and his daughter. This event opens nothing in the protagonist's life and is not easily biographically integrated – like all earlier and further life "adventures." It is not another obstacle in life the overcoming of which triggers new ideas and redirects life in a new direction. Rather, we get a signal of the experienced trauma, confirmed later at the end of the interview. The rapid current of adventure narrative which has thus far exposed the narrator's agency stops for a moment.

However, this narrative suspension does not last long. The dynamic story of the next business adventures, the need to close down the Internet company which has no chance of surviving in a market dominated by big players, quickly returns. The narrator, although illustrating the growing difficulties and attempts to adapt to increasingly difficult conditions, does not dwell on his business failure at all. He suppresses this thread to develop the next story. It is a story about running a large seaside holiday resort on a lease basis.

He owes the entry into this transformational microcosm to his second wife, whose father-in-law used to be the manager of a neighboring resort, which belonged to one of Warsaw's factories during the period of socialist modernization and employee holidays. After its fall in the 1990s, he became an agent for the declining complex, and then bought it at a good price in order to renovate it.

The story's intricacies do not allow for even a brief factual reconstruction. The more so because the already complicated vicissitudes of family business (previously family life remained on a distant narrative set) are again embedded in the set of colorful pictures of the Polish transformation. Not only are grassroots made credible through his own experience – as we already know well from the entire narrative so far – but, additionally, here narrated from

the coastal periphery, from the perspective of the holiday outskirts of former factory holiday resorts.

In this quiet holiday area, the business struggle turns out to be fiercer than in the city, and the rules of the game are much less transparent. After these few years of adventure, we return to the Tri-City with the narrator, where – together with chefs employed at the seaside – he runs a school canteen for several years, and then engages with home baking of trendy healthy bread. After a few more years of this chaotic micro-entrepreneurship (chaotic understood as above – more philosophical than colloquial), he attempts to enter a strongly institutionalized and structured labor market, and work in a large banking and insurance corporation. This decision is presented as very rational and well-thought over; however, it is taken, like many others in the life of the narrator, under the influence of an accidental impulse:

I rather went there to return to the labor market. I cut myself off because of the fact that I kept the server here, well, it was a very cheap solution and very convenient, because I could be with children almost all day. And be useful at home. However, I lost contact with reality and was out of the loop. Well, so I went to this insurance company with the thought of renewing old contacts... It was an impulse because I was at a friend's funeral in the winter, who was just "a gem," or "a diamond." It was the year '98, I met him in the street and he was cheering with delight, how well he is doing. He was just so optimistic that you can't imagine. And then/ and this picture I kept... I was at the funeral and afterwards I was talking to the widow and said that I got this opportunity, because here, nearby is this branch and they were just looking for someone to work. So I said that if Wojtek praised it so much, maybe I will go there, something will pop up. And she directed me there, to some of his colleagues who were still working there and I talked to them.

Coming into contact with an international corporation done locally, with a large bureaucratic business employing (producing) a new middle class, with Polish capitalism, which achieved spectacular success, lasted only a few months (*ipso facto*, it was limited to the initial induction training). This short biographical episode turned out to be intense enough to be remembered by the narrator as a series of expressive, ironic images of a hostile world of paid work tasks of a completely new Polish middle class: "it's terrible trash."

This distance is not surprising when we know the biography of the narrator, as well as his way of constructing the story. It can, however, be interpreted more objectively as a measure of the biographical and social difference between his world and the world of his colleagues – perhaps also graduates of philosophy and earlier technical secondary school – who twenty or so years ago entered the stable, predictable path of newly opened corporate careers and have remained on it to this day (Domecka 2016). In a social and in their own sense, they

achieved professional, maybe also “life” and transformational success (or vice versa) – from the narrator’s perspective: at the cost of abandoning the multitude of biographical plots, and of giving up “philosophizing.”

“I started driving a taxi”

Driving a taxi is a direct consequence of corporate disappointment of the narrator, and it is still his occupation at the time of the interview in 2017. Presented as a completely natural life choice, which, of course, does not necessarily mean that it has been the target choice. How to locate it “structurally” in the context of the entire biography? It could be perceived as a return to individual entrepreneurship in its next stage of development. It could be a “wait and see” strategy, entering a professional time in-between, allowing him to “return to the market” at a more favorable moment and into a place where it is possible to use intellectual competences and previous experience. Though which ones? Since there were so many biographical action plans so far, and they were so different. And all of them – seen from a distance – turned out to be so fleeting, impermanent, and so poorly shaped.

It is not easy to classify the biography of our protagonist as one within the studies of “positional wanderings in the period of radical changes” (Mach 2003). There is even no certainty whether he is a “loser” or a “winner” of these processes, to recall the binary (and probably too banal) conceptual opposition popular (also) among sociologists (Palska 2002, Jarosz 2005).⁶ At the same time, we have no doubt that we are dealing here with the biography of the time of Polish transformation – that the narrator’s experiences reveal the characteristic socio-historical processes of that time. And he, thanks to his ethnographic imagination and narrative zest, is a good guide to various transformational micro-worlds. Their credibility is assured by the biographical experience of the narrator – these are always participatory observations. He even brings to life some of these narrated microcosms, and then abandons them, extinguishes, closes in order to engage in the next ones.

Unfortunately, these changing worlds of life are not hierarchical at all. I do not even mean in the sense of economic profitability of the activities or “professions” undertaken, because the differences are quite clear (although most often through guessing), but in their subjective valuation by the narrator. A state job is just as good (or bad) as importing offset plates in one’s first company run with a colleague, as later running a computer company, as

⁶ See Chapter II.

providing Internet to nearby residents, as running a holiday resort and school canteen, baking healthy bread, or driving a taxi. This last occupation has the additional advantage of providing a constant source of amazing human stories that drive the protagonist's imagination (although the freshness effect may also work here) and which he willingly shared with me – also after turning off the recorder. External measures and possible "structural" consequences of performing these various, vastly scattered professional activities do not appear at all. The meaning of life seems to be located somewhere else.

It is only at the end of the interview when we learn that the first "permanent" job after studies, taken in the spring of 1989 (this date appears only in this context, seems difficult to calculate for him and is not automatically located in his memory, which tells a lot about the individual experience of the political breakthrough), the narrator treated as a waiting room before what he *had been planning* to do in his life: "Because I submitted my papers and I just wanted to become an assistant lecturer." So, in the long run, *just* an academic philosopher. He was not employed at the first attempt, but in the following year, it was a success and this ready, ultimately very simple and predictable (though difficult to implement) professional scenario – in the terminology of biographical analysis of Fritz Schütze: the institutional model – seemed to be within the range of biographical possibilities.

It is impossible to judge today whether it was "transformation" that cancelled these life plans. Certainly, it brought about chaotic, de- and re-structural compositions in the midst of which our protagonist turned out to be an extremely effective and efficient actor, though playing in small-stage performances. This efficiency and agency are something more than "coping with" social change as described in depth by Adam Mrozowicki (2011) using the examples of Silesian workers. He abandoned his doctorate in philosophy, because combining teaching and running a company quickly proved impossible. Years later, he tried to return to university as a lecturer (not just of philosophy), but this also proved to be only a fleeting experience – incompatible with his main paid occupation and the associated way of life ("at the seaside") at that time. However, this unrealized philosophical path is not considered in terms of a biographical loss, an unfulfilled career. The narrator does not cling to this biographical thread when he casually summarizes this story: "The scientific thread has been cut off. And that's it."

The binding factor of this autobiography is neither "career" nor other structural embedding, with its daily routines, professional practices, ethos, or, at least, auto-stereotypes ("IT specialists," "entrepreneurs," "taxi drivers," etc.). Just as the protagonist's ancestors, at least in his stories about them, tried to sneak out of History and resort to their own counter-stories, he, himself, escaped the sociological transformation schemes to... Well, exactly, to what?

I would say that into a particular kind of “philosophizing.” Individual, non-systemic, very literary. Constantly emphasizing the non-obviousness and multidimensionality of the world, as well as its flickering and grotesque quality. Of every world: the war, communist, transformation, German, Polish, Gdansk (the latter, perhaps the least sociologically important, seems to be the strongest *symbolic* anchor of this biography).

The narrator faces the chaotic reality of “meantime.” He changes it into small ones, looking for streaks of subjective agency somewhere between the disappearing, or perhaps – decaying, old order, and the new one, emerging chaotically since the late 1980s. Even if each subsequent streak seems to be narrower than the previous one, as the new institutional and structural order crystallizes and becomes more and more closed, the *narrative agency* of the autobiographer remains unwavering.

Whatever happens in life – except maybe for this one life tragedy, when his wife dies in an accident and the daughter and other passengers, including himself, survive “by a miracle” – the narrator is always in control of the shape of his autobiographical story. Regardless of his current profession and life vicissitudes, he remains a reflective humanist – an independent hermeneut of his own fate (Filipkowski 2018), not by title, but through active practice. Driving a taxi – maybe even freer than before. At the same time, at the level of operation, as never before dependent on the courses ordered.

Conclusions

A careful reader has probably noticed that the above analysis focuses much more on the protagonist’s autobiographical narrative, on a *life story*, than on his biography, on *life history* (Rosenthal 1993). In places, it may even resemble a literary interpretation, and not a sociological and biographical analysis focused on the reconstruction of the real course of life or different phases of life experience. As in the classic proposal today of Fritz Schütze, which aims – on the level of individually analyzed cases – to reveal the sequence of “biographical process structures” (Schütze 1983). This is the most well-known and well-grounded proposition in Polish biographical sociology, but the problem of the transition from the narrative, that is, the linguistic representation created during the interview, to the life behind it or experience (what it was like in the past, at the time of experiencing it) is a key problem. It is a constantly recurring subject of all the most important theoretical and methodological proposals in this research field, in particular, those which today are most popular and still creatively developed, that is, in Germany by Gabriela Rosenthal, and in England by Tom Wengraf (Każmierska 2013).

As the years go by, it is even clearer that the former accusation of excessive "narrativism" put forward by Daniel Bertaux against the "German school" in biographical research (Wengraf's proposal also deriving from there) was rather misguided (Rokuszevska-Pawelek 2006). Perhaps even – though this claim would require solid historical and sociological verification – postmodernism and linguistic turn did not weaken, but, paradoxically, strengthened the realistic orientation of sociological biographical methods, which sought to defend some "truth of experience" against the narrative, or rather narratological arbitrariness. Although, of course, it is still not the very general realism of social structures and facts which Bertaux had argued in favor of in that polemic, but the realism of the individual experiences of social actors. In other words, the narrative "how" is to be oriented towards the biographical, but also sociological, "what." Today, such realism, or rather – realisms, though at different levels of analysis, as well as the subjective, humanistic perception of the actors present in biographical approaches, is easier to defend theoretically by referring to the works of Margaret Archer (2013b).

I recall these well-known matters to make it clear that my analysis of this case basically stops at the narrative "how." What I propose here is, first of all, the extraction of the narrator's ways of *linguistic portrayal* of both his own biographical experience and the reality of the Polish transformation observed from the bottom, locally. So, it is a kind of second degree hermeneutics, or, after Giddens (1996), *double hermeneutics* (Halas 2001), which explains and organizes the senses and meanings of the *presented world* by a narrator rather than gives an insight into the experiences (s)he once lived. I say "rather," because, in this interview, there are long, strictly narrative passages, in the sense in which they are defined by Fritz Schütze, looking for access to the past reality experienced and lived – "there and then." It is also possible to reconstruct the elementary process structures of this biography, oscillating constantly between biographical action plans and (weakly outlined, fragile, just emerging, or undergoing revision and decay) institutional patterns. Yet, both are embedded here in the context of dynamic structural and cultural changes of the time of transformation, creating in effect the impression of a mosaic-like and fortuitous course of life. If we were to examine it with a survey repeated every few years (e.g., carried out as part of the POLPAN Polish Panel Survey), aimed at locating this narrator – who would then be called the respondent – in the hierarchically understood socio-professional or class structure, we would probably get a picture of gradual transformational "social degradation" – from a scholar, philosophy lecturer at the university, through a petty businessman, to a taxi driver.

However, this mosaic, fortuitousness, or even more so the loss of position in the social structure diagnosed from the outside, seems to be a secondary aspect of the narrator's biographical experience. When we treat his story as a whole

(which does not exclude or invalidate detailed analyses), taking into account its various components, and thus also descriptive, argumentative, theoretical fragments, but also considering its self-presentation, relational and persuasive function (Schulz von Thun 1981), something else emerges in the foreground. This is not the biographical experience, but the autobiographical narrative. Or, more precisely, a consistent way of its construction, which puts the narrator in the center of events, gives insight into his various, mounting and surprising life adventures and events, as well as into the social micro worlds he co-created or just passed along the way. At the same time, it makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to move from the story level to the level of experience. The interview, which was successful in my opinion, and the resulting many hours of biographical narrative, which fully meets the structural formal requirements, should, at least potentially, constitute good research material for in-depth sociological analyses, even those based on the rigorous assumptions of Fritz Schütze's method. However, I get the impression that these analyses do not really give good insight into the narrator's real, historical experience. As a subject and object of historical/social processes, it still remains poorly perceptible. And, where it can be captured, it is difficult to see much more than the case of the biography of the transformation period, even if extremely interesting. However, what organizes and binds the whole story is the author's specific attitude, which I call *narrative agency*.

The autobiography does not try to be here, first and foremost, a representation of experience – even in its most narrative parts – but its creative organization and interpretation. Certainly spontaneous, that is, not fully controlled and consciously constructed by the narrator, and certainly not prepared in advance and played for the needs of the interview. And, at the same time, marked by clear literariness – natural, unpretentious, own, although revealing various cultural or literary influences. This literariness is obviously of a spoken and storytelling type.

At the same time, this spontaneous, original narrative organization and interpretation of biographical experiences is so strong that it imposes, in a way backwards, a specific form and meaning.

Here, the narrative order prevails over the biographical order and organizes it to such an extent that the resourcefulness of the protagonist, who is adventurous, mischievous, and exposes a peculiar eccentricity, can be accepted by the benefit of the doubt or rejected, as, for example, a literary creation or biographical illusion (to recall the known critique of biographical approaches by Pierre Bourdieu). However, it is very difficult to challenge it analytically – by juxtaposing the truth of the narrator's experiences with the lack of truth in his narrative. Or, to put it slightly differently: the depth of his experience with the superficiality or conventionality of his wording. Consciously or not (I suppose

not), the narrator does not give us access to this first level. We have nothing to grasp – except maybe for one moment when the memory of his wife's fatal accident stutters his swift tale.

However, this difficult access to our truth and depth of the narrator's biography is not necessarily a problem here. After all, we get not only an engaging and suggestive, but also cognitively intriguing autobiographical tale, which – at least – is a valuable, even if mosaic and flickering, illustration of the social and cultural changes of the transformation period.

Yet, it is also a case of something theoretically and methodologically more important. I am convinced, drawing on many years of experience in conducting and interpreting biographical narrative interviews, that once again I came across a very individualized, authentic, creative way of linguistic organization and interpretation of one's own experiences and observations of the social world by an "ordinary person." I call this way *narrative agency*, which is a working and a bit of a technical term. Even if it restricts access to real socio-biographical processes – and perhaps even more so – it deserves attention. Both methodological – it is difficult to dogmatically defend the assumptions of the method, as "it does not work" or its application does not contribute much. As well as theoretical – the transition from experience to its narrative representation has not been in biographical sociology, in particular in the classical proposition of Fritz Schütze, worked out once and for all and ready to be used in every case.

For there are such stories about individuals' own lives – as the one above – which, although they seem to fulfill the recently recalled (Waniek 2019), strict criteria of the sociological biographical method at the empirical level, they encourage its theoretical reopening. It is difficult to find a better excuse than the serious problem disclosed here by moving from the narrative "how" to the biographical "what."

Joanna Wygnańska

PART 2

FROM PPR TO SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

The purpose of the introduction and chapters presented in Part 2 is not to follow the historical, political, or economic narratives about the past, but it is rather focused on sociological reasoning about the biographical experience of the PPR and the transformation times separated by the conventionally adopted date of the year 1989. The inference aspires here to show, on the one hand, the essential advantage of the autobiographical narrative interview which enables the researcher to reconstruct significant biographical processes which shaped one's life and the social processes in which biographical experiences have been entangled and shaped by social frames of those processes (Schütze 1992a, b, 2008a, b, 2014, Kaźmierska, Schütze 2013). When applying such analysis we can see the processual character of social reality. Therefore, investigating the biographical experience gives researchers the opportunity to grasp the relationship between the individual perspective and macro-structural processes.

Thus the perspective of this part of the book is focused on analyzing biographical ways of experiencing and reconstructing the socialist and transformational Polish reality in individual life stories within the frame of processual change. In this view, the transition from the socialist period to the time of transformation through the perspective of the continuity of individual biographies allows one to reconstruct the social contexts of both systems and the structural conditions for the formation of individual biographical identity. In other words, we intend to show the transition through the analysis of the biographical life experiences in both of the indicated social realities and the biographical working out of this time by ordinary people.¹

It should be stressed here that in the wider perspective of the historical and social context the Grand Narrative treats the year 1989 as the most important turning point in the newest history of Europe. This time boundary is emphasized in the appearance of the democratization processes among the countries and societies of the Eastern Bloc, politically, ideologically, economically, and militarily (to varying degrees) subordinated to the hegemony

¹ See *Methodological note*.

of the Soviet Union.² Thus, the time after 1989 is connected with the process of democratization of the memory of the past,³ both in the dimension of the experience of World War II and building a narrative on the 45 years of everyday life in the People's Republic of Poland. Biographical memory⁴ allowed after the fall of communism to refer to the topics treated in the PPR as political and social taboos and superseded by the then-current logic of power.⁵

In such a context it is important to consider broader phenomena as a background for the main issues discussed in the book. Today we may say that they are related to the social post-war history of Polish society. At the same time, it is worth stressing that the texts presented here do not fit into the perspective

² It should be noted that the Eastern Bloc in Europe was comprised of such countries as East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania. Other ones which were also under the Soviet Union repression were: Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine. The European country which in those times was less dependent on the Soviet Union's ideological power was the Former Socialistic Republic of Yugoslavia, which till the mid-1970s had been economically strong. At the same time, Poland was defined as "the funniest barrack from the bloc" with respectively wider space of freedom and relationship with the Western world, at least in terms of culture and intellectual inspirations. At the same time, we cannot forget that Poland was regularly shaken by bottom-up upheavals that expressed the citizens' discontent and frustration related to different aspects of the socialist system. The common frames of the postwar reality in the aforementioned regions were the communist and socialist ideologies, in which they all functioned differently – from a very strong dictatorship to a so-called soft-totalitarianism.

³ In a much broader perspective, we can also point to the political changes taking place in the 20th century, leading to democratization of societies not only in Europe, but also in Latin America and Africa, inscribed in the fall of dictatorships. In this case, we are dealing with the "decolonization of memory" (Nora 1989), which means making memory subjective and giving voice to those who could not share their history so far.

⁴ It should be stressed here that the mechanisms of forgetting present on the level of collective memory and public discourse didn't mean that individual biographical memory cannot last. As a result, the biographical memory awakened in Poland after 1989 was expressed in the intensification of memories from World War II and its direct consequences for Poland, as well as in the lack of a cultural model for building stories about Polish society shaped by socialist formation. It is important to point out here that biographical memory concerns the experience of the past and it is a form of the (re)interpretation and reconstruction of the images collected in the individual memory of the past dependent both on an individual life-course and a wider socio-historical context (Kaźmierska 2008: 90).

⁵ The democratization process of memory concerned those Polish citizens who survived World War II in the Eastern Borderlands, that is, on the territories of current Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania (Kaźmierska 2016).

of memory studies or oral history analysis of the transition from the PPR to the systemic transformation. On the contrary, they are focused on the sociological approach and study biographical experience and social construction of reality of the PPR and the biographical experience of the process of transformation, as well as its social construction (separated by the conventional date of 1989). Thus, the subject of the analysis, on the one hand, refers to the biographical experience of the reality of the PPR entangled in the collective influence mechanisms of the system subordinating the individual to the hegemonic and ideological power of the USSR. On the other, it focuses on the experience of the transition from socialism to capitalism in the biography and the reconstruction of the links between both aforementioned social realities in the individual life story. The biographical perspective presented in this book allows us, in other words, to capture the individual biographical experiences entangled in the social processes linked with both indicated social realities and logics of power.

Although the intention of this introduction is not to recreate the social history of the PPR and the time of transformation in Poland, yet it is worth pointing out here a few important issues that outline the social-historical context for the analyses undertaken in the following chapters. Fritz Schütze (1992a: 193) noticed that socialism to a certain extent bore the hallmarks of social movement and from the beginning was reactionary in its character. It means that the propaganda work of its supporters was based on the political and social problems of the afflicted people. As Schütze stresses, otherwise they would not have had a chance to succeed. It should be mentioned, however, that the author speaks of National Socialism, and in the case of countries such as Poland, rather than the reactionary nature of socialism, we should speak of certain imagined alternatives to social and political life on which the building of Polish reality at the time of PPR was based. But, significantly for the analytical perspective presented in this part of the book is Schütze's observation that biographical experiences of living in socialism, seen as a type of totalitarian societal system, are symbolically triggered and subordinated by the representation of social energy and a demonstration of strength combined "with the barely hidden threat to use organizational, administrative, or sheer physical force" (Schütze 1992a: 195).⁶ As it will be seen in some of the texts included in this section of

⁶ Schütze is analyzing the phenomena of National Socialism from a German perspective, but his reflections about the mechanisms of functioning of this social formation we can, to some extent, observe in the other countries in Europe which were under political dominance of the Soviet Union after World War II. However, it is worth noting that it is not the intention of the text of this introduction to present all features of socialism listed by the researcher. It is rather an attempt to capture a certain framework for interpreting the impact of this system on individual biographies also in Polish perspective.

the book this type of phenomena of control and power revealed itself in the biographical strategies of dealing with this type of reality.

The social order of the socialist period was characterized by a strong influence of disciplinary power and a lack of free market (i.e., Mach 1998: 9). This social reality dependent on the power of the USSR should be also considered as a specific cultural heritage and specific mentality of the Polish society at the time (e.g., Mach 1998, Marody 2010, Miszalska 1996, Świda-Ziemia 1997).⁷ In the historical and political perspective of the period of socialism in Poland, it is also important to point out a few events typically defined as the breakthrough moments or the turning points determining the framework for the post-war Polish history. Primarily, October 1956 should be stressed here, known as the Polish October or the Polish thaw – the turning point of the PPR inner politics resulting in the liberalization of the political system. Secondly, March 1968, which resulted in the suppression of students, and a subsequent repression of the Polish dissident movement and mass emigration following the anti-Semitic campaign.⁸ Thirdly, December 1970 in which workers' protests took place, sparked by a sudden increase of prices of food and other everyday items.⁹ Thereafter, it is important to list August 1980 when the Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity" (*Solidarność*) emerged. Last but not least, there should be a reference to December 1981, the time of introducing Martial Law in an attempt to crush political opposition. This narrative is present on a public discourse level and it is connected with the process of pluralization of the collective memory after 1989 (Korzeniewski 2010).

However, the biographical research perspective shows that those historical dates do not usually organize the individual life history. It does not mean we can generalize that the narrators do not have knowledge about them, it just shows that when people were not structurally engaged in the mentioned historical

⁷ In contemporary perspective there are many scientific texts which study the cultural heritage of the PPR and make an attempt to describe the complexity of the mentality of Polish society during socialism time. Inter alia there can be listed *Opowiedzieć PRL* (2011) which touches the heritage of the era of communism in Poland in a cultural, historical, symbolic, and discursive way. In this understanding of studying the past of PPR, one should also point out the studies of PPR memory collected in the journal publication titled *Sondowanie pamięci* (2013) edited by Ryszard Nycz and the recently published book *Życie codzienne w PRL* (2019).

⁸ Recent studies of events of March 68' in Poland are conducted, that is, by Andrzej Czyżewski in his project titled "Generation or generations of March 68' – between oral history and biographical method" (NCN, 2017/27/N/HS3/01602). Here the researcher's article: Czyżewski (2016: 553–580) can also be recalled.

⁹ The riots were brutally put down, at least 42 people were killed and more than 1,000 wounded.

events they are just not so important for shaping one's biographical identity. In this understanding, studying the biographical experience of socialism times and transformation enables us to uncover the biographical processes which has shaped an individual life in subsequent phases of biography (Każmierska, Schütze 2013: 131) and the social processes which influenced an individual's life course, and reconstruct them in political, historical, and social frames.

In turn, the collapse of socialism is connected with the events from the late 1980s and the early 1990s which took place in Poland and other Soviet countries. In short, this fall can be linked to the triumph of the "Solidarity" ("Solidarność") movement and the democratization processes happening in the post-soviet European republics. In terms of economic and social changes, it can be linked to the transition from a socialist to a capitalist system, which led to the collapse of the hegemony of the Soviet Union. In political optics, it meant also the transition from the disciplinary logic of power entangled in the socialist propaganda work to the neoliberal rhetoric and the processes of the reformation of the Polish political system following the West-European patterns of democracy. This transition can also be understood as the process of changing the cultural heritage of Polish society built in socialist times and shaping the new Polish social reality (Krzemiński 2011: 31).

In the analysis of the processes mentioned above, turning to the biographical approach enables us to capture the strategies of normalization of the past both of the PPR and the transformation times vivid in the individual biographical experience. Thus, the texts included in this part of the book describe the social processes and the patterns of action characteristic for both discussed realities. This is done by showing the presence of the phenomena of continuation or the break-up of concrete attitudes towards the system, referring to the whole life history of individuals (conditioned by the influence of both time frames). Moreover, the study of the biographical experience of the time of the PPR and time of the Polish transformation makes it possible to reach the ways of building stories within these time frames. It allows us to discount the categories which often take the form of certain labels in public discourse, for example, "pro-communist" (in other words, post-communist) or "anti-communist" (in other words, post-Solidarity). It also allows us to redefine the visions and myths present on the level of the collective memory of those times. Additionally, such a study is an opportunity to reconstruct the experiences of everyday life in those time frames and to reconstruct the social and historical changes, their influence on the dynamics of the narrators' lives immersed in both the socialist and post-transformation reality.

In this perspective, it is worthwhile to refer to the results of an international research project: Biographical experience in PPR and GDR and its discussion in the post-war generation of 1945–1955. Sociological comparison based

on biographical analysis¹⁰ in which the researchers found out that in Poland and Germany there is no valid cultural model for building stories of socialist past and on how both societies had been planned, established, formed, developed, and impacted by the socialist societal formation; and what actually happened to them in the aftermath of the system transformation and its resulting processes. It is hard to observe a profile of such a model in Poland, whereas in East Germany contradictory attitudes are predominant, whose coexistence has not been accepted by the society, not to mention reaching a common thinking pattern and reference system. This lack of an accommodated or even agreed, but not schematic, collective way of narrating hinders the construction of a historical–autobiographical narrative about everyday life experiences and biographical experiences of that time – particularly such narratives, which could subsequently function in the public discourse. Also, it seems that in the case of Poland, it is hard to speak about models of storytelling deeply rooted in the Polish culture, which go beyond the experience of World War II, the framework for which is well-embedded in the Polish literature of symbolic suffering and heroism of the Polish society and war narratives. Thus, in the case of the time of the People's Republic, it is hard to define such an unambiguous framework. The reason for this lack can be linked with the ambiguity of life experiences. In many, if not in most cases, the PPR's experience in a personal dimension was neither a heroic experience nor related to biographical suffering, nevertheless – particularly from the perspective of the present time – it was related to an increasing sense of deprivation, helplessness, and hopelessness of the socio-political situation and no prospect of change.¹¹ At the same time, we could observe a nostalgic longing

¹⁰ The project was produced between 2012 and 2014 and was funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science (application 100201/ project no 2012-03). The Polish team of researchers included: Kaja Kaźmierska, Katarzyna Waniek, Joanna Wygnańska (Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź), Piotr Filipkowski and Maciej Melon (History Meeting House of KARTA Center); The German team included: Fritz Schütze, Ulrike Nagel, Anja Schröder-Wildhagen, Carsten Detka (University of Magdeburg). On both sides of the project 80 interviews were collected (each side conducted 40 interviews) with the narrators born in the post-war generation in the PPR and the GDR.

¹¹ The study done by Katarzyna Andrejuk (2016) describing the experience of social advancement of women in the times of the PPR can be given as an example of presenting the PPR structures in different contexts. It concerns the analysis of biographical interviews collected from a contemporary perspective (2014–2015). The analysis allowed, on the one hand, the highlighting of the category of the individual agency in the biographies of the examined women. On the other, the research showed the role of macro-structural factors in the dimension of changes and control of their professional careers in the period of the PPR.

for the times and symbols of the PPR and the ritual celebration of the “good life” in socialism, which did not produce a diverse and living culture of memory nor biographical work on this experience. These two interpretations rooted in different strategies of social reality construction are identified and analyzed by the chapters’ authors from various perspectives, which consider both the narrators self-presentations and argumentations, the way they were involved in the system and/or strategies to deal with it. What should also be stressed here is that when we speak about the biographical experience of the PPR and transformation time from the perspective of nostalgic longing for socialism, we may be dealing with obscuring the need for analysis and reflection on biographical suffering, on the hindered development in socialism, and on persecuting dissidents, which included ruining their lives or at least intruding into their biographical potential for development and social participation rights.

This kind of narrating about the experience of those times has been abundant in recent years in many statements or written autobiographies of the so-called children of the system (children of prominent functionaries of the system), where the above-mentioned blurring is built from the perspective of life in a totally different social world¹² (no queues, no economic, social, or political deprivation).¹³

In recent years, we can also observe a certain awakening of the generation born in the 1980s, describing their childhood memories of the period of the People’s Republic of Poland with reference to the changes after 1989. These texts very often bear all the hallmarks of autobiographical stories. It is worth mentioning here the autobiographical comics by Marzena Sowa with drawings by Sylvain Savoia describing the adventures of Marzi – a little girl growing up in Poland in the 1980s.¹⁴ In one of the interviews, the author of the comics

¹² It is illustrated by, for example, a book *Towarzyszka panienska* by Monika Jaruzelska.

¹³ It should be mentioned that the narratives presenting the time of socialism in terms of the lack of oppression can also be found in some of the workers’ narratives. This remark is not intended to indicate any particular narrative of this kind, but is marked to show that such stories can also be found when studying the period of socialism in Poland.

¹⁴ The comics were first published in France between 2005 and 2009. In Poland they were published in three collective volumes translated by the author: *Dzieci i ryby głosu nie mają* (2007), *Hałasy dużych miast* (2008), *Nie ma wolności bez solidarności* (2011). Marzi, the heroine of the comic books, lives in a block of flats (large panel system-building, in Polish “blok z wielkiej płyty”) in one of the Polish cities. Each part of the comic book includes short stories showing various aspects of everyday life in the PPR. The author also made a comic book *Dzieci i ludzie* (2012) presenting this time not an autobiographical story but still the story told from the childhood experience

stresses: “I didn’t make a comic book about a great story. I made a comic about the lives of ordinary people. About everyday life in the PPR from the point of view of an ordinary man.”¹⁵ *Marzi* is a fully autobiographical story, only the names of the characters have been changed. Another interesting vision of the PPR is the book by Wioletta Grzegorzewska entitled *Gugule* (2014), containing a narrative about growing up in the Polish countryside during the socialism period. It is a very personal, even intimate story, which shows the biographical fate of the narrator’s family. Another book worth pointing out is *Znaki szczególne. Pierwsza autobiografia pokolenia urodzonych około 1980 roku – dzieci polskiej transformacji* (2014) by Paulina Wilk. This publication was very widely discussed by literature critics and Polish researchers because Wilk, as the only one from the aforementioned authors, is trying to construct some social diagnosis of the PPR and the transformation times and generalize her personal biographical experience against the whole “generation” which she feels a member of. Still, apart from the critical judgement of this publication which is not the subject of this book, this kind of attempt to deal with biographical past is, here, the example of reconstructing the PPR and transformation memories in a personal story.

The aforementioned international research project concerning the biographical experience of the PPR and GDR times in the comparative perspective was conducted by the researchers of the Department of Sociology of Culture (University of Łódź), who are also the executors of the biographical research of the process of transformation in Poland studied in this book. Moreover, the above-mentioned narratives concerning the experience of World War II, in which one can see a cultural pattern of building a story about this difficult biographical experience, were collected in another research project titled *Biography and National Identity* in 1992–1994,¹⁶ also conducted

perspective about the Polish reality in the 1950s. A boy named Wiktor, who is the main character of this narrative, is entangled in the mechanisms of repressions of the totalitarian system.

¹⁵ <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1523195,1,dziewczyna-komiks-i-stan-wojenny.read> – interview with Marzena Sowa (published January 14, 2012). Retrieved: September 15, 2019.

¹⁶ Still available recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were archived in 2013–2014 in Qualitative Data Archive in IFiS PAN Institute (Warsaw). The collection address is: <http://www.adj.ifispan.pl/katalog-3>. The interviews create a colorful and heterogeneous record of the biographical experiences of the wartime. They contain both borderland narratives (Eastern Borderlands) and narratives from central Poland. The former often contain much more extensive descriptions of the wartime experiences and interestingly constructed images of other nationalities. What connects and distinguishes all the available interviews is that they are certainly contained in the

in this Department. The collection of the wartime biographical experiences is therefore complemented by the interviews showing the PPR reality, biographical experience, and the biographical experience of the transformation process in Poland. Thus, the commentary which reflects a certain tradition among the researchers of the Department of Sociology of Culture (University of Łódź) is important in order to show many years of experience of working with the biographical method and conducting research which focuses on the analysis of individual cases within a framework of macro-structural references. This short introduction to the previous projects carried out in the Department should make it clearer to understand the approach towards the examination of the transformation process in Poland outlined in this book.

As already mentioned, this part of the book is devoted to showing the relationship between the biographical experience of the People's Republic of Poland period and the biographical experience of the transformation time. It is based not only on the interviews collected in the *Transformation* project, but also presents the lives of the narrators of interviews from other collections. The common framework for all the presented texts is the connection of the biographical experience of both the PPR and the transformation of social realities in terms of biographical and social processes. The following chapters (IV–IX) show the already mentioned phenomena of transition from disciplinary power to neoliberal rhetoric and its impact on the biographies of the narrators and also the biographies of their parents and grandparents. The perspective of family history is important here especially due to the impact of the narrators' parents and grandparents' biographical experience on the life story of the narrators themselves. Moreover, these chapters refer to the aforementioned nostalgic memory of socialist (as well as communist) times, often inscribed in the recreation of the memory of objects and products of symbolic culture. The individual subsections in this part of the book also describe the connections and important differences between the discussed logics of power.

Chapter IV: *The experience of systemic transformation in contemporary biographical narratives of older Poles* written by Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek, explores whether (from the subjective perspective of the people born before the end of World War II) the systemic transformation brought about significant changes in their individual lives. The presented analysis clearly shows the discrepancy between individual biographical experiences and public discourses, giving meaning to the transformation processes.

frames of "living history." The narrators talk about the everyday life of the war, which is experienced and remembered uniquely in each of the narratives. Scientific works on analyzing those narratives include Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek ed. (1996), Kaźmierska (1999), Rokuszewska-Pawełek (2002), Dopierała, Waniek ed. (2016), Kaźmierska (2016).

The fifth Chapter by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas titled: *Social innovators in coping with social problems – PPR, systemic transformation, and new Poland*, is describing mainly the opportunity structures emerging in Poland under the socialist regime and during the post-systemic transformation. The analysis conducted in the text describes the interrelations between the use of the opportunity structures involved in the two types of political and economic systems, and the social reformers' careers. The most crucial issue here is also the analysis of the whole biographical life history of the studied social innovators in terms of their individual experience of the PPR and the transformation times.

The text written by Renata Dopierała (Chapter VI): *Life of things from the perspective of the Polish systemic transformation* is focused on presenting a "biography" of things which appear in the life stories of the biographical experience of the transformation process in Poland. The author analyzes the passages of autobiographical narrative interviews and tries to catch different social actions connected with things. The theoretical frame of this approach connects the sociological and anthropological study of the "life of things." These interdisciplinary considerations are mainly embedded in the context of the People's Republic of Poland and the process of transformation of the 1990s.

Chapter VII by Kaja Kaźmierska: *Paradoxes of ideological privileges – a case study of a female textile worker from Łódź*, discusses a case study based on Łódź as an industrial city and a biography of a female textile worker who worked in one of the textile factories in Łódź between 1975–1998. Her life history is analyzed in both chronological and social context in order to reconstruct a complete image of Łódź and the world of female textile workers. Łódź – as the industrial city which had not been damaged during World War II from the point of view of Polish authorities – was the place where the main assumptions of the new political deal could come true. Conversely, the analyses of empirical data disclose the paradoxes of the system related to the asymmetry between the powerful ideological definition of workers as a leading class and the reality of their lives represented in the analyzed material.

Chapter VIII, written by Katarzyna Waniek, titled: *The process of acquiring and developing a critical attitude towards the socialist regime in Poland* presents the biographies of people born in the post-war generation. The author focuses on showing the biographical experience of the PPR from the perspective of the so-called *awakened*, that is, people who, at the beginning, were often fascinated by the communist ideology and the promise of a better future, but encountered important turning points in their biographies and, as a consequence, developed opposition to the systemic rules.

The last text (Chapter IX) is written by Joanna Wygnańska titled: *A new logic of power, old biographical patterns of action. The case study of Weronika's life history*. It concentrates on showing the change in the status of the narrator's

family from a privileged position in the socialist period to the experience of unemployment and poverty after 1989. On the other hand, the text analyzes the necessity of the narrator's mother's emigration to Italy in the mid-1990s. Also, an important perspective adopted here is the experience of migration by the narrator, who at the time of the interview had also been living in Italy for 10 years. The case study shows the experience of the transformation process in Poland with reference to the previous PPR's logic of power. The author focuses on showing the biographical costs present in the experience of the narrator's parents and her individual biographical experience of those costs crucial for shaping her biographical identity.

We treat this part of the book as a sort of prelude to further analysis of social phenomena and processes. In each of the presented texts, despite concentrating on other detailed issues, a comparative perspective can be seen. It is related to the juxtaposition of two systems in the biographical experience. Of course, it is framed by different generational perspectives. For those born in the 1980s, it is to some extent intermediated by the biographies of the parents. Last but not least, the comparison of the two systems will accompany us in the successive parts of the book, although sometimes in a recessive dimension, but always significantly formatting (whether we want it or not) the present perspective.

Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPERIENCE OF SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES OF OLDER POLES¹

Introduction

The political, economic, and social changes which began in Poland in the 1980s and evolved with great intensity throughout the 1990s had a varied impact on individual biographies. Some people perceived them as a time when new opportunities and chances opened up, while others experienced a sense of uncertainty or social degradation; for many, the transformation brought about a mosaic of ambivalent experiences. The perception of, and adaptation to, these changes depended on many factors, well-researched by macro-structural sociology, such as the place in the social structure (including different characteristics: from social origin, through education, to achieved status or position in the labor market), political views (often related to previous biographical experiences; one's own or parents'), and psychological characteristics (authoritarianism, self-confidence, etc.).² In this context, a factor

¹ The text was originally published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 20–45. Retrieved December 2019 (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.02>. The works leading to this publication were carried out within the following projects financed by the National Science Center, Poland: “Significant Life Events and Turning Points in the Biographies of the Oldest Respondents of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN” (grant no. 2017/25/N/HS6/01928) and “Multidimensional Biographies and Social Structure: Poland 1988-2018” (grant no. 2017/25/B/HS6/02697).

² Polish sociological literature on systemic transformation, both in the quantitative and qualitative paradigm, is extremely rich. The following works encompass numerous references to books and articles devoted to this topic: Kolasa-Nowak (2005, 2010, 2012, 2014), Doktor (2010). An edited volume containing a selection of sociological works from the 1990s (Krzemiński 2010) is also worth

that undeniably influenced the type of experience associated with the most turbulent period of transformation was the age of the people who participated in (or were touched by) the changes.

Systemic transformation created different opportunities and limitations for young people, who were just entering adult life,³ as compared to conditions for mature people, for whom the period of the most intense professional activity and important personal decisions coincided with the times of the Polish People's Republic. In the period of social and economic changes, younger and older people were at different stages of their personal life and professional career; they differed in their life experiences and motivations, which often had an impact on how they perceived and experienced the changes. Moreover, contemporary survey studies (e.g., CBOS 2019a) indicate that even today – 30 years after the most intensive transformational changes – age is one of the most important factors differentiating the opinions of respondents as to whether it was worthwhile to change the system in 1989 and whether the introduced changes brought more losses or benefits. Survey methods, however, cannot provide an exhaustive answer when we are interested in sources of such opinions, especially in their biographical background. This kind of analysis can be conducted with the use of qualitative methods.

Over the last few years, Polish sociologists who study social changes from a biographical perspective have devoted many publications to the subject of systemic transformation (e.g., Domecka, Mrozowski 2008, Mrozowski 2011, Gospodarczyk, Leyk 2012, Kaźmierska 2016).⁴ Most of these works focus on investigating the life courses of people born during the socialist era. In contrast, in this chapter, I analyze contemporary biographical narratives (collected in the last six years) of people born in the years 1922–1942 who were aged 72 or over at the time of the interview. In the symbolic breakthrough year of 1989, they were between 47 and 67 years old and were generally at an advanced stage of their careers or had already retired. What is also important, a vast majority of the

mentioning. As for the qualitative approach, I refer to selected works in footnote 19. Since empirical analysis presented in this chapter is based on (qualitative) data collected from the participants in the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN, I also want to mention those works based on the fundamental (quantitative) part of POLPAN that are most relevant to the topic of systemic change in Poland: Slomczynski (2000, 2002), Slomczynski and Marquart-Pyatt (2007); see also articles listed on polpan.org/en/publications/articles.

³ See, for example, Mach (2003, 2005), Tarkowska, Korzeniewska (2002), Tarkowska (2007), Rek-Woźniak (2016).

⁴ See also the whole issue of *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4) 2019 entitled *Thirty years after the Great Change. The process of social transformation in Poland in biographical research perspective(s)*. Some other chapters are based on articles published in this volume.

narrators can be classified as so-called “ordinary people” – they were not active actors in social and political life during the transformation period.

Systemic transformation is widely regarded by historians and social researchers as the most important socio-political event (or rather process) in the post-war history of Poland. Its evaluation is still a subject of public debate; it is also connected with the assessment of the previous period, that of the socialist regime. The aim of this chapter is to explore whether from the subjective perspective of people born before the end of the WWII systemic transformation brought about significant changes in their individual lives, and if yes – what was the meaning of those changes for them. In particular, I seek to answer the following research question: whether and how biographical stories of 49 narrators born in the years 1922–1942 reflect the experience of the most intensive period of systemic transformation, that is, the events of the 1980s and 1990s – the emergence and development of the Solidarity Movement, the introduction of Martial Law, the economic crisis of the 1980s, the revival of “Solidarity” in the late 1980s, the collapse of the socialist system and related political changes of 1989 and the early 1990s, the economic transformation of the 1990s and its social consequences. I perform the analysis in three steps. First, I investigate the place of systemic transformation in the narratives and consider the reasons why it is relatively often absent or poorly reflected there. Second, I present thematic motifs prevailing in those interviews where references to the systemic change appear. All three threads repeated in the largest number of interviews turn out to be related to the sphere of work and employment. In the third step, I seek to deepen the analysis by examining not only what the narrators are talking about, but also how they are doing it. I investigate the meaning of experiences connected with transformation for the narrators, the accompanying emotions – some of them still persisting – and ways in which the narrators incorporated those experiences into their biographies.

I consider my work to be a continuation and extension of the biographically orientated studies on Polish transformation that were carried out by the authors mentioned above. Due to presenting the experiences of older Poles, this chapter enhances the so far accumulated knowledge of the subjective perception of systemic change. The interviewees are over 72 and they perceive past events in a specific time perspective – the perspective of their long lives, which leads (at least some of) them to make summaries and undertake reflection on their entire biography. These facts allow us to see their experiences related to systemic transformation (or: the lack of such experiences) in a wide context of their life courses. Focusing on the narratives of the participants from one age group makes it possible to thoroughly analyze those aspects of their experiences from the period of systemic transformation that were related to their age and cohort(s) to which they belonged. The

application of a biographical approach leads to identifying some social and psychological mechanisms that are difficult to observe in survey studies, but are likely to contribute to the results obtained in them.

Research material and method of analysis

This chapter is based on 49 biographical interviews conducted in 2014–2019 with selected respondents of the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN (www.polpan.org), born in the years 1922–1942, that is, belonging to the oldest group of the survey participants. POLPAN is a quantitative study of social structure, repeated every five years among the same respondents, with the participants from the youngest age group being regularly added in each wave since 1998. Originally, in 1987, respondents selected to participate in the POLPAN survey were aged 21–65 and formed a nationwide representative random sample (Słomczyński, Tomescu-Dubrow, Dubrow 2015).

The authors of the biographical research project⁵ sought to select highly diverse interviewees in terms of education, belonging to socio-occupational categories (at the time of the interview or in the past), region, and size of the place of residence. As for occupational diversity, the “biographical subsample” consists of relatively many people with the experience of working in industrial plants, public offices, and institutions, or on a farm, yet there is only one artist and very few people who ran their own business during any period of their lives. This “imbalance” reflects – at least to some extent – the real occupational divisions that existed in Polish society during the times of the Polish People’s Republic.

The consequence of selecting narrators from among the participants drawn (formerly) for the POLPAN survey is that the “biographical subsample” consists of people who experienced systemic transformation in different ways, or even, in their own opinion, did not experience it at all. They were not usually active actors in social and political life during the transformation period. They did not belong to the elites (neither old nor new) that shaped the new reality at a supra-individual level. The reason why they were selected for biographical research was also not because they belonged to the category of “beneficiaries” or “victims” of the transformation (Pisz 2000), its “winners”

⁵ All biographical interviews were conducted at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in three stages. The original project of the pilot biographical study was developed by Dr. Piotr Filipkowski in cooperation with Dr. Katarzyna Andrejuk and carried out with the participation of Danuta Życzyńska-Ciołek. The latter then continued this undertaking under two separate projects. Most of the interviews are available in Polish from the IFiS PAN Qualitative Data Archive.

or “losers” (Jarosz 2005).⁶ To a certain extent, their ways of experiencing transformation may, therefore, overlap with the experiences of other so-called “ordinary” Poles, although, of course, we cannot speak of any “qualitative representativeness” here.

Although participants of the biographical project formally belong to the category of “the oldest POLPAN respondents,” they do not represent a homogeneous age group or cohort, and they certainly do not represent a *generation* in the sociological sense. The birth dates of the oldest and youngest narrators are as many as 20 years apart, which means that their socialization, education, and entering adulthood took place under very different historical circumstances: in the case of the oldest respondents, these processes had begun before WWII and were brutally interrupted by it, while in the case of the youngest ones, those processes fell entirely within the first two decades of the Polish People’s Republic. As a consequence, the participants of the biographical project differ significantly in their experiences during the most formative periods of their lives, that is, childhood and youth.⁷ Also, the time of transformational breakthrough, which was conventionally set (at least until recently⁸) in 1989, “found” the narrators in various life stages: the oldest ones had already reached the age of 65 and sometimes had at least a few years of retirement behind them, while the youngest did not reach the age of 50 and had to face the labor market turbulences. Their experience and the way they lived through systemic transformation could therefore be varied also because of that reason, which probably has not been fully captured in this chapter.

As the aspect of age is important for my analysis, it is worth mentioning that there is a significant age difference between the narrators and the interviewers. The researchers who conducted the biographical interviews were in their 30s or 40s at that time, so they were at least 30 years (and sometimes even more) younger than the interviewees. I will refer to this fact in the next section of the text.

The intention of the biographical project’s authors was to conduct the interviews using the method of Fritz Schütze’s (1983, 2016) autobiographical

⁶ More on this topic see Chapter II.

⁷ In her book on the adolescence of young people from intelligentsia families born in 1926–1930, Hanna Świda-Ziemia (2003) wrote about how the age difference of even one year could have significantly influenced the processes of socialization and education.

⁸ In the CBOS survey of January 2019, the respondents were asked: “Which event can be said to mark the end of the communist system in Poland?” The highest percentage of those surveyed, 25%, chose, “The first completely democratic elections to the Polish Parliament and Senate in 1991,” while 22% indicated the “Round Table Talks in the spring of 1989.” Ten years earlier, the respective percentages were 9% and 40% (CBOS 2019b).

narrative interview, which means that the first, fundamental phase of the interview should consist in the respondents' free-flowing narrative on their own lives. In practice, the conversation often took the form of an unstructured, in-depth interview, usually with longer narrative fragments (Filipkowski, Życzyńska-Ciołek 2019). Also, the research was not aimed (especially initially) at exploring any specific subject or sociological problem (in particular: the systemic transformation experience). The researchers did not have a predetermined list of topics to be addressed or questions to be asked, whether in the final phase of the interview (if the interview was conducted according to the planned pattern) or in the course of the interview (if this form was not retained). Nevertheless, as far as events such as significant historical and political changes are concerned, the researchers usually asked questions about WWII and the period of transformational changes (if the interviewee did not raise these topics him-/herself).

For the purpose of this chapter, I did not conduct an in-depth analysis of interviews using Fritz Schütze's method, although I sometimes invoke his terminology and assumptions. I treated the interviews in a cross-sectional way, looking for references to the events of the 1980s and 1990s.⁹ In each case, however, before quoting or interpreting an interviewee's statement, I considered it in the context of the entire narrated biography. I focused on those fragments of the interviews that were narrative in nature, that is, when the interviewees talked about events they took part in or events that took place in their immediate vicinity. These parts of the narratives were often accompanied by vivid emotions. I treated fragments that contained general opinions or comparisons (especially comparisons of the period "after the transformation" – or the narrative "present" – with the times of the Polish People's Republic) in a secondary way and I have not analyzed them in detail here. I assume that the analysis of narrative fragments allows us to get better insights into the interviewees' experiences at the time than the analysis of descriptive or argumentative parts.

(Non)presence of transformation in biographical narratives

The first thing that draws attention when looking for "transformation themes" in the biographical interviews with the POLPAN respondents is the small number of spontaneous references to the historical circumstances and events of the 1980s and 1990s. This "omission" is not limited to purely political events (such as the Round Table Talks), which some of the narrators could then probably view as something that took place "somewhere far away,

⁹ I performed thematic coding (Gibbs 2007) using MAXQDA software.

in Warsaw,” in the sphere of politics that they were not interested in. It seemed more interesting to me that the interviewees relatively rarely spontaneously referred even to those social consequences of systemic transformation that were potentially felt in everyday life, such as, for example, the hyperinflation of 1989–1990 or unemployment rising in the 1990s. The narrators’ stories about this period of their biographies most often focused on situations from their family or occupational life, sometimes on health problems, and were devoid of a broader context, while the background for the events usually involved the closest social environment, co-created by the members of the narrator’s family, friends, or co-workers. If we recall the distinction between two styles of narration developed in the 1990s by the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź, one can say that the narratives discussed here were most often “rooted in *milieu*,” while the cases of being “rooted in history (theory)” were relatively rare (Piotrowski 2016a, b).¹⁰ Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 125) uses the expressions “neutralization of history” and “private frames of remembering” to characterize such a narrative style that omits the broader social and historical background. However, if references to the socio-political situation spontaneously appeared in interviews, they usually did when the “grand” history became directly present in the narrator’s life, or the lives of their closest friends, which means that it was difficult for the narrator to explain their individual situation or the reasons behind their decisions without invoking history. It was often the case that the memories of these events were accompanied by emotions, still strong after 25 or 30 years. The kinds of situations and decisions that are meant here will be explained later on.

What happened when the researcher directly asked a question about the events of the 1980s and 1990s and their reflection in the narrator’s life? Most often, the interlocutor recalled certain experiences and situations from their life or from the life of their immediate social circle that were connected with the transformational changes. Occasionally, these memories were placed in the context of collective identity, for example, the experiences of one’s own socio-professional group. If the interviewee did not refer to the events from their own life when answering the researcher’s question, they sometimes expressed general opinions and views on the changes that took place in the country

¹⁰ “Rooted in history means...the narrator’s tendency to place and interpret their own biographical and inter-biographical processes in the plan of historical and social macro processes and refer to theoretical categories (knowledge) and/or various ideological and historiosophical models. From this perspective, the course of one’s own experiences is presented as a case that illustrates a general regularity. Rooted in a *milieu*, on the other hand, involves telling and interpreting one’s own experiences in terms of the course of events and dependencies taking place on a micro-scale of the immediate living environment” (Piotrowski 2016b: 49).

(such reflections, not rooted in biographical experience, will be treated as a background in this chapter, since I am mostly interested in narratives about events). In a few interviews, however, the narrators clearly stated that – from their subjective perspective – they had not noticed systemic transformation at all, or had not been interested in it.

The absence or weak presence of historical circumstances in a biographical narrative may stem from various reasons. However, the issue of reasons suggests that this situation constitutes an exception that needs to be clarified. Perhaps the opposite is true: the focus on the spheres of family,¹¹ work, and health is the norm, while the exceptions from this norm should be explained. However, in the discussion below, I will refer to the explanations I found in the empirical material.

Firstly, the narrators themselves sometimes explain their lack of interest in socio-political events by referring to their heavy burden of hard work that left neither time nor energy to look at their own lives from a broader perspective. Paradoxically, sometimes this justification coincides with a high value placed on such work. This factor would explain the absence of “grand” history in the narratives of the majority of farmers from our set of interviews, especially those who were poorly educated, sometimes struggling with a difficult material situation, and sometimes simply attached to the idea of “hard work” as one of the central values of peasant tradition. One example can be a statement by Stefan,¹² a farmer who was also a manual worker of the railways:

I wasn't particularly interested... I wasn't interested in that or... Because there was no time, you know, to follow it, because I had, well, I had 16 hectares of fields here! It was waiting for work to be done, and the animals... Four cows, two horses... You know, I had a lot of work to do. [W2/19]

However, a similar focus on tasks related to work can also be found in the biographical story of a private entrepreneur with secondary education, who managed his own business until the age of 75 (and later worked part-time). When asked about the transformation, he immediately recalled an investment he was making at the time and moved on to discuss its organizational and financial details, without any direct reference to the broader socio-political or economic situation. As this example suggests, it may not always be about the external necessity to focus on the sphere of work, but, instead, it is sometimes about a more or less conscious choice of priorities in life or about highly internationalized values.

¹¹ As CBOS surveys (2017, 2019c) show, most Poles invariably point out that family is the most important value for them.

¹² The names of the interlocutors have been changed.

Secondly, the focus on events from everyday or private life can be temporary, for example, caused by unexpected, sometimes dramatic events that coincided with the period of systemic transformation (as in the case of the female narrator who became a care provider of a disabled grandchild at that time and experienced serious family problems). The interviews conducted within other studies (Mach 2018) and by myself in other projects¹³ indicate that the argument “I didn’t have mental space for it at the time” is also used in relation to systemic transformation by younger people who started their adult lives during that period: they entered into relationships, started families, or were absorbed in their student life.

Thirdly, I believe that in the case of some interlocutors who fared quite well in the socialist system and held relatively high positions in it, the omission of the transformation as a topic may be due to their difficulties in surviving the collapse of the system and the concerns about today’s evaluation of the narrators’ previous role and attitudes.¹⁴ In Fritz Schütze’s terminology, we would be dealing here with the fading out of awareness (*Ausblendung*): whether unintentional (in the past) or intentional (currently).¹⁵ The omission of difficult experiences may be connected with insufficient trust in the researcher, additionally reinforced by the current (as well as previous, existing in the early 1990s) public discourse, which stigmatized anything connected with the Polish People’s Republic. Another reason for distrust

¹³ For instance, the project “RePast – Revisiting the Past, Anticipating the Future,” funded from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program (Grant Agreement no. 769252).

¹⁴ I suppose it might have been equally difficult for some people to talk about participation in ownership transformations (privatization) in the 1990s, but I did not find such references in the interviews.

¹⁵ One example is the biographical story of Maria, a civil servant who worked for 35 years in one of the central government agencies. She retired in late 1989 under circumstances that were not fully explained in the interview. As she says, a new person was employed in the office at that time and she “reported to others.” The narrator presents the previous atmosphere and working conditions in the office with great sentiment, she also defends good opinions about Jerzy Urban, who was the face of government propaganda in the 1980s. At the same time, she answers the question about systemic transformation as follows: “You know, I have that character, my husband says I don’t give a damn about anything... I didn’t feel any such changes really” (W1/10). The interview reader can be struck by the contradiction between good memories of the socialist times and the narrator’s marginalization (even banalization) of the experience of the collapse of this system. In this respect, Maria’s story contrasts with that of another narrator, Elżbieta, who openly spoke about her membership in ORMO (volunteer citizens’ police) and her role in blocking the establishment of “Solidarity” in the office where she worked in a management position.

may also be that the researcher – a person who is several decades younger – will not understand the complexity of the circumstances under which the narrator made his/her life decisions.

The fourth explanation would be related to the relativization of the importance of transformational changes: in the context of the narrators' other difficult experiences during their long lives, such changes may seem to be a relatively insignificant historical turmoil. World War II, which ruined the childhood and youth of some interviewees, sometimes seems to be much more important in the contemporary narratives (despite the considerable distance in time) than any subsequent historical circumstances.¹⁶ The *longue durée* perspective used by the older narrators to view their lives is evidenced by the fact that when asked about the general assessment of the socialist period in Poland, they sometimes use comparisons referring not to the years after systemic transformation or to the present day, but to the situation before World War II, and they do so in the context of their own biographical experiences. Traumas and turning points in personal life (e.g., death of a child, sudden death of a beloved spouse) also may push other experiences to the background.

Fifthly, it seems that people who were not associated with any institution or company during the transition period (e.g., those who were economically inactive at the time) usually experienced the effects of the transformation in a less intensive way in their own lives and, therefore, sometimes do not mention those events in their narratives, unless the consequences of systemic changes were manifested in the lives of their loved ones, for example, their spouse or children. However, as regards people who were employed at that time, it should also be noted that the effects of transformation, both those perceived as positive and those felt as negative, were experienced differently in different working environments. Obviously, the type of position occupied at work could also have had an impact on the narrator's life trajectory in the transition period.

Sixthly, the inability to comment on the situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s may stem from the belief that the question about abstract "transformations" or "changes" is more about the world of "serious politics," which the interlocutor is not interested in,¹⁷ has no influence on, or does not

¹⁶ Kaźmierska and Schütze (2013: 125) also mention the memory of World War II, "still alive and dominant in the discourse of biographical and collective memory."

¹⁷ The POLPAN survey regularly asks a question about the respondents' degree of interest in politics. In 2018, a total of 17.2% of all respondents declared that they were interested in politics to a large or very large extent, 38.3% to a moderate extent, and 44.4% – to a small extent or not at all (weighted data). Among POLPAN participants aged 72 and over, the percentage of respondents interested in politics

feel competent to comment on, and not about the experience of everyday life. The latter interpretation would be supported by a statement by Jacek, a foreman in a construction company, whose free-flowing narrative presented the reasons for his dismissal in the early 1990s as a coincidence of two circumstances: the manager's unfavorable attitude and the then poor economic situation in the country. However, when asked directly about the "transformation of 1989" and the accompanying feelings, Jacek answered:

[T]hat was a time when that unwanted man [not accepted by me] was my manager. And I was really so busy with my problems that I didn't care about the rest... [I] didn't care much... I was busy with myself... That's why I won't tell you anything about this topic. [W1/2]

At this point in the conversation, the narrator treated his career problems (which were clearly the consequence of systemic transformation) as an experience that was separated from the political and economic decisions taken at the country level at that time.

To sum up this part of the discussion: most of the discussed biographical narratives revolve around important events in the personal lives or careers of the narrators or their loved ones. During the narrators' long lives, family ties often proved to be more stable and guaranteed a greater sense of security than the changing social and political circumstances. In this sense, interviewees place the "grand historical events" at the margin of their lives. On the other hand, the interlocutors had either limited influence or no influence on the historical circumstances (WWII, post-war poverty, Stalinist years, economic crises, etc.) accompanying successive stages of their lives, but they had to deal with the consequences. In the vast majority of cases, their *individual agencies* manifested themselves in reactions to the "wind of history" rather than an active influence on the mainstream course of events. In this sense, the narrators' lives happened on the margins of "grand history." The political, social, and economic changes of the 1980s and 1990s do not generally seem worth incorporating among the central events from one's own biography, unless they had a direct, non-negligible impact on individual life courses.

was slightly higher, but they were still the minority – the corresponding levels of interest were 23.6%, 38.9%, and 37.2% respectively. In addition, in 2003, the respondents were asked the following open-ended question: "Throughout your entire life, what was the most important political event for you, the one you felt or experienced the most?" Despite the question wording, suggesting a reference to personal experience, as many as 34% of respondents did not answer that question (Wysmulek, Wysmulek 2016). These data prove that many Poles feel a sense of alienation from the world of politics.

What do the narrators talk about? Dominant topics, situations, and events

In this part of the chapter, I will present three selected thematic threads concerning the period of systemic transformation, which were raised by the narrators when talking about their experiences (about the events from their own lives). One common feature is that these threads were repeated in a relatively large number of interviews. They all concern the sphere of work and employment.

The need to make career decisions in conditions of great uncertainty

The issues of the narrators' occupational situation in the context of the political events of the early 1980s, the economic crisis, personnel changes in institutions and companies, the labor market transformations in the 1990s, and the legal regulations changing with high frequency are present in almost twenty narratives. Many narrators were making important career decisions at that time and did so in circumstances of considerable uncertainty. Some of them, seeing the deteriorating situation in their manufacturing plant or fearing that the reorganization of their institution would be detrimental for them, voluntarily applied for collective redundancies. Others, who had earned the relevant entitlements, opted for retirement or the so-called early retirement. The legal regulations at the time facilitated such decisions; there was a system of welfare benefits to help people who were only a few years from reaching retirement age (Cichon, Hagemeyer, Ruck 1997). The narrators often present their decisions as a combined result of the situation at work and other factors, for example, care duties in the family (spouse's illness, the need to help in looking after grandchildren, etc.). A recurring topic in the interviews is that of changing legal regulations and uncertainty as to whether the moment of making a decision is good: in some cases, a difference of a few days or weeks had measurable consequences, for example, it affected the amount of pension granted. In several cases, the narrators who voluntarily left their workplace to receive some kind of welfare benefit worked at the same place later, even for several years, usually on a part-time basis. Sometimes the managers of enterprises and institutions tried to circumvent the law to benefit the employees, as was the case with the factory where Maciej was employed:

Well, there was a transition period before retirement. Because then the laws made it easier, no special effort was needed. The enterprise was officially declaring that it was eliminating this position, even though it wasn't true. Often, you would continue to work for five years in the same position. But, your certificate of employment stated that you worked on another position or something. [W1/21]

Some narrators took up new jobs after retirement. However, they do not talk about this as a turning point which marked a new and important stage in their occupational path, but, rather, they view it as an “add-on” to their previous career, driven by the need to earn more money. Sometimes they were exposed to new organizational culture and work relations (often seen as inferior by the interviewees). This was the case with Tomasz:

You know, in these private companies, the atmosphere was completely different. No one trusted anyone, no friendly relations. [W1/19]

However, interviews also include stories of dismissal or forced retirement, not accepted by the employee. One of the most dramatic stories is that of Jacek, who suffered a stroke after receiving a termination notice (during a period of intense unemployment in his region of residence). Paradoxically, however, he considers this to be a positive fact since he received a disability pension as a result, which enabled him to survive until his retirement. Another narrator had been working in a low-status job for several years before his retirement. Although the narrators sometimes complained about the low amount of pension granted during the transition period,¹⁸ none of them mentioned having a personal experience of long-term unemployment or total lack of means of subsistence.¹⁹

Personnel changes, interpersonal tensions at the workplace, “helping hands”

The changes experienced by the narrators in the 1980s and 1990s often had the “faces” of specific people who were involved. The themes concerning interpersonal relations are very diverse. Some memories concern antagonisms that appeared between the members of the Communist Party (Polish United Workers’ Party, PZPR) or official trade unions and supporters of the

¹⁸ “The amount of benefits was kept low. This was due to a sharp increase in the number of pension recipients receiving a pension between 1989 and 1991. Many people were already sent to retire early before 1989 in order to reduce the extent of latent unemployment. In view of such a large number of beneficiaries, it became impossible to maintain the level of pensions” (Ziomek 1999: 63–64).

¹⁹ Sometimes the narrators mentioned such experiences in relation to their children. Socio-economic consequences (especially those negative) of changes introduced in the 1990s have been widely described in Polish sociological literature; see, for example, Beskid (1992), Karwacki (2002), Palska (2002), Tarkowska (2000), Tarkowska, Sikorska (1995), Tarkowska, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Wódcz (2003), Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (1998).

“Solidarity” trade union (NSZZ Solidarność). In several interviews, one can notice criticism of specific people from the narrators’ immediate social circle who joined the Solidarity Movement, sometimes performing important functions there;²⁰ following the changes of 1989–1990, some of those people took up managerial positions in the narrators’ institutions or enterprises. The narrators accuse these people of hypocrisy and double standards: in their view, some of them had previously actively supported the Communist Party, but when the political sentiments changed, they began to declare pro-Solidarity views with zeal. Such people were also sometimes accused by the narrators of denunciation, lack of solidarity with other employees, attempts to make an easy career, making financial gains from being a trade union activist, incompetence, or even immoral or illegal behavior in private life. All the narrators who expressed such opinions had been members of the Communist Party in the past, although – according to their declarations – they were forced to join and were not actively involved in the party.

Sometimes new executives and managers faced mistrust not because of their specific political behavior or attitudes, but rather because of their young age:

Later on, when things changed, we went private [the enterprise became privatized], and the young people were promoted and became our bosses. Whoever spoke English, knew about computers, and was under thirty was promoted as a branch manager or a floor manager. Those people often lacked professional experience and, above all, life experience. [W1/21]

Tensions between employees may also have been caused by a sense of threat due to potential redundancies or unemployment:

Well, later on, when the changes began, things changed a bit. Things weren’t so nice anymore, there weren’t good relations at work, things were different... An employee talking with an employee, you had to be careful what you say and to whom. [W2/6]

The interviews also include memories of specific difficult situations connected with interpersonal relations during the period of change. Janusz, who came to Silesia to find work in the early 1960s and joined the Polish United Workers’ Party to obtain housing (“it was more of a room”), recalls the pacification of the workers’ strike in the Wujek coal mine shortly after the introduction of Martial Law, in Poland (December 1981):

²⁰ Although this is not always explicitly stated, all these situations seem to concern the so-called “second Solidarity,” that is, the revival of the trade union in the late 1980s.

At the workplace, even though they were colleagues, they would spit at my feet because I was a party member. [W2/11]

Barbara, the headmistress of a rural primary school, reported a situation when one of the teachers hung a cross in the school. The narrator was summoned to the municipal council to explain the matter. The whole situation made her so upset that she decided to retire (it was in 1987). Another narrator, Aldona, believes that her dismissal was facilitated by an unfriendly colleague who presented a negative opinion about her to the new manager.

However, the research material also contains stories about the narrators receiving assistance from friendly people or simply competent officials, or about human bonds which brought about new experiences during the period of change. Elżbieta, a fairly high-ranking official in the town hall, recalls a phone call from a friend of hers employed by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), which helped her to retire at a favorable moment (as a result, her pension was higher²¹). This situation can obviously be viewed negatively as an example of a member of the former nomenclature using resources that were not available to others. However, the narratives also mentioned examples of support provided under more “democratic” rules, also by persons representing various institutions. Teresa, a cleaning lady, received valuable help from a legal advisor from the public employment services: following the advice, she wrote a letter to the Voivod (head of province) and obtained permission to extend her unemployed status for an additional year, which helped her to financially survive until retirement, taking advantage of unemployment benefits. Tomasz, a technician in a construction company, was offered a job in a private company after retirement: the company was headed by a woman who used to work in his former workplace and who “wanted to hire a trusted person” (W1/19) in her newly established company.

Turbulent times for factory employees

The narrators who worked in manufacturing facilities often mention what happened to their enterprises during the period of systemic transformation.²² In more than ten interviews the narrators mentioned the liquidation of the manufacturing plant, the gradual limitation of output and workforce, or the privatization of the enterprise, sometimes involving a division into several or

²¹ At least for some time, because later, as the narrator mentions, the legislation that made this possible was considered unfair and a financial adjustment was made to the benefit.

²² This is also done by people who did not work in such plants, but observed changes occurring in their place of residence.

even several dozen companies, the plant's assets being stolen or purchased by foreign capital. I will not provide here any quotes from the interviews because this type of narrative is widely known, and I will elaborate on this subject in the following section. The prevailing attitude towards those changes in the interviews is negative. Comments on positive outcomes of such transformation are very rare.

Of course, the three issues highlighted above do not exhaust all of the themes contained in the interviews. I decided to discuss only these three because, as mentioned earlier, they recurred in a relatively large number of interviews, and they also provide a good introduction to the last part of this chapter, devoted to the meaning of the events of the 1980s and 1990s for the narrators and different ways of dealing with them emotionally.

The biographical meaning of the systemic transformation experiences

How did the narrators see the significance of their experiences during systemic transformation? How did those POLPAN respondents who mentioned the transformation-related events from their own lives incorporate these experiences into their biographies? How did these experiences affect their sense of identity, the sense of life, or their self-image presented in a biographical story? What kinds of emotions are present in those memories? I attempt to answer these questions below: I present selected “combinations” of how the narrators experienced systemic changes and how they incorporated them into their biographies.

As I wrote earlier, many interviews lacked (extensive) references to events from the period of systemic transformation. Therefore, I decided to present here only three – in my opinion most distinctive – patterns that emerged from the research material, illustrated with quotes from selected interviews. When making a choice, I was guided by the following criteria: (a) in the chosen interviews, the material concerning the experiences of the systemic transformation period was relatively rich, (b) the narrators spoke about the events in which they personally participated, (c) judging from the content and structure of the interviews, these events were important for understanding the biographical path of the interviewees.

Life “put into question” – two versions

“Indeed, communism was repressive, but for many people, it was the home they had learned to live in.” This statement, attributed to Jacek Kuroń by Zbigniew Mikołajko (2019: 30), is a good reflection of the experiences reported by some narrators. In particular, the communist system became a “home” for some people from peasant or working-class backgrounds, who took advantage of

the educational opportunities and social advancement, usually associated with membership in the Communist Party (PZPR), where such membership was treated more or less instrumentally.²³ Even if they noticed the repressive aspects of the system, their own biographical experience was sometimes so positive that they played down any contradictory information. One of the strategies to reduce the sense of participation in a system that was morally dubious could be to focus on working conscientiously and minimizing political involvement. That was the choice of Aldona, who had been employed as a city clerk for many years. For people like her, the change of the political and economic system represented a threat. Indeed, the narrator was forced to retire early:

[I] retired after I turned fifty-five. I mean, I didn't want to, but it was the whole, so to speak, the transformation of these systems, and we were just... People like me, who performed some functions, especially in the home affairs department. People always said it was a political department. That's where various things were arranged. Well, all of the people who worked there were chased away. So I retired at the age of fifty-five in 1990... I was very bitter because... I wouldn't want to show you all this, but I was a highly valued employee, I received awards. I was awarded the Knight's Cross, a Gold Cross of Merit, a Silver Cross. I collected the Gold and Silver Cross of Merit in Warsaw. I was extremely bitter, and my mother's illness overwhelmed me so much that I decided not to do anything. Leave it the way it is. However, I still regret it because I did not deserve to be thrown out of the picture just like this; I had done thorough, honest work. [W1/6]

As we can infer from the last sentence (and from other fragments of the interview, not quoted here), the narrator has not managed to deal emotionally with the forced retirement to this day. For her, systemic transformation brought about a breakdown of biographical order, or – using Schütze's terminology – the beginning of the trajectory.

Also Feliks, a long-term director of a technical college and a member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), found himself in a situation where, in the second half of the 1980s, his entire career, and perhaps also his life, was put under symbolic assessment. As he recalls, he passed the “exam” at that time:

[Y]ou needed to renew your appointment once every five years. Towards the end of my service time, I faced a dilemma. I wasn't sure if they would appoint me for another term of office or not. But, strangely enough, the “Solidarity” trade union at the school wrote a long essay saying that, “he is the only guy.” The teachers approved it, saying: [the narrator's name] will be the headmaster. [W3/4]

²³ An interesting article on the upward social mobility of women in the Polish People's Republic was written on the basis of selected interviews from the discussed collection (Andrejuk 2016).

Together with the oldest school headmasters, Feliks was appointed to this position for an indefinite term. However, it soon became apparent that the new education authorities, related to “Solidarity,” intended to cancel the previous arrangements and introduce a periodic assessment of all school headmasters. At that moment (it was 1991), the narrator decided to retire. Since then, he has used his spare time to collect materials on the history of the school where he used to work and to write down his memories. Some of those materials have been published as a book. During the interview, Feliks was most happy to talk about his school and his past career. One could get the impression that he is mentally living in the past. He mentions meetings with former students in the interview:

[T]here are those sentences that I hear. One of my former students would say: “Hey, you old commie.” But, many others say: “You are, or were, the foundation of respect, and you promoted respect for the school.” And that’s a beautiful end of my service as a teacher. [W3/4]

There is no room for an in-depth analysis of both interviews, so I will try to provide a brief summary: both narrators deeply experienced changes brought about by systemic transformation. In their case, these changes were associated with the end of their professional careers. Moreover, for Aldona and Feliks, the arrival of the new system meant calling into question the life path they had chosen and undermining its value. The transformation-related changes resulted not only in a change of the narrators’ status on the labor market, but were also perceived as an “attack” on the identity they had developed over the years, with essential components such as solid, reliable work done with commitment and dedication (“service,” as described by Feliks), as well as decency and making sure not to harm anyone. The narrators still defend this identity, also in front of the researcher who conducted the interviews.

However, there is another, more common form of “feeling at home” in the previous system. It was experienced not only by people who occupied managerial positions during socialist times, but also by those who worked in bottom-level positions and were not PZPR members. This feeling is connected with the stability of employment and, indirectly, the stability of life guaranteed by the communist system. One striking element in the collected narratives was the long period of work in a single company or institution mentioned by the interviewees: this period often stretched over 30 or even 40 years. The prevailing pattern of an occupational career trajectory in the interviews is that of an “anchor” (Domecka, Mrozowicki 2008). Quite naturally, such a long period of employment was conducive to various relations with the workplace and the co-workers that were established and then developed over the years. The feeling of attachment (to the workplace and the workmates) was strengthened by the emphasis on collectivism and the priority given to the “common good” in the official propaganda, as well

as by the pride related to being part of the modernization of the country in those years. In this context, the “*annihilation* of communist order” (Golczyńska-Grondas, Potoczna 2016: 25), resulting in redundancies in many enterprises and institutions or a collapse of those entities, and the destabilization of the labor market, generated a sense of regret, humiliation, rejection, and “cancellation” of important areas of people’s biographies. Perhaps this also stretched onto the sense of identity which consisted of such basic components as the belief in having made a personal contribution to the success of the organization and a sense of solidarity with colleagues.

The experiences of this kind can be illustrated with the case of Lucyna. She had worked her entire career as a skilled worker in large and prosperous plants manufacturing aircrafts, helicopters, and their parts for domestic and foreign markets. The narrator was strongly attached to her workplace. In the interview, she recalled that before her early retirement the company had no other orders and, as a result, produced potato graters, among other things. Although Lucyna is very brief here, the context of her entire narrative indicates that the “potato grater” becomes a symbol of humiliation and a loss of the sense of dignity enjoyed by the workers of what used to be a flagship plant in the Polish People’s Republic.

In turn, Zbigniew, who was employed for many years as a carpenter producing furniture and other wooden products, talks about the construction of a new hall, which the employees volunteered to build without remuneration, and about the later history of the cooperative:

And the new plant was also in [the name of the town]... but it was a bit out of town. I had bad feelings about it. I had already left [the cooperative], but my colleagues would go there to work. The plant was nicely built in the 1980s. It went on until the 1990s, they sold the plant to some private guy for little money. And selling was not that much of an issue, but that guy fired half of the people. He sacked them. Only half of them stayed on, and then, whenever I met colleagues, everyone complained. They said, “We had put so much effort into it...” Well, we volunteered to build that plant, for free. We just had our regular wages, and we, and we worked after hours to build that plant. We would gather in groups... Well, we did various things to build it as soon as possible, to... [Before] [i]t was like this: there was a plant here, downstairs, there were halls, and people were living upstairs. Yeah, in the town, in the old buildings. And it was a bit dangerous already and, secondly, it was horribly cramped. When we built the elegant halls, that was quite a different story. But, we didn’t enjoy it for too long. Things turned out differently. [W2/8]

Anselm L. Strauss (1959: 93) called the turning points to be “critical incidents that occur to force the person to recognize that ‘I am not the same as I was, as I used to be.’” The situation is different in the case of narrators

experiencing the feeling that the value of their entire life was being undermined: with the systemic transformation, their identity was called into question by the changed social environment.²⁴ If they show nostalgia for the past, it can be not only an expression of the trauma they experienced, connected with the sudden and radical change (Sztompka 2000), or a tool for criticizing the present (Mikołajewska-Zajac, Wawrzyniak 2016), but above all an attempt to defend their own identity and preserve their self-image. As Krystyna Kersten wrote, a positive attitude towards the period of the Polish People's Republic could stem from defending the sense of one's own life:

To put it simply, those who believed in the communist utopia, those who – after adapting to the unwanted, but real situation – were rebuilding Warsaw with great commitment, building Nowa Huta, according to their understanding multiplying the nation's wealth, lifting Poland from centuries-long civilization backwardness, serving the society as doctors, teachers, developing Polish culture and science, and finally those who owed their social, material, and cultural advancement to the “people's rule,” are less inclined to criticize the Polish People's Republic because this would entail depreciating their attitudes and contradicting the image stored in their memory. (2006: 152–153; cf. also Synak 2000)

Disappointment and unfulfilled hopes

Some of the narrators were more or less active in supporting the changes in the 1980s, but felt disappointed later. “Later” could mean very different periods: sometimes the disappointment occurred even before the first partially free elections in 1989, sometimes it coexisted with intense unemployment and liquidation of plants in the 1990s, sometimes emerged under the rule of the Civic Platform in 2007–2015, and sometimes appeared only recently, after the Law and Justice party started to implement its program called “Good Change” (since 2015). However, I will focus on the disappointments of the first period of systemic transformation. An example of a person with such experience is Antoni, who had worked as a driver in a poultry plant for 37 years. In the first minutes of the interview, he quotes an episode from his life, probably from the 1980s. Antoni was told to take the office workers from the plant, including the new director, “assigned” by the party, to a propaganda meeting held in a nearby city. Unexpectedly, the director invited Antoni to join the assembly (according to the narrator, the aim was to boost the number of

²⁴ Here I refer mainly to specific events that contributed to the emergence of this feeling among the narrators, but the anti-communist public discourse is a separate issue: some narrators argue against this discourse in the interviews.

attendees). During the meeting, the director told the participants about the need to “tighten the belt”: they should not expect salary increases in the nearest future, but rather, unfortunately, price rises in the shops. Antoni describes the follow-up events as follows:

He finished the discussion, that’s all. I got up. And I started preaching to him! I addressed him as “citizen,” as I had been taught. I couldn’t say “comrade” because I wasn’t a party member myself. There were no “Misters” at that time [I could not use this word], there were only “citizens.” So I said, “Citizen Director, you know, I was taught that under socialism we would achieve prosperity, and what kind of prosperity is here? You are giving us one kilogram of meat per month! Food coupons? Is this prosperity?! These are actually survival rations.” Everyone applauded me! [He claps]. And one woman... she rushed towards me, kissed me on the cheek. I swear! They applauded me! The guys say, “Fuck, he’s gonna fire you now.” “No, he won’t, I told him the truth!” Everyone knew it, but nobody would say it because everyone was afraid... [I] continued: “When I was a child, my sisters would take me to the forest, to pick blueberries, cowberries, we would gather them. When the forest was getting bigger and darker, and there were no blueberries, we’d go back because there was a wrong track. Same thing here: we went astray, stepped off the path to socialism. Socialism was supposed to lead to prosperity. But, there was no such thing as prosperity here.” That’s what happened, ma’am. [W2/2]

From the very beginning of the interview, Antoni presents himself as a person who was critical of the then political system and who, perhaps under the influence of an impulse, gained a great deal of civil courage and acted as a people’s tribune, hurling “the king is naked” directly in the face of the man who represented the authorities: socialism was supposed to look different. The interview does not provide much more information about the narrator’s anti-communism involvement. He emphasizes that despite repeated pressure, he never joined the PZPR party, but was a member of the Solidarity Movement. He says that during the period of systemic transformation, party members working in the factory “turned tails.” But, soon Antoni gets emotional about what happened later to the plant. He sharply criticizes Lech Wałęsa and believes that the leader of “Solidarity” cooperated with the communist regime. The respondent also blames Wałęsa for not holding the communists, especially the UB (Polish Secret Police) members, accountable. He accuses the new political elites, as well as those who have taken over plants located in one of the cities of the region within the privatization process, of getting overly rich:

Look, three guys grabbed that company and turned themselves into millionaires. And they don’t respect the people. [W2/2]

Antoni's outrage expressed in this fragment of the interview can be seen as echoing the media coverage because it cannot be a result of his personal experience. However, the narrator also makes references to the latter. The company he worked for was involved in the production and sale of chicken eggs. The narrator is proud to point out that the output was exported to Germany, Italy, and even Saudi Arabia during socialist times:

And the plant, not really a plant [sense: relatively small], but, you know, they generated so much revenue! Revenue for the government, but also people from the village would breed chickens and sell eggs. The eggs were good because the breeding was wild. Later on, people set up these industrial farms, and the eggs weren't the same anymore. [W2/2]

When the narrator was retiring, the plant was already in decline, and was subsequently liquidated. This makes Antoni bitter.

Similar feelings were expressed by Lucyna, the aforementioned technical controller at the aircraft plant. Yet her biography is more complicated. Lucyna was active both in organizations supported by the former regime (Polish Youth Association, Polish United Workers' Party, and Women's League) and in "Solidarity." There is no clear moment in her biography when she would change her views; it seems that contradictory ideological currents often simply coexisted in her life. The experience that could have tipped the balance (but it did not) was the involvement of her son, a student, in strikes at a university and the resulting need to hide from the authorities during the Martial Law. Lucyna says that during this period she not only faced the militia looking for her son, but also took part in demonstration walks during the time of night TV news shows (these walks were supposed to show the authorities that the citizens did not accept the propaganda sent via the media). When asked about her "Solidarity" membership, she says:

Of course, I always had to get involved. That's how it was. I always had the urge to get involved. When there was "Solidarity," ma'am, I was on the social committee, but then I quit "Solidarity" because I didn't like it. I was on the ["Solidarity"] committee, and so on. From the very beginning, I tried to help them organize themselves in the plant, help the people, because I always had some volunteering in the plant, some kind of social work. But, most of all, I was involved in the social sector – I organized children's camps, and kids would go there. All kinds of things. And there were all kinds of unions, different societies, they always asked me to join in, to keep an eye on things... to attend the party [PZPR] meetings... I was always involved in things. [W1/3]

Lucyna quit "Solidarity" for several reasons. She did not like the people who became members of the works council and she was discouraged by the

disproportionately high salary of the union chairman. As she says, she thought it was suspicious that the “Solidarity” members did not have membership cards (perhaps she was upset about the lack of transparency as to who is and who is not a member of that trade union). Much like Antoni, Lucyna expressed her mistrust of Lech Wałęsa:

I began to dislike Wałęsa’s rule. Everyone knows Wałęsa, but you know what, I even started to suspect that he’s not with us fully, not all the way. Whenever something was to happen, Wałęsa would get arrested. Why?... [T]hey knew things earlier, he was always covered, not by us, not by people, not by “Solidarity,” but he was shielded by the [communist] party. I didn’t like it. [W1/3]

Both of these narratives come from the respondents with a working-class background. Both correspond with phenomena which were discussed by researchers and journalists who analyzed the weaknesses and failures of the transformation process: mistrust towards the elites among the workers, a sense of distance from the actions taken by the elites, opposition to growing social inequalities, a desire for egalitarianism, no acceptance for radical economic changes. As Domecka writes:

[A]ll these changes hit mostly those who made them possible. “Solidarity,” which started as a trade union and a broad social movement of people who wanted a better life, became a political power valuing other concerns over social justice. (2016: 60)

In both cases, however, based on the broader context of the whole interview, I believe that the experienced disappointment did not cause a mental “latch” in the past for these two narrators. Their lives go on, now filled mainly with family matters and health issues, and the emotions associated with the transformation-related experiences return mainly when they watch TV news.

Fulfilled hopes. Life gets “confirmed”

Among the interviews analyzed here, Maciej’s story is the clearest example of a successful adaptation to transformation-related changes (something he supported right from the start), which resulted in a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. The narrator, born in 1940, completed a technical secondary school and immediately took up a job at a plant that manufactured electrical equipment. He worked in various positions there: as the “workshop planner,” fitter, foreman, until he retired in 2000. He never joined the Polish United Workers’ Party. In the interview, he repeatedly referred to examples of communist mismanagement and low ethical standards, which he knows from his work at the plant:

There were many different positions and even if a lazy guy and a drunkard started working on the floor, he was tolerated, up to a point. Then he moved to floor B, and the halls were numbered up to G. So it took years for him to end up at floor G at the plant... Looking back, years later, we can see that many of these jobs were superfluous. [W1/21]

And so it was. At first, under communism, when there was a delegation going somewhere, to a coal mine or a power plant, people would always sign to confirm that the delegation stayed three to four days longer. People would return home, but would get the money to buy accommodation and per diems. That's how people would earn [extra] money. Maybe we should be ashamed of it today, but it's like this... You know, everyone did that. The engineer who went with that worker, he did, and some other employee did, too. It was customary to do so. [W1/21]

The plan was a sacred thing. There were so-called production meetings and then things were discussed, starting with the foreman, everyone expressed their opinion. "The plan is feasible, comrades, we just have to do the following..." And then the head of the production would come and there was a casual conversation: "Boss, we can't manage, we can't do it." "Look, there's a plan, and there's an adjustment to the plan later." And then the generator, which was the apple of our eye, because it had a production cycle stretching over many months, was reported in December as ready, but it appeared on the conveyor belt, which is the final phase of the assembly, only in June of the following year. It was all fictitious. [W1/21]

Phrases such as "looking back, years later, we can see" and "we should be ashamed of it today" point to the critical reflection that Maciej has applied to his professional past as time passed and new experience accumulated; this indicates that he performed his biographical work (Schütze 2016) to reconcile and internally integrate his own experiences.

Maciej says that he was a member of two, if not three, "Solidarity" works committees. Asked by the researcher, he declares that he had no difficulties at work because of his involvement, but he earned the opinion of "the crazy guy":

Because they knew that when on the thirteenth day of every month²⁵ people would go out for a break and gathered at the main road, then nobody tried to stop me anymore because they knew I'd go there anyway. [W1/21]

The narrator talks about the visits of "Solidarity" activists to the plant, he also says that one of them was even employed by the company as his subordinate for some time. When asked how he perceived the changes that

²⁵ On December 13, 1981, Martial Law was imposed in Poland; the situations of going out to the street, mentioned by Maciej, were probably connected with the fact that the factory workers commemorated that date.

occurred in 1989, Maciej states that he looked at them with hope, like everyone else, including party members. “We all wanted something different,” he says. He adds, however: “Though later we said that was not what we had expected.”

In 1990, the plant was sold to a foreign corporation and divided into companies; a few years later, further organizational and ownership transformations took place. Maciej claims that he personally did not feel threatened with redundancy during the privatization period (although he acknowledges that others may have felt this way and confirms the researcher’s suggestion that the employment figure actually decreased) and that he did not experience any stress related to change. He mentions training courses where the new management taught employees to admit a mistake right away. This was contrary to the previous practice when errors were hidden and the plant incurred huge costs due to the detection of “imperfections” of the manufactured equipment only after some time, once it reached the user. The narrator views the changes positively:

Maciej: Certainly, higher culture and completely different products are being made now. They go out to the entire world and those are high-quality products.

Researcher: And the atmosphere, the relations with people, was it better then, or perhaps it didn’t change?

Maciej: It did change, it changed radically. There is perhaps a different [=better] kind of respect for work and different care. [W1/21]

Maciej also appreciates how the issue of overtime has been resolved: in the past, employees used to depend on informal pressure from their superiors, but later the system was changed.

Summing up his career, which began under socialism and ended under capitalism, the narrator says:

This is a plant that makes large electrical machines, so [it produced things] starting from some kind of motors for traction, fans for railways, drives for generators, and generators. Today, I am somewhat proud of it because [power plant in] Bełchatów, all ten generators, three hundred and sixty megawatts, that’s partly my work. Opole power plant, four generators, three hundred and sixty megawatts... One, because there are... Right now, I forgot the name of that neighborhood. There’s a piece of my own work in there, too. And in Africa, and India, and China. And somewhere on the Soviet ships that were built at the time. Because the shipyard in Gdańsk, usually had... When you walked along the waterfront, there was Ivan X, Sergei Y... It was made for Russia because they apparently had converted all their shipyards to work for the Navy. Civilian ships were built by Poland. There is certainly a grain of truth in there. The equipment, top-class stuff, had to be bought in England, and so on. We didn’t produce it. But, we made generators for ships...

Because a navy ship is a naval unit. So we made generators for ships, and they are out in the waters somewhere, I don't even know [where]. Apart from Antarctica, where penguins walk around. I certainly won't find my contribution there. But, otherwise, I can find it everywhere. [W1/21]

Maciej says that when he retired, he said to the HR manager:

You know, I'm leaving with my head up high. I didn't have any argument, no drunkenness, no theft... So I'm leaving the plant in peace. [W1/21]

His departure "with [his] head up high" seems to be more than just a feeling that he did not break any basic moral principles in the course of his occupational life. This phrase probably also reflects the satisfaction with the systemic change that the narrator expected and viewed positively (though not uncritically). It also expresses satisfaction with being able to adapt to the new working conditions in a changed economic and social reality. Finally, despite verbalized criticism of the socialist era, there is also a feeling that the effort made throughout his whole career made sense since the effects of his work can still be found in many places around the world.²⁶ The experience gained in the course of his life confirmed the accuracy and sense of Maciej's life choices.

The above review of the narrated experience of the events of the 1980s and 1990s in Poland and the ways of coping with them is not exhaustive, obviously, even if we take into account only the material from the interviews that have been analyzed here. Other options are also possible, such as the feeling of peace and satisfaction with one's own choices despite them being called into question by the new reality. We can also find pragmatism that helps the narrators not to worry too much about various turns and effects of transformational processes, alongside a sense of being stuck in ambivalence concerning the assessment of the past and the present, both collective and individual. Also, one can relatively often come across a firm view (positive or negative) on the outcomes of the transformation, despite having no significant personal experience related to the events of the 1980s and 1990s. As I wish to adhere to the criteria set out at the beginning of this section, I do not describe those alternative variants here.

²⁶ Piotr Filipkowski (2018) finds very similar "sense-making" themes for work in shipbuilding in the narratives of Gdynia shipyard workers.

Conclusions: what can we see through the prism of individual experiences?

The author of the report entitled *Was It Worth Changing the System?* writes: “The social consequences of the changes taking place in Poland since 1989 have been seen through the lens of individual experience” (CBOS 2019a: 8). By this, the author means that those who believe that they and their families benefited from the transformation tend to assess the systemic change positively. Conversely, the respondents who declare that the changes brought them more losses than gains tend to see the transformation as a failure. The analysis of biographical interviews allows us to go beyond the “loss-benefit” dichotomy and to see the complexity and diversity of individual experiences mentioned in the CBOS report, as well as different ways of incorporating them in biographies. On the one hand, it makes it possible to see how these experiences “work” today in some persons’ internal world and how deeply they are rooted. In such cases, the analysis presented in this chapter shows that we deal with profound psychological mechanisms through which systemic transformation may be perceived as something that undermined or confirmed the narrators’ biographical identity. It is likely that for people whose life choices were “put into question” or “confirmed” by the transformation, this experience has consequences for many different spheres of life, including those often examined by sociologists, like voting behavior. On the other hand, current analysis suggests that many people may assess the systemic change, or at least its first period, based on observations and external messages (coming from the media or social networks) rather than based on their own experience. This chapter contributes to the existing literature on systemic transformation written from a biographical perspective by an attempt to explain relatively rare spontaneous references to the historical events of the 1980s and 1990s in the interviews with so-called “ordinary people.” Last but not least, the narratives of older people give an insight into the specific experiences (such as forced retirement) related to the stage of life at which they were when the transformation began.

In this chapter I put the biographical experience of the narrators at the center, trying to reach it by analyzing the narrative fragments of the interviews. Narrative interviews may be, however, analyzed with a focus on the “mediating aspect of time” (Piotrowski 2016a: 239) and influences of public discourse(s) on the way older people talk about systemic transformation. Such analysis would enrich the existing literature on the collective memory of systemic transformation (e.g., Bernhard, Kubik 2014, Breuer, Delius 2017, Laczó, Wawrzyniak 2017).

Agnieszka Golczyńska-GronDas

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL INNOVATORS IN COPING WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS – PPR, SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION, AND NEW POLAND¹

Introduction

Despite the noble ideological slogans contained, among others, in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland, according to which the basic goal of the state's activity – based on the principles of social justice – was a comprehensive development of the socialist society, of the creative forces of the nation and each person, and the increasingly better satisfaction of the needs of citizens (Article 4), the subsequent governments of the Polish People's Republic (PPR) failed to eliminate “human exploitation by man,” to diminish the differences between the city and the country, between physical and mental work (Article 5). The PPR did not ensure equal rights for all citizens regardless of their birth, education, profession, nationality, race, religion, origin, and social situation (Articles 67, 81), nor did it lead to equality between women and men (Article 78). As part of the propaganda of success, the authorities of the PPR argued that the quality of citizens' life had fundamentally improved, contrasting the image of the promotion of the entire Polish society with the images of pre-war Polish poverty and blocking, especially at the beginning of socialism, research on social problems² (Jarosz 1984: 31–34, 83, KracZła 1992,

¹ This is an extended version of the paper originally published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 68–64. Retrieved December, 2019 (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.04>

² Especially in the first years of the PPR, no analyses that would question the functioning of the socialist state were undertaken, for example, in 1945–1955, when Polish society was simply “starving” and budget deficits in working families exceeded 50–60%. Periodically, no official statistics on household budgets or consumption growth directions were kept. For example, the data on the population's income being “sensitive and uncertain” disappeared from censuses, and in the research by Central Statistical Office, the surveyed households were grouped” in a special way, actually blurring the differences between them (Jarosz 1984: 83, Jarosz 2002: 19–21).

Machnikowska 2012). However, it is evident from the then few analyses that the PPR was a country with a considerable scale of inequalities and social problems, including material inequalities. The income of citizens, and thus their consumption possibilities, depended on the location of the workplace in specific sectors of the economy, in the production branch, as well as on the region of residence. In the 1970s, the phenomenon of deep social divide started growing – with the high-privileged ones on the one side and the deprived communities on the other side of the spectrum. A permanent element of the social landscape of the PPR was the poverty of “a proportion of pensioners, people receiving social benefits, invalids and the handicapped, single mothers, multi-children families, families who found themselves in poverty as a result of numerous random accidents” (Jarosz 1984: 192, Beskid 1972, 2002). According to Maria Jarosz, the consequences of social inequalities were social conflicts and “social pathologies” – intensification of neuroticism and neuroses “situating the Polish population in one of the leading positions in Europe and the world,” juvenile delinquency, self-destruction (suicide,³ alcoholism,⁴ drug addiction), family disorganization and the growth of the phenomenon of social orphanhood. Particular intensification of non-normative behavior was observed among children from families with the lowest material status.⁵ It was not possible to block the mechanism of a selective education system, which resulted in maintaining the mechanism of inheriting good social positions and petrifying the social structure (Jarosz 1984: 9, 14–15, 186). Social policy institutions subject to state administration were burdened with the shortcomings of centralized, bureaucratic, politicized systems focused on

³ Suicide statistics indicated an increase in the phenomenon between 1951–1978, its decline in the years of the Carnival of “Solidarity” and immediately preceding it, followed by a renewed increase in suicide in 1982–1984. The highest suicide rate was recorded among workers, men – which is a constant tendency – they committed suicide five times more often than women, a dramatic increase occurred in 1951–1980 in the youngest age groups – 400% among 15–19-year-olds and 600% among 10–14-year-olds (Jarosz 1987: 46–57).

⁴ In 1987, Maria Jarosz wrote: “There’s a lot of drinking, often and in many places. There are no [...] effective mechanisms limiting this phenomenon [...]. People exceed the norms of traditional and customary drinking, so those who in our tolerant society are considered to be drunkards constitute 10–15% of the population. It is assumed that one-tenth of the adult population drinks half of the total amount of alcohol consumed.” Alcohol consumption rates would increase during social crises, while they decreased in the periods of “strong social integration around a socially accentuated goal” (Jarosz 1987: 37–38).

⁵ The increase of health problems, repeating the school year, theft, and suicides of children and adolescents (Jarosz 1984: 224–226).

controlling rather than helping those in need. Additionally, in 1946–1950, most non-public entities which provided for social needs were excluded from the public sphere. Competences regarding social services were allocated to various ministries,⁶ and some of the social security obligations were taken over by the workplaces.⁷ In the 1950s, in the extreme cases, only persons who were unable to work received social assistance in the form of an allowance or placement in an institution (Szumlicz 1987, cited in Płasek 2014: 99, Leś 2000, Machnikowska 2012, cf., Wohlfahrt 1992, Willing 2011, Płasek 2014, Polakowski, Szelewa 2015). It is worth remembering that in the People's Poland – implementing, as will be discussed briefly later, “a modernization project” (Zysiak 2018: 47) – the area of social policy was not a “barren land.” The Constitution of the PPR even contained a provision establishing “special protection of the state towards the creative intelligentsia, as well as the pioneers of technical progress, rationalists and inventors” (Article 77). In the area of social activities which is of interest to us in this chapter, currently referred to as the human sector, social reforms and experiments were undertaken in the field of mental health or resocialization,⁸ although probably the “life” of such innovations in formalized, centrally managed institutions was rather limited (see, e.g., Sulek 1977). In the 1960s, the professionalization of the social welfare system began, opening, among others, schools for social carers functioning since the late 1950s as part of the healthcare system (Szumlicz 1987, cited in Płasek 2014: 99).

⁶ An example here is the issue of assigning responsibility for organizing help for children and young people. Relatively quickly, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare lost its prerogative in favor of the Ministry of Education, and then the Ministry of Health (Płasek 2014).

⁷ The functioning of social policy institutions during the PPR would undergo changes resulting from historical and political phenomena and changes. Krystyna Kluzowa, for example, distinguished three periods of functioning of social welfare institutions in the years 1945–1989: the post-war rescue period, the stage of stagnation in the development of social services during the Stalinist regime, and the stage of reassuming assistance activities after 1958 (Kluzowa 2006, cited in Płasek 2014: 97, Polakowski, Szelewa 2015).

⁸ Probably the best-known example in Poland is the one of MONAR with its network of therapeutic centers for drug addicts. And, Marek Kotański, the leader of this organization, who founded the first center in Głusków (a small village in central Poland) in 1978. MONAR survived the period of transformation, developed and professionalized its activities. The names of other reformers, such as Dr. Zbigniew Thille, who, in the 1970s, had an innovative approach to treat drug addicts in a psychiatric hospital in Lubiąż (a village in the Lower Silesia region) and who was deprived of the opportunity to work using the ideas taken over “from the rotten West,” are probably not remembered by many (see, e.g. Thille 1981, Potaczala 2014).

This chapter presents the opportunity structures conditioning innovative professional work⁹ and social innovations in the broadly understood field of working with people (helping professions and education) by people referred to here as senior social changemakers. Already in the 1930 Florian Znaniecki indicated the need for biographical studies on social innovators. He named culture-forming individuals as above-normal deviants. In “Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future” he wrote: “There is a definite need to undertake thorough studies of deviants using the biographical method with special attention given to abnormal deviants who have been scientifically neglected until now. Before exploring biological factors, one should first exhaust all scientific possibilities of capturing deviants as cultural personalities on the basis of their [life]-histories as active participants in the civilization in which they live” (Znaniecki 2001: 275). The intention here is to take it a step further – that is, to analyze the biographies of people not only engaged socially, but who can also be described as a social activists’ elite or better yet, social change leaders, authors of applied, model systematic solutions in the human sector (broadly defined social work and education are the examples here). Senior social changemakers initiated their reforming activities in the PPR as the creators and co-creators of alternative society structures (Leś 2000), as well as the employees of the public sector. It seems legitimate to state their work positively contrasted the quality of the activities performed by average public institutions responsible for social/community work, treatment or education. In the first years of the “new order” – when the breakdown of the socialist system resulted in rapid growth of the scale of social problems – senior changemakers engaged directly and indirectly in the process of transformation, implementing innovative models and methods of social activism and social work, community work. Their past experiences influence and, to some extent, have formed the modern field of social change in the human sector. The newly emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) – considered as having a much stronger innovative potential than the “new brand public sphere” institutions – stood for the “natural environment” of social reformers’ professional activity; therefore the narrators can also be called the builders of the Polish third sector (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011). It must be

⁹ The concept of innovative professional work comes from Katarzyna Waniek who follows Everett Hughes’ notions on professional work understood as a series of actions undertaken by individuals with theoretical expertise and long-lasting practical experience socially recognized as experts in their vocations. Innovative professional work is defined here as a series of novel interactional and communicative activities performed by social reformers in social worlds of human services towards the others defined as students, wards, clients, service users, or beneficiaries. It is the foundation of social innovations as the first stage of implementing a novel, systemic solution oriented towards solving social problems and fulfilling social needs.

underlined here that especially in the 1990s the CSO's workers and supporters believed that the procedures of teamwork, the applied principle of "every-day democracy," elasticity, a more direct contact with clients, seemed to be bringing more positive results in their clients' lives than the interventions undertaken by public welfare agencies (Elementarz III Sektora 2005).

Hence, the main purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the opportunity structures¹⁰ – political, institutional, discursive ones, as well as the structures operating on an individual level, facilitating the professional and personal development of social reformers.¹¹ Although it can be firmly asserted that undertaking this social role by the reformers stems from their personality (which constitutes the subject of psychology), biographical research creates an opportunity to consider the social, cultural, and biographical conditions "generating" social innovators.¹² Using both the life histories of social innovators and source texts, we refer here to the structures functioning not only during the PPR period, but also to those which emerged over the years of the systemic transformation. The paper is based on the preliminary results from the analysis of four pilot narrative autobiographical interviews conducted with the representatives of the oldest generation of Polish social innovators.¹³ The

¹⁰ The concept of opportunity structures appears to be one of the most interesting descriptive categories in the analysis of social innovators' biographical conditionings. For more on this issue see Part 3 Transforming opportunity structures: biographical chances, hopes, illusions, and dead-ends.

¹¹ The principal argument is that the social innovator's career interrelates with the use of the opportunity structures available in a political and economic system, regardless of the type of system and the prevalent ideology. Social reformers are not only active beneficiaries, but also the creators of political and institutional opportunity structures. It has to be mentioned that the systemic transformation of the 1990s, on many levels, not only opened the opportunity structures for social reforming, but also caused certain structures to disappear inevitably.

¹² Research of that kind has been attempted in sociology to a limited extent. Compare studies of the individual's role in social change (Hatcher 2013, Ulate-Sanchez 2014), analyses of socio-biographical contexts of social innovations, including social activism and entrepreneurship (Barendsen, Gardner 2004, Chimiak 2004, Palska, Lewenstein 2004, Chimiak 2006, Weryński 2008, Wit 2008, Schütze et al. 2012, Chimiak, Iwińska eds. 2015, Cnaan, Vinokur-Kaplan eds. 2015, Alber 2016, Sławecki 2016). The comprehensive account of issues pertaining to biographical conditions can be found in Jadwiga Koralewicz and Hanna Malewska-Peyre's (1998) book about Polish and French social activists. In 2011 Ilona Iłowiecka-Tańska (2011) published a book partly based on in-depth interviews with social change leaders presenting their role in forming the third sector in post-transformation Poland.

¹³ Social reformers constituting the researched population come from CSOs. Following Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen, Nagel, Treichel (2012), we can distinguish

narrators – in their 70s and 80s – were born in the late 1930s – early 1950s. One could assume that they are at the point of retirement as “sociologically” the norms and expectations of “the social clock” would render senior citizens professionally inactive. However, contrary to old-age stereotypes, the narrators appear to be active team leaders, advisers, mentors, and role models in their communities. At the same time, psychologically they are at the stage of their lives which enhances their tendency to summarize the whole *Gestalts* of individual biography through identity and biographical work.

Opportunity structures in biographies of senior social reformers

Witold, Zenon, Zofia, and Żaneta – narrators telling their stories in the project – are reformers embedded within the social world of human service professions at the grass-root level structures of both the alternative society of the People’s Poland and post transformation Poland. In light of the dichotomic categorization of social activists formulated by Koralewicz and Malewska-Peyre (1998), who identified ideologically oriented and pragmatically oriented individuals, they represent the second category. Representing the latter are people working in micro and meso social worlds implementing their ideas in helping professions and alternative education. However, according to their clearly defined systems of values, they also shape public politics on the macro level.

Senior social reformers are witnesses and co-creators of contemporary history of post-war Poland. The origins of the lives of the oldest narrators are painfully marked in various ways by the shadow of World War II which sometimes dramatically shaped their childhood. “Impossible to forget images” anchored themselves in Zofia’s memory: as a young girl she witnessed Gestapo soldiers killing Jewish children, she recalls her father, “a tough man,” crying on the day Janusz Korczak was transported out of the ghetto to Auschwitz. She herself survived the execution carried out by German soldiers on the patients of the insurgent hospital, which was to be evacuated the following day. During the post-uprising mass exodus of civilians she watched burning

three cohort generations of CSO workers functioning right now in Europe: 1) older generation of “grandparents” who experienced the Second World War and “eclipse of humanity,” 2) generations of “parents” growing up in politically divided Europe, some of whom experienced “their more or less total seclusion within the state-socialistic societies” (Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen, Nagel, Treichel 2012: 155); 3) generation of “grandchildren” born in stabilized European culture. However, biographical experiences of the narrators place them closer to both grandparents and parents on this continuum.

houses, the suffering of people and animals. She lost her grandfather during the Volhynia Massacre¹⁴ and her beloved brother in the Warsaw Uprising. Her grandmother, a resident of areas incorporated into the Third Reich, died in “despicable conditions” evicted from her flat because she refused to sign the Reich list. When Żaneta was born, the front line passed next to her town. She grew up in the Auschwitz vicinity, “about which little was known in those days. People kept silent, so it goes. In the shadows of smoke, I grew up.” Both Zofia and Żaneta “were lucky” – their parents survived and they grew up with them. Zenon’s family fell apart – the mother, a teenage soldier of the underground state, was unable to take on the roles necessary for functioning in an adult life as a result of war traumas – the narrator first spent childhood and adolescence with relatives and later in care and children group homes. Only Witold, the youngest of the informants, mentions the war in the context of the loss of the pre-war, nationalized craftsmen’s grandparents’ estate, one of whom believed that “this [system] would one day turn on itself.” The period of adolescence of the narrators and the time of their early adulthood is the period after the October Thaw and the years 1960 and 1970.

People’s Republic of Poland – the structures of opportunities

Although the post-war history of the Polish 3rd sector in literature descriptions often begins with the systemic transformation of 1989, it must be stressed that cultural and social capital, which was used in the establishing of its structures, was not created in a social vacuum. Also in the times of PRL, let’s not forget – a highly oppressive state, there existed structures of opportunities shaping individual biographies, so that after 1989 innovators were ready to form the social reality in new political and economic conditions. First of all, there was a living practice of organic and “social” work at a base-line level. Koralewicz and Malewska-Peyre (1998) indicate that these traditions were rooted in environmental ethos referring to three basic themes: 1) activity for regaining and maintaining the independence of Poland, 2) patron’s missions of the landowners class and intelligence, and 3) organic work for the country – raising the standard of living, hygiene, education, et cetera. This last thread, which can be described in terms of modernization, is the most interesting, considering the content of this chapter and the narrators’ accomplishments. Secondly, the Polish People’s Republic itself, although not to assess the historical and social

¹⁴ For example, Portnov, Andrii. 2016. “Clash of Victimhoods: The Volhynia Massacre in Polish and Ukrainian Memory.” Retrieved September 20, 2019 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/clash-of-victimhood-1943-volhynian-massacre-in-polish-and-ukrainian-culture/>).

consequences of this period, was a great modernization project implemented in the post-war years (e.g., Zysiak 2018), whose declarative goal was to rebuild the devastated country and shape a new social order – creating a space for making various innovative actions (not necessarily consistent with socialist ideology, especially in post-Stalin decades). Thirdly, the People’s Republic of Poland, “the merriest barrack in the socialist camp” was not a closed system. Despite the Iron Curtain between Poland and the “West” – the flow of information and ideas was possible to a limited extent even before the October Thaw and became clearly visible at the turn of 1960 and 1970. The emphasis on mass participation in culture favored the intellectual development of people interested, for example, through access to relatively cheap cultural goods – publications, cultural events. Even in the most difficult years of Stalinism, there could have been circumstances conducive to the acquisition of skills by teenagers involved in social life.

In relation to the narrators concerning life in the PPR, there appear sets of structures of opportunities within which their training towards biographical careers of social innovators took place. These setups were related to: 1) functioning in youth organizations, 2) the use of educational opportunities, 3) participation in counter-cultural movements, 4) participation in democratic opposition and alternative society structures, and 5) the use of opportunities existing on the outskirts of the system and its institutions. It should be emphasized that these structures of opportunities were available primarily for people living in big cities; even if they did not originate from intelligentsia, they participated in those social circles.

Annotation 1. All narrators **in the period of adolescence** and early adulthood have been **active for some time in youth organizations** – the Polish Youth Union (ZMP), Polish Scouting (ZHP),¹⁵ or the Union of Polish Students (ZSP). As a high school student, Zofia, enchanted with slogans of struggle for peace and social justice, signed up for ZMP and for a certain period of time was a very committed activist of this organization. Mocked during the

¹⁵ Polish scouts played a huge role in the underground structures during World War II, and after its completion they joined the reconstruction of the country. The Polish Scouting Association (created after World War I) in its “pre-war form” was appropriated by the communist authorities. Although formally in existence, in the history of Polish Scouts, 1948 is put as the year of the liquidation of the union taken over by the activists of the Polish Youth Union (ZMP) and cut off from the idea of pre-war scouts. In 1956, the ZHP was officially reactivated, restoring partially the Scouts traditions. Pre-war instructors returned and became active training the younger generation. However, in 1958, the Polish United Workers’ Party again took control over the association (History of the Scouts; see: <https://zhp.pl/ozhp/historia-harcerstwa/>. Retrieved April 18, 2019).

meeting, when, as a practicing Catholic, she put the thesis about the cohesion of the idea of communism and Christianity, then urged to become an informer by the communist party activists (aiming at digging out dirt on one of the lecturers teaching “true” Polish history¹⁶), before college Bacalaureate examination she resigned from ZMP. Zofia, Żaneta, and Witold were also acting in scouting organization lead, to some extent, by pre-war scouting staff:¹⁷

Stalin died. Year 1956 [came]. And suddenly, it turned out that we could form a scouting troop... that there were such wonderful people among us... who were scouts before the war, during the war... I will never forget how we started to create scouting troops... we made a scouts' den [in the school basement] with our own hands... The first camps, wow, it's an amazing experience... We had to pitch our tents and these were heavy tents, military ones... We had to construct our beds, make them, build a latrine, and so on... It was again a period in my life, when I was getting something, well, I got an inheritance of these values, ideals, truth, respected by scouts, that is: “Fatherland, science, virtue,” and initiatives for the benefit of others and care for younger ones... These nursery schools in various villages, crèches, day care centers for children... It was very important to me. It is still very important today, as we are talking about social innovations. To go to camp in summer, we had to work all year to earn some money, because of poverty... So we collected scrap iron, various waste, we took it to those scrap yards. Well, we put aside funds there, financial means to go somewhere... usually somewhere close. And then, we were already involved in the initiatives, some wider projects: the rally at Grunwald¹⁸... we were also discovering [the] Trail of Eagles' Nests¹⁹... It was in this project that our activity was combined with the benefit for the local environment, historical education, although it was then called differently. And also nature education was very intense. Well, and community, great brotherhood, the evening came, sitting by the fire and singing. [SIB01 Żaneta]

¹⁶ The contents transmitted as part of school history lessons, especially in totalitarian regimes, are subject to ideological constraints – transformation and instrumentalization of the past, knowledge of which is supposed to support the functioning of the system (see, e.g., Kaźmierska, Pałka 2018). The “Marxist version of history” was coercively used in the Eastern Bloc Countries, especially in Poland most evident was the manipulation of the Polish-German and Polish-Russian relations, especially the history of World War II (Wawrzyniak 2005 as cited in Kaźmierska, Pałka 2018). Some of the history teachers – risking persecution by the communist authorities – passed a different picture of historical events to their students, consistent with the collective memory of at least the intelligentsia and simultaneously contradictory to the official version.

¹⁷ Compare Palska, Lewenstein (2004).

¹⁸ Scouting rallies held annually at Grunwald commemorate the anniversary of the victorious battle of Polish-Lithuanian military forces over the Teutonic Knights in 1410.

¹⁹ The route between Kraków and Częstochowa leading along the towns where are the ruins of Polish settlements and castles from the beginnings of Polish statehood.

Collected data reveal the formative significance of the structures of opportunities created by formal organizations, that is: task training, internalization of values and norms related to independence, responsibility, community formation, discovering the meaning of social ties, or – under “favorable conditions” – lessons in democracy:

In any case, at some point... we had just decided that we wanted to introduce democracy... “We want to elect a squad leader.”... the team leader said: “Choose him”... he handed it [responsibility] over to us. We chose Antoni Zieliński, who... was afterwards a member of [the name of the opposition organization], you know, he founded [name of the underground publishing house]... Then there was the question of the name of the squad, so we chose a very innovative name... Our team was called “US” ((laughs))... not Eagle Feathers, well, yeah... “US.” [SIB04 Witold]

It must be underlined here that participation in socialist youth organizations could also confront future reformers with the constraint of making choices and withdrawing from actions incompatible with internalized values:

[P]eople in power, however, realized that the scouts could run into contradictions [with rules imposed by the communists] and managed to use the back door to smuggle in indoctrination... And so you had to slowly withdraw from this scouting, even. There was no acceptance in me to change the method of pedagogy to which I was attached very much... Although sentiment and memories, very, very strongly got stuck in my psyche. [SIB01 Zaneta]

Annotation 2. An additional set of opportunities that emerged in the biographies described here are associated with **participation in educational institutions**, primarily **at the level of higher education**.²⁰ It is worth recalling here that despite the apparent openness of the system during socialism (free of charge studies, preferential system for youth of working class and peasant origin), only a few high school graduates took up tertiary education.²¹ This elite

²⁰ Only Witold talks about the importance of secondary school, or actually contact with a prominent high school teacher as a formative significant other, and the value of peer relationships.

²¹ In the work published in 1963, Jan Szczepański wrote about a few percent of the first-graders of primary schools taking up university studies at the end of their educational career. According to the Act of 1958, higher education institutions should ensure “such class composition and the moral and political image of the university youth so they can best fulfill their tasks of educating and shaping/molding people’s intelligentsia” (Szczepański 1963: 45). According to data provided by Szczepański, for example, in 1959/1960, 12.6% of high school graduates took up studies. In the

also included the narrators, students of the humanities in the 1960s and 1970s. The formative influence of tertiary education is most apparent in the interview with Zenon – for some time a student at the polytechnics, who undertook subsequent humanistic studies in a special “empty year” of recruitment (the result of school reform and the creation of 8-grade primary schools instead of 7-grade schools). At the time, “all remnants” set to the entry exams, at the age of graduating students, definitely more mature than their colleagues from older years, which established a special position of that year’s students amidst academic staff, thus motivating them to intensive efforts:

[There was] something called individual studies... If you looked at my index, you would be shocked because, first of all, I have twice as many subjects as there was for a regular student quota, secondly, more than half of these are doctoral seminars...or some postgraduate [ones]... I was a member of four research teams... I was engaged very deeply in scientific activities ((with a smile)). I made money in this way, that... I was conducting research... for doctoral theses... S. [name of a colleague], which in turn was an absolvent of mathematics, we were the main... statistical and methodological consultants, at that time we both completed a postgraduate seminar under [names of professors], leadership – multivariate analysis, so I have, I have a powerful education... methodological and statistical. [SIB02 Zenon]

The years of studying provide enormous **opportunities to learn with and from outstanding teachers and mentors** who became significant others, and even “professional” biographical carers shaping aspirations and professional identities of the narrators: “it changed my life, because I went to meet him [the name of the lecturer].” Żaneta and Zenon also took on the role of active participants in social organizations supported by the communist authorities – they joined the Union of Polish Students (ZSP), quickly taking over the functions of the chairmen of the university/faculty councils.

Annotation 3. **The counter-culture trends from the West** reached not only the PPR, but also other countries of the Eastern Bloc,²² “seducing” young people with the **ideas of freedom, authentic culture, and community**. As Aldona Jawłowska (1988) writes, in the 1960s, ideological manifestations

first years of socialism, recruitment procedures were successfully manipulated so as to equalize the chances of youth of working and peasant origin constituting in the 1950s and 1960s about 50% of the students. In the following years, this figure systematically decreased.

²² The socialist countries represented a specific type of industrial society with features independent of the political system (Toffler 1980). In the 1970s, faith in technological progress became less and less pronounced and disillusionment with “favors of a large industrial civilization” was growing (Toffler 1980, Jawłowska 1988).

of youth were based on the slogans of changing the world through the reconstruction of oneself and the immediate environment. The change was to take place not through the destruction of macrostructures, but by blasting the whole system through alternative organizations “pushing into all the ‘slots’ of the prevailing organization of social life” (Jawłowska 1988: 20). Humanistic psychology has been developing in the grey socialist reality, and the traditions of other (previously considered incompatible with communist ideology) orientations of “western” psychology were restored.²³ Alternative student theaters appeared and vanished.²⁴ They were inspired by the idea of “active culture” and the theater of Jerzy Grotowski’s Laboratory. The seeds of the future Buddhist sanghas were germinating, and the hippie contesting system shocked the “decent” citizens of the PPR with their looks and behavior.²⁵ During their studies Zenon and Witold functioned in communities similar to the hippie movement, but clearly situated on its outskirts:

They were not exactly hippie communes... We were learning therapy and... and we were working... I worked with [name of professor]... since the beginning of the second year [of studies]... At the same time, many things have happened... It is difficult for me to calculate how many hours there were in the day time... because I think close to fifty hours... Well, because I lived in a commune, where every day... in the evening, there were some activities... structured ones. There was either a vernissage or... paratheatrical activities or a community or a therapeutic group or dances... Of course, everyone flocked down together in the evening because everyone was working very hard... Having completed the first year of studies, I had my first [therapeutic] group of patients, just like I am thinking that... back then... the Earth was spinning much slower ((laughing))... We

²³ For example, Hanna Strzelecka-Jaworska (2007) describes the return to the tradition of analytic psychology that took place in 1960 in Poland thanks to the efforts of Jan Malewski. Malewski, despite the censorship and blockade of scientific exchange with the West, managed to reach psychoanalytic literature. Following his experiences from scholarship in Prague he “smuggled” ideas of psychoanalysis into the state medical care system.

²⁴ In 1970–80 there were several hundred student theaters in Poland (annually, on average, their number fluctuated around 200). Paradoxically, their functioning was possible thanks to the patronage of the (Socialist) Union of Polish Students, an organization involved in dealings with the communist authorities (Jawłowska 1988, Grupańska, Wawrzyniak 2011).

²⁵ Polish hippies appeared as a collective in 1967. The hippie movement was anti-systemic also in the political dimension: “The Polish hippies reminded the authorities that the Polish nation is still not looking in the direction in which it should. He breaks out of the ideological field of gravity; he is still looking for his center outside the devised orbits in the Kremlin” (Sipowicz 2008: 94).

dreamed that maybe in ten years' time we will have our own clinic, after five years each of us had a clinic... Life flew so much faster, you know, than imagination.
[SIB02 Zenon]

Fascinated by Grotowski and acknowledging him as one of his masters, Witold²⁶ was also involved with student alternative theater; using the term coined by Stefan Morawski, he can be included in the category of “by-artists” (*przy-artysty*) (Jawłowska 1988: 8–9) – sympathizers and friends of the theater stemming from the circles of young intellectuals, informal co-authors of performances, reviewers, advisers. Witold regards his ties with both theatrical trends as one of the most formative biographical experiences:

I got into [name of the student theater]... You could get there, there was an exam, you had to audition on stage... they said, “You’re totally a rookie, you have to earn your stripes here.” And it was extremely formative for me... I also signed up to the group which was led by [the name of the creator], then he was a kind of a mentor to me for a long time, somebody to whom I dropped in to talk about life, get angry, you know, such a good adult figure, so much smarter, a wiser man, it was amazing, how I used to roam around this theater, [the title of a play] I watched... fifty times or forty... from every side... I then thought that I would be a theater man, we would do different happenings and ventures... Even for a long time, as I was learning therapy and this, and so on, I did physical activities, pantomime classes, paratheatrical activities, therapeutic for patients, but along these lines. [SIB04 Witold]

Annotation 4. All of the narrators actively participated in the actions of **the political opposition** to a different extent, going through specific training in empathy and practical skills. The narrators were involved in **anti-system activities** already as young adults. Witold, Zofia, and Żaneta recall their active participation in the events of March 1968 – the student protests in particular, and, most of all, the deportation of people of Jewish origin, “a period of shame in the history of Poland”:

Suddenly it transpired that I have Jewish friends... my closest friend was a Jew... and suddenly... his father was fired, his mother is in trouble, he tries to wrap his

²⁶ “Because the second current, extremely important, it was Grotowski... We went to ‘Apocalypsis cum figuris’ [one of the most famous performances of the Laboratory Theater] to Wrocław... And what was going on for me was like an encounter with the Absolute... After all, we were transported into a different dimension... I just stood there, with my friend, we were thunderstruck, we were... just shivering... When Grot came to Warsaw... we were such groupies, sat with him in the hotel, went to all meetings, I admired his way, actually, you can say – I took something in from him... this respect to people, that there are no stupid questions” (SIB04 Witold).

mind around [hmm] his Jewishness and I just, I was ashamed that I'm Polish... there was this, from home [preconception], you know, "And like a Jew about an empty store"... such anti-Semitic comments... His [the friend's] suffering just hurt me, you know, too close to the bone... Suddenly my friends started to leave, forced by their parents, forced by the situation... it was as if you were tearing away a piece of your heart... [In] [19]69..., Antoni [a friend from scouting] approaches me, says: "Listen, the anniversary of 1968 is coming... Are you in?" "I'm in. What is it?" You just have to throw leaflets to the crowd in the city, remind them of this anniversary... I organized [people in] five pairs. The system was as follows... you only have a leaflet and glue... and I have a stack of leaflets. You just hold one, you go, and you stick it and leave. If they catch you, you have nothing [in your hands]... I follow you and when I see there is nothing happening [no danger], then we meet again and I give you another leaflet... there was all this methodology. [SIB04 Witold]²⁷

This oppositional activism is most evident in the biography of Zofia who, after the October Thaw, was one of the initiators of the ZMP denouement. She defended her MA thesis as a twenty-one-year-old ("everything was happening so fast after the war") and became a school teacher. Her early career of school teacher rapidly ended in being blackballed (getting a "wolf ticket") – she refused to agree to the demands of the Polish United Workers' Party secretary, who pressed her to change the final grades assigned by her to her students (high school graduates expressing views incompatible with the communist ones)²⁸ to insufficient. In the years 1956–1989 she participated in many anti-system goings-on. During the uprising in Hungary she helped collect blood sent to fighters, participated in a network of help for Poles returning to the country who had been laid off from Siberian camps. As mentioned above, she took part in student protests in 1968, actively got involved in helping workers injured during the Radom strikes in 1976 and co-ran one of the underground publishing houses. In the "Solidarity" Carnival, she became one of the experts in the field of independent education. She did not give up her involvement with the opposition despite brutal repercussions from the Security Service. For many years, Witold actively cooperated with the opposition, performing tasks for them (distribution of independent publishing bulletins, conducting observations, and

²⁷ For Zofia and Żaneta, the participation in March events brought about the repression of the communist secret service. As for Witold, militia "got him" later, when, as a student of a Catholic university, he illegally distributed Leszek Kolakowski's "Thesis on Hope and Hopelessness."

²⁸ In the justification of the work ban, which she received from the director of the facility, it was written that she: "educates young people in the spirit of fideism and enjoys the adoration of young people because she favors their lowest instincts." Zofia became a doctoral student and an assistant researcher at one of the Polish universities.

social research). Żaneta, a girl who dreamed of a career as a politician, quickly withdrew from attempts at political activity: “there was always a beginning to make, and then I kept on coming across... a blank wall of discord, a concession of a moral nature.” She survived the time of professional drift, for some time working as a journalist. From the context of the interview it appears that she was keenly engaged with the future political elites of the new Poland. Zenon also mentions his active role in preparing opposition candidates for the June elections in 1989, which indicates his engagement. The activities and even the acquaintances themselves in social networks and circles created by the political opposition of the PPR during the systemic transformation will constitute access to symbolic and economic resources, as well as the possibility of creating neoliberal institutional opportunity structures.²⁹

Annotation 5. Already in the 1970s and 1980s, adepts of professional help structures, Zenon and Witold, engaged themselves in activities that can be described as innovative professional work. Having completed their internships in institutions run by their mentors, they (co-)created teams that in their own innovative way worked with so-called difficult youth and/or psychiatric patients. These undertakings animated social activities in local neighborhoods, establishing centers and even schools. From interviews, it appears that within the framework of innovative professional work in the socialist regime, **the institutional structures of opportunities and discursive structures existing at the outskirts of the system** or even **shadow opportunity structures**³⁰ (constituting the invisible basis for actions) were used there.

The work of reformers in the People’s Poland can paradoxically be described as a “joyful creativity” or ingenuity combined with “scheming.” In order to introduce innovative solutions, all possible ways were sought out: coalitions with like-minded professionals were formed and inventive actions were skillfully “smuggled” to

²⁹ According to Palska and Lewenstein (2004), social activists who were active in political opposition in the PPR can be characterized as individuals strongly oriented towards social reforms.

³⁰ I would like to thank Magdalena Rek-Woźniak for the concept of shadow opportunity structures. They are depicted in the interviews in the example of the financing of Polish multi-annual research and implementation programs from funds subsidized by the US government as part of the settlement of the grain loan (which was commonly known information). Yet, during the transformation period, it was said that these funds were at the disposal of the CIA supporting the activities of Polish pro-democratic circles, to which the American services included, among others, new therapeutic trends. One may also put forward the thesis that – apart from the shadow opportunity structures – there are dirty opportunity structures – as an example it is possible to give funding for socially approved activities from means of illegal sources or crime. We would therefore deal here with the innovations in the classical Mertonian sense.

formal institutions. Allies were sought in ministries and institutions, the officials' ignorance, as well as "gaps" in law and ideology were used to communicate with decision-makers: "it was such a contraband. It was not possible to 'do' upbringing, because the upbringing was to be socialist, but the therapy could be done." One could also use a hospital set-up to run desired school activities, out of which more complex work systems or neighborhood club networks grew:

I began to deal with pulling people out of the drug addiction, home rehab... different things like that. And at some point... there [was] a professor S. at the moment, retired, the head of the hygiene clinic... And he had a small building... upstairs there were some empty rooms... and an attic. And we [a group of young therapists] went in and started talking to him... [that] you know [we want to] take care of these young people, who are senselessly on drugs, help them to get out. And I just do not have [enough] words of appreciation for him, that he just said to such a gang: "So, I am giving you this attic and... just go on." It was not that, you know, we worked for him... [Later on], at some point, our children did not get into school... so we went to [professor] S., we say: "Wouldn't it be possible to piece together some school here?" And he says: "Well, why not? We'll use hospital set-up for classes."³¹ [SIB004 Witold]

The use of institutional, PRL opportunity structures was associated with **dilemmas regarding the definition of the situation and the social roles** assigned by the system:

I suddenly became a director in education... we are full of enthusiasm, and finally we won [got our own center]... I have to hire people full-time, we will just do our job. At that time, there was such [a supervisory] institution [with] a well-known financial manager... And as the director, I had to report to her... I walk in, long hair, you know a little bit, slack, well: "Can I help you?" no ((giggle)), and I say that my name is Witold W., in connection with this center [name] which is to be opened. "But, this... Aaaaa, welcome. sir, director!" And I turned around because I thought someone came in. And... suddenly such goosebumps on my back, I say: "Damn, she is talking to me! I am a director in education ((with excitement))) it is impossible!" [SIB004 Witold]

Similar **cognitive dilemmas and interactional problems** in relations with people representing the alien social world for them were experienced by representatives of socialist authorities. And it was them who had a final word

³¹ Hospital classes/schools were organized in hospital wards in in-patients/walk-in clinics for ill students admitted there (to a hospital or a clinic), so that they could participate in school activities on a daily basis. In the case discussed in the interview, this form was used while working with so-called troubled (acting-out) teenagers treating them as SEN children.

in the fate of innovative programs. If they decided that the project could pose a threat to the public or simply their personal interests, they undertook formal or informal actions to close them down:

Each year we celebrated... the holiday of the residential area... [The idea of] festivities which [shocked] the board [of the socialist housing cooperative]... They were completely stunned... it was of bigger dimension than the festival of "Trybuna Ludu" [communist daily] near the Palace of Culture, only that the celebrations... under the Palace of Culture cost millions of zlotys, and that... everything... the residents did it themselves... Asked if they could come to our meeting... Then it turned out that they had cash prizes and medals for us... They came – and they were witnesses of the scandal, [because] I said that I would be only a guest [during the feast]... but, of course, I was chipping in ((laughs)). And, of course, our team rolled over me like a lawn mower... Suddenly, they saw a bunch of people, who, with no inhibitions whatsoever, don't take any prisoners. And also that – without any respect, you understand, I almost got my head bitten off, that ((laughs)) that it was that. And they did not say a word... they did not acknowledge that these medals and bonuses were of their doings, but in the evening the secretary of the party came to me, a bit woozy... in exasperation and said, "Mister, you must come to us"... I knew that I could not refuse him, although we have never been hanging out with them... That... all the apparatchiks and all of those secret service thugs, and they... said, "This is communism, what are you doing"... They meant... what... Marx and Engels went about... in their postulates, that honesty, openness, authenticity, yes? Full social control, yes... they thought beforehand that "I, head honcho, run the show with an iron fist"... And it was a matter of how to seduce me... They saw that this team is totally uncontrolled... that... I only have a chance [standing] if I manage to convince people to do something... Keep in mind, it was half a year before, you know, "Solidarity"... And since that day on it started, some massive obstruction in our work and so on, so it went. That if girls, for example, went on parental leave, then they lost their jobs and so on, that's how it was. Anyway... it turned out that eighty percent of our problems were not problems with the implementation of this program, only with the justification. And we thought that... it makes no sense at all. And, well, we moved away. [SIB02 Zenon]

Towards the end of the socialist period, opportunity structures on the outskirts of the system continued to open. Leaders introducing innovative solutions in education and work with children and youth or people socially excluded just after transformation were prepared for their roles already in the 1980s, including participating in trainings organized by narrators:

Hundreds, thousands of people came, such cycles, containing interpersonal training, in which was included self-improvement work, preparing yourself to work, to help... under the banner of sociotherapy. It spilled into different areas,

one can say, at some point in time, I called it “the movement of psychological help in education” and it happened, in the whole country... And we told those people who were finishing the course... first of all, stay together as a group... There is integration, keep going, create something more, your reality. Secondly, if you need a structure, you can always say you are our colleagues from [name of the professional association], associated with a club, group, workshop... And in this way... from such powerful energy in the meetings of a group, such bubbles were created... People became heads of provincial counseling... because their competence grew in strength... Throughout the country there was such a movement formed, people knew each other, went to conferences... so that they would get to know one other, flow. In the meantime, new centers were created. [SIB04 Witold]

Concluding this part of the text, it is important to say that the use of socialist structures of opportunities was of considerable importance for the development of biographical careers of the narrators. Participation in both socialistic formal organizations (“psychologically available” only for some young people) and structures of the alternative society prepared social reformers for functioning in the first years of transformation and the emerging neoliberal new reality. Narrators gained knowledge and skills used in various ways throughout their professional lives, and developed the assumptions and working procedures used today. It was in the PPR that they became independent, mature professionals. It was then that their beliefs and attitudes were formed, which did not always facilitate and do not now facilitate their functioning in neoliberal social order.

System transformation – 1989: the first years of new Poland and new structures of opportunities

Systemic transformation in many dimensions completely changed the modus operandi of the opportunity structures in which Polish society functioned. As Piotr Sztompka (2000) wrote, in the first decades of transformation, Poles experienced trauma of great change. The change of political system was accompanied by the disappearance of some institutions of public life, the emergence, in their place, of new and far-reaching reconstructions of others. Life-styles, patterns of education, work, and leisure were being modified radically. The history of Poland was being redefined, language was evolving,³² questions about the importance of subjectivity, and citizenship were born (Sztompka 2000, Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011, Modzelewski 2013). The time caesura seemed to radically separate the times of socialism (“before”) from

³² The discourse of real socialism was replaced by the discourse of the birth of capitalism (Alexander 1992, 1998 as cited in Sztompka 2000).

the new reality (“after”), and the transformation would become “a decisive element of collective experience” (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 50) of several Polish generations. According to Iłonia Iłowiecka-Tańska, builders of the 3rd sector of the Free Poland (“PPR” social activists and opposition activists) attempted to create this sector consciously as a new formation based on new types of social relations arising from the self-organization of civil society. In the process of modernization that would make up for Poland’s civilization backlog, a “new man” was to arise, changing reality for the better in a different way, a man with new attitudes, behavior patterns, complete opposite of self-centered, passively subordinated to fate, and external coercion *homo sovieticus* (Tischner 1992, Koralewicz, Malewska-Peyre 1998, Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011, cf. Palska, Lewenstein 2004). Therefore, the builders of the 3rd sector were the followers of the “utopia, in which the social order was to support moral development and the fulfillment of which... seemed closer and more real than ever” (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 81).

Iłowiecka-Tańska’s analysis also shows that the 3rd sector builders kept on rejecting the models of functioning of the organization of the PPR period, both mass social organizations and the democratic opposition ones, recognizing both models as anachronistic, and the PPR itself as a negative reference point. The basis of their social project was to raise society to participatory democracy by rebuilding social capital. The utmost significance was assigned to the independent, decentralized, horizontal structures and organizations which, from the bottom up, using innovative methods, were to solve social issues and problems. The emerging leaders of the third sector were advocates of collective actions based on the principles of solidarity, trust, and cooperation, activities regulated not by coercion, but ethical norms valid throughout the sector. In the new order, non-governmental organizations were supposed to be an equal, independent from the state, partner of social dialogue, subject to legal regulations of that state, including registration possibilities (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011). Considering the 3rd sector statistics, plans, and dreams of Polish civil society were close to being fulfilled. In Poland, similarly to other post-communist countries, there was an “eruption” of civil society organizations. In the period of 1990–1993, about 67 thousand associations were set up every year, and the index of foundations growth was in the early 1990s at 500% *per annum* stabilizing at the turn of 1993/1994 at the level of 115% (Elementarz III Sektora 2005, e.g., Racko 2008, Fabián, Dubnová 2018, Facts about NGOs³³).

³³ In 2018, there were 117 thousand associations and 26 thousand foundations registered in Poland. It is estimated that about 65% of this number is active. Organizations operating in the human sector are probably about 20% of all organizations (7% deal with social services and social assistance, 13% with education and upbringing) (see: <https://fakty.ngo.pl/fakt/liczba-ngo-w-polsce>. Retrieved September 20, 2019).

At the beginning of the transformation, narrators, then people in the Eriksonian phase of generativity, became very intensely involved in the activities of the non-governmental sector. In their biographies, from the opening transformational structures, the following opportunities are particularly visible: 1) the possibility of establishing independent foundations and associations; 2) access to people of power deciding on the political opportunity structures; 3) economic opportunity structures; 4) dissemination of models and standards of innovative professionalism on the supralocal level, including shaping discourse opportunity structures.

Annotation 1. In the early 1990s, the narrators established **civil society organizations and non-public institutions** that constitute **the formal framework** for their own **unique actions**. Zenon and Witold had at their disposal teams on which they could rely. The programs they implemented constituted in certain dimensions the continuation of professional activity dating back to the period of the Polish People's Republic. Zenon, with the team, established a foundation that organized a network of community work centers in one of the districts of the big city. Witold joined the attempts to reform the education system by training, among others, employees of the ministries, education supervisors, and directors of the institutions. When it turned out that the "system gets bogged down" due to the resistance of the social environment to change, with its association created and implemented nationwide programs of activating the unemployed youth. Then he set up his own training facility with a semi-commercial profile. Zofia and Żaneta started an innovative activity in the human sector in the institutional dimension, in a sense "from scratch," only in 1989. Zofia, just after the elections on June 04 – implementing her values and ideals – created one of the first Polish, non-public, democratic schools:

[A]lready in June, eighty-ninth year, using word of mouth, we announced the recruitment to the school that we wanted to set up... Under the cover of the university, professor X agreed to make the room available to us. And they came, those who wanted to be teachers, those who wanted to have children in such a new school, and also the students themselves... And together we discussed the program, the principles of education, the educational program, and the didactic program. We wrote a pretty good program, where subjects were correlated... And this idea of school democracy was also born there, so that the students could influence the community. And so that in that way they could learn responsibility not only for themselves, but for the group they are part of. And all these postulates... we have integrated into the program of the school to be open and we had an unbelievable number of candidates. We did not have a building; we had no money, nothing but a massive crowd of willing spirits... There were probably five candidates for one place. We... created four classes, no location was known, where it will be. [SIB03 Zofia]

Żaneta, for whom the communist political opportunity structures had been open for some time and who, for ethical reasons, abandoned the idea of a political career in the socialist system, quickly got disappointed with the political reality of the Third Polish Republic. After the fiasco attempts to influence the new order through expert work directed to the government authorities, aware of the costs of transformation, which were dramatically high for a part of the society, she decided to establish her own center:

I then cooperated with professor M. very closely. We wrote one program, then the next. Such a national program for youth, but politicians did not accept it. Well, it was a failure again... not frustration, as in the 68th year, but frustration, nevertheless, disappointment, I would say, and then it was such a turning point. So, if you cannot change the system, and it was very raw, personal pain, I was 100% convinced that this is a big mistake and later the following years proved it... Well, I decided... to set up my own space... Create, organize such a space that will generate conditions for those people who are hurt by transformational changes. It was somewhere around 1993, more or less, that is to say, the association was born out of this sense of defeat, failure, and refusal to accept it. [SIB01 Żaneta]

It is worth referring here to the statement formulated in the mid-1990s by Koralewicz and Malewska-Peyre (1998: 150), according to which in the new Poland the choices of activists lost “the nature of moral imperative.” The content of interviews indicate that the thesis was overly “optimistic.” Moral imperatives “evoked” by the increasingly visible, growing wave of social problems could continue to be a significant motive for the actions undertaken by the reformers. Only the contexts, in which choices and decisions were made, have changed,³⁴ which sometimes turned out to be the starting point for well-thought-out biographical projects. It should be emphasized that organizations and institutions established in the first years of transformation under these projects operate to this day, mostly with the involvement of narrators.

Annotation 2. **Access to the people of the “new power”** created the possibility for the innovators to **influence political opportunity structures**, constituting significant conditions for the professional innovative work of the interviewed narrators in the initial years of transformation. The narrators, who were embedded in the structures of civil society, personally knew the activists

³⁴ Iłona Iłowiecka-Tańska (2011: 139) writes about the builders of the non-governmental sector, who, in the early 1990s, “stood at the crossroads, whose paths led in opposite directions,” occasionally merging around building a new style of work.

of the anti-communist opposition that formed the first post-transformation governments. For a certain period of time, some of the senior social reformers themselves were in performed functions in ministries, advisory bodies, expert teams, also at the central level:

Well, in the ninety-ninth year, when the Round Table talks began, I was invited to participate in talks by this “Solidarity” committee, at the so-called educational “sub-table”... We just outlined this postulate of the right to establish independent schools and social schools, which could be founded by other entities, different than the state. And that they could function in accordance with their programs. And we succeeded, that consent came out. [SIB03 Zofia]

Initially, the authorities seemed willing to use some of the innovative solution models developed by the environments centered around noteworthy social change leaders, who also **influenced discursive opportunity structures** by participating in debates on key social issues. Impacts of social innovators are visible, for example, in statutory provisions and regulations, for example, related to the reform of the social welfare system introduced at the turn of 1998/99. Over the years, the influence of senior social reformers on social policy processes became more and more limited; people from the 3rd sector became one of many social actors in a complex, political, multi-dimensional game of interests.

Annotation 3. Being embedded within the circles of the elite gave access to **the economic opportunity structures**. In the first years of transformation, this access could be related to the support of activities by politicians, for example, by facilitating access to technical infrastructure (like the using of a deputy computer) or transferring grants from the funds available to familiar decision-makers:

First elections, the fourth of June... citizens committees asked us for help in the elections and we were there to prepare candidates for two months... And all our candidates... won... in these elections by a large margin... bigger than the rest. And everyone suddenly appreciated us very much... and they told us that they would give us everything they could, but they could not do much. Nevertheless... gradually... we got more and more money and as long as they were [there]... And until the end of 2000, we had a lot of resources. [SIB02 Zenon]

It was also possible to obtain fixed assets in the form of premises remaining after closures of institutions, including the liquidated property of communist parties whose resources, after transformation, became the property of the state treasury. And although this practice seemed to be quite widespread among

emerging CSOs, again, personal relationships with people in power could have a considerable significance:

By the end of this eighty-ninth year... there was disbandment of Polish United Workers' Party. And the place, which was a party activism school in Starowiślna street... [was] being vacated?... I ran to the minister [surname] with a request to grant us this building for our facility, which has been functioning in such [very temporary] conditions for three months now... And we got permission to have it and that's how we moved to [street name]. [SIB03 Zofia]

In the area of economic opportunity structures, a significant role in the development of civic society and the professionalization of the 3rd sector was played by **foreign aid programs** implemented since the early 1990s. These programs, to a large extent, were working as the opening opportunity structure, anyway – based on the principle of grant contest – they caused tensions on the procedures and the ethos of work. "The freedom of action" was largely limited, and their implementers had to prove that they acted professionally, deliberately, methodically, and effectively, achieving effective results based on the principles of economics (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011). The rules of the grants' contests forced the change of attitudes and identities, the transition from the symbolic space of spontaneity to the ordered and structured space in accordance with the principles of social engineering (Szacki 1994 as cited in Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 100; see also Dudkiewicz 2002). It seems that at first the narrators were relatively resistant to these constraints. Their innovative projects were the effect of both personal (intellectual and emotional) and social capital accumulated over many years. Senior social reformers, embedded in their professional roles, with elaborated work procedures, do not need support of foreign experts, whose role in creating post-transformational institutional order is mentioned in literature (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011); some of them even claimed that those experts "sell" the knowledge that Polish specialists have already possessed for years. The narrators carried out their activities maintaining and improving their own methodologies and work systems, efficiently adapting to the cumbersome formal requirements that limited access to the opening structures of opportunities:

We've got at least as much, from various international competitions, and so on. And there was a 20-year program [of community work]... We got EQUAL,³⁵ that

³⁵ The EQUAL Community Initiative Program was implemented in 2001–2014 in the European Union. Financed by the European Social Fund and from the budgets of member countries, it was aimed at developing and disseminating innovative solutions and good practices (see: <http://www.equal.org.pl/equal.php?lang=pl>. Retrieved September 20, 2019).

gave us the opportunity to... support... our [wards]... in the period when they entered the labor market, but for us it was an opportunity primarily... to validate... our results. And... like with all these programs [from the pre-transformational period], the effects were stunning. [SIB02 Zenon]

The **emergence of the 2nd sector** is also worth mentioning together with the economic opportunity structures – profit-oriented business organizations and private capital. Although in the first years of transformation the concept of corporate social responsibility did not function in Poland. Gradually, a group of people willing to support the actions of non-governmental organizations emerged:

[W]hile I was looking for the first venue... I had carefully worked out premises of this venture, the mission, the structure, even the organizational scheme... despite various difficulties [my association] keeps on developing like a *perpetuum mobile*... A businessman helped me, mmm, Mr. G., who ran a business here since his great grandfather's time... At some meeting he listened, listened, got up and said: "And, you know, you make sense. I will give you a venue... Free, without money, meaning, but only for three years. After three years you will have to get your own." [SIB01 Żaneta]

As it is apparent in research field observations (as well as in the interview with Witold), some social reformers in the area of the human sector, during the period of transition, founded professional companies that often provided highly expensive psychological and training services – thus, **shifting from 3rd sector to 2nd sector**. Probably exceptional was the attitude of one of the narrators, who in the first years of transformation ran his own profitable business company, from the profits of which he financed, for two years, the activities of his teams working with socially excluded people; and the construction of a training center offering free or low-paid training cycles for adepts and professionals.

Annotation 4. **Dissemination of the models and standards of the innovative professional work** on the supralocal level stands for another very important set of opportunity structures. This dissemination took place through trainings implemented within the framework of projects that promoted vocational procedures standards, passed on knowledge, and skills. One should emphasize the importance of extensive training cycles, based on training/meeting group procedures, which added value were changes in the attitudes and ethos of their participants' work and, above all, "copying" innovative solutions in places of residence and work of trainees. Also, both ephemeral and permanent new national, professional associations, confederations, and unions of associations operating in similar professional areas were established.

Open environmental conferences and seminars were organized. Senior social reformers in these activities functioned and continue to function as trainers, supervisors, members of advisory bodies. It can be argued that in many dimensions of social policy disseminating activities created a new kind of institutional discourse referring to the idea of subjectivity, demarginalization, solidarity, and social inclusion.³⁶

Although the transformation aimed at creating a democratic state of law, based on a strong civil society, in the case of the 3rd sector seemed to create conditions that were particularly conducive to innovative professional work, the opportunity structures that were opening up in a democratic state were not unlimited. On the contrary, as mentioned above, as the years passed, it became increasingly apparent that profiting from the opportunities was associated with many barriers, constraints, and coercions. Already in the first years of transformation at the macro-social level, dichotomous, discursive structures appeared – of a systemic optimism accepting a new order and a systemic pessimism containing a multidimensional critique of this order (Kowalski 2010). Senior reformers, despite their support for the emerging Third Polish Republic, were fully aware of the costs of transformation, encountering in their practice the rapidly growing unemployment and inequalities. Their dreams and illusions about Poland as a democratic state, created in the times of the PPR, quite quickly disappeared:

After the 89th year it could be clearly observed that the new order, new power, new Poland, for which... we dreamed of and sang songs about, is an evil stepmother. She is a stepmother and she is being built at the expense of those people who are the poorest, the weakest... especially the young ones, it was assumed by the politicians that either they would cope, or... simply drown.
[SIB01 Żaneta]

Professional counteraction to the effects of transformation and social action towards (re-) integration also in the area of the 3rd sector were soon subjected to the rules of neo-liberal economy. The area of the 3rd sector has

³⁶ For instance, the language structures concerning the institutionalization of children and young people have changed very significantly. In the early 1990s, placing children from multi-problem families, including simply poor families, was treated by the employees of the children and family care system as a legitimate or even obvious solution. Over the decade (the time of intensive training of foster care staff supported by social campaigns on deinstitutionalization run by prominent CSOs) the language of debating on this issue has changed – institutionalization started to be described as a “final outcome,” possible after all other means and methods have been exhausted.

been dominated by the logic of the free market together with the discourse of knowledge-based economy (or innovative economy) founded on the “grant culture” or “contract culture.” Grant contests rules along with the principles of competitiveness required new patterns of actions, forced confrontation of previously held values and attitudes used over the years. “The man of service” was to be replaced by a competent professional (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011, Zarycki 2014) who managed projects, as well as their beneficiaries, whose attachment to values such as selflessness, spontaneity, and solidarity seemed to interfere rather than to help. The tensions resulting from the functioning of this logic in the case of senior social reformers can be associated with their axiological identity defined as a permanent commitment to change proof actions as a result of new circumstances or emotions, accompanied by a sense of freedom, values defined in opposition to power and privileges (Koralewicz, Malewska-Peyre 1998). Following Zenon’s statement, we can think about the narrators in terms of “old school,” inspired by the traditions of social reforms, social change, community work, cultural change, or even dreams about a better new world typical of 19th century social activists. It seems also that narrators are stable in their focus on working with specific groups of clients, and at the same time to some extent immune to “grantosis” (the common-sense term used to describe the phenomenon of chasing project after project with unclear, short-term results depicted mostly in statistics and ongoing evaluations, with no focus on clients’ specific needs or their situation). Two strategies seem to be crucial in the narrators’ biographies: one is the strategy of manipulating and working out the system “while doing your own thing,” developed and perfected in socialist times; the second is the commercialization of actions combined with maintaining significant pro-social values – this thread requires, however, a separate study.

Conclusions

Social reformers of seniors’ generations differ in some important dimensions from their peers in the course of the life cycle (see, e.g., Zalewska 2016). Their biographies, both in the professional and personal dimensions, are certainly not standard. Social reforming is in their case a kind of lifelong, consistently developing activity, or referring to the concept of Fritz Schütze, a biographical plan of action in which retirement (understood in terms of the period of professional deactivation) was not foreseen – the narrators continue to be very active in their social sub-worlds.

Narrators certainly represent this generation of activists with whom axiological “I” resonate closely. Using the words of Koralewicz and Malewska-Peyre (1998), it can be stated that these individuals are different from Bauman’s

postmodern man – their professional biographies are characterized by continuity, cohesion, and pro-social orientation.³⁷

The analysis of the first collected biographies of senior social reformers indicates that the concepts in which social change is described as a process occurring in the space of structural options defined in terms of limited opportunities for action are justified. These options result from the accumulative effect of earlier actions (Sztompka 2000). As Piotr Sztompka (2000: 17) writes: “The process of social becoming takes place in the social context inherited from the past, that is, in a common pool of ready-made patterns of symbolization, interpretation, conceptualization, and narrative of current social practice.” Concurrently, the analysis seems to support the assumption formulated by Gleiss (2017) that social activities are performed in two kinds of spaces-political/institutional and cultural. The interlinks between the political and discursive opportunity structures are noticeable in the collected material.

The four cases presented in this text illustrate the individual processes of knowledge and skills accumulation using the structures of opportunity existing in various political systems. The constellations of opportunity structures create both unique biographical patterns, as well as more general models. Here, two such models of biographic careers of senior social reformers are disclosed: 1) a consistent implementation of innovative activities regardless of political conditions (Witold and Zenon) and 2) undertaking innovative professional work only when post-transformational opportunity structures have emerged (Zofia, Żaneta). It is worth noting that the years 2015–2019 are a period of re-transformation of the political opportunity structures and discursive struggle in Poland, which clearly determines the activities of actors of the 3rd sector. The planned continuation of biographical studies covering both the generation of senior social reformers and their successors brought up in the neo-liberal reality gives an opportunity to verify the findings and the statements contained in this chapter.

³⁷ It is worthwhile to acquaint oneself with a sentence by Bohdan Cywiński from “Rzeczpospolita” (April 2000) in the article “Premature Obituaries of Intelligentsia”: “without people from Żeromski’s world, without ridiculed ‘Strong Women,’ Judyms and Gajowiecs [names of social activists – protagonists of positivistic literature of the 19th century], all of this Poland will render itself an unbearable space, a dirty and boorish marketplace from which honest and decent survivors will have to flee” (Cywiński 2000 as cited in Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 28).

Renata Dopierala

CHAPTER VI

LIFE OF THINGS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE POLISH SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION¹

Introduction

Igor Kopytoff (2003) notes that things, just like people, have their biographies. When building a biography of a specific thing, questions analogous to the questions about human biographies can be posed, for example, "what are biographical possibilities, which entail its status, time of existence, and the culture it belongs to? How do those possibilities manifest themselves?... Are the objects of different age, what are the stages of their life, and what do their culture determinants look like? How do things use up with age and what happens to the object when it stops being useful?" (Kopytoff 2003: 251–252). The questions posed by the author – particularly relating to the life of things, their uses, and socio-cultural contexts where those processes take place – determine the structure of the chapter which aims at analyzing the systemic transformation from the perspective of the sociology and anthropology of things.

The aim of the chapter is the analysis of the life of things in selected autobiographical narrative interviews. I present, first of all, the stages of life of several things, which appear in autobiographical interviews conducted within the project *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on a Biographical Perspective*. Secondly, I discuss chosen aspects of the systemic transformation process in Poland in the context of the items described by the narrators. I refer to three interviews: with Szymon (born 1973, graduated from Higher School of Art and Design, academic teacher), Piotr (born 1975, engineer, corporate worker), and Michał (born 1982, majored in IT and econometrics, entrepreneur). In these narrations – compared to other interviews – things appear with the highest frequency, therefore they were selected as the basis of the analysis. The things in the interviews, for

¹ The original version of this chapter was published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 46–66. Retrieved December, 2019 (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.03>.

example, pieces of furniture, household appliances, and devices, are mentioned spontaneously (are not brought about by the interviewer's questions), which points to the significance of those items in a biographical experience of the transformation process. Biographical memory is triggered by and focuses around things which change with time. The significant presence of material objects in the biographical experience is the reason for the discussion.

Biographical material is used for illustrative purposes. It is not my intention to carry out a classic analysis of narrations in accordance with the principles formulated by Fritz Schütze, that is, to seek processual structures, reconstruct argumentative strategies, et cetera, but the applied theoretical categories were developed by the sociology and anthropology of things, as well as the sociology of media and communication. This perspective is different from the biographical sociology prevailing in this volume. However, this point of view makes it possible to complete the interpretations of Polish systemic transformation presented in this book.

The text starts with a brief description on recognition of things from sociological and anthropological perspectives. The following part of the chapter deals with: (I) status and usage of things in the society of shortage economy and (II) technological devices as harbingers of the systemic change. The text ends with a reflection on the ambiguity of things in different socio-cultural contexts. Considerations on things are marked by three historical periods in the history of Polish society: the late People's Republic of Poland (PPR), the 1989 breakthrough, and the modern era.

Sociology and anthropology of things – selected aspects

A life cycle of a thing is typically made of three major stages: creation (invention, development, manufacturing), usage (determined by time, varied), disposal (no longer useful). This general pattern is applicable when things are treated as basically the same objects. However, when we look closely at specific objects – isolated items – it appears that the same thing can work differently in varied contexts to manifest its agency (Abriszewski 2010: XXI). They need new ways to “make them speak, that is, to make them suggest their description, create a blueprint for their usage by others – humans or nonhumans” (Akrich 1992 as cited in Latour 2010: 112).

Things cannot tell their own biographies – they are written by people (Kopytoff 2003). The life of a thing – linked to an individual, her or his body² – manifests itself by actions and their consequences. The fact that things

² Although things are interwoven with a body, they are somehow slightly separate from it at the same time; they are movable – the body can move them or set them

live means that they trigger, determine, and authorize actions, enable or prevent them, encourage, allow and suggest, but also stop or forbid actions (Latour 2010: 101). Things require individuals to “do something with them”; such demands are effective if they bring about desired effects (Gibson 1977, Mitchell 2005 as cited in Krajewski 2013: 69). It means that things are not outside the social order, but they are its integral part and actively participate in it as actors. Although the considerations concern the life of things, it is not possible without the individual, who triggers action (or not) on the basis of the meanings given to the objects. The significance of the object results from how the person is ready to act towards it, which involves different ways of experiencing these relationships.

Building a biography of things by actors requires considering a number of factors resulting from their mutual relation; things can be used as carriers of meanings, requisites in status games, instruments in classifying others, mediators of interactions and relationships. Through things, people can communicate with others, demonstrate their status and identity (see: Goffman 2008, 2011). “Things are useful in a number of ways: they enable us to do what we want and need, facilitate communication, and establish suitable conditions for expressing our cultural ties, as well as our individual self within the community” (Dant 2007: 26). Individuals create unique cognitive and emotional interactions with things, use them idiosyncratically, present diverse attitudes to the material world (Bodei 2016: 75). What those individuals share is inability to live without things “because we entrust things with our identity, our society strengthens and embeds its principles and values underlying our culture in things and through things, we give things responsibility for our everyday lives” (Sierocki 2008: 175). At the same time, things create a secret space where everyday events freely take place (Rakowski 2008: 55). Their existence is a “secret language” of culture (Pearce 1995: 49); things are unnoticeable parts of our lives, even though they are frequently closer to us than people.

Functions of things which are significant for their uses – symbolic, economic, esthetic, technical (material objects as tools), emotive (evoking emotions by items), socio- and ideo-functions (communicating social or ideological meanings), can change, move, or appear simultaneously in different stages of life of material objects (Krajewski 2013: 49). It is also applicable to the status (roles) of things, which can be (giving only a few categories): a tool, decoration, souvenir, collector’s item, useful thing. Depending on their use there are items used daily, occasionally, or on special occasions, for personal use or shared with others. In terms of their esthetic-functional categories, objects can appear as handy, pretty or ugly, single- or multi-use, durable or short-lived

in motion (frequently by means of other tools); they are related to social activities resulting from them or facilitating their coming into existence (Krajewski 2013: 21).

(Krajewski 2013: 80). The layers of culturally and socially created meanings result from their different uses; reevaluations in the perception of things are also related to changes of their status (Waszczyńska 2016: 9).

Let me look at a few things which appear in the narrators' stories to highlight actions they triggered and how they changed in various social-cultural contexts.

I. Goods in the economy of shortage

With regard to the time and culture in which the goods mentioned by the narrators exist, they refer to the late years of the People's Republic of Poland – it results from their teenage years back then. With reference to material goods this time can be described as dominated by two phenomena: a permanent shortage of goods (both staple goods and durable goods) and their rationing (from 1976 to 1985) and, secondly, building strategies and practices which facilitated survival in such social-economic order, particularly creating informal nets of acquiring goods and exchanging goods and services.³ Initially, from 1976, the only product whose trade was regulated was sugar. “The scope of regulation started to extend in 1981 when it was regulated to trade meat, butter, wheat flour, groats, cereals and rice, washing powder, cigarettes, alcohol, chocolate and other sweets, soap and many articles for infants, such as semolina, powdered milk, washing powder Cypisek, cotton wool, baby soap, and olives” (Fuszara 2004a: 120). The list is not complete because, due to recurrent shortages, their substitutes were launched, that is, articles which were available for purchase instead of those stated on the cards (e.g., it was possible to buy sweets or cacao or coffee instead of cigarettes or alcohol – these articles were considered both prestigious and hard to come by). Other products were also subjected to regulation and they included: “oil, shoes, carpets, tropical fruits, stationery items – notebooks, drawing pads, crayons, paper cutting pads, pencils, sharpeners, rubbers, modeling clay, paints, and brushes... The situation began to change in 1983 when regulation of some articles was rescinded. Subsequently, the trade of washing powder and soap, cigarettes and alcohol, and sweets ceased to be regulated... Further changes took place in 1985 when regulation of the trade of flour and grains products and fats were rescinded” (Fuszara 2004a: 121).⁴

³ I refer to private and private-public markets for goods – developing informal networks of connections based on the social status of individuals, their professional status, social capital as values which facilitate a mutual exchange of services and goods hardly available on the official market (see: Wedel 2007).

⁴ To ensure fair division of consumer staples, the authorities introduced the mechanism of regulation between 1976 and 1985 and in specific areas of the country and it embraced a range of grocery and industrial articles which entitled doing the shopping on the basis of

1. Lack of goods

Considering the level of deprivation above it is not legitimate to argue that the presence of goods was silent (Pearce 1995). Interpreting this description backwards – the lack of goods was noticeable in the narrators' stories. There are references to shortages of one of the rationed goods in the interview with Szymon, that is, notebooks and the whole range of stationery items, and in another excerpt to the lack of wallpaper:

N: Even now I have err some notebooks, 'cause we used to keep supplies. 'Cause when they delivered/ there was a delivery of goods to the stationer's, and you had to buy notebooks or some other devices or school materials, then we bought as much of it as we could, not as much as we needed, but as much as we possibly could get hold of. Therefore, I still have some notebooks, still blank, which I have kept since my primary school time, they are lying some place and they are nice. It'd be a pity to throw them away, it'd be even a pity to write in them now, 'cause they are, you know/ err I guess you can try to put them somewhere like Allegro and see if anybody takes an interest in it. Nevertheless, now they are souvenirs in a way we bought such notebooks, rubbers/ well, it's funny but now all products are Chinese err and they amount to shoddy quality, don't they/ I mean not only 'cause China produces almost everything. Electronic equipment and more and less advanced technologically. But, generally this flood of Chinese products is associated negatively. I remember that back then there were/ err there was a delivery of Chinese stationery materials, for example, and it was somehow attractive. Fragrant Chinese rubbers or some markers or some rulers or there were some 3D err gadgets and it was/ incredibly attractive. So it is incredibly changing, you know, its perception. I guess that back then err the Chinese economy was functioning slightly differently, you know, but, but, but those Chinese products were delivered to Poland and they were a kind of wind from the world.

N: I remember when Martial Law was announced, it was when we were wallpapering in our flat and my mum's friend and her husband came over. It was Sunday and I remember that they were wallpapering because they had little time so we were wallpapering. I remember that wallpaper, it was ugly and had a brown flowery pattern. The wall was wallpapered/ because you had no choice back then, you know, quite simply. Previously there had been some bathroom wallpaper in

rationing cards, stamps, and allocations. The regulation did not quite succeed, however, in realizing the "fair" distribution, there were malpractices concerning settlements of ration cards and fraudulent allocations (see: Zawistowski 2017: 440–493); additionally, there were also multiple exemptions from the system because there were many categories of privileged people due to their profession, social function (see: Fuszara 2004b).

the living room, tile pattern, as ugly as it gets, it was coming off the wall. My mum would say she would have to pull it down and they stuck a brown flowery one.

Let me point out a few aspects of the life of notebooks. They were hardly available on the market back then which illustrates severe shortages in the economy of the People's Republic of Poland. The demand could not be satisfied, but it also entailed a set of phenomena resulting from an imbalance of supply and demand. The consequences of restrictions on availability of goods⁵ result in, for example, longer consumption processes which consisted of several stages: looking for available goods (visiting many stores, searching information about deliveries to stores), wait time (long queues), unintentional substitutions (using substitute products), and resignation from purchase if obtaining a given product became too difficult or impossible (Mazurek 2010: 19). Supply deficits were not merely an economic event, but also a social problem which reflected divergence between propaganda promises of satisfying people's needs and a real ineffective economic policy (Mazurek 2010: 20–21).

Living in the economy of shortage (as opposed to shortages in the economy, see: Kornai 1985) called for inventing consumer strategies, which relied on "making supplies" (it did not apply only to stationery products, but virtually all kinds of goods: long- and short-lived). It showed foresight which made it necessary to buy whatever was available on the market in legally regulated quantities without much consideration for the current and real needs, thereby breaking the elementary mechanism of purchasing – need-realization-satisfying the need. (I leave aside the dominant, but by no means the only model existing in consumer societies: creating a need – purchase – disappointment – a new need, see, for example, Bauman 2009). Such stocked articles were some form of material security (in case those products became unavailable on the market); they could also be used for exchange within informal social networks.

⁵ This experience, obviously, did not befall all members of society equally. Another narrator, Michał, says:

N: My err grandfather/ my granddad was err a director of an energy plant for some energy area so err in the time of PRL I don't remem/ I can't remember that err it was such a bad time. I don't/ I can't recall, can't recall such err big, you know, problems or err shortage of (.) (*smacking lips*) / Heck then, I guess, it seems to me that err somehow we weren't suffering from a lack of something, but, you know, I mean, everybody err all people didn't have such various err various elements, different articles, which are also available nowadays

I: Hmmm.

N: So what, what was available then my parents well, well I can't remember if there were, if there were any / any problems, but err it got stuck in my mind, you know, such pictures of those/ pictures of that time.

Functionality of products, as well as their quality and esthetics (which is well-illustrated by the statement on wallpaper), and their uses (bathroom wallpaper in the living room) were subordinate to their availability on the market. The thing that additionally draws attention in the narrator's statement are positive connotations linked with goods produced in China, which are currently rather associated with low-quality mass production. They also symbolize contacts with another culture through material objects. The life cycle of a product is related to the biographical memory of an individual which is visible in the way the article is perceived, its uses (desirable items vs. worthless things), and in assigning significance to them (attractive vs. shoddy), which result from biographical experiences and macro systemic transformations.

This excerpt illustrates a sentimental-nostalgic dimension of things – a network of meanings remembered from childhood/youth in particular. A notebook is an everyday use article which hardly ever deserves a mention. Notebooks, which would be a pity to get rid of, change from everyday use goods to symbolic items (which leads to suspension of their pragmatic function), and become collector's items. Loss of use value, whereas its primary function was actually never realized (after all, a notebook is for writing in it, so its rapid use due to its limited capacity makes it useless soon), paradoxically gave it an emotional function – the notebook became a keepsake. It is striking that it is a blank notebook which contains no content, and therefore it represents merely a potentiality. The value of a notebook usually stems from its contents written on its pages. As contents lose relevance, the medium becomes useless with the exception of contents of emotional or instrumental value (e.g., diary, memoirs), then it lasts a long time. Blank, unwritten pages saved the notebook from destruction and disappearance; passing time paradoxically enhanced its value. A used written notebook would probably be useless, waste paper (see: *Processing and Collecting Things* further in this article). Having gained a new status – a valuable item – it became an object for contemplation which brings back memories (Bodei 2016: 50–51).

However, an intention to sell old notebooks on Allegro indicates another, different, commercial function of those goods. On the one hand, they are extraordinary, but, on the other hand, they could present market value (they could be sold or exchanged) which is applicable to ordinary goods (Kopytoff 2003: 253). In the case in question, those categories overlap – the owner expects that the market value attributable to this unique item will be the same to potential buyers. We also observe a process of fixing and negotiating the price (Latour 2010), which is influenced by the distance between culture where the article was created and the present day, when it gains new worth.

In regards to actions triggered by notebooks which also illustrate their lifecycle, there are several stages: after being manufactured they were

transported to retail outlets where clients bought them. Then they were being used to some degree (e.g., by Szymon) as originally intended. Each of those stages brings about human actions and interactions with the article (writing, buying, transporting); when the action is not taken, the product becomes an idle resource (notebooks lying around somewhere) and enters the transition period (to be discussed below).

2. Processing and collecting things

Olga Drenda defines the late PPR as a practically wasteless culture. “There were hardly any plastic carrier bags, so if you happened to see one, it probably came from Pewex or abroad and was reused many times. I found it very interesting to read statements about collections of packaging which had decorative functions in Polish flats, whereas abroad they were regarded as ordinary rubbish. It applies particularly to cigarette or drink packaging. There are collections of beer or fizzy drink cans in the photos from the 1980s” (Drenda 2016: 34). Speaking about waste we mean “all things (or substances) which we would like to have to dispose of. Becoming waste, things lose their useful function. Waste materials are an amorphous mix of things, which have de facto ceased to be things” (Izdebska 2017: 32). Analyzing lexical transformations of the terms “waste” and “rubbish,” Roch Sulima (2015: 90) refers also to the Etymological Dictionary of the Polish Language which says that “rubbish” – since the 15th century – has been a discarded thing, ruined, worthless, useless, refuse. Waste, on the other hand, suggests that rubbish has been objectified.

An institution which contributed to the minimalization of waste (although it was not its primary goal) were to buy-back recycling centers (also known as waste paper recycling centers) that Szymon speaks about. This institution was a middleman where the client could receive some goods (e.g., toilet paper) in exchange for their waste materials (see: Lipiński, Matys 2014) or a voucher to pay for goods in specific shops.

N: And my mum first worked in glassworks, and then changed for an office work err and then when there were, you know, when it was possible err (.) to set up a private business she franchised a waste paper recycling shop. It was a moment when there were/ err (.) now it's obvious, but now you look at it quite differently, but back then, eighty-nine/ninety/ it was the beginning of the '90s. '89, '90, it was also a feeling of some discomfort, my sister and me thought it was a shame. It seemed to us that a waste paper recycling shop or waste materials was the biggest shame, you know. And it was the time when it was possible to earn well on it. And err mum took over that shop with someone and they collected not even from those people/ you know/ it wasn't even retail amounts. Of course, they

were bringing it, got toilet paper for it/ because it was hardly available, there were vouchers, they got coupons/ I was often spending time there, I was going there as a child, as a teenage err during the holidays or something I would stay there and take this waste paper and write out some coupons in exchange for some kilos. And it was possible to go and use that voucher to buy tape cassettes or tights or something else. Some stores offered products available only in exchange for vouchers for waste materials. It was, you know, it was an affiliated shop. You either got toilet paper, which was/ one roll for some kilos. So it was, you know, an equivalent. Err and err it was also from companies. We received from companies some, you know, and delivered it to the paper plant and simply it was just possible to maintain a family on it and earn.

If Szymon's notebooks had been used as originally intended, they could have ended in a waste paper recycling shop. Their biography would probably have ended in a landfill site or in an installation for processing waste materials – even if they had been bought for a keepsake or used for writing in as intended.

It seems that waste management is awkward and embarrassing to the narrator, because it belongs to another axiological-normative order. Waste is considered spoiled, frequently flawed (Douglas 2007), and therefore it is removed from a close area of human affairs (Thompson 1979). They belong to a separate territory and occupy margins of social human and individual life (trash bins are typically placed in dark places). Both waste status and waste management deals remain unclear. The narrator admits that dealings were profitable (though not always quite legal), but it was accompanied by stigma and negative emotions (apart from embarrassment he felt disgust – due to internalizing rules of order and cleanliness, see: Tokarska-Bakir 2007: 27–31).

Referring to the thesis of no-waste and considering limitations of this analogy it can be assumed that PPR represented a common zero waste/no waste policy. It aims at minimizing waste or eliminating it completely from households, practicing moderate consumption of available resources. Today most of the time it is an element of the life of the new middle class – focusing on conscious consumption, ecology, and healthy food, et cetera. Back then it resulted from life necessity, it was not a question of choice. Recycling resources (e.g., multi-use milk bottles) did not only limit amounts of waste, but also created a closed circulation of goods. This mechanism enabled the turning of useless things into functional and even worthy articles, such as paper (not only toilet paper). It allowed the reduction of useless things in their intended use by recycling and further use. Economic and effective management of scarce or hardly available products resulted in resourceful strategies. Vegetable and fruit pickles, sewing, fixing clothes, needlework,

DIY – which are currently treated as, for example, a minimal or zero-waste lifestyle⁶ – were quite common skills then.

The status of plastic carrier bags from East Germany or received in packages from abroad should be also noted. There were very few of them and they were used not only to carry the shopping, but they had luxury value perception, privileged access to unavailable goods and a requisite impressing others (Goffman 2008: 34–36). As Marek Krajewski (2013: 181) noted, “plastic carrier bags have plenty of uses, which consumers discover and make carrier bags substitute other unavailable goods... Carrier bags are equivalent to modernity and western lifestyle in many social circles,” which accounts for their viral popularity. Since they were used multiple times, carefully stored, there were not too many of them (as they are considered a major threat to the natural environment today).

Reducing waste did not only stem from deficits in the economy, but there was a popular fashion in the 1980s among young people, especially boys, to collect things, which were regarded as redundant or had other uses in the West. Renata Tańczuk (2013) notes that the very essence of collecting is gathering items which are attributed with value, thereby transforming objects of everyday use into objects endowed with meaning. Such an object is “freed” from its original references and is included in the context created by the collector (its value in use is replaced by aesthetic value). “The items gathered in a collection have been excluded from ordinary consumption, have become objects of aesthetic experience, which means that belonging to a collection, they will not be used, but will be admired. Moreover, when becoming part of a collection, their value in use becomes secondary or even invalidated” (Tańczuk 2013: 107). Jean Baudrillard (1996) proposed a system of objects in relation to their functions and divided things into those which are used and possessed. Szymon says:

N: there was an exchange of those addresses, you had lots of addresses, Western addresses, of different Western companies, firms from various countries, you sent the so-called requests to those addresses. The requests were in an informal language, prepared in English with four or five words. Perhaps four, five is too few, but let’s say, I don’t know, several, up to ten simple words, which said: send me, please, some prospectuses, stickers, anything. And you wrote it down on a postcard and, of course, you spent all pocket money or money you earned from selling some, I don’t know, bottles, waste paper, anything, you spent it on sending postcards to different places. And I find it astounding that, of course, from the perspective of time when I think about it, that those companies were sending back.

⁶ The lifestyles above illustrate deconsumption based on two principles: *reduce* (intentional reduction of one’s consumption and assets), *reuse* (another use of products), *repair* (fixing articles or their new use), *recycle* (recycling products), *redistribute* (exchanging, selling, or giving away redundant things), see: Wilczak 2016.

I: They did? That's interesting.

N: They did. Those companies were sending envelopes with prospectuses, stickers, tags, letters to our home address. Well, I think now that it was err it was, I guess, their marketing maturity/ as if they were predicting some time. I think that in the '80s, it was, of course, still communism and socialism, and so on. But, for those Western companies it could be a potential market for their product in the future, even far in the future. So when we got Coca Cola stickers, we were over the moon. We were putting those stickers everywhere, or other brands, or, for example, from other firms. I remember that my biggest, my kind of / treasure/ first of all, it was ridiculous that you were taking those addresses and sent them. You were sometimes sending those requests just about anywhere, to any company. So I remember that I got from UEFA or some companies from Switzerland. For example, some chocolate producers from Switzerland and they were sending color labels. Of course, it's all rubbish now, but in the '80s this label err of a Western chocolate was precious, or, or, or some, err I don't know a sticker or whatever or a poster. Another type of print, there were some printed materials with some, I don't know, golden elements, letters. Everything was very colorful, glossy, err as I say now every chocolate bar is wrapped like that, but back then when it was totally different from everyday life, you know, when an envelope arrived, when an envelope arrived in the postbox/ a postman brought an envelope from the West we were extremely happy. I remember I got some stickers from Hong-Kong. And it's the farthest place which I keep thinking about/ [...] So there was, in fact, such an element and I even don't know where I keep it, I've lost it. Because in the meantime, we were moving a few times so, so all those treasures/ and they were my incredible treasures, got lost somewhere, but it doesn't matter, because I was putting them from one place to another in my memory. I remember them, Korea, not Korea, but Hong-Kong, from Hong-Kong some colorful/ and it's some memory, because as I say we have it all around every day. Every silly chocolate bar wrapper or tea packaging is also well-printed, designed, better or worse. But, back then when you received some colorful brochures or chocolate packaging or Lego stickers or err...anything then it was a really big day. And incredible emotions were associated with it. And it was lasting through all my primary school (.) it was. Err perhaps more about the fifth, sixth grade, because primary school had eight grades then. And it, it lasted. And it was an attraction, when we received something, we brought it to school and boasted of it in front of one another.

Szymon's statement illustrates the successive stages of the life of things when they differ in their uses, move between social-cultural contexts, where they acquire different status and meaning. Importantly, one object (e.g., label) can be categorized as waste-paper or sentimental fetish or a collector's item. It is the user who decides the value and the use of an object – they specify social practices about it, considering “parameters” (potential) of that object. Things such as prospectuses, brochures, stickers, labels, which were primarily used for marketing-advertising purposes in capitalistic economic reality, represented

cognitive (extending his knowledge) and emotional values (evoking ecstatic responses). They were used differently from their intended use; they served as decorations, helped to personalize space, facilitated identification on the basis of items collections.

Perception of Szymon's artifacts as potential items of private collections was influenced by their value which was unachievable in socialist economy and their prior experience with consumer culture (packaging after products unavailable in Poland). Although they did not present any (recognizable) esthetic value and practical functions, they were regarded as worthy. These collections signified that their owner had access to unique products, which raised his/her status in social circles. These goods were also used in interactive practices of building ME (Goffman 2011). Using those items for collecting extended their lives; before they became waste products, they went through multiple stages of use. And although they were eventually dematerialized ("vanished"), they remained in the same place each time the narrator moved house and thus became a durable item in the narrator's biographical memory.

Graphic elements, colors, and design made them objects from another order than everyday used things. It can be said that "contact" with those goods was making the day in everyday life. The narrator defines them as "treasures," ergo something attributed with high value (emotional and material), which requires special treatment (efforts and care), is (most of the time) unreachable to others, and (frequently) remains mysterious. Szymon, when speaking about his "treasures," describes them as "extraordinary" (to amplify their significance), which indicates a different attitude to goods, which he admits are quite "ordinary" in terms of their availability today, transience, failure to evoke emotions and aesthetic experiences. Those previously desirable objects regained their intended functions in the capitalist economic system and, additionally, they became commonplace and plain.

Actions mentioned by Szymon prove diffusion processes in the core-periphery configuration (using globalization terminology). It is of interest that an impulse came from a peripheral culture representative. The narrator demonstrated his entrepreneurial spirit while acquiring goods – he used one category of goods (with a PPR background) to gain access to other goods representing Western culture. Cashing in on redundant belongings, waste paper and bottles, he was "investing" in media of exchange (stamps and postcards) initiating processes of transfer of goods between varied cultural contexts. The uses of goods described above – differing substantially from the uses in their culture of origin – illustrate mechanisms of including objects into existing culture (in this case, it was prestigious functions of items) and their reinterpretation in accordance with local culture principles (Linton 2007).

II. Goods as a means of transformation

The case related by Szymon shows that the organization of life described above did not result in closure or lack of cultural contacts. Family or friends living in the West provided access to its assortment of goods by sending packages with deficit products in Poland such as: coffee, chocolate, sweets, household chemicals, or clothes. In addition, the second half of the 1980s brought about intense economic emigration, both short- and long-term, legal and illegal. “Large scale and dynamic migration in the last decade of PPR, especially in 1980–1982 and 1987–1989, signified major political, economic, and social changes. Increasing emigration at the end of that decade might have contributed to the final ‘collapse of etatism’, which determined Polish living conditions for the previous forty years” (Stola 2015: 55). Comparing household goods in terms of durable goods in two time intervals (per hundred households) we note “that there were 2,4 passenger cars in 1965 while 20 cars in 1985. Radio sets respectively: 1965 – 77 pcs., 1985 – 110 pcs., TV sets: 1965 – 27 pcs., 1985 – 90 pcs., washing machines: 1965 – 45 pcs., 1985 – 75 pcs., refrigerators: 1965 – 9 pcs., 1985 – 80 pcs.” (Kulesza 1990: 81). In spite of their rising popularity, the summary does not include articles such as tourist equipment, tape recorders, record players, hi-fi, camera films, projectors, slides, kitchen and other household devices, stocks of books, gramophone records, et cetera (Kulesza 1990: 81). Foreign trips and proliferation of technological appliances show potential for modernization of goods, including attempts of individuals to differ in terms of possessions.

1. Migrations of things and people

The movement of elements of culture – material and nonmaterial goods – was a consequence of liberalization of passport policy (1987–1988) and a collapsing economic system (see: Stola 2015). Trips to other people’s republics (particularly East Germany) became more common; Yugoslavia and Hungary were popular destinations, too. Those trips had different purposes, but their commercial aspect – a covert function of such declared tourist travels – was among major goals. Michał (1st excerpt) and Szymon (2nd excerpt concerns trips in the 1990s) speak about their parents’ foreign trips:

N: Then, in 1987, 1988, more or less, when we moved to [a town in south-east Poland]. Patents got a flat then./ And from that time

I: Hmm.

N: So I remember that all dad’s trips: to Turkey, Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia/ the former ones err opportunities to trade

I: (laughing)

N: abroad. They were also buying, I don't know what they were buying. Still / no, I remember that there were here / in Poland they were buying, I guess, some (*smacking lips*) err calendars

I: Hmm.

N: and took those calendars to Bulgaria. They sold those calendars in Bulgaria and bought something, I don't remember what. Then to Turkey, jeans and turbo chewing gum in Turkey.

I: (laughing)

N: And then to Poland. So he took trips like that (.)

I: And there were cosmetics in Hungary, too.

N: Oh. Cosmetics were also somewhere / where were those cosmetics from? / No, those cosmetics were, they were Soviet, I remember. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

I: Well, my dad /

N: Russian, Russian cosmetics, yes.

I: (*laughing*) My dad used to go to Hungary and Czechoslovakia, too. (*laughing*)

N: So we, we, Hungary, no. Hungary, Czechoslovakia, no. The route was to the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Turkey. It went, it went that way.

N: So it was extremely poor everywhere and somehow people were getting by. Err I remember a little when I wasn't admitted to [a large city in Poland] and I was getting about and somehow err there was a time when my mum started to travel to trade, it was the time when people were travelling abroad, Hungary, Turkey, and so on. Italy, so it was that / from time to time she would leave her work, take time off to earn some extra because she was working and err and err to earn extra they were travelling to deal something small. So there was a time when, when, when Polish people started going abroad. I mean, they had travelled abroad before, to Hungary and so on, and brought some grocery products err food. Then there was also Turkey, some sweaters, some clothes, they went and brought back, and so on.

Travel destinations (apart from Turkey, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Italy mentioned above) differed depending on the area of living (Michał – south-east Poland, Szymon – central Poland). Different products/goods were traded in each country. It was essential – to make the trip financially successful – to know what assortment was in demand in a given country. TV sets were often brought from the Soviet Union, watches, video players, and cameras from West Germany, clothing and cosmetics from Turkey (Lesiakowski 2015). Circulation

of goods in designated directions, regulation of this process by a set of rules and principles somewhat reminiscent of the tribal kula (see: Malinowski 1987). A major difference is that the transactions above were of commercial character (absent in the kula), and did not lead to creating lasting bonds between partners.

Referring to biographical experiences connected with a camp in East Germany, Piotr speaks about the assortment of products available in shops there (this comparison does not always show advantage of foreign range of goods).

N: Well, at first sight, grocery stores were better stocked there. At least I wasn't too interested in other stores as a young man, perhaps I wanted to buy some tapes, too, and (.) they were of miserable quality compared to those you could buy in Pewex. But, they were available, I mean, it was cheaper and there was one more thing that err I mean cocoa was available there. I mean, stores were well stocked. It was also possible to buy film for the camera, also black and white. It wasn't so easily available here towards the end of the 1990s.

Trips to East Germany and other state-controlled economy countries, which did not suffer such severe shortages, brought substantial effects in private consumption. Commercial tourism was generating a private import of goods to the country, which later found their way to resale shops. The effect was that private foreign trade was thereby legalized and the assortment of available goods in domestic shops became broader (Mazurek 2010). Thanks to tourist trading attractive products were appearing on the market and other complementary initiatives were developing in unofficial channels of production and distribution. Dariusz Stola (2015) even writes about an explosion of new forms of entrepreneurship and resourcefulness. Owing to articles brought from East Germany, Polish households boasted of new equipment and devices. "There were toasters, cameras – households were upgrading. Products from East Germany were just a sample of a better, consumer world of the West; they were made more carefully and became available for purchase on the Polish market, not only seen in advertising catalogues" (Mazurek 2010: 123). They were also usually cheaper so it was possible to sell them at a profit (Kochanowski 2010). As a result, individuals raised their material status, but also gained prestige in social and family networks.

2. Emancipation through things

In their interviews, the narrators refer to radio and television, which played a significant role in their processes of socialization, and cassette and video tapes. The media and data carriers above enabled looking at the systemic transformation of the late 1980s and early 1990s not only from

a perspective of technological inventions, but also through the development of private entrepreneurship. Both of these phenomena were characterized by the liberation of individuals from patterns of behavior imposed by socialism. Szymon and Piotr speak about the impact of radio and television on their lives:

N: there were two channels on TV, we had a black and white TV set, old and damaged Ametyst.⁷ The picture on Channel 1 was quite alright, but the picture of Channel 2 was hardly working and it was necessary to wave an aerial to see anything, there were days when nothing was working on Channel 2. But, there were days when the picture was a little better, but poor picture was usual. As a rule, the picture was poor. (.) So, for example, some program starts at some time in the afternoon, there were programs/ err there were fewer news bulletins so they were more accessible.

N: It seems to me that I was largely influenced by TV in the '80s, but also by the radio. But, perhaps it was (.) well, it is difficult to say to what degree. The radio was a contact, some contact with the foreign world when it comes to music. (.) And there were some things on the radio which came from abroad, from behind the western border. Err there were fewer such things on TV.

The media work as a monopoly in a monocentric political system: the state-owned television controlled both TV channels (Channel 1 was available nationwide from 1958, Channel 2 from 1970⁸), the state-owned radio offered four channels,⁹ launched over ten plus years. This organization of the media

⁷ TV sets appeared in Poland in the '50s. "The first batch of 80 'Leningrad' TV sets was imported to Warsaw in 1953 while in 1955 about 10,000 pieces were available on the market. They were imported from USSR and East Germany ('Rubens' cost 4600 zł a piece). The production of 'Wisła' (4000 zł), the first Polish TV set, was launched at the turn of 1955 and 1956. It was modeled after the Soviet set 'Avangarda,' which was no longer in production on account of its too tiny screen. For this reason, production of a more updated brand 'Belweder' was launched in 1957. Since January 1957 TV sets had to be registered (subscription fee was 40 zł), there were 21,000 pieces" (Kozielec 2001: 266).

⁸ The first experimental program was broadcast in 1952; TV programs were available twice a week in 1955 and the first nationwide channel was launched in 1958. Channel 1 of Public TV had a reduced air time in 1981 whilst Channel 2 was suspended altogether then and restored in 1982 in limited available air time (Kozielec 2001: 315–316).

⁹ It was broadcast nationwide in 1945 and local radio stations were also set up in Kraków, Katowice, Poznań, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Łódź, Szczecin, Toruń, and Wrocław. In 1949 Channel 2 (broadcast 24 hours from 1962). Channel 3 started broadcasting

system that was realizing political goals of the ruling party called into question the credibility of news broadcasting – it raised antipathy and resistance (“it is difficult to assess the credibility of the news on TV and on the radio” [Piotr]).

The development of video tape players and VHS cassettes in the late 1980s and the “video boom” between 1988 and 1992 marked a crucial event in the existing structure of the media system because it created new socio-cultural practices. The new technological inventions extended access to Western popular culture contents, which was severely limited in PPR. Piotr says:

N: I don't know, it seems that VHSs were generally important in the late '80s and there were films on them, which I hadn't seen. But, for example, my sister was delighted. *Dirty Dancing* is something I still don't understand. And (.) this dance is so completely strange to me and so on. I know that some people are moved by it even today. When my wife met with my sister (.) some time ago they recalled it and all, but it, really, for me doesn't matter at all. I know there was such a phenomenon. For me, tape cassettes were more important, and they suddenly disappeared. It was probably sometime in the middle of the '90s when I started studying at the university. And (.) I was listening to music recorded on those cassettes, there was a lot of music which could be classified as Polish rock music from that time. Err there were many bands back then such as Maanam err Lombard err Budka Suflera, Lady Pank. (.) I hope not to overlook any band, but all those cassette tapes were recorded by someone, it was absolute piracy, 'cause, I don't know, I don't know at all what you had to do to get a hold of a real vinyl record. But, such things were really happening. And you could erase and copy music on those cassettes as much as you wanted. (.) it, you could play it afterwards. It was possible to swap those cassettes, exchange, listen to them together or alone through headphones. There was such a contraption as the radio and tape player, it was licensed by Grundig. Err my wife recalls Kasprzak, it was probably the same inside, I guess, but it had better design outside. And those cassettes fit there. (.) so, I guess, everyone was listening to those recordings on those cassette tapes. They were getting used up, let's say. I could point at the shops in [a large city in Poland] where they were located back then, where such cassette tapes were available, but I don't know if it is relevant. I mean, they mattered a lot back then. Err (.) oh, several days ago I heard there was a day of the shop, a day of the vinyl record shop. It's strange it could be celebrated now, 'cause everybody buys music pieces on iTunes today. So, so (.) it was needed, some effort, it was necessary to go to some shop, which was a private enterprise, that was the name for a little business then. And you could buy some cassette there, it was a little better quality than your own recordings. It was probably also a pirated tape, but it didn't matter then. I guess it

in 1958 on short waves and became available nationwide in 1962. Channel 4 started broadcasting in 1976. The state-owned radio station was a monopolist until 1989, but it was possible to listen to programs broadcast for Poland by radio stations from the West: Radio Free Europe, BBC, Voice of America (Grzelewska 2001: 246–260).

didn't. I mean, I couldn't buy any other cassette but pirated ones, and nothing else was available.

Cassette tapes and tape players (Grundig and Kasprzak, which the narrator regards as reliable and long-lasting in another unquoted excerpt) occupy an important part in the narrator's biographical memory. They provide some context for considering other factors in the media perception; first and foremost, a wide variety of the media reception situations – an individual can use the media on his/her own or use this opportunity to build social relations. The media also offer social functions such as integration or entertainment. Piotr discusses benefits and gratification gained thanks to definite media choices, for example, making/maintaining social contacts, emphasizing specific lifestyles, opportunities for emotional release, deriving cultural satisfaction (see: McQuail 2008, Maigret 2012). In addition, this excerpt illustrates privatization of the media reception, thanks to possible ways to record the picture or sound and reproduce them many times afterwards (it was possible to record/copy, etc.). Secondly, there was an aspect of creating social networks and circles around preferred kinds of music, bands, or musicians, which was further strengthened by the exchange of cassette tapes here. It was of crucial significance in the political system in question, as it made it possible to free oneself from official cultural contents and the state-controlled media. Although the recorded pieces often came from the state-owned radio stations, creating personal music compilations was an act of individual reception practices, which were treated as subversive actions. Piotr enumerates several names of bands from the 1980s – Maanam, Lombard, Budka Suflera, Lady Pank – whose music contested and opposed the existing system. Listening to independent rock music from pirated cassette tapes was a generational experience of a youth's coming of age in the 1980s.

Looking at the life of things, Piotr says that cassette tapes "got tired"; it resulted from their multiple uses which led to a lower quality of recorded sound. Using this formula the narrator defines a not-so-obvious psycho-physical state of this medium (more or less consciously). The resulting stage was when cassette tapes "got lost" and were replaced by CDs and then dematerialized in favor of digital sound recording symbolized by iTunes. It is interesting that exploitation does not apply to vinyl records which have not lost their vitality and have become desirable collector's items. VHS cassettes did not play a significant role in Piotr's biographical experience, whereas Michał recalls them in the context of "very nice aesthetics of the 1990s and the first VHSs." We should note several phenomena stemming from the growing popularity of video players in the 1990s.

Grzegorz Fortuna (2013) identifies three areas where changes resulting from the appearance of video were noticed. From an economic and political perspective, the video market was one of the first to be ruled by the forces of

supply and demand (the government had no control of its development), from a cultural and social perspective, it was the time of the varied offer which was not provided by other mass media, and which shaped the taste and attitude of many participants of cultural life. “With the benefit of hindsight, an objective value of those objects is not too high, however, they carry great sentimental value. They are reminders of an intriguing period: budding capitalism, adventure of looking for desired titles on the shelves in the rental store, and the first film fascinations” (Fortuna 2013: 43). By that means, viewers gained access to the medium which let them become independent of political authorities and film critics’ power who decided which films entered the cinema and television distribution (Filiciak 2013). Films on VHS cassettes presented a variety of film genres and varied artistic levels – most of the time they were popular Western productions.

Taking into consideration the original cost of purchase, video players signified a high social status¹⁰ and ensured material and social distinction. “Video players were status symbols to Polish people, but first and foremost, they were a source of contact with Western popular culture, a source of escapist pleasures, but also a realization of modernization discourse and aspirations related to consumption. Nevertheless, in 1985, when the number of video players in Poland was estimated to be nearing half a million, there were merely ten films in official distribution...A steady supply of new film titles was provided by informal social networks – professional to some extent and somewhat community-based” (Filiciak 2011: 72).

An informal market for cultural goods such as cassette tapes and VHS cassettes shows a scale of piracy then, but also a growing entrepreneurship. “Illegal video cassette rental shops or stalls were usually in private houses and were not easy to find, so to be admitted it was necessary to know somebody who knew the owner – it was working completely underground and beyond the state control. Besides private houses, video cassette rental shops were often located in garages, bazaar stalls, or car trunks, from which cassettes were rented or sold at the local fair. There was still another popular method of distribution in the countryside and little towns which looked like the travelling cinema – the

¹⁰ “At the beginning of the 1980s video players were exotic and hardly available in Poland. Branded video players, available in Pewex and Baltona, cost from 800 to 1000 dollars in 1981. Although their prices were gradually decreasing (in 1985 a Panasonic, Sanyo, or NEC video player was available for 430–500 dollars), but those amounts were still much beyond the financial reach of average Polish people, who earned from 30 to 50 dollars a month. They would have to spend their yearly earnings to buy a video player” (Fortuna 2013: 28). As a result, a substantial number of video players available in Poland between 1980 and 1982 were smuggled from abroad. They were in the possession of wealthy or enterprising individuals, whereas legally purchased sets were mainly at schools or in state institutions.

TV set and video cassette recorder owner arrived in some place and placed a TV screen in the back of the van and played a film to the viewers for a small fee” (Fortuna 2013: 30). At first, VHS cassettes were available in unofficial video rental shops, fairs offering illegal films, or paid recording services on a blank cassette bought from Pewex or Baltona (Fortuna 2013: 30). The Baltona store also offered original American films on cassettes, but “if somebody did not particularly care about an original edition – it was available in the car trunk sale from some enterprising man at the nearest bazaar,¹¹ typically recorded on two blank 180-minute tapes. The films were usually recorded from satellite TV with Polish dialogues or they were copied from foreign cassettes brought from foreign trips by relatives or friends” (Drenda 2016: 121). Video rental shops were legalized in 1988 and then the market stabilized. In the early 1990s, the first private television stations¹² started broadcasting and the media offer became more diversified, which decreased popularity of video cassettes.

Apart from watching and sharing films on VHS cassettes it was possible to use them differently in the post-transformation media system (see: Mikułowski-Pomorski 2008). It became common practice to record films from TV channels and play them later on (another aspect of becoming less dependent on fixed hours of television programs). It was also possible to video everyday life, for example, family events (TV channels held competitions for funny videos sent in by viewers in the 1990s). Accordingly, collections of VHS cassettes became a sign of the times.

¹¹ “Cassette stalls became popular in the 1990s. They are often in photos from 1989, 1990, 1991: Niewiadów caravans changed into a makeshift grocery store or small restaurant car offering toasted cheese sandwiches and pizza... They served ice-cream and fast food of the late PRL – toasted cheese sandwiches and Polish versions of hot dogs, bread rolls with mushrooms... Then street sides were occupied by K67 kiosks – a tidy modular creation designed by a Slovenian Saša J. Mächtig” (Drenda 2016: 109). They were an alternative to makeshift stalls, looked modern, aesthetic, and tasteful, they are used for different purposes, for example, newsagent’s, kebab bar, janitor’s booth. The objects where private enterprises were developing appeared in Michał’s narration:

N: Err that time some 1989 when err there was certain economic freedom it was starting to look like that. There were those buses with err bus-bars or, or caravans err with bars inside (.). It was that those, those, those sausages ord-/ ordered from those buses at some fairs or some err some public feasts. Well, it terribly got stuck in my mind, you know.

¹² Polsat TV has been a licensed broadcaster since 1993 (Polsat Channel 2 was launched in 1997), TVN (formerly known as TV Wisła) began broadcasting nationwide in 1997, RTL7 has been working since 1996 (Świdorski 2002). Radio Zet, RMF FM, and Radio Maryja received radio licenses to broadcast nationwide in 1993 (Dobek-Ostrowska 2002).

Ambiguity of things

Transformation processes can be used to classify changeability of things and a variety of their categorization. I am speaking about things as in waste materials and things as in treasures, which appeared above in the context of processes of change and collecting items. It is difficult to define a strict criteria for the usefulness of a thing or lack thereof. A thing is useful if it is practically used, but also a thing which is useful and needed for various purposes (functions of material things). Within the framework of culturally constructed and socially regulated meanings, things go through three stages: they are goods, waste, and keepsake. The uses do not always change to the same degree. Those stages can overlap depending on individual attitude and mindset. It is clearly demonstrated in Michał's interview:

N: Err so it was (smacking lips) hmm it was like at first (.) there were hmm/ at first we wanted to run a store here in [a big city in Poland] with (.) different crappy things, you know/ I mean, actually, they weren't rubbish, kind of "precious rubbish," because it was very

I: Hmm.

N: It's very/ for somebody those things/ those things are just rubbish, for another person, they are treasures.

I: Rare things.

N: Rare things. We wanted to run a little store like that in [a big city in Poland]

I: Hmm.

N: Err with things gathered from the market a little big, a little from err from the family loft. Such things which err you remember from childhood.

I: Hmm.

N: For example err some err fairy tales err such fairy tales for (.) a projector, fit for a projector/ What was the brand's name of those projectors?

I: Err (thinking)

N: Projector Jacek and projector, I guess

I: Ania.

N: Yes, that's right. Ania, I guess/ but probably there was also Jacek, I guess. Yes. Err or some err old post stamps, packaging hmm, posters, old car models, something that brings back childhood memories... Or err there were also mainly pictures. All kinds of book covers, which everybody used to have then, because everybody had the same books. It's kind of scary, you know, how deep it was inside me.

I: Hmm.

N: Even these days I have those flashbacks and all the time, we, I mean, we, I mean [name of the shop] want to use in our err in our products because this is something which is not available now, but back in the past err it was available and for me, it was hmm err what? Important, joyful, it wasn't sad at all. So err I guess that is about it what I wanted to say about/ about (laughing) such memories

I: Hmm.

N: And using those memories today.

The narrator's story focuses on two systems and rules for action aiming at opening a "rubbish-treasures" shop. It is not an obvious combination of words as the shop is typically associated with needed/desirable goods, whereas rubbish (in most cases) lacks these attributes. It may also be noticed in the ways of acquiring those articles: the market and attic work differently – the market is associated with cash transactions, money, while the attic stores things which are out of use to some degree: periodically, redundant, outdated, even though they can potentially be used later in the future. The attic also stores things whose life is in limbo before it is decided whether they are still needed or could be scrapped, and the attic is their repository (see: Thompson 1979). An article in the attic can "return" to its former functions, acquire/gain new ones (e.g., as a component of a new product, be renovated), or become completely useless. There is one more interesting aspect in Michał's story – memories as the basis of his current economic activity. On the one hand, he emphasizes the emotional (sentimental) significance of things from his childhood, on the other hand, he talks about their commercial (commodity) potential. These modalities are rather opposite, but in this context the various forms of use are intermingled. As Marek Krajewski notes (2013: 32) "things often act as stimuli evoking purely behavioral reactions or items evoking memories."

Michał speaks also about bringing together objects of different eras and origins – he points to his household furniture which comprises items made in the '60s and '70s and modern industrial productions. It should be observed that he distances himself from PPR politics and focuses only on esthetic and sentimental aspects of articles:

I: ((laughing)) Well, but if we, for example... / visited you at home, then you also have this, I mean, does it look like

N: Yes.

I: a variety of items?

N: Hmm.

I: Does it look like that?

N: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Well, err (.) well, then, doesn't it. So we have err p-posters, old Polish posters on the walls, err they are everywhere. I have a glass case with packages. I just like old Polish packages very much.

I: Hmm.

N: So it is arranged err hmm in this style / the furniture is also old, from the '60s and '70s, so it is set / arranged in a mixed style, a little old, a few Ikea pieces.

I: So, am I right that although you cut off those political and historical, let's say, events, you are still aware of what those things are connected with and their history/

N: You know what? Well, well, whether you want it or not, but it isn't a topic we talk about.

I: Well, it's clear. But, still/

N: We're only and exclusively into their aesthetic dimensions.

The narrator defines things in different ways depending on his life experiences and biographical perspectives. The redefinition – an ongoing process of cultural changes of value of things – occurs due to a variety of factors: market forces, changing aesthetic tastes of individuals, trendy lifestyles (Smolarek 2013: 74–75). Articles, which have their origins in PPR, may be classified as useless and therefore “rubbish,” or they may be significant as they have sentimental value (“treasures”). Accordingly, neither of these definitions eliminates their potential commercial value (“taking advantage of memories”). The redefinition is illustrated by the popularity of items produced in PPR. Many pieces of furniture (e.g., armchairs) or electronic goods (e.g., record players) have revived and become fashionable today. They are valued for their design, functionality, durability, and reliability – they are not only indicative of a vintage lifestyle, but they also present an autotelic symbolic value. Popularity of those goods and devices is also related to their independence of politics, focus on their aesthetic dimensions (as explained by Michał), and making those artifacts elements of folklore. Including them in the capitalist system triggers a range of actions which change their meaning, status, uses, and functions to mark another/new stage in their biographies.

Conclusions

Notebooks, stationery materials, wallpaper, prospectuses, brochures, colorful labels, posters, cosmetics, old books, grocery products, clothes, VHS cassettes, video players, and tape players; the wide range of material things, household appliances and devices appear in the analyzed narrations. It is worth

emphasizing, the narrators talked about materiality spontaneously, without the interviewer's questions, which points to the significance of those items in the biographical experience of the process of systemic transformation in Poland. All of these objects performed various functions (economic, esthetic, emotive, pragmatic) in different stages of the narrators' lives. Values attached to material goods varied in different political and cultural contexts (socialism or capitalism), just as uses of those items, and the importance given to things in specific social conditions (rubbish or treasures). They are not assigned to things for good (though such cases are possible), but this is rather subject to changes resulting from both dynamics of social life (macro level processes) and circumstances of individual biographies (micro level). The complex meanings attributed to things and interactions with them determine at the same time the narrators' biographies and biographies of things.

Kaja Kaźmierska

CHAPTER VII

PARADOXES OF IDEOLOGICAL PRIVILEGES – A CASE STUDY OF A FEMALE TEXTILE WORKER FROM ŁÓDŹ

Introduction

This chapter¹ presents a particular case study of Łódź as a working-class town, and a biography of a textile worker, who was working in one of the weaving manufacturing plants in Łódź from 1975 to 1998. The material² gathered in the research process will be utilized to consider one of the key ideological issues in the People's Republic of Poland, namely the initiation of a process of modernizing the post-war society, and in particular workers' participation in this process, who became both the subject and object. It is one of the many paradoxes of real socialism which could be formulated as follows: ideological objectification of the privileged social class, which the working class was to

¹ Acknowledgements to Adam Mrozowicki, Katarzyna Waniek, and Agata Zysiak for their comments on the preliminary version of this text. The original shorter version was published in 2014 *Praktyka Teoretyczna* nr 3(13): 136–169.

² This chapter also utilizes materials gathered in the research project *Four Discourses of Modernity – Modernism of Periphery on the Example of Łódź (XIX–XX Centuries)* – funded by the National Science Center (2012–2015). The common feature of our project and this one is the intention to analyze macro processes by using micro perspective. In the case of this study: A paradigmatic example of problematic dealing with modernity – understood as a chance for a better future, a gesture of actuality, modernization project, but also a social handicap and economic imbalance – is the city of Łódź. The project has been focused on a paradigmatic case study of a central-European city, incorporating and intensifying features of industrial and subsequently post-industrial *milieu*, in order to present logics of construction of modernity discourses in four threshold moments of Polish history: – rapid capitalist modernization and industrialization in the late XIX century; – regaining independence after I World War; – the new political regime after II World War; the fall of real socialism in 1989 (Piskała, Śmiechowski et al. 2018).

be in the time of the People's Republic of Poland. According to the declared ideology of the post-war order, laborers were to constitute a new social power. They were assigned the role of the system's avant-garde, particularly of processes of the country's modernization, which was to manifest itself not only in rapid industrialization and the resulting reconstruction of the Polish society structure from the impoverished – rural to the working class – urban. It was also related to the broadly-defined emancipation and social advancement. Evaluating those objectives from the contemporary perspective is inconclusive in view of a diagnosis of causes and effects of the changes (Zaremba 2012, Leder 2013), their dynamics in political, economic, but also social dimensions, social costs related specifically to the era of Stalin's terror, though not exclusively. That assessment is also frequently related to the author's own views. Notwithstanding preferred ideologies it seems appropriate to agree on the following points: firstly, we can only hypothetically determine the condition of the Polish economy and society were they not subject to the Soviet hegemony; secondly, although the processes of modernizing the country to a large degree were at odds with declarations, and were deemed hardly avant-garde particularly in comparison to Western Europe, the era of the People's Republic of Poland may be also analyzed with reference to modernization, breaking social barriers, social policy; thirdly, ideological declarations of the system did not usually translate into the social reality, which gave rise to a number of ambivalences, tensions, and paradoxes, which I will discuss in more detail now.

The primary slogan of real socialism pointing to the working class as the leading power of the nation found its way not only to declarations, manifestos, and speeches of political activists, but it also reached the public discourse. For example, as early as in 1945³ a local newspaper in Łódź talked about leading workers and the joint effort in rebuilding the country resting chiefly on the shoulders of working class masses. Laborers were to build the new order as an ideological and socially privileged class, while the authorities were to represent their interests. From this point of view, "protests of the working class, which were treated by political authorities as their social base, were embarrassing at least: representing workers' interests was formal legitimization of the ruling of the communist party" (Gardawski 1996: 49). In light of the above, numerous post-war strikes of workers between 1945 and 1947 did not only spoil that image, but also showed that assigning workers an avant-garde role in the planning of social changes was differently defined by them. Therefore in subsequent years the authorities wanted, using contemporary sociological parlance, to deprive workers of agency, particularly with reference to their

³ Obviously, postulates of this sort were expressed before the war, especially by communists, but only after 1945 they started to dominate public discourse.

work environment, the related biographical dimension and social experience, which was constitutive for the system's favored attributes of the collective/class identification. "Totalitarianism recognized neither individual nor group interests" (Lesiakowski 2008: 167), and workers' protests resulting from low wages and high prices of necessities and outrageous conditions of work, were defined as group interests. Essentially, the sticking point did not concern workers' standard of life, but it had precisely to do with divergent definitions of their role in the post-war scenario. To put it differently, a fundamental cause of the conflicts between 1945 and 1947 was depriving workers of a chance to independently manage a plant and of influence on organizing their work (Kenney 2012: 80) – "What kind of socialism is it, where workers have no say, only apparatchiks" (Świda-Ziemia 1997: 231).⁴ These tensions were manifested in intense local protests lasting continuously in the late 1940s and early 1950s, reaching its peak in 1956, when their resistance was not only an economic or social manifestation, but most of all political. As Hanna Świda-Ziemia argues (1997: 211), the protests of 1956 showed that "workers radically crossed the line drawn in the scenario of destalinization which led to a bloody tragedy in Poznań," yet this perspective of authority was maintained at reactions to subsequent protests (1970, 1976, 1980).

Another paradox may be determined as a tension between the declared by the system and the experienced opportunity structure. Belonging to the favored class gave an impression that other (higher) classes are not legitimized in the social system particularly in view of dismantling the pre-war social order (Leder 2013). Put differently, the existence of classes prevailing over workers was illegitimate. As noted by Julian Gardawski (1996: 57), "[t]hat comfort was strictly limited – and ended brutally when higher social aspirations appeared, for example, when laboring elites wanted to obtain real influence over managing a company."

This phenomenon could be also presented with reference to individual professional or educational careers. On one hand, channels for social advancement were opened mainly through more dynamic, though sometimes forced, spatial mobility⁵ from the country to the city, which entailed social mobility. On the other hand, the system "rewarded stabilization of aspirations at a low level, lack of initiative, abandoning thoughts of success, career, high income, reluctance to occupy managerial positions" (Gardawski 1996: 57). One of the strategies which were strengthening these characteristics was a conviction that achieving professional success depends on the party membership – therefore those who wanted to avoid ideological implications did not develop their professional

⁴ A worker's statement obtained in 1949 while doing research in a manufacturing plant in Łódź.

⁵ I will return to the question of forced mobility later.

aspirations.⁶ Mirosława Marody (1987: 93) refers in this context to the attitude of *envious egalitarianism* resulting from the social equality principle “perceived rather as a point of arrival than a point of departure of individual careers,” accordingly blocking potential opportunities to stand out. Adopting this strategy, reinforced by ‘the little stabilization’, blurred both the recognition of the working class as a leading force and quality of modernization processes.

However, the biggest paradox of the system was the fact that social changes which entailed modernization changes manifesting themselves specifically in industrialization and urbanization processes took place in fact at the expense of workers, not thanks to them. So although the People’s Republic of Poland “rhetorically and symbolically appealed to ordinary people” (Leder 2013: 192);

[w]orkers completely deprived of any influence on the social order, but also free from responsibility, in their civil status hardly differed from old landless peasants – a social strata which they usually came from and which they quite closely resembled in their mindset (Leder 201: 193).

Although, as argued by Świda-Ziemba (1997: 207), workers constituted a material base of the new state, were its productive force participating “in the enormous collective work of building socialism,” it was not them, but the party functionaries who set the plans and production norms, working goals, and pays. Comparing workers from the turn of the 1940s and 50s to landless peasants refers not only to the fact of depriving them of agency, but also their bad conditions of work, material conditions, and frequent poverty wages. Accordingly, workers were treated like a slave labor force, but that fact, as demonstrated by Świda-Ziemba, was concealed behind the façade of the collective enthusiasm towards the new, jointly built order. The elements of this façade included, for example, the so called labor race personified by labor leaders and the collective work of whole factories, related to apparently enthusiastic and voluntary, yet in practice forced acceptance of obligations to exceed the set plan or its quicker implementation. In the case of acceptance of such obligations, civic responsibility of workers was emphasized, particularly in the press. However, when workers refused to work beyond their strength

⁶ To a large degree it was precisely like that; on the other hand, a phenomenon (and also a paradox) of the Polish version of socialism is the fact that many people refusing to meet that requirement (sometimes taking the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy), that is, not belonging to the party, succeeded in developing their professional careers in spite of less favorable circumstances than in the case of the party members. Such instances could be found in biographical interviews of retired professors of the University of Łódź gathered in the Department of Sociology of Culture of UŁ in the project *Academic Łódź in Biographies* (Każmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015).

and their objections to implementing thoughtless organizational changes, they were attributed to a lack of awareness of the working class, which was often discussed at meetings of the party committees. In both cases we deal with specific social engineering. “Influencing people, shaping desired attitudes and awareness was to diminish the gap between the communist party’s official propaganda and the existing reality and to lower »the threshold of internal self-control of individuals«” (Sielezin 2008: 189). Another element of the façade was high norms which were supposed to be exceeded anyway, not only in the name of ideological requirements, but also under economic duress (when failed to exceed the norm, the worker was paid a paltry sum for work). Still another example of the façade was “ritual manifestations of enthusiasm for the new era,” namely seminars, mass gatherings, workers’ meetings (Świda-Ziemia 1997: 208–209). Recapitulating the situation of workers from the turn of the 1940s and 50s, Świda-Ziemia (1997: 212) highlights three parameters: “1) total submission and subjugation to their work area, 2) work beyond their strength in miserable conditions, 3) abject living conditions, or to put simply, misery.”⁷

The briefly discussed question here related to the paradox of the privileged and objectified working class is by no means a new problem. Conversely – it constitutes one of the frequently researched issues both by sociologists and historians, when it comes to characteristic features of real socialism (see Malanowski 1981, Gardawski 1996, Ślabek 2004). It should also be noted that the long history of the People’s Republic of Poland, marked by the turning points in 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980,⁸ which were initiated by workers (repeatedly breaking out of their assigned role in the scenario), is not homogenous from the point of view of the subject in question. Postulated and real egalitarianism (e.g., in the form of “envious egalitarianism”) intertwined with strongly varied situations of workers, for example, through standing out professional groups clearly favored by the system, like miners for instance, or through uneven distribution of benefits in terms of social support (e.g., through developing holiday resorts, ministerial healthcare infrastructure, state service housing, company onsite retail outlets, etc.). Yet, this chapter does not aim at presenting the whole range of phenomena and processes related to the situation of workers as a social class, but it focuses on, to use a term by Clifford Geertz, *microscopic* – a description concerning a specific case: *social space* – Łódź as a working class city, and *social milieu* – local female laborers working in weaving factories. The choice of Łódź

⁷ In Łódź, most weaving machines were made before WWI, they had not been modernized, production halls had no ventilation, there was a lack of space, no sanitary facilities, the machinery was unsecure (Lesiakowski 2008: 44).

⁸ I leave out 1968 here, because its significant events concern a slightly different social context.

as ‘a case study’⁹ is determined by the character of the city on one hand, and on the other hand, by research studies which produce empirical materials and their potential references to other studies on Łódź of a similar character. By this I mean particularly unique research conducted by Świda-Ziemia (1997) at the turn of the 1940s and 50s, but also a series of documentary films devoted to female workers, which were made in the 60s, 70s and 80s thanks to directors such as Krystyna Gryczalkowska, Danuta Halladin, or Irena Kamieńska, who contributed to the establishing of the Polish school of documentaries. These films perfectly fit in the *microscopic* perspective. “The authors adopt the attitude of a ‘delicate observer’, who looks at the world penetratingly and warmly. The lenses of their cameras attentively observe private issues, discovering in them an exciting microcosm of human problems. They peep under covers of events with a special sensitivity towards the fates of the filmed individuals,” particularly women, whose portraits constitute a separate current among documentaries produced by the above directors.¹⁰

The aforementioned analysis of a case study imposes another paradox on the ones highlighted before, which results from a peripheral character of Łódź and female weaving workers being a peripheral professional group among Polish laborers. Łódź, for many years the second largest city in Poland, a big industrial center, developed as a result of the unusually rapid pace of modernization at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, was labelled peripheral – paradoxically also in relation to its working class character. The city was also associated with workers, but actually female workers, who in real terms could constitute a large social force, for example, in a fourteen-thousand-worker Uniontex, where Mrs. Adela used to work – a weaving worker whose case will be analyzed here.

Let’s recapitulate preliminary comments. The primary empirical frame of reference is Łódź as a special case of a working class city and the work of local weaving plant workers shown in the context of specific biographical experiences of one of them. Mrs. Adela’s narration refers to the time from the 70s to the 90s, while she was working in the largest weaving plant in Łódź and one of the largest in Europe. Using other materials – studies on the social history of Łódź and sociological studies of Świda-Ziemia, I would like to place Mrs. Adela’s case in chronological and social contexts in order to reconstruct possibly a complete image of Łódź, as an industrial city which weathered World War II unscathed and where (in the view of the then authorities) the plans of the new system could be successfully implemented, which (from an analytical perspective)

⁹ I use this term in inverted commas, because it is not methodological in the strict sense of case study. It is mostly about reference to an example which displays some specific characteristics.

¹⁰ The text written by Mikołaj Jazdon is derived from an informational brochure attached to a series of films released by the Polish Audiovisual Institute.

perfectly exposed its paradoxes. Therefore I will attempt to first characterize the situation of Łódź workers in the decades preceding Mrs. Adela's story to present her narration as the next in a chronological order, but also a socially defined phase of experiences of Łódź female workers. Accordingly, I am going to combine a dimension of individual biographical experiences with a dimension of collective experiences of weaving laborers in Łódź – female workers.

Łódź – case study

Łódź might be treated as one of many Polish cities, which in the communist era were identified as a chiefly working class city.¹¹ Nevertheless its specificity was preserved in the pre-war industrial infrastructure (thanks to insignificant war damage the city had the widest and best developed industrial base in 1945) (Kenney 2012: 75), particularly the weaving industry and the feminization of the labor market.

With reference to the former feature we should emphasize apparent ambivalence between the continuation and initiation of the new order, whose construction of reality relied on rejecting the previous system. The continuation is related to the fact that after the war factory jobs were taken by mature workers who assessed reality through their pre-war experiences; put simply, they compared the capitalistic and socialistic systems. I will return to this topic later. The continuation was also visible in the linguistic dimension – in the post-war, highly ideological press of the 1940s, initially the pre-war factory names were used, that is the owners' names such as Scheibler and Grohmann, Poznański, Biedermann et cetera.¹² Finally, it is a paradox that it was the pre-war industrial infrastructure of Łódź, the then modern weaving machines adjusted to processing high quality raw materials (which turns out to be a major problem

¹¹ Promoting Łódź as an academic city is highlighted in a study by Agata Zysiak (2010).

¹² Initially, nationalized factories preserved original names, that is, surnames of their pre-war owners. It was only later when they were changed, in the first stage eliminating the original names, and then introducing names relating to the new system. For example, in the case of Scheibler and Grohmann's factory, in 1945 its name was changed into the state owned Scheibler and Grohmann's Zjednoczone Zakłady Włókiennicze (United Weaving Company). In 1946 this company was nationalized under the name of Państwowe Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego (State Textile Company no 1). In 1962 it was renamed to Obrońców Pokoju Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego (the Peace Defenders' Textile Company), and Uniontex finally. The article "It is time to find other names for Łódź factories" from *Kurier Popularny* in 1946 referred to national and ideological arguments: "Neither Germans nor capitalists will return to Łódź factories. Memories after them in the form of names are redundant."

soon), the pre-war stocks of high quality paints and other materials, enabled the launching of production and implementation of economic plans of the new system, which in subsequent years will not be able to initiate modernization processes within this scope. Acquiring property and production means was ideologically justified in the 1940s,¹³ but it was hardly successful in the 1970s, when Łódź weavers still operated the same pre-war machines.

With reference to the latter feature, feminization of the labor market in Łódź, first of all, it should be recalled that the question of the place ascribed to women in socialism is one of the key problems of this system. On one hand, women's rapid emancipation in the 1940s and 1950s might be regarded as an avant-garde process in comparison to Western Europe then.¹⁴ On the other hand, this emancipation in socialistic countries was rather superficially framed by patterns of traditionally constructed roles of women as wives and mothers and from then also workers.

The specificity of the weaving industry bolstered by post-war demographic characteristic¹⁵ resulted in women making up a majority of the workers shortly after the war, particularly in the weaving industry. While in Poland women comprised a quarter of the labor force, in Łódź they made up more than half of the workers (Kenney 2012: 77). Women dominated most of all weaving, textile, and paper industries. Weaving and textile industries were dominated by women from the beginning due to activities typically done by them (Zarzycka 1966: 354, after Lesiakowski 2008: 42). This tendency continued also in subsequent decades, for example, in the first half of the 1970s "the degree of professional activity among women was the highest in the country and amounted to 87% of the labor force resources." It was related to the fact that the working class character of the city was still being built by the crews of weaving, textile, clothing, and woolen manufacturing plants (Lesiakowski

¹³ For example, in an opinion column entitled "In the old Eisenbraun's factory: Good and bad points of the worker's life" in *Kurier Popularny* from 1946 within a series "Exploring our industrial facilities" we can read: "When we think that this garden, this spacious palace, and the lot serve those today who adored the world and natural beauty only in a piece of the sky, looking at it from a smelly large city backyard, the chest fills up with joy. In the tycoon's palace hall we are greeted by workers. We look through the Venetian window – in the broad park path run two children of workers. In the shine of their laughing eyes, in the joy of their loud laughter, ghosts of the past disappear – a new life is born."

¹⁴ Sometimes it took quite grotesque forms, which is well-exemplified by the slogan "Women on tractors."

¹⁵ A number of women per 100 men was as follows: 1945 – 134.6, 1946 – 129.5, 1950 – 122.7, 1955 – 120.3, 1960 – 117.4, 1965 – 115.8, 1970 – 115.9, 1975 – 116.3, 1980 – 116.9.

2008: 261). There is a good reason why Łódź as a working class city was labeled a city of female workers which was indicative of its specificity¹⁶ – on one hand, the “red” labor Łódź, on the other hand, a city of women who did not quite fit in particularly with the subsequent image of the working class as a subject challenging the socialist system in later protests, particularly those which were attributed with the character of political mutiny.¹⁷ However, an analysis of source materials on workers’ strikes which was carried out mainly by historians particularly concerning the latter half of the 1940s and from 1971 shows that women did not only take an active part in protests, but they were a special challenge to the authorities. Their postulates were frequently free from direct political references, particularly exposed paradoxes of the system. Ideas of emancipation and equality in the case of Łódź female workers were easy to set against the fact that although women constituted a majority they belonged to the least privileged group, which demanded controlling their work environment in connection to such fundamental questions as continual work in an upright standing posture, lack of a variety of tasks, lack of breaks, piecework, high norms, et cetera.

These issues posed to the factory management and authorities as a ‘simple’ question ‘why?’ were particularly embarrassing to the party apparatus (Kenney 2012: 102). These questions were further supplemented with equally specific dilemmas in regards to other social roles of women, for example, “Why didn’t the factory produce children’s clothes? Why were nonproduction workers being fired when factory administration was growing? Why must even pregnant women exhaust themselves working night shifts? Why couldn’t child care be more convenient so that women working the morning shift would not have to leave for work as early as 4 am bringing their children to deposit at the factory day-care center? (Kenney 2012: 103).

In this context it is legitimate to recall the research which was conducted in 1949–51 in Łódź weaving manufacturing plants by Świda-Ziemia while

¹⁶ Looking at the latest social history of Łódź from the contemporary perspective it may be noticed that this social demographic characteristic affected not only an idiosyncratic character of Łódź as a city of workers, but there is also a range of other phenomena and social processes such as, for example, wretched health conditions of residents of Łódź and the region, forms of family life, force of attachment to tradition, ratios of religiousness showing higher secularization than in other parts of Poland, political involvement, et cetera.

¹⁷ It may be claimed that to some degree those labels were overstated. Ideological involvement of workers was not so obvious and had to be only constructed by the new state authority. In 1946 the ratio of workers’ membership in the party (PPR and PPS) amounted to about 8%, in 1948 it increased to about 14% (Kenney 2012: 84). Strike activity must not be overlooked either. I elaborate on it later on.

she was still a student of sociology of the University of Łódź.¹⁸ Particularly from today's perspective this material, first published at the beginning of the 1990s, is an invaluable and unique source of knowledge on life and attitudes of workers in Łódź at the turn of the 1940s and 50s. From 1949 to 1951 the author was able to meet pre-war laborers, whose comparative perspective on the new system was pre-war capitalism, oftentimes the same workplace in the same factory – once managed by its owner, and after the war by a director and party functionaries. Świda-Ziemia (1997: 215–219) differentiated a few categories of workers, I will bring up some of them. The first consisted of skilled workers endowed with pre-war professional experience, respected in their community, with local roots (in Łódź). The second category was made up of unskilled workers – quickly trained to their profession, who occupied a lower rank in an unwritten hierarchy, were frequently treated instrumentally by decision-makers, had their roots in the country – and 'opened' the mass migration process from the country to the city. On one hand, they were avant-garde of the new system, on the other hand, this group were badly treated, earned less, and were often illiterate. Their position in the social structure was probably a reason, that along with pre-war workers, they were fighting for their rights in the wave of strikes in Łódź factories from 1945 to 1947. Thus in the light of propaganda, insubordination (defined as defiance to the scenario established to the working class) in the case of skilled workers was imputed to their pre-war (capitalistic) habits, yet in the case of young workers it was diagnosed that they were made up of a "[v]ery high percentage of new workers, who had not worked before the war and therefore they did not go through the class struggle. A high percentage of the youth grew up during the Nazi demoralization and brought that experience to factories" ("KW PPR report," after Lesiakowski 2008, 46). Another category is women – wives of skilled and unskilled workers and single women – typically members of unskilled workers' groups. Most of them started working only after the war on account of economic necessity, not emancipation ambitions. Those who also performed roles of mothers and wives

¹⁸ Paradoxes of the former system should also include organizing research within sociology as this science was relegated from the Polish universities during the Stalin era as it was deemed bourgeois science. Nevertheless the Ministry of Culture ordered sociology students of the University of Łódź (those who were allowed to finish off their studies) to conduct research on the "activity of workers' clubrooms within an operating manufacturing factory" (Świda-Ziemia 1997: 200). The goal was to show budding workers' culture as opposed to bourgeois culture. In spite of her openly declared skepticism to the new system, Hanna Świda-Ziemia was accepted as one of the researchers which led to her collecting unique material for her own use (interviews and free talks conducted on her own account, observations, notes), which were permitted to be published only after 1989.

had to keep houses according to the common cultural pattern existing not only in the working class environment. For that reason, frequently after a twelve-hour shift in a factory, they had to continue working doing the housework in overcrowded flats without any conveniences,¹⁹ but they also had to struggle with difficulties with regards to food provision, but also household cleaning products or clothes availability. Finally a separate category was created by the author for the so called ‘creators of the system’ – they were people who focused on the development of their professional career through social advancement guaranteed thanks to the party membership, unrelated, though, to genuine ideological commitment (e.g., supporting the pre-war communist ideology or post-war conviction of the system’s mission), but rather to instrumental or opportunistic attitudes. They aimed at the fastest possible achievement: leaving physical labor for administrative jobs and management structures.²⁰

Comparing the author’s categories with Mrs. Adela’s biographical situation who took a job in the same factory thirty years later, we can notice that that categorization remained valid; there were only changes in proportions. Consequently the group of pre-war workers substantially diminished due to the passage of time. Importantly, women started to outnumber men in the weaving industry (it is confirmed by previously presented statistics, as well as Mrs. Adela’s account, which I will highlight later on), the distinction between native, local, and migrating/commuting workers, predominantly unskilled, still remained. Mrs. Adela belongs to the latter category and points to the labeling character of that identification. It is clear that the emancipation character of structures of opportunities created by the new system and modernization mechanisms related, for example, to increasing dynamics of people’s migration from the country to the city, which was the cause and effect of urbanization and industrialization processes of the country, was understood by the grass roots rather in the context of traditional perception of the social structure and division for the better and the worse:

¹⁹ 63% of the post-war housing stock consisted of unicameral premises. The local press during that period published many articles describing miserable housing conditions in Łódź. It is necessary to note that they were changing very slowly. Documentary films, which I refer to later, showing the reality in Łódź at the turn of the 1960s and 70s portray everyday life where women had to tackle wretched housing conditions, face difficulties in food and clothing provisions, and they, without a husband’s assistance, deal with all houseworks.

²⁰ While in 1947 63% of people occupying managerial positions had higher education, this percentage dropped to 30% in the years of 1948–1949 for the benefit of politically engaged workers (Kenney 2012: 31). Świda-Ziemia (1997: 218) presents statements such as “Madam ... I won’t stay here too long, they are to take me to the HR,” “I’m going to take an internship in the Soviet Union, so when I come back – you understand.”

Residents of Łódź chose other, lighter jobs while here on the bale – I was working on the middle one – so... so, here it was only village people mostly worked. Mostly only village people worked. Or such ‘false’ Łódź women, cause they treated themselves as women from Łódź, but they all came from the country! The same. But, you know... but, you know, you had a hard time too when you decided to go there. I just got/, I was still a young woman, when I went to work, wasn’t I? And, you know, I got my machines right away. So they were grumbling there too, that ‘I have just come and have my own machines, and so on’, something like that, you experienced different things with people there. Cause/ as I say, all came from the country. So they also added work on the farm err, to that/ to the pension, so they could leave, and then it turned out that nearly everyone is from the country. But [...], you know, they called us differently: ‘Mazowsze’²¹ (laughter), or for a bus, you know, they teased simply that Mazowsze arrived’ or something else (laughter). They also teased us, you know, but [...] you had to [...] you had to work, didn’t you? ‘Cause what?

Returning to the study by Świda-Ziemba, who, on the basis of conducted conversations²² and observations, describes opinions and attitudes of the then workers both to work and the new system. Apart from the abovementioned dissatisfaction of women – wives, particularly of pre-war workers, who had to take jobs on account of material conditions, there are quotes of opinions on the possibility of realizing work ethos. Older workers made comparisons to the pre-war period, when they felt their work was appreciated and they could see its positive effects in the high quality of products. In the 1940s high required norms coupled with clumsy organization of work, frequent lack of raw materials, and their low quality resulted in workers’ frustration. Weaving machines were adjusted to process high quality raw materials, but after termination of supplies from the UNRRA (Egyptian and American cotton), low quality raw materials were imported from the USSR (Lesiakowski 2008: 120). Weaving workers perceived those conditions as depriving them of workers’ dignity: “Working with such tools and such materials is like an insult to me”; “Although I am a specialist, because of the work race, because of this crap,²³ I finally produce trash. And, although I’m not to blame for it, I eventually feel like a failure” (Świda-Ziemba 1997: 223). Consequently we deal here with another paradox which could be named the lack of reciprocity of perspectives: the New system’s

²¹ State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble “Mazowsze” established in 1948, very popular in the era of the People’s Republic of Poland, was treated as the hallmark of folk culture.

²² On purpose I do not use the term interviews as these conversations were conducted unofficially, that is, not in the mode of official sociological research in which Świda-Ziemba took part. See footnote 18.

²³ As explained by Świda-Ziemba, it was related to tools and materials.

declaration of aiming at dignifying the working class premised on rejecting capitalism resulted in another definition of ‘good job’ – relying on quantity, not quality. This measure also turned out to pose problems in light of multi-year shortages in supply. Put differently, while experienced, pre-war workers grew frustrated because of their awareness of ‘messing up’ the job, in subsequent years it would relate to a lack of translatability of their commitment to potentially positive verification of effects of their work. It is appropriate here to recall Mrs. Adela’s narration where she refers to the 1970s and 80s:

It was/it was probably/ it was a time when cotton was coming from Russia.

I: Hmm.

N: From the Soviet Union [...] it was coming. Err it was/ to the Soviet Union. You can’t know how much you could make, but they would take it all! One couldn’t buy any material in Poland even though we worked day and night, in the three-shift system. So, for example, in the medium one, here at us, it was/ cause I worked/ it was in the teasel division, so for a start, four rooms, four rooms, fifty six machines in each, you can imagine how much machinery there was, four, so there were two hundred machines, and on each machine four combs, for example, you placed them here, then it made sixteen kilos every forty minutes. It is possible to count how much, how many tons we made, for, for, if it worked in three shifts. And it was constantly too little, too little, and too little. It wasn’t only about the quality, it was about the quantity! It was constantly too little of it all. Constantly too little.

The time when Świda-Ziemba carried out her research was after a stormy wave of protests and strikes which lasted from 1945 and reached their peak in 1947. All the aforementioned circumstances and particularly multitasking (operating several machines at the same time by one worker) added to the growing dissatisfaction of workers. The strongest wave of strikes struck Łódź weaving factories in September 1947. Approximately 27,000 workers from eleven large factories participated in the strikes which amounted to over 70% of all employed (Lesiakowski 2008: 155).

Such a big protest of Łódź weaving workers certainly exposed tough conditions in factories, violent dissatisfaction of workers, their fears before implemented changes, and low awareness among the existing authorities, party structures, managements of factories, and trade unions of the workers’ state of mind” (Lesiakowski 2008: 155).

A considerable role in those protests was played by women, who were not politically active, did not occupy posts in factory administrative structures, but presented high determination and constituted “a leading element of the strike” (Lesiakowski 2008: 156–159). One of the consequences of the 1947

strikes was a political recommendation of intensive ideological indoctrination of women who demonstrated high activity during the strike – it was attributed to insufficient political agitation by the party activists. The issue of raising work efficiency was ‘solved’ by stressing competition among workers and introducing bonuses for exceeding high production plans, which actually took multitasking for granted and were supposed to substitute proper modernization. For instance, in 1948 an article “Small rationalization meaning big tasks for industrial Łódź” from *Dziennik Łódzki* (1948: 5) says:

Full rationalization of the Polish industry, meaning thorough modernization of production resources, replacing outdated machines with modern ones, is a long-term goal in the current conditions [...] Rationalization (hereinafter referred to as small rationalization – KK) will be accomplished by raising work efficiency and refining work organization methods.

Rationalization replaces modernization here. Again, although in roundabout terms the burden of increasing work output is pushed on the workers’ shoulders, who, facing a lack of real modernization of the factory have to ‘rationalize’ their actions, which in euphemistic terms means demands of elevated work efficiency. A further section of this article explains that small rationalization comprises “technological and production processes, work station organization, adjusting machines to increased norms,” and leading workers as models for its realization.

However, the most significant consequence of the 1947 strike wave was setting up Secret Service units which received wide-ranging prerogatives. Functionaries should freely move about the factory facilities, check documents, demand explanations of the administrative structures, and talk to workers. They exerted pressure on the environment through their daily presence, could encourage workers to collaborate, could control social moods, and identify potential protest instigators (Lesiakowski 2008: 163). After the 1947 strike wave, manufacturing plants started to be concentrated. In the second half of 1945 there were about 900 of them, in 1946 their number declined to 400 and in 1949 the weaving industry consisted of 20 factories out of all factories in Łódź. Breaking territorial and environmental bonds, focusing production in large companies which enabled higher anonymity, and contributed to the disintegration of crews (Lesiakowski 2008: 168). Accordingly, it became easier to implement standards relating to, for example, work competition with regards to an individual, not a collective approach to accomplished tasks. Undermining group loyalty and introducing rules of supervision reliant on a lack of trust gave rise to another paradox of the system, which in their declarations was supposed to be built on collective actions and group/class sense of responsibility, but in practice it aimed at breaking up social solidarity.

Subsequent years (1948–1952) did not bring about substantial improvement in workers' conditions, on the contrary, it might be inferred from the materials gathered by Świda-Ziemia that their situation actually deteriorated. Although the Stalinism era associated with the fiercest terror led to a decrease in the number of strikes, altogether 258 strikes broke out in Łódź and its region,²⁴ most of them in the city. It was the highest number in Poland (Świda-Ziemia 1997, 200). As the research of Świda-Ziemia (1997: 231) indicates, in spite of rising terror, workers constantly showed their dissatisfaction. The author managed to collect many critical and ironic statements: "It's new slavery, and our obligations! An 8-hour workday is the worker's right! We were fighting for it, as were our fathers for years!"; "Is the difference between capitalism and socialism that in capitalism threads were good and in socialism they tear? These norms are ridiculous, it's exploitation. It's about cutting our wages! Perhaps someone from the party and management should take the trouble and see how we live."

The subsequent years did not result in significant changes in work conditions of female weavers in Łódź. In the early 70s they were still operating the same outdated machines, in the facilities whose condition was described as 'technical death',²⁵ with no social or material support, in horrid noise, enormous dust, and high temperature (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 10). Workers' dissatisfaction, strengthened by prices raised by the government in December 1970 and activated by the events of December 1970 on the Baltic coast, led to widespread strikes in Łódź in February 1971. Workers of weaving factories in Łódź demanded pay raises and solving problems of bad organization of work, miserable conditions of machine park, low-quality materials, weak healthcare, and excess administrative structures (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 14). The prospect of higher prices of food raised justified concern, because wages in Łódź weaving factories were rising at half the rate of other cities, 41% of workers received social allowances for the lowest earners, wages in 64% depended on number of pieces produced, so frequent downtimes on account of the condition of old machines which often broke down, resulted in lower pays (Lesiakowski 2008: 262–264). 40 factories in Łódź went on strike in February

²⁴ Other estimations indicate that the number of all incidents of even several hour work stoppages amounted in Łódź and its region to 519 (Lesiakowski 2008: 200).

²⁵ About 40% of the machines were made before World War II, 20% before World War I, there were changing rooms in 85% of the factories, canteens in every fifth, and showers in limited numbers in every other (Lesiakowski 2008: 262). When in the early 1970s "Andrzej Wajda was making *Ziemia Obiecana* (*Promised Land*) in Łódź factories, American critics thought that factory facilities were built specially for the purpose of the film." However, real workers, dressed in 19th century outfits, operating their machines were used as extras (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 10).

1971, of which 24 were weaving factories. 60,469 people out of 107,420 employed took part in them (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 30). Considering that in the next strikes in 1976 the number of people on strike was estimated to be between 55,000 and 71,000 nationwide, the scope of the protest in Łódź in 1971 was considerable (Lesiakowski 2008: 313).

It is worth highlighting that there is little known about the strikes in Łódź perhaps because they did not have overtones of a political rebellion, but they predominantly had economic and social dimensions (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 16), which to a large degree showed paradoxes of the system – protests were directed against miserable living conditions of workers, who continually appeared to be a privileged and leading force of the nation²⁶ in propagandistic slogans. The specificity of strikes in Łódź was related to the fact that an active role in them was performed by women, who were probably not as concerned with political issues as with material ones. While protesting they played roles of workers, but also wives and mothers running the houses.

Having to keep house, working in a three-shift system in the context of persistently increasing difficulties in food and clothes provisions, they gave vent to their frustration in strikes: “Emotional sensitivity of women brought nervous excitement and determination in sustaining proposed demands and postulates, which in some cases involved desperate forms of behavior. It was one of the causes why arguments of impossibility of pay rises and immediate acknowledgement of postulates were hard to accept.” However, it was their desperate resistance, not directly rebellion on the Baltic coast, which made the government withdraw disastrous price rises in December 1970 (Lesiakowski 2008: 314).

It is legitimate at this point to return to the earlier mentioned question of periphery. As it results from the data quoted and the description of form and scope of the protest, female workers represented a huge social force. However, they did not have that force in social perception and social narration. Padaric Kenney describes this phenomenon as the “gender of resistance” (Kenney 1999). The power of workers’ protests (even though their origins were in economic and social dimensions) was usually measured by the system in terms of political rebellion. Yet as the strikes of female workers of weaving factories in Łódź in 1971 showed, it was those “peripheral” forms of contestation, which in a way broke out of typical actions by “subversive

²⁶ Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for the lack of knowledge on strikes is a lack of research conducted at the time or inability to publish them. Jan Lutyński points to the 1971 strikes as one of the researched subjects, whose results were not published, “accordingly they were not included in the circulation of sociological information” (Lutyński 1990: 88).

factors,” that proved effective.²⁷ From this perspective, the case of Łódź is instructive – it demonstrates the strength of periphery on one hand, but on the other hand, it shows how it could be utilized as a social engineering strategy which neutralizes or trivializes forms of protests, which in the public discourse (both official and underground ones)²⁸ might be diagnosed as less significant.²⁹

Following the strike wave on the Baltic coast and in Łódź, a new strategy of development was adopted, which aimed at economic modernization. It brought about tangible effects between 1972 and 1974 when the pace of economic growth reached its peak, however, in subsequent years stagnation tendencies prevailed caused by both global processes (rising crude prices and the oil crisis), and local ones – a quarter of the export income was allocated to paying back foreign credit, facing difficulties in satisfying previous obligations the government took new loans (Sielezin 2008: 199).

A specific exemplification of the above situation is Mrs. Adela’s narration. As I have noted, this case, as interesting as it is per se, kind of continues the hitherto presented story, because the story of Mrs. Adela about her work in a weaving factory begins in the middle of the 1970s.

The case of a female worker in Łódź

The two-hour autobiographical narrative interview with Mrs. Adela was conducted in 2012 in her flat in a location near Łódź. Mrs. Adela was born in the country about 40 km away from Łódź in 1943. Her childhood was severely

²⁷ For example, during the talks with strikers, when the authorities’ representative argued that due to ‘price regulations’ in December 1970 although prices of many food products were raised, some prices declined, for example, tights for children, “one of the angry female workers responded »Mr. minister, don’t you talk about cotton [...] Should I feed my child with tights and pull them like a chewing gum«” (Lesiakowski 2008: 296).

²⁸ For example, Andrzej Paczkowski (2003) in a small book on strikes in the communism era in Poland, in the 12-page chapter on the years 1968–1971, devotes five verses to the strikes in Łódź in 1971.

²⁹ *Nota bene* students’ strike in Łódź in 1981 was also similarly perceived. The protest, regarded as the longest sit-down strike of students in the 1980s in Europe, involved about 10,000 participants. According to relations of the leading participants of those events, the protest was initially underestimated by the authorities on account of recognizing the University of Łódź as a peripheral university. From the perspective of well-esteemed academic centers, such as Jagiellonian or Warsaw University, the rebellion of Łódź students was perceived as insignificant or even a provocation of the Secret Service (see the film *Bunt na Łodzi* (Rebellion in Łódź), directed by Jacek Talczewski, a biographical narrative interview with Barbara).

stigmatized with war – her father was killed in an execution, her mother was transported to compulsory work in Germany. Mrs. Adela, together with her siblings, was taken and was being raised by her mother's brother's family. After the war, her mother luckily returned home, but as a result of her abject poverty could not take care of the children. In time Mrs. Adela's elder sister went back to her mother while her sister and brother stayed on the uncle's farm. Mrs. Adela's childhood bears a close resemblance to Cinderella's – although her aunt did not have her own children, she hated her sister-in-law's daughter: Mrs. Adela was humiliated by her aunt, neglected, she was not able to continue her education in secondary school because she had no means to commute and no clothes to wear. She got married early, treating this change of status as a remedy for her family situation. However, as she noted it did not result in substantial improvement of her life situation – her husband's parents lived in poverty because of their own incompetence and inability (they were the only farm without electricity supply due to her father-in-law's objection), her husband started to drink heavily soon after and developed an alcoholic habit, following a typical pattern of development of state-owned farm workers. Mrs. Adela gave birth to and raised three daughters and when the youngest one started to attend kindergarten she took a weaver job in Uniontex – the largest weaving factory in Łódź, which employed about 14,000 people. She took that job in an action of factories seeking new workers in nearby villages. Workers paid a minimal fare for being transported to the factory in Łódź. Mrs. Adela was working in the factory for 23 years till 1998, when, aged 55, she took early retirement. On account of hard work conditions she wanted to quit earlier, but she had no alternative. Her daughters attended schools during that time. The eldest was studying in Warsaw, the middle one graduated from a technical secondary school, and then graduated from part-time studies while working already. The youngest one studied in the late 1980s. As explained by Mrs. Adela, working on a state-owned farm, her husband was entitled to receive free allowances of potatoes, milk, and vegetables, which prevented her daughters from obtaining student social allowance. Money was in short supply. After her husband's death, the narrator lived through a particularly tough time when she alone had to support herself and her youngest daughter at the university. Thus, all three daughters have full university education and developed stable professional careers. She now lives with one of them. Her grandchildren also graduated from the university or are about to graduate. When asked to sum up her life she exposes the experience of poverty, only now she can enjoy a stable life, she even started to travel with her daughter.

Mrs. Adela's narration comprises many interesting thematic threads and analytical dimensions. They cannot be discussed in detail here, but it is worth mentioning them. The most important includes the war impact and

war experiences of her parents on her biography, experience of abject poverty bordering on destitution, which was widespread particularly in the country, poignant trajectory of suffering, characteristic for nearly all the narrator's life, which resulted from an unhappy childhood (social orphanage and cruel treatment by her foster family), hard marriage and her husband's alcoholism (even though Mrs. Adela did not define her marriage as unhappy, but as ordinary, which is symptomatic *per se*), and, finally, an extremely harsh experience of working as a weaving worker. In the whole story the trajectory of suffering is the main biographical experience (Riemann, Schütze 1991). The individual trajectory is caused by a complicated constellation of life experiences – her family fate and difficult marriage. The collective level of trajectory relates to the experience of postwar poverty and then the experience of exhausting, slave-resembling work in the textile factory. That last thread, thanks to the theme of the chapter, deserves more space. The description of work in the weaving factory takes 156 verses altogether. Below are abridged quotes from that part of her narration.

(1) It was hard work, very hard work. Everybody always said it was a “white mine,” “white mine” simply...

I: Hmm.

N: Cause, you know, it was awful, terrible dust! Dust and even more dust. Maybe later, 'cause it was a few stages there, maybe further on, at the very/ at the threads they made, maybe there wasn't, but where I was working in earlier stages, it was abominable. When/ even, even there wasn't/ you had to be there: teasels – they raise dust, so [...] it settled on the face, hands [...] It had to be humid, it had to be humid and suitable temperature so, so that it could go on some way, you know. So it was sometimes that overalls often got stuck to your back, 'cause, 'cause it was so humid. Overalls stuck to your back and here you/ your face was stuck in dust (laughter) and settled on your hands, that dust was so horrible. The dust was everywhere! So, everybody was picking their noses (laughter) 'cause, 'cause it was a reflex, and that dust settled everywhere on your head, in your hair, in your eyes, in your ears, everywhere. So, if I worked in three shifts, for instance, from the morning, then the afternoons and the nights. And the nights. Five nights. But, on Saturdays we worked also in the afternoon for six hours, so there were afternoon shifts, 'cause later on, probably after *Solidarność* was established, they cancelled those afternoons, there weren't afternoon shifts on Saturdays.

(2) Anyways, the machine park was also trashy. For instance, in the early laundry there were machines from 1936. That machine park was out-dated. It was breaking down all the time. And it was... Maybe further on at the end itself they had a little/ cause there was/ where threads were, perhaps they had a bit more modern/ those machines were also, but also, [...] too, too, all the time, like ours. And it was there where women kept hands in the air all the time. Arms in the air all the time. Right. It was the same/ it was also/ perhaps they had less dust, but

again, they had the same hard work, and we were complaining we had lots of dust, and we had to lift lots of loads, and carry them, but they there [...] had such as if spools, you know, and they made such thin [...] but it was, I'm telling you, all the time, you know, arms were in the air and it was like that all the time. You know how it is, how much can you take? Ok. So, it was horrible.

Both of the quotes describe various aspects of work, which particularly from the current perspective, evokes associations of strenuous, back-breaking toil. It may be argued that the message expressed by means of a restricted code³⁰ is most gripping and does not require additional commentary. Let us try, however, to juxtapose it with the previously presented story of work in Łódź weaving factories. In the first quote Mrs. Adela focuses on work conditions related to her job, that is carding. Similarly to subsequent parts of the narration, it is dominated by physical experiences: dust and sweat, lifting heavy loads, working in a standing position with arms raised up, lack of time to relax and eat proper meals, which translates into another tangible dimension – unhealthy diet that leads to being overweight. Although research (Sokołowska 1986) confirms that an instrumental relation to one's own body is related to education – the lower the education the higher probability to treat one's body as a tool, which is subject to using up the longer it is exploited, in the presented pieces that body exploitation is experienced rather as obligatory than 'normative'. It is worth juxtaposing Mrs. Adela's narration with a short report "This is Łódź" published in *Dziennik Łódzki* from 1945, in the section "Factory reports":

This young, fair-haired female worker, whose face is so serene as if she did not hear piercing noise produced by the loom, as if she was not disturbed by the noise of all the machines in the hall. That noise is her element. The factory and her became one. She came to work here (supportive job) when she was 15. She is so intimately close to the loom that her fingers play on the warp like a pianist's fingers on the instrument" (Paszko 1945: 5).

The author of the text, Halina Paszko, visited the Zjednoczone Zakłady Włókiennicze (United Weaving Company) – formerly known as the Scheibler and Grohmann's factory, and subsequently Uniontex, where Mrs. Adela was working. The report presents a rhetorical figure diverse from Mrs. Adela's description, nevertheless it also relates to corporality. Noise is neutralized

³⁰ I refer here to Basil Bernstein's distinction of two language codes: the restricted code and elaborated code. An ability to use them is typically shaped by an individual's position in the social structure. The elaborated code is highly individual and unbound on a verbal level, requires a broader competence gained, for example, in the family environment and educational institutions. The restricted code reduces abilities of verbally expressed differences between individuals (Bernstein 1980: 58).

by characterizing it as an element with a positive meaning, working at the looms (described by Mrs. Adela as equally physically exhausting as her job) is not related to excess exploitation, but is dignified: it becomes a sort of art – a masterly crafted body. The instrument metaphor seems to neutralize the noise which appears to be a tune pleasing to the ear.

Therefore we deal here with two descriptions – an ideological one, made at the beginning of the new system era, which builds the figure of a worker as enthusiastically committed to the ethos of (socialist) work, and a biographical narration relying on experiences about 30 years later, concentrated on the hardship of work, which borders on the suffering experience. Both descriptions concern the same factory and both of them – in spite of different rhetoric – are quite similar when it comes to the description of work conditions. Mrs. Adela's report from the middle of the 1970s indicates that little had changed in the meantime. Remember, Uniontex was the largest weaving factory in Łódź (and one of the largest employers in Poland).

The degree of dramatic work conditions is not neutralized by social amenities described by Mrs. Adela:

(3) But if, for example, [...] what kind of policy it was, you know, they made bathrooms, bathrooms aaand that, and locked them! I don't know what it was, but it was, what kind of politics it was! They built bathrooms and locked them, and in fact, there were sinks here, there were sinks and it was/ there was a big bath to wash, but who used that bath if [you hardly finished your work and then had to run to catch a bus], and anyways, there was another shift coming in, so who was to go to that bath to wash? So you just ran there, you know, washed feet and face here a little and hands and quickly did it. Ok. So there were those baths, but they were miserable [...] When you worked in the morning, when I worked in the morning, then then [...] it was that [...] at four, at three I got up so where was I to eat breakfast?. I drank something and went to work. Aaand then at work too, when you came to the factory room you didn't know what to do, cause one was standing next to another, take dust out, sweep here, sweep and something, so about nine, what we had in the bag, how much you were/ had sandwiches in the bag, so you ate it at once, cause later there was no time anyway. Whatever there was to eat you ate at once and only when you arrived home, so as late as about 3 pm or so, you could eat something... anyways, you got used to it, cause what else could you do. So we laughed, then we were covered with that thick dust, and I was always this very thin, and then in that factory, cause when you stuffed yourself, so quickly, on the run/ you ate here, you looked there, you put a pot here, 'cause here we go, here is the manager coming, so you mustn't quietly sit down there to eat quietly, so you grabbed something to eat quickly, aaand you know [...], so [...] and we had drinks, yeah. It's the first category of employment, only later, you didn't get anything for it... You didn't get anything for it, 'cause, you know, there was no/ there was no/ there were bonuses, then they were taken

away and so you know. At first there was even milk, milk and soft drinks. And then gradually milk disappeared (laughter) and we had some water, some lousy water they brought, but whatever [...] OK. So it was, it was hard work.

In the excerpt describing possibilities of using the bath two issues need highlighting. Firstly, using irony the narrator stresses paradoxes of the work organization system – there are baths, but they are locked. Restricted access aimed, as might be guessed from the report, at protecting these amenities from exploitation and maintaining smoothness of work. Mrs. Adela distinctly points out that in the existing organization of work it was not possible for her to use the bath because she would either incur sanctions of the management (for leaving the work station too early), or she could disorganize her private time as she would miss the company bus. Secondly, introducing an aspect of gender is a most interesting element in this excerpt. While describing her work in collective terms, Mrs. Adela uses the first person plural in the feminine form all the time, alternatively she simply speaks about other women.³¹ The topic of men working in the same factory is first introduced in the narration in the excerpt quoted above (then it appears again when Mrs. Adela describes activities of *Solidarność* trade unions) in the context of their greater possibility of organizing their own working time. There appears a sentence: “well, men there had perhaps more leeway there” and it is contrasted with a statement indicating nearly physical ties to the work station: “for us, we couldn’t leave the machine. We couldn’t.” Leaving the work station could result in an ‘internal’ consequence (from this perspective, a woman sort of became a part of the machine) – it could disturb the rhythm of the machine work which raised implications – and an ‘external’ one – an omission could be noticed by a foreman.

One more excerpt deserves observation, which concerns the company transport.

And the worst was [...] it was/ nights were horrible, they were, nights were terrible, so very tiring, nights. But, mornings too, from the morning, as well. For example, in the morning when I here, err we were leaving before 4 am, half past three, twenty to four, and buses were running at will. So at half past five I started my work, but often as early as ten past four I arrived at the factory. So you were sitting on a bench in the changing room, you were sitting and waiting, till half past five you were sitting, as one depended on the bus here, as there was no other transport, one had to wait only for this bus cause there was no other bus and only this bus took you back and forth. And then how much, actually, practically was it? Thirteen, fourteen hours at work.

³¹ Verbs’ endings in the Polish language are subject to conjugation in feminine, masculine, or neuter genders.

The rules of Mrs. Adela's work did not only govern her lifestyle (e.g., previously mentioned irrational eating habits which led to being overweight), comprised not only hours spent at the machine, but also encroached her spare time, for example, spent on sleeping at night (natural, physiologically essential body recovery). The description above perfectly illustrates the previously mentioned scheme of 'landless peasants'. Managing personal and social time in diverse dimensions is one of cultural and ideological tools for exercising control (Guriewicz 2001). In the quoted excerpt it stands out clearly in the linguistic layer highlighting a contrast between impersonal passivity: "one was sitting and waiting" and anthropomorphism of the system: "buses carried us at will." We deal here with forced twofold mobility: in the literal sense, as described in the quote above, and in a deeper social sense, when in the context of the whole story the company transport to the factories of the recruited 'Mazowsze' is more suited to the figure of 'landless peasant' than class-privileged beneficiaries of the system. The excerpts presented above strike with their simplicity and potent imagery. Set against previously described work conditions of Łódź female weavers they show that actually little had changed about the weaving industry in the several decades of the People's Republic of Poland (perhaps except higher wages, particularly when working overtime, that is on Saturdays, and occasionally even on Sundays). Although the story of Mrs. Adela is set in the 1970s and 80s, so in the time of rapid modernization of the country thanks to the new economic strategy in the so called Gierek's era, it may as well be set in the research of Hanna Świdziemba from the turn of the 1940s and 50s. Mrs. Adela's narration also proves that the situation of female laborers, who also had to perform family roles, take care of daily provisions – difficulties in getting essential goods, even if changeable, remained an element of the socialist landscape. This picture, built from the perspective of a single biography, which is at the same time representative of the collective experience of Łódź female workers, may be contrasted with an external perception of the city's modernization, which can be embodied in huge industrial factories, thus described by Mrs. Adela:

Uniontex, that is the Obrońców Pokoju, you know, Tymienieckiego and Piotrkowska Streets.

I: Hmm.

N: It was the largest factory in Europe. Twelve, when I started to work there, there worked 12,000 people (2) and there was an entrance/ there were twelve porter's gates. Twelve porter's gates. Because it was...

I: I didn't know that.

N: Yes, there were twelve porter's gates. To get in, you know. It was, you know, a very large factory, 'cause it was: it was from there er Fabr-/err that Targowa

– entrances, here from Piotrkowska this whole area and here. It was a factory A, B, C and D. A – was a weaving plant, D – it was – ‘cause it is here from Kilińskiego in the direction to Piotrkowska there were A and D, and C here, it was a weaving and finishing plant, dyery plant, it was here. And here was A – it was a medium weaving plant/ thin-/ thin-/ I’m sorry, it was thin weaving, and I was working in the medium one, in weaving plant B, it was in Tymienieckiego here, the corner of Przędzalniana and Tymienieckiego.

While describing the layout of the factory Mrs. Adela refers to the knowledge and spatial imagination of the interviewer who, she knows, lives in Łódź. Additional explanations are therefore unnecessary. Marking the space by giving street names and meticulous recreation of the topography of the factory indicates not just its huge size, but also her preservation of the mental map of the place, where for over twenty years Mrs. Adela was working, and whose topography she probably had to learn as a Łódź non-native, which, as claimed before, in the context of the work environment of female weavers had degrading overtones. I will return to the thread of the narrator’s relation to space later.

The presentation of Mrs. Adela’s story of her work could be supplemented by a visual image created in documentary films devoted to women’s work. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, a series of documentary films dedicated to working women, which were made by female directors who co-created the Polish school of documentary films. It suffices to refer to two films directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska.³² *Our Friends from Łódź*, is a 16-minute film presenting three women at three points of their biographies, namely in the second, third, and fourth decade of their lives. They may be used to building pictures of the life of a Łódź female weaver from her twenties, who after graduating from a vocational school works in a factory, attends a secondary technical school in the evenings, but the three-shift system of work prevents her from reconciling work and further education (her shift foreman does not agree to it in spite of his former promises). A young girl is full of dreams and aspirations – we do not know if she will accomplish them.³³ The second woman is a mother to three children. Her story exposes endurance of everyday hardships – her family (although her husband does not appear in the film) lives in a wing of an ordinary shabby tenement house with no conveniences in Łódź. We do not listen to the woman’s narration, we only observe scenes of her work and feeding children with bread

³² *The 24 Hours of Jadwiga L.*, 1967, directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska, produced by WFD, 14 min.; *Our Friends from Łódź*, 1971, directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska, produced by WFD, 16 min.

³³ In the gathered research material there is a narration of another Łódź female weaver, who had to quit her secondary technical school due to similar reasons.

and jam and tea in the kitchen, where they could hardly squeeze in. Finally, we watch the third female weaver during her visit at the doctor's – she is 44, and has already been working for over 20 years. Her emaciated body suffers due to back-breaking work (she suffers from arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders caused by irregularly eating proper meals resulting from the three-shift system of work). Then we observe her in the factory hall and listen to her narration from behind the camcorder, which almost drowns in the noise of machines, about hard work, a cold living space without conveniences, her husband, who does not join in any housework. Her hope is in her daughters, who attend schools, all her efforts aim at investing in their future, to ensure a better life thanks to education.

The second film, *The 24 Hours of Jadwiga L.*, shows one day in the life of a woman, who has three children and works in a factory in Łódź. The film begins with the scene when she leaves home and goes to work the night shift. After returning home, her space is a flat, where she regularly and systematically moves between the kitchen, where she stirs soup every now and then, and the room, where she irons her clothes, where her bed is, where her resting time is governed by the precisely set alarm clock. The viewer gets an impression that all activities are executed in rhythm, well-planned in advance, determined by the layout of the flat, and the way to and from work.³⁴ The other members of the household, two younger children, husband and a teenage daughter (who scatters her clothes around and makeup in front of the mirror), are, all in their own ways, as it were, from other worlds. A seemingly different world than the monotonous everyday life of Jadwiga L., who is systematically 'against the flow' of normal life, as it is at odds with a biological rhythm of life. The film starts in the evening, when Jadwiga L. prepares to leave home for work when the others prepare to go to bed. The author "used staging, so that the static and ordered stills would underline the monotony and banality of the daily grind: legs onto which hands pull stockings, the chair from which hands remove a shirt, a silhouette in the kitchen, the face at work, repeated actions of wire drawing in the factory, getting on a bus, standing in a queue, ironing, sitting down at a laid table. In this way the film maker creates a picture of an anonymous woman,

³⁴ That picture seems to be a quite lasting cultural figure pointing to the closed women's world in spite of the system's change. I found a similar description of the pre-war time and life of a pre-war female worker in other biographical materials. One of the professors describing his university study time at the turn of the 1940s and 50s thus recalls her classmate: "It was a classmate of mine who came from a beautiful social background of the time as he was a son of Łódź workers. His mother, both parents were working in Poznański's factory then, *his mother, as he wrote in his CV, knew only two ways: she left home only for the factory or church* [emphasis added by K.K.]. He was so very loyal to the party. Very strictly devoted to the party, he stuck to it."

broken into a dozen repetitive gestures and actions, that say almost nothing about her individuality, yet a lot about the role she plays in life.”³⁵

While collecting autobiographical narrations in various scientific and methodological contexts we may face a question of the authenticity of stories and the truth of description. There is too little place here to discuss this issue – it would require an extended methodological commentary. We should note though that coherence in the case of the presented materials herein by Mrs. Adela and the picture shown in the documentary films is rather striking. As a matter of fact, the narration of a Łódź female weaver could constitute a commentary accompanying all of these documentaries, both in the esthetic and chronological dimensions – the films above were made at the turn of the 1960s and 70s, we can also add to them Irena Kamińska’s *Female Workers*³⁶ documentary film, made in 1981, depicting female weavers’ work in a factory in Krosno, which is a faithful reflection of Mrs. Adela’s narration.

The description of work in the textile factory, belongs to the main part of the narrative. In the questioning part Mrs. Adela is asked about the strike in August 1980 which she does not mention herself, but she probably must have witnessed. The narrator did take part in the strike, when asked, Mrs. Adela talks about her experiences formulating a long and very dense recount. It is worth quoting it in its whole length:

It was/ it was/ the time of strike. There were strikes, it was/ we didn’t work, we weren’t allowed to leave the room. And it was, I don’t know, fear,³⁷ it was such **anxiety** [...], there was some **dread** (shows the atmosphere of terror). It was silent in the rooms, **dark everywhere**, kind of **twilight**. And we were **afraid**, we had a **fear**. Even in the streets, when we were leaving, it was like that in the town/ it was in Łódź/ trams, all, you know, was at a standstill, and it was **horribly hollow**, it was **hollow all around**, it was **very unpleasant**. There was a **fear**. There was simply a **fear**. And that Solidarność – how did they appear here? In that Uniontex. It was that they chose the unions for/ that, that Solidarność and selected one such man, and later he was even for the whole Uniontex. But, I saw him [...] frankly speaking, I saw him as [...] (looking for a word) a quirt, I would define him. ‘Cause he was maybe about thirty, maybe over thirty. And he enjoyed drinking. So he began his work as/ he came to work and began work in our room and I knew him for that. And then he was working only on one shift, ‘cause he was like as if he was cleaning machines, repaired them, ‘cause when you worked from the morning then one-two machines were standing idle, because they were/ thoroughly cleaned and greased. So he had this kind of job. So he worked only on one shift, from the morning. So it was him,

³⁵ The text written by Mikołaj Jazdon is derived from an informational brochure attached to a series of films released by the Polish Audiovisual Institute.

³⁶ *Female Workers*, directed by Irena Kamińska, produced by WFD, 16 min.

³⁷ The words are bolded by the author.

they said, that had those rationing cards, there they were, you know, there were such meetings, and there he spoke, and another guy as well that rationing cards, sugar, and it was probably about two kilos per person of that sugar. And those rationing cards, it couldn't be like that, and you know, to improve working conditions, make free Saturdays, so we could have free Saturdays and you know it all. But, enrolling on the list of those trade unions?? I didn't enroll because I didn't belong to either side, so I didn't enroll in *Solidarność* either. I just didn't like that man. Perhaps if it was somebody different, and if I didn't know him, but I recognized and knew him, that he seduced young mistresses, you know, he ran away and got married theeeere/ there were other such young girls working in other rooms so he presented himself as a bachelor, but he had been married, and he was fooling around, because it was too little/ you know. While he was working with us he was dependent on the foreman so he had to stay in the room, but later when he was only cleaning those machines then the foreman didn't pick on him so he was running around the whole factory at will, right? So I know that, you know. So he didn't have a very interesting reputation and so, I don't know, I believed and I didn't believe what he did there, you know. Here on TV they also said that, you know, then it just happened that it was such/ probably it was a rainy summer err summer/ you know/ it was rainy and here err, you know/ people couldn't bring in all their crops from the fields, OK? And, you know, they again on the radio were saying and they were blaming the weather, but not that everything was carried away to Russia, right? So you kind of believed in it, too. And there was *Solidarność*, and when that one of *Solidarność*/ they established those unions, and you know, wanted us to enroll, and how goooooood it would be, and that there were bad conditions there, and wanted better working conditions, you know, they offered, that they would cancel rationing cards, you know, so some people believed them, others didn't believe them, 'cause, you know, what it was like then, don't you? But, it was simply/ it was this kind of period, it was [...] err, you know [...] **fear, fear, fear**. Because we were staying at those machines and there was, you know, **fear**, generally there was **fear**. But, then when they went on strike, they went on strike about anything. Somebody said to change err that shop assistant. You know, that shop assistant in that, 'cause there was such a shop, right? At the factory. So about the shop assistant. "We strike to change the shop assistant!" so it didn't make much sense either [...] So, I don't know... What freedom of speech?? Anyways, err what could they say there? To whom? The manager?? When the manager came, then what? Were you to tell on somebody? On the foreman or on something else? Then he/ he wouldn't be behind me, but he would be behind the foreman [still...]. Then whom? [...] Who could you go and complain to? The manager, when he was coming in from afar, all took to work and everybody stood at the machines, 'cause/ 'cause sitting at the machine wasn't welcome, even if they had a spare moment, to sit down or something.

As we can see, Mrs. Adela presents the description of the strike as one of the phases of establishing a *Solidarność* trade union movement. Her perspective is very intriguing.

Firstly, her way of experiencing the strike does not correspond with commonly known images of the strike atmosphere of those days which, especially from the perspective of the results (victory of the *Solidarność* movement in 1980 and the so called *Solidarność Spring*), are usually created in a collective memory as a festivity of freedom, social enthusiasm, and a great achievement introducing future democratic changes; whereas Mrs. Adela recalls her experiences as mainly associated with a feeling of fear. We can see it in the text by accumulation of words describing the mood of dread. Although the restricted code dominates the narrator's story, yet, here her language is very expressive. She uses different words to describe fear, applies different linguistic means in order to reconstruct the atmosphere, like specifying the tone of her voice, describing emotions by recounting them, using various expressions and emphasizing words, drawing a gloomy picture of both the factory and the whole city. Although the narrator does not allude to such associations, the Polish reader can easily build them, for example, referring to the described atmosphere to sayings like "silence before the storm" or a commonly known poem "silent everywhere, hollow everywhere, what will be, what will be."³⁸ Mrs. Adela's description is also based on the double contrast: the image of a noisy and dusty workshop hall is contrasted with terrible silence and a lack of any motion and activity – "horribly hollow." It is as if she wanted to stress that a factory which is not working becomes socially defined as a *worse* reality than noisy and dusty conditions of work, though so difficult to manage. We may treat this ambivalence as a metaphor of the future liquidation of the textile industry in Łódź in the late 90s when all textile factories were sold, then quickly bankrupted and thousands of people lost their jobs. The second contrast has been already mentioned; it is related to the discrepancy between her experiences and interpretations evoked by stereotypical images of workers' strikes in 1980, which were rather associated with action and agency.

Secondly, Mrs. Adela constructs her narration about strikes in a very interesting way. She starts with a short description concentrated on emotions (fear) and a gloomy image of hopeless waiting. Then she introduces an extended commentary on the local context of the social movement represented by the person/man with doubtful moral legitimacy and not fully representative of female textile workers' professional life. From the very beginning the man is placed on the side of a privileged group of workers.³⁹ When flirting with women he uses a closed awareness context (Strauss) by presenting himself as

³⁸ This phrase comes from a very well-known romantic piece *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz.

³⁹ See the previous fragment of the narrative when Mrs. Adela describes the division into men's and women's worlds of work.

a bachelor. The strategy of building this asymmetric relationship (by a closed awareness context) and playing with women puts them in the position of objects, a very similar one to their world of work. Mrs. Adela estimates the man's behavior by relating to moral values, but her lack of trust in this respect is transmitted onto the man as a *Solidarność* activist whose aim would be to fight for workers' rights and democracy. In Mrs. Adela's perspective, the basic distribution of power had not changed that much because her position as a labor worker remained the same – she was still dependent on others placed higher in the working hierarchy. Thus Mrs. Adela does not expose collective values promoted by *Solidarność*. She alludes neither to democratic values, noble ideas like freedom nor the chance to regain the dignity of a worker. To the contrary, she shows how the development of careers was based on local power relations, not necessarily associated with noble ideas of "Solidarity," how new channels of social upgrading (this time being an activist in a democratic social movement) were occupied by people not representing her as a worker. Again, gender differences discriminating between women's and men's worlds of work are coming to the forefront. The *Solidarność* movement is described from the perspective of rootedness in *milieu* and not history.⁴⁰ After this comment Mrs. Adela comes back to the rhetoric of fear in order to close this fragment with the comment about having no agency also in a new situation officially defined as a new social agreement – Mrs. Adela "simply" confirms her status. The power related positions were in part newly distributed, partly remained the same, but nevertheless, this did not change her/the workers' position.

In Mrs. Adela's story, positive changes introduced by *Solidarność* merge with the developing crisis in the early 80s and gradually worsen work conditions as we could see in one of the earlier quoted fragments. She does not see positive effects of the workers' revolt, especially on a collective level. Social changes introduced by *Solidarność* are as if a herald of future economic and social changes that from Mrs. Adela's view were experienced as a lower income, increasing difficulties with availability of work, and finally privatization.⁴¹ In the narrator's case, she retired so she did not experience the fate of thousands of

⁴⁰ I allude to the concept of rootedness in *milieu* and rootedness in history coined out in the project *Biography and National Identity* based on the life stories of Poles who experienced World War II. The research was conducted in early 1990. In the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź. One of the results of the narrative analysis was identification of two different modes of interpretations of one's biographical experiences when presenting them in frames of local *milieu* or in a broader historical context (Czyżewski 1996).

⁴¹ Although she does not mention it directly both the narrator and the listener, who come from Łódź, know the fate of the local textile industry, which after the crash of the Eastern market in the early 90s, totally collapsed.

female workers who lost their jobs and in many cases they became permanently unemployed. Therefore the stigmatization of these kinds of workers continued, yet in a different decorum of capitalism. In this respect, moving from one system to another appeared to be a very painful process.

An analysis of Mrs. Adela's biography perfectly shows mechanisms of losing agency in the world of work. That is probably the reason for not drawing an enthusiastic or at least positive picture of *Solidarność* times. It is worth referring here to the concept of *homo sovieticus* elaborated by Józef Tischner (1992).⁴² Among other features he exposes especially three values appreciated by *homo sovieticus*: work, power, and dignity. They were framed by the communist ideology and provided background for the described paradoxes of socialism. Work in these terms was defined as the main social value of the system upgrading "men of work," mainly workers, giving them power and a sense of dignity coming from both: appreciation of the world of work and positioning workers as a leading social class. People were taught that these values were guaranteed by the communist system and as a result an attitude of *homo sovieticus* was constructed as a slave-minded man passively accepting the system's expectations. He started revolting against the system when it stopped respecting *his* values. When entering capitalism, *homo sovieticus* was used to his mentality and expected the new system to respect values defined in the previous one. Post-communist societies experienced so many difficulties in the new democratic civil society because people continued to passively expect the mentioned values to be guaranteed privileges, but not individually gained achievements.

Moving from socialism to capitalism has been a long and painful process. I gave this comment to put more light to the discussed problem, but also to show that Mrs. Adela – although she fulfilled the main features of a working class member – did not have a chance to make use of the two mentioned values: power and dignity. Obviously, the discussion of what these values really meant can be considered as one of the key points in contemporary studies on the socialist system. There is no space to present it here, but I tried to show in this chapter to what extent this ideological construction of reality appeared to be false in the face of social construction of reality. Coming from the beginning of this chapter we can see here the double paradox built on the collective social level, as well as on the peripheral level of specificity of the textile industry and female workers.

⁴² The very notion was introduced by Aleksandr Zinowjew, then discussed by Leszek Kołakowski and developed by Józef Tischner. There is no space for reconstructing its meaning elaborated by the above thinkers. Here I refer only to some aspects of Tischner's *homo sovieticus* concept.

Conclusions

My goal was to confront frequently discussed paradoxes of real socialism in sociological and historical literature through a specific case. This, in my view, is not only a good exemplification of those paradoxes, but it also shows how within their framework subsequent paradoxes intrinsic to the place locality might be constructed. In the case in question the measure of this locality is peripherality, whose various aspects were discussed herein. As a reminder, the starting point is the peripherality of Łódź as an industrial city and peripherality of female weavers in their world of work, which also in the time of the People's Republic of Poland was diversified and hierarchical. One of the effects of that peripherality was striking invariability of the world of work, which comprised the work environment, work conditions, and distribution of knowledge and power in subsequent decades of the socialist era. An analysis of the press articles from the 1940s and contemporary narrations, supplemented with documentary films from the 1970s and 1980s, shows changes only in the rhetoric of presenting the world of work, but not its real (r)evolution.

In regards to Mrs. Adela, one can pose a question if her case should be interpreted as a uniquely unlucky confluence of life circumstances. Or, should it be interpreted as an exemplification of not a single, but somehow a significant biographical profile of the period of the People's Republic of Poland? The *microscopic* perspective of description, relying not only on presenting this biography, but equally as important Łódź and its local female laborers, was aiming at expanding the range of analyses on more universal contexts and interpretations of phenomena and social processes (Geertz 2005: 36). Either of the two strategies could be utilized here: recreating my reasoning from details to generalities, or conversely, showing the cases of Łódź and Mrs. Adela against a broader context. The choice of the latter strategy, perhaps misleading in regards to established methodological premises, enables us to fit the case in question in specific chronology and dynamics of (anti)changes during the socialism era, which were contextualized in specific social space and therefore, on the whole, seemed more interesting to me.

The biographical method uses, for example, a distinction between a *life story* built by the narrator and a *life history* – put differently, between life as related and life as lived (Rosenthal 2012: 49). This distinction proves to be very instructive in regards to Mrs. Adela's narration, where certain elements of her life history might indicate potentially alternative interpretations of this biography. They include, for example, taking quite a well-paid job in the city, spatial mobility enabling a perspective beyond the little community of the village, and social advancement of her daughters, who gained higher education. These facts from Mrs. Adela's life allows us to fit in her biography,

in a positive image of the post-war system, the opening of channels for social advancement and creating new structures of opportunities. However, although it was undoubtedly true in other biographical contexts, Mrs. Adela's narration does not substantiate this interpretation. It is hard to perceive her biography as a result of social advancement while it was dominated by the trajectory of suffering inherent in the subsequent stages of her life (social orphanage, tough childhood, living with an alcoholic husband, back-breaking slave labor against the backdrop of her family and everyday life difficulties). The higher education of her daughters is presented in the narration not from a perspective of open structures of opportunities, but as an effect of their own motivation and hardship of their mother's work to gain money to maintain the children. In her story there are no elements indicative of her own sense of advancement. On the contrary – quite a well-paid employment was described in the light of slave-like work conditions, a sense of deprivation with regard to satisfying daily needs: provision shortages, never-ending struggle for existence, and her family and the narrator's invariable sense of tiredness:

[W]hen I come to think about it and say: "How could you stand it? [...] How could you put up with it?, Right?" And, remember you couldn't buy anything then. Here in the country, you couldn't buy anything, you had to stay in Łódź and buy there/ you had to shop around in Łódź, you always managed to hunt for something and buy it. And then you had to come back home, I had three kids/ three daughters, and you had to buy something and/ I could sew, so I did (laughter), and I did something more, and I don't really know. However, two elder daughters could clean and you know, they gave me a hand, but the youngest one, the one I live with here, was six years old, so she was like: after the night shift, she covered me, covered and kissed me. She thought she was doing something good to me, wasn't she? (laughter), but she woke me up, and I was so tired from that, you know. And when you wake up after the night then you often slept [...] and you were tired, anyway. Nights were terrible. Terrible nights for work.

Although Mrs. Adela does not use this term, in many images presented, both she and other female weavers are deprived of dignity in regards to various contexts of their biographies, which on account of the system's considerations were dominated by the world of work. With reference to such cases the paradox of ideological privilege is particularly tangible.

Post scriptum completing this image is nearly a total liquidation of the weaving industry in Łódź. The complex of Uniontex, the Obrońców Pokoju State-owned Textile Company no 2, was partly revitalized, partly fell into ruin. The building of the great Scheibler's factory, so precisely where Mrs. Adela was working, comprises luxury lofts, and their developers and owners willingly refer to the pre-war narration of tycoons rather than the socialist era history of

the facilities – the spinning mill B located on the corner of Przędzalniana and Tymienieckiego streets. Thus the peripherality is enriched with a new meaning – this time in the dimension of a generational history of Łódź female weavers. To a certain extent, their personal biography, whose considerable part was spent working in a production hall, is symbolically invalidated by eliminating it from the fixed reality. Just like Mrs. Adela many years ago could not see effects of her work (endless bales of material disappeared ‘somewhere’), now she cannot build a sense of continuity of the biography through references to sites which disappeared from the topographic and symbolic map of the city.

Katarzyna Waniek

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING A CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SOCIALIST REGIME IN POLAND

The chapter attempts to explore the socio-biographical conditions under which a far-reaching change in subjective understanding and interpretations of the socio-political system in post-war Poland may have taken place. The findings to be discussed are based on five autobiographical narrative interviews with well-educated people: intellectuals, academics, and artists born between 1947–1954 who were raised and educated in the Polish Peoples' Republic (PPR) and who were adults or young adults during the so-called “real” socialism era. What makes their biographies intriguing is that the socio-political system in which they grew up (“taken for granted” and “natural” world of everyday life) has become questionable and problematic, that is, it has ceased to be coherent, plausible, and trustworthy. Hence, the key questions to be considered here are: how (or by whom) the process of “awakening” or “alternation” was initiated, why it was possible at all and how it unfolded?

It should be noted that the individuals whose autobiographical renderings will be investigated here were not prominent figures or players in the anti-communist civil opposition organizations. They rather played second fiddle in developing a regime critique and contesting the system, still, their experiences and interpretation of the social and historical processes are of great importance for the understanding of individual and collective mechanisms and phenomena. It should also be mentioned that there are many publications in which the life histories of people who – according to Alfred Schütz's concept – may be called “the well-informed citizens” or “the experts” (1946) were presented (e.g., Mucha, Keen 2006, Torańska 1994, 2004, 2006, Kondratowicz 2001, Grupińska 2011). They were rather not meticulously discussed and analyzed in the light of the autobiographical narrative interview method. The aim of this chapter is thus, not only to enrich the spectrum of the possible variants of biographical experiences and their social and historical consequences among well-educated Polish people, but

also to show complexity and a multi-levelness of individual and collective transformation processes.

Within the broad scope of empirical data collection, there are some compelling life histories of people who were born into the world in which the communist and later also the real socialist political system was taken for granted and seen as a world beyond question. Their everyday reality initially created and maintained by their parents, then supported by the education system and the omnipresent communist propaganda were both biographical and structural conditions fostering “attuning to the system.” For a long time (sometimes till their adulthood) it was sufficiently coherent and consistent to let them “unwittingly” benefit from the opportunities given by the state and ignore political turmoil. However, at some point in their life course, they were confronted with alternative definitions of the socio-political system. This made them radically change their attitude towards the world of their daily life and profoundly reinterpret the meaning of the past, re-evaluate their identities and reconsider their life orientations (cf., Strauss 1959), as well as to search for new sense-making resources. Among the cases discussed below counter-definitions that put the reality of the interviewees’ daily life in question were: 1. the consequence of some critical “awakening” incident in the biographical experience which is a turning point marking “some sort of movement in identity” (Strauss 1959: 93–94) – the case of Wanda; 2. discovered and adopted after entering social worlds that (sometimes in passing) were criticizing, contesting and/or actively fighting against the regime; and 3. mediated by politically active significant others.

The sequence of events and related inner changes, as told by the aforementioned interviewees, seem to correspond with Berger and Luckmann’s description of alternation processes “in which accents are radically re-assigned” (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 176) and consequently one “must cope with a problem of dismantling, disintegrating the preceding nomic structure of subjective reality” (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 176). This nomic structure – which should be remembered – is guaranteed by an overreaching symbolic universe that also “provides order for the subjective apprehension of biographical experience” (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 115).

While gradually (mentally) abandoning the old reality and the unquestioned and consistent world of everyday life, the interviewees had to systematically broaden and reformulate their stock of knowledge at hand (and sometimes even acquire a new one) which would help them understand and legitimize the new order. It is very much apparent in the formal features of their storytelling: there are a lot of argumental commentaries which are to explain to the listener and themselves how the process of alternation was triggered, how its dynamics developed (cf., Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977, Schütze 1987), and how this change has influenced their life then and now.

Before discussing in detail individuals' cases it is important to mention and discuss some common frames and features of their biographical experience: 1. they are all children of the war generation and in their childhood and adolescence they have to deal with "overprotective" parents and suspicious awareness context; and 2. they go through the alternation process that implies reflexive and critical (re)thinking of their past and thus they are forced at least to initiate some sort of biographical work.

Post-war generation

It is remarkable that in all cases discussed in this chapter there are extended passages in which informants deal with World War II experiences of their parents or their suffering in the era of the Stalinist terror just after the war and (sometimes implicitly) show their effects on family life and on maintaining or developing certain attitudes towards the communistic regime and the real socialism era. Often their autobiographical accounts start with an extensive reconstruction of their family members' background and engagement in remote historical events (not only the fight with the Nazi occupation). We should note, however, that the very interviewees neither were participants in the war nor eyewitnesses to the war atrocities, but were born into the world that was "saturated" with traumatic (and/or silent) recollections of that time. As many other people of the wartime generation, their parents had to struggle with painful experiences of threats of imminent death, of losing close family members, of fear, of hunger, of powerlessness, of seeing other people dying or suffering, but also with consequences of destruction of moral basis of social cooperation associated with a mutual lack of trust and loyalty (cf., Schütze 2014: 257). To put it in other words, they were entangled in the collective trajectory of suffering and (at least some of them) were trapped in the collective moral deterioration (cf., Schütze 1992). Thus, there is no doubt that war exerted a deep influence both on the narrators' parents and (through the processes of transgenerational transmission) on the very narrators' schemes of interpretations, frames of reference, systems of orientation and hierarchies of values.¹ In other words, parents often had to "fade out" their sufferings that were too painful to be remembered, but still, as if "unconsciously," affected their lives. Usually, the parents – sometimes being morally trapped – did not want to admit how much they had to sacrifice to ensure emotional and financial security for

¹ Silencing or veiling the experiences of the Second World War by parents usually has damaging consequences both for themselves and their children. This issue was, among others, widely discussed from different perspectives by Gabriele Rosenthal (see 1998, 2003).

their families and to give their children a sense of autonomy and freedom. This usually meant introducing a suspicious awareness context, that is, concealing their true identity and genuine reasons for actions. Yet, keeping their children from realizing or even suspending their real motives, aims, and biographical costs (cf., Glaser, Strauss 1964: 670) may lead to a risk of misunderstanding and growing distrust in the family.

Undoubtedly, the experience of war and (in some cases) the repressions of the Stalinist era had a significant impact on the way the “new” post-war reality and the Soviet-dependent authorities were perceived and defined by the wartime generation. Being very tired of painful memories of those years, first and foremost, people desperately wanted to return to a normal life and the “normal order of things.” They employed different strategies of (re)normalization of their mundane life in order to find peace and quiet. The overwhelming fear of war and the need for security (usually associated with the idea “no more war”) prevailed and probably held many people back from thinking about the socio-political system in a critical way and from objecting it directly. Many of them were ready to support any “agendas” which provided a sense of social order and guarantee some sort of equilibrium in order not to expose their children to any harm and danger. Still, it must be remembered that the war-time generation’s attitude to the system was very much differentiated: there were people who were devoted, ideologically-involved followers, some others felt (at least for some time) privileged and therefore obliged to be grateful for their advancement.² There were those who believed in its modernization project, some were pragmatically obedient citizens, some were indifferent, and still, others were conciliated with the (political) situation and did not believe that anything could be changed. Regardless of their more or less conscious attitude towards the communist regime, the parents wished a normal life for their children. Some of them, consequently, became overprotective in different ways and very demanding. They devoted themselves to protecting their children and securing a better future for them.

Finally, we must also take into account that a considerable number of people of the war and the post-war generation believed that the state-socialist system would never end. Even those who did not accept it aimed rather at transforming it and creating independent arenas of discourse, than at bringing it down.³

² There were mostly workers and impoverished who – as Padraic Kenney puts it – “were anointed the new ruling class” (Kenney 1997).

³ Bogdan Borusewicz in Dariusz Rosiak’s book described the situation in Poland at the beginning of the 1970s in the following way: “Then [...] nobody thought about overthrowing the system and breaking alliances seriously” (Rosiak 2014: 62).

1. A critical transforming incident in the life course of Wanda Nemec⁴ (b. 1954)

The course of events in her life – until she was a law student finishing her final year – seemed to be almost a perfect scenario⁵ for “a socialistic development of a young woman.” She was a clever and diligent student coming from a “model” socialistic family with a strong figure of a father⁶ – an engineer who held many managerial positions in the electronics industry in Poland and who believed in modernization. She says: “My parents belonged to the generation which started their careers [...] in fact they had completed their studies right before the Polish October⁷ and were about to start working and were full of hopes that something would change in this country.” There is no wonder that Wanda also believed in the promise of equality and social justice, the processes of modernization and industrialization and opportunity structures that could be used by all who were ready to work for the common good and the benefit of a community as she did. She was a member of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association and then she was active in the Polish Socialist Student Association (an organization supporting the socialistic order). This “idealistic” picture might have “pulled the wool over her eyes” and impeded her will and ability to systematically reflect on the political, social, and ideological issues. Yet, a certain (cited below) critical interactional episode forced her to recognize that there is something wrong with the taken-for-granted reality (and the state-socialist ideology) she used to believe in.

[...] and a third- or fourth-year student approached me saying: you know what, Wanda, maybe you would like to become a member of the Party?” I said: “You know what, Mary, I haven’t thought about my future yet and what I will be doing in

⁴ All the names are anonymized.

⁵ In other words, her biographical development was seamlessly organized by institutional expectations of her parents and the socialistic society.

⁶ At least from her current perspective (i.e., presented at the time of the interview) it seems that although her father was a devoted “Builder of the People’s Poland” he did not accept the system without reservation. Wanda mentions that he was very critical about the politics of Władysław Gomułka (see also the note below) and he very negatively experienced and evaluated “the games within the Communist Party by means of those catchy anti-Jewish slogans” in 1968.

⁷ In October 1956 Władysław Gomułka took power as First Secretary of the Party and offered a “Polish road to socialism” which marked a major change in the Polish political system (later called “small stabilization”). It is believed that then the era of the Stalinist repressions and terror ended and Poland recovered (at least partially) its sovereignty and liberty.

three years, it is a long-term perspective.” “Well, think about it, your grade average is very good, erm, if you become a member, then we will find a place for you in assistant lectureship.” I looked at her [...] and I was usually enthusiastic also when it came to social life (laughing) I looked at her and it was like a bucket of cold water thrown in my face. I came to realize that all the people around me joined various organizations to later find a proper job. Anyway, I was deeply grateful to Mary because if she had approached me trying to talk me into party membership by saying “you know, Wanda, erm we shall reconstruct this department, it is all rigid and the country needs changes and so on and so forth,” if she had started in the modern vein, then who knows, these were the mid-70s, I might have been convinced (laughing). And it made me realize that those young Party members are careerists, well [...] it made me look at them in a totally different way, [...] And only, only those who had a certain social and family background had a chance to get a good post.⁸

It is noteworthy that the face-to-face situation of receiving an offer to join the Party is told in a very detailed and vivid way and reconstructed in the form of direct (quoted) speech, that is, the interviewee attempts to quote her own and her colleague Mary’s sentences in their original wording. This makes the scene very authentic and confirms its importance to Wanda’s identity transformation. The episode is thought-provoking, leaves a modicum of doubt about the world taken-for-granted so far and results in questioning the interviewee’s self-concept. It is one of these experiences that Anselm Strauss defines as turning points and argues that “there are [...] certain critical incidents that occur to force a person to recognize that “I am not the same person as I was, as I used to be.” Such critical events usually initiate biographical work and force a person to think over, re-consider, and re-evaluate his or her identity and life situation. Strauss mentions a number of different types of turning points. One of them corresponds to the experience of betrayal (Strauss 1991: 321) in which “the agent of destruction is less personal,” that is, in which people (like Wanda does) notice that they “have been deceived, not by any specific person, but by events in general” (Strauss 1991: 321).

The conversation in which a student puts forward a puzzling idea of joining the Party for consideration is described by Wanda as “a bucket of cold water” – an incident that radically transforms her attitude towards the “socialistic reality” and its societal formation. Suddenly, she realizes that the normative order of the world that has been taken for granted has to be questioned. She abruptly understands that people cannot achieve their status through their abilities, hard work, and devotion to the community, but they

⁸ See: It is a serious breach of reciprocity of perspectives manifesting itself in: (1) the idealization of the interchangeability of the standpoints, and (2) the idealization of the congruency of the system of relevance (Schütz 1990a: 11–12).

have to join the Party if they want to succeed. Moreover, it becomes clear for her that she was drawn by her colleagues (similarly to the experiences of Don Quixote analyzed by Alfred Schütze) into the “let’s pretend” world that should be taken as reality (Schütz 1976: 145–146). Consequently, she fails to establish a universe of discourse with her peers which makes her more and more aware of “breaches” in her interpretation of the everyday reality and the “ideological” frames of “real socialism.”

In the light of this critical experience, her system of relevance and the scheme of interpretation breaks down. Her former biographical experiences and orientations are seriously undermined (cf., Schütz 1976: 231) and receive a new interpretative meaning. She is bewildered, confused and disorientated. Moreover, she admits that she could have been even more deceived if the proposal had been formulated differently (this means not at face-value, but in a more hidden way, implicitly). Her anger and irritation caused by her “naïveté” (and the credulous assumption that people are honest and straightforward) add to the feeling of deep and bitter disillusionment.

This “eye-opening experience” – as it was mentioned earlier – intensified (or even started) the biographical work⁹ of the interviewee and subsequently brought about crucial changes in her attitude towards her world of everyday existence and biographical identity. Furthermore, this resulted in reshaping her image of the “incorporated collective figurations” and social constellations. Thus, her scheme of interpretation, the established order of relevance and frames of reference have changed dramatically. Wanda became much more sensitive to the basic contradictions and incoherencies within the real socialism societal system (and its “hidden” logic). She also became much more circumspect about the intentions and motives of other people. In all probability, from then on the organizing principle of her life in the public sphere was the “limited confidence” rule. She seemed to develop a more objective, rational, and critical viewpoint towards (any) political system and/or ideology. This has had crucial importance for her biographical development and her world view. Moreover, the process of her identity transformation was then intertwined and deepened by the biographical experience of many years’ stay in another socialistic country (which her husband came from and where her two children were born). Consequently, she learned to take into account and consider different perspectives. This enabled her to build contrast sets (especially of the everyday life, social relationships, the degrees of confidence between members of the “we”-community, the forms of political opposition and attitude towards economic and political dependence

⁹ “The aim of biographical work is to: re-knit the past with the present and future, in order to achieve a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness about one’s identity” (Corbin, Strauss 1991: 366–367).

on the Soviet Union and its oppressive (often military) actions, et cetera in Poland as compared to the other communistic countries).

As we learn later in her rendering, Wanda was very involved in politically autonomous Polish reform movements of the 1980s – especially in the reform of the administrative court system. Her attitude and concern were probably rooted in her biographical experience of exposing the falseness of the political system in communist Poland.

2. Entering social worlds that criticize, contest, or actively fight against the regime

Basically, it may be said that the social worlds¹⁰ of the Polish anti-communist resistance normally cross-cut and intersect with (or even emerge from) the social worlds whose primary or core activity is to look at society in a critical and reflexive way and/or contest it. Thus, even those who had joined the latter groups without a strong sense of concern for political issues and the need to fight the communist regime were as if incidentally engaged in civil-resistance struggle with the system and became more and more politically conscious. Three autobiographical accounts discussed below will illustrate the issue in regard to: a) the social world of academia – the case of **Henryk Kwiatkowski** (b. 1947); and b) the social world of the hippie subculture – the case of **Tomasz Lubecki** (b. 1954), and c) the social world of alternative theater – the case of **Adam Malec** (b. 1950).

It is remarkable that all the cases analyzed below basically follow a very similar storyline. While talking about their childhood and adolescence they explicitly and/or implicitly address the strained, turbulent relationships with parents and the “suffocating,” tense home atmosphere. This defines the logic of their alternation process which finds its roots in their desire to break free from home. The interviewees talk about emotional (and/or intellectual) distance between the parents, fake feelings, hidden issues, ambivalences and a loss of trust, which are intertwined with their parent’s strenuous efforts to build some sort of isolated, free-from external influences, overprotective shelter for their children. Consequently, the children feel trapped and cornered.

¹⁰ The Arenas/Social Worlds framework implies exploring the social world as different arenas, where multiple worldviews coexist within the processes of negotiated interaction (Strauss et al. 1964, 1981). Clarke (1991: 128) defines social worlds as “[...] groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about building their business” (Clarke 1991: 131) and an arena as “[...] a field of action and interaction among a potentially wide variety of collective entities” (Clarke 1991: 130).

This frustrating feeling of being discontent, of being very tired of all the limitations and the unbearable, overpowering conditions at home, forces them to break free from the subjectively defined emotional insufficiency and to (re) gain the sense of authenticity (Kaźmierska et al. 2011). Consequently, they wish to emancipate themselves from their parents in the quest for meaning, authenticity, individualization, and autonomy. They start to look for open paths and autonomous space that would let them develop their own biographical plans, explore new possibilities, as well as discover and form their new identities (this includes exploring new independent “me’s” (Mead 1934). They search for opportunities to assert themselves, to increase their independence and to define their life orientations. These are normally offered by many different social worlds. The cases discussed below show how joining such groups triggers the process of alternation and emancipation, as well as creates a new system of meaning.

2a. Contesting a structure as a biographical orientation of Tomasz Lubecki (b. 1954)

The life course of Tomasz Lubecki who leaves home at the age of sixteen and joins the hippy subculture groups lets us reconstruct the process of becoming a “backseat” oppositionist who— being a rebel – as if “by the way” takes part in actions directed against the ruling authority. But, in order to understand his biography, we must first take into account that he was brought up mainly by an overprotective mother, “wrapped in cotton wool,” in a “censored” home and in the atmosphere of distrust between his parents. All of these he wanted to escape from and leave behind in the quest for meaning, authenticity, individualization, and autonomy.

Tomasz comes from a working-class family. He was an only, late child – his mother was 34 years old¹¹ and his father was 40 when he was born. His mother (and especially grandmother) was an advocate of communism and the father rather opted for socialistic principles. He describes his mother as a very possessive person who “tended to keep me only to herself” and when he talks about his father he says: “like many men from his generation (...) he left the child’s education and housework to his wife without taking responsibility himself, but came from time to time and wanted to order everyone about. So he was rather aloof and when he came then/ then he was a grim figure, forcing his various ideas on others, so I remember I was quite afraid of him and felt rather alien to him.”

¹¹ Having a baby at the age of 34 was considered to be late motherhood in those times.

One of the most important reasons for leaving his home so early is probably some sort of “taboo” in the air that entails the very cold family climate. He finds out much later in his life that his parents had been separated during the war (his father was working as a war captive for a *Bauer* in Germany and his mother was hiding at her aunt’s place) and they were probably accusing each other of having an affair. The interviewee’s explanation of the “cool relations” between his parents might be accounted for by the concept of a suspicious awareness context (Glaser, Strauss, 1964: 670). Since the true identity of the other is falsified (although its true “version” is assumed) it normally destroys the moral basis of interactive reciprocity and undermines mutual trust, thus presenting a potential for the sudden destabilization of their life situation.

They were very focused on the existing time, on managing somehow, perhaps they were even hiding some of their various views, or memories before me because they feared that err if I knew them I would tell everybody around about it and that could get me into trouble. I guess they really had that specific, to me, incomprehensible fear at the time when I was a child and when I was a little older, fear not to show too much, so/ so as not to speak out their views, so as not to stress any opposition against the then authorities [...] I was living in blissful ignorance as to post-war history, for example.

As a child and a teenager, he unwittingly became a beneficiary of the system because a friend of his grandmother – a well-known figure in the local communist movement supported and protected him during his school education. Moreover, he was protected from external influences, certain historical and political issues were not discussed at home.

Towards anti-structure

Drawing on Victor Turner’s explanation of the terms structure and anti-structure, we may define Tomasz’s biographical orientation as primarily opposing the modality of a society that is described as “a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less” (Turner 1969: 69). Referring to Van Gennep’s concept of rites of passage (a change of status in a society), Turner pointed out their three-part sequence: separation, liminal period, and aggregation and put emphasis on the experience of liminality and *communitas* (both constituting anti-structure) in which persons are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner 1969: 95). It is, however, important to remember that the process ends with reincorporation or reassimilation which means returning to society with new roles and statuses. In the case of Tomasz, however, the process

(which should temporarily “extricate” individuals from their social statuses) never stops. Whenever he is confronted with social alignments, irritated with arbitrariness and artificiality of social norms and customs, bored with the routine of everyday life and whenever the existing social structure seems to limit his sense of freedom, equality, and the need for developing new alternative actions, he starts to oppose or at least does not feel comfortable (for instance: the description of his obligatory army service resembles the fateful adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk, when he was offered a position at a University which he soon found dissatisfying and got bored with and its institutional ceremonial rituals which seem to have horrified and overwhelmed him). In other words, Tomasz was constantly experimenting with alternative ways of living and often refused to conform to fixed standards of conduct. He tends to withdraw if his new innovative practices seem to structuralize (formal institutions and laws start to emerge). In order to manifest his involvement in the anti-communist opposition (or to be more precise: to manifest his anti-structure attitude) he closely cooperated with the activists of Rural Solidarity (*Solidarność Rolnicza*) and Fighting Solidarity (*Solidarność Walcząca*) since his mates from the hippie group were settled down in the Bieszczady Mountains (that was very typical for the hippies in those times). Still, he remains very much critical of himself. There is no wonder that he has become a recognized addiction therapist who deals with young people at the margins of society.¹²

2b. The academic arena of discourse which absorbs Henryk Kwiatkowski (b. 1947)

Henryk Kwiatkowski is an academic teacher holding a PhD in humanities. He is the elder son of a Jew coming from an extremely poor family living in a middle-sized town in central Poland. His father is the significant other who – according to the interviewee – has shaped his identity and who (in a more or less explicit way) has influenced his biographical orientations and evaluations.¹³ Since, consequently, there are a lot of narrative passages addressing his father’s biography, as well as many elaborated argumental commentaries dealing with the complex father-son relationship also the father’s life history should be reconstructed here. It seems to be crucial for his life course that he had been imprisoned twice: in the interwar period as a young adult he was sentenced to

¹² We must remember that *communitas* is manifested through liminality, marginality, and inferiority.

¹³ This might be empirically traced via the analysis of the interplay between institutional expectation patterns and biographical action schemes. Both process structures are described in the *Methodological note*.

four years for his political activity in the Communist League of Polish Youth¹⁴ (and only while in prison did he learn to speak Polish), and at the beginning of World War II he spent about a year in jail in the Soviet Union where, ironically, he escaped to look for shelter. Henryk recapitulates that when his father returned to Poland with the Second Polish Army (created in the Soviet Union in 1944 as a part of the People's Army of Poland)¹⁵ he was given a choice either to join the Secret Police or the Prison Service (both being the agendas of the newly established communist regime in Poland and both considered to be employing a large number of Jewish people especially in the top positions).¹⁶ His father decided to work as a prison administration staff member claiming that he had gained a lot of experience on the other side of the bars and he knows how the prison works. He was a highly-ranked prison officer (later he was upgraded and worked for the administration of the prison service) who was valued for his managerial skills and therefore was regularly transferred from place to place.¹⁷ Consequently, their family moved very often and the father was hardly ever at home.

But still, we must take into account another feature of his life history – very typical for the majority of Jewish people – he was the only one who had survived the war. He belonged to the generation which had to hide or “fade out” their sufferings, which were too painful to be remembered, but still as if unconsciously, impacted their life courses. Sometimes they did not want to admit how much they had to sacrifice to ensure financial and emotional security for their families (for instance while being morally trapped) and attempted to keep their children away from realizing or even suspending their real motives, aims, and biographical costs. Henryk explores that all these experiences had left his father emotionally wrecked. Thus, these might be reasons for being overprotective and for his desperate attempts to become Polish after the war. Both issues will be discussed later in the chapter.

He married an 11-year younger, simple, lovely, nice, and very beautiful Polish girl (who was barely 18 at that time). Henryk describes his parents in the following way: “He [the father] was a man who created us [...] Created intellectually. We owe to him our talents. Our mum was lovely, good, and she

¹⁴ In Polish: “Związek Komunistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej.” This was the youth wing of the Communist Party of Poland between 1922 and 1938 and a part of Young Communist International.

¹⁵ It was a Soviet-controlled army led by a Pole Karol Świerczewski, who from the beginning of the war had served as an officer in the Red Army.

¹⁶ Although the interviewee does not admit it, due to his position in the state institution, his father must have been embroiled in the system or had even served it.

¹⁷ Henryk says that his father was often defined as a rolling stone and implicitly suggests that therefore he was forced to change his work locations so often.

was a wonderful housewife, caring, but she used to look at us and she still does as if we were [...] not her own offspring.” Henryk claims that his father did everything to avoid stigmatization (mainly of his sons) and save them painful experiences of disapproval and rejection he himself had endured while trying to cross the cultural borders and assimilate. In this sense, his biographical experiences illustrate the life course of a marginal man (Park 1961; Stonequist 1967) who, on the one hand, was never fully accepted by the Poles¹⁸ and, on the other, was excluded from his Jewish community because of not being religious. It is worth mentioning here that Robert Park pointed out that by definition a marginal man has a more civilized, more intelligent, and more objective, rational viewpoint (Park 1961: xvii–xviii), but during the period of transition that “is inevitably a period of inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness” (Park 1950: 355) he experiences inner conflicts and moral dichotomy (Park 1950: 355). Furthermore, Everett Stonequist stressed that the marginal man’s sense of loyalty might be doubtful and therefore he may suffer from being torn by two loyalties and responsibilities (cf., Stonequist 1967, Schütz 1990b). Presumably, his allegiance to Poland before and during the war might seem questionable to many people. His strenuous attempts to overcome his fragile “me” image in the eyes of others and to become recognized and accepted as a Polish person were associated with gaining some sort of cultural valence (and expecting his sons to do the same)¹⁹ in Antonina Kłoskowska’s understanding.²⁰ His efforts to become Polish and to secure a better, free from stereotypical judgments, and the sense of a (self-)alienated future for his sons culminated in the change of the family surname from Blumenfeld to Kwiatkowski in 1966.

It is crucial for the analysis of Henryk’s overall biographical orientation to investigate how the image of his father is outlined. Generally speaking, taking his account at face value we may say that the interviewee sees the relations with his father in a symmetrical way (emphasis is placed on harmony between a very wise, intelligent, loving father and his extremely clever son). Yet going deeper, the picture seems to be much more complicated and ambiguous. In

¹⁸ Till the end of his life he was mangling the Polish language and therefore his ethnic background was probably recognizable at once. Moreover, the kind of occupation he did for a living and his (former?) ideological engagement in communism might have aroused reluctance or disgust among Poles.

¹⁹ For instance, he was exceptionally happy for his son’s school achievements in all subjects, but especially in Polish.

²⁰ Kłoskowska (2001: 117) defined cultural valence as: [...] not only the appropriation of a certain essential, including canonical, part of national culture, but, above all, as the acknowledging of this culture as one’s own, as familiar, as satisfying hubristic needs (that is, the need for self-worth, personal dignity, and a feeling of participation in the community).

many (recessive) passages we learn that he was abusing alcohol, that he “was unbelievably overprotective and we were not allowed to do many things,” but also very demanding (at least his sons wanted to please him, to meet his expectations, and to win his approval). His father almost obsessively supported the education of his two sons and took pride in their school successes and achievements. He introduced them both to the world of books, in which Henryk finds some sort of shelter when he needs to escape from the harsh reality of everyday life. His immersion in the utopian world of literature, imagination, and abstraction help him struggle with the ambiguous life situation. Furthermore, Henryk mentions that when it came to his choice of university, it was also (and maybe in the first place) motivated by its distance from home and adds that his father “while being sensitive and wise he was also a type of an autocrat, well, a DESPOT.” Both, Henryk’s immersion in books, and his decision to go to study in another city might be interpreted as a sort of escape from the unbearable conditions at home. It is also interesting that his father would not talk about his occupation (although his wife often asked him about it) and warned Henryk against doing the job. It is most likely that these unspoken issues and the complex relation to his father resulted in an emotionally ambivalent relationship with him and led to some sort of disorientation and disorder in his life. The untimely death of his father, due to the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, was a shocking experience for Henryk, who was then only 19 years old. This resulted in a serious breakdown of self-orientation and the feeling of self-alienation (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 343). This is how these vague feelings and experiences are expressed in the background construction:

Oh! Our father used to assign a very strict [...] demarcation line, barriers between his professional occupation, which he considered nasty, and our world of imagination. So, in fact, we were living in a utopian world of literature, we were given an immense sense of emotional security, our father provided us with it, he used to be tough on those/ if one has crossed, err, the line calling me again “a Jew a Jew,” he could [...] manage it pretty easily, he was a high-ranked official, so he had power over thousands of people, I must say. So we were living with this sense of security, but it was not the security provided by a civil servant, but the security given by our father, who [...] really loved us [...] very much. And when we lost him [with trembling voice, trying to restrain emotions] (longer pause) IT WAS DESTROYED [...] this destroyed the sense of security and then [...] my problems with depression started and so on.

In 1965 Henryk entered the academic world of humanities with its arena-discourse structure and (mainly because of the people he met) became more and more aware of the illusions of the system and more and more open to

other perspectives, alternative sources of meaning, and systems of reference.²¹ As a second student, due to his intelligence and well-reading, he was noticed by a recognized professor who nominated him for a scholarship. This was the first step in his academic career and the beginning of his many years' cooperation with professor Antoni Talar. Henryk makes a psychoanalytic diagnosis (being aware of his malfeasance) that professor Talar replaced his father. He became his mentor and "shaped his scientific identity." But, this coaching relationship (Strauss 1969) did not mean following the footsteps of his master uncritically, but was rather based on endless intellectual debates and discussions with him (and his students). Henryk says for instance that: "I was really attached to him, though I didn't share most of his [scientific] views." Thus, his intellectual profile was rather developed in contrast to his master's works, but his admiration and respect regarding Talar's knowledge and intellectual curiosity strongly supported his alternation process (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). It must be mentioned, however, that Antoni Talar was well-known for his anti-communism attitude and involvement. His moral stance and principles strongly affected the young intellectual for whom the experience of (value, identity, ideological) disorientation was still a dominant one. In this context, it might seem to be absurd, but just after March 1968²² Henryk joined the Party. But, besides his supposed ideological "enticement" and leftist convictions, we should also consider what Henryk could irretrievably lose in the consequence of the political turmoil: his plan (to some extent imposed by his father) to become a Polish intellectual already carried out partially in 1968 could come to nothing. This would be a dramatic turn of events especially if we take into account that he was the first in the family who went to university, that his father had been then so happy and enthusiastic about his son's achievement that he visited all his neighbors and acquaintances to boast about his son's success, that the academic career was the only one Henryk could imagine for himself. There is no wonder that in the light of a real threat of losing crucial parts of his identity (i.e., Polish and intellectual) joining the Party seemed to be necessary.

²¹ Although he says that even earlier his attitude towards the system was critical and he would often criticize his father.

²² March 1968 – a series of student demonstrations triggered by a removal of a theater play *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) by Adam Mickiewicz from the playbill in Warsaw. The interpretation of this most important work of Polish Romanticism by Kazimierz Dejmek was considered by the communist authorities as unacceptably anti-Soviet. The protests spread to many towns and cities in Poland, but were quickly suppressed. The propaganda claimed that Jewish students and intellectuals were responsible for inciting the Polish youth. The anti-Semitic ("anti-Zionist") campaign developed leading to expulsion of thousands of Polish Jews.

But, there is good reason to believe that with time, along with other dramatic events in Poland (Henryk mentions the events in 1970, 1976, and 1980)²³ and under the influence of his master, he systematically changed his biographical orientation and attitudes toward the “socialist reality” of everyday life and imposed an ideological system.

Moreover, regardless of his involvement in on-going discussions in the academic *milieus*, he also observes and is deeply moved by the moral attitudes of one of his colleagues (active opponents of state socialism) who is arrested during the Martial Law. Consequently, he becomes more and more tired with the “as if, fake life” and with “apparent activates” in all spheres of social life.²⁴ But, first and foremost, we must remember that he is very sensitive to the “mechanism of negative social labelling and stigmatization.” Henryk gradually becomes aware that the communist ideology is aimed at humiliating and degrading people, especially when he observes what happens to people who dare to openly criticize the regime and actively fight with it (putting their lives at risk and danger).

2c. Taking over the role of an opponent after joining an alternative theater group – Adam Malec (b. 1950)

Adam Malec was born in 1950 in a small town in Western Poland (from now on referred to as B.). He was the only one out of seven children to be born after the war and the only one to be born after his father spent a couple of months in jail as a political prisoner. Adam’s mother did her best to get her husband released from prison. Interestingly enough, she was acting as if on two levels: on the “rational” one she hired a lawyer (and paid a lot of money for his service) and on the “transcendental” level she promised to God to deliver another baby and dedicate it to God. This is how Adam Malec was brought into being.

In order to understand his initial attitude towards the state socialism and then his biographical change, we must take a closer look at Adam’s family’s fate

²³ December 1970 – riots in Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin, motivated by a sudden increase in food prices; hundreds of shipyard workers were killed or wounded by the soldiers, June 1976 protests in many Polish cities against prices and workers’ riots in Radom; 1980 strikes in the shipyard in Gdańsk and the emergence of the “Solidarity” trade union led by Lech Wałęsa.

²⁴ This might be compared to the “second grade” activities described by Hanna Świda-Ziemia. The “first grade” meant rituals of formal participation in activities imposed by the communistic authorities, while the “second grade” meant taking part in different kinds of niche, informal activities that only seemingly fit the scope of the current institutional and legal framework (Świda-Ziemia 1997: 73–75).

and see how he talks about his father's experiences, especially those connected with his imprisonment. It is very intriguing, since, as we have already learned, our interviewee was born after his father's stay in prison.

Adam's father came from a very modest family that could afford to educate only one child. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, he was a teacher in B. and surrounding villages and towns. Just after the war he was elected a Vogt (wójt) of B. and still he was very much devoted to the Catholic Church and connected to the PSL party.²⁵ His local social status was surely very high. But, then Adam reports that: "In the [19]50s the situation of my family was very bad." The dynamics of the storytelling force him to go into details and to explain the causes of the situation. We learn here that his father was imprisoned without any court sentence. The circumstances were as follows: when the Archbishop of Poznań was planning to visit B. in 1948, Adam's father was advised by the state security officers not to welcome him officially in the church. He did not obey these commands and, consequently, was put in prison for about 7 months. Then his farm and household were burnt down, his land was taken over by the state and he was a victim of a press witch-hunt. This probably undermined his reputation and status within the local community. There is, however, hardly any commentary on what had happened in prison. We learn only that when Adam's father returned to civilian life he had to commute about 60km to his work in the Department of Agriculture in Poznań (that was somehow connected with his membership in ZSL²⁶) and spent little time with his family. Then he got involved in setting up agrarian schools in B. and cared very much for the education of farmers. He also established an amateur theater with farmers and formed a theater troupe performing in little villages.

But, it seems that from the perspective of the then-state that Adam's father's imprisonment had the intended effect and his re-socialization was successful: he was not critical about the system anymore and started to behave in accordance with the political system's expectations of the totalitarian state (please note that he was arrested and released during the Stalinist era in Poland that ended in 1956). It seems that his actions were "tamed" and became compliant with the ideology (at the level of "doing"). Moreover, we may guess that he had been changed and his old self had been – at least to some extent – "mortified" (Goffman 1968). Adam mentions that politics was not discussed in his home

²⁵ The Polish People's Party (Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), sometimes translated as Polish Peasants' Party, is an agrarian and Christian democratic political party in Poland. Opposing the pre-war Sanation regime and aiming at preventing the communists from monopolizing power in Poland. Its functioning was forbidden in 1947.

²⁶ The United People's Party (Polish: Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe, ZSL) was an agrarian political party in the Polish People's Republic formed in 1949. It used to be a satellite party of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).

and that the authorities (via practices in total institution – see: Goffman 1961) were able to break a person down. In consequence, the father's political past and involvement, as well as his imprisonment, became a family taboo. Thus, as a young man Adam was not very much aware of the political situation in Poland. In his adolescence, as a chair of his school council, he gave a speech criticizing the "Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops" (sent on 18 November 1965) and then went to Poznań to support Władysław Gomułka in his counter meeting to the Christian Millennium celebrations led by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1966). These strongly oriented political activities were discussed neither with his parents nor his much older brothers. It must be stressed that both events are presented in a passive form. Moreover, a couple of times he repeats that he was very immature. For instance, while referring to the events of 1966, March 1968 in Poland, and Czechoslovakia (the invasion of the Soviet Army and those from the Warsaw Pact in 1968) he says that things were "very strange" that he and his friends "did not know what is going on," that "everything was some sort of mystery, sensation" (March 1968). The following passage that is a background commentary illustrates his attitude towards the political events in 1968 in those times:

[...] to be honest [...] I was still... I still felt like a child, I had no idea what it is all about... Politics was never talked about in our house, so I was not involved in any option, my option was my family. And there were so many issues passed over in silence, taboos that were connected with my father's imprisonment, so we never talked about politics. The Jewish issue and politics were never talked about in my home.

Some lines later he adds:

It resulted from my father's prison experience, that still the authorities if they want to destroy a man they can do it...

Adam's alternation started only some years later, that is, in the beginning of the 1970s, when, as a student, he was seeking a vent for his acting passion (interestingly, aroused by his father). Paradoxically, through the Polish Students' Association performing under the aegis of the communist government, he could meet some members of an alternative (artistic) group which he eventually joined. His involvement in its activities (theater performances) that were defined as rebellious and mocking the communist political system both by the audience and by the Security Service constituted a turning point in his biography (Strauss 1969). He took up the challenge and successfully, as well as genuinely, performed the role, at least to some extent, imputed by others (McCall, Simmons 1966: 139). But, this required a fair amount of biographical

work that has to be “carried out in service of an actor’s biography, including its review, maintenance, repair, and alternation” (Strauss 2010: 98) that was aimed at “[re-knitting] the past with the present and future in order to achieve a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness” (Strauss 1991: 366).

While Adam talks about his involvement in the alternative theater movement, his language changes radically. He strongly identifies with the group via a “we” form that becomes dominant in this part of his experience and rendering. Moreover, he obviously places it on the other side of the barricade and defines it as an “enclave of freedom,” says that during their performances “we were having an hour of freedom and we were using it to a maximal degree” and that “we were fighting for getting rid of fear.”

This is how Adam Malec became one of the most recognizable members of the theater movement strongly associated with the cultural opposition in Poland.

3. Meeting with and the guidance of (politically involved) significant others – Makary Dostatni (b. 1949)

While analyzing the socio-biographical conditions under which the process of alternation is possible, Berger and Luckmann point out that the transformation of subjective reality cannot be started and continued without establishing a highly effective (similar to emotional dependency during primary socialization) identification with significant others (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). Furthermore, they emphasize that “These significant others are the guides into the new reality” and “provide the indispensable plausibility structure [...] that must become the individual’s world, displacing all other worlds, especially the world the individual ‘inhabited’ before his alternation” (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). Such important *dramatis personae* playing a crucial role in the process of alternation may be found, for instance, in the autobiographical rendering of Makary Dostatni. Thus, in this part, the focus will be on the case in which a politically involved significant other (here: Gutek Mochnacki) – is “the guide into the new reality”²⁷ and provides an alternative direction in biographical development and orientation. He “teaches” the interviewee to notice certain discrepancies of the system and to criticize its paradoxes (primarily economic scarcity and social inequality), as well as to make them sensitive to the experience of those who are victims of the regime (invigilated, imprisoned, persecuted, and oppressed).

²⁷ These significant others here might be also defined as “coaches” in the process of status passage (Strauss 1959) guiding, counselling, and advising their “political” development.

The case of Makary Dostatni (b. 1949) and his friend Gutek Mochnacki will be considered here as an example. Based on the detailed analysis of his storytelling, we may presume that the parents of Makary Dostatni were rather attuned to the system and benefited from it. For instance, when Makary describes his life as a young boy it seems to be much more affluent than a life of an average teenager in those times. He recapitulates for instance: “My father [...] he was an economist, an accountant, he always had the opportunity to arrange a three-week stay at a summer camp, and we were the only ones or among a few who could go to a summer camp, most often to the seaside.” Yet, then his privileged position was “seen but unnoticed” (Garfinkel 2007). Although he started his secondary education from a vocational school as a very gifted student he could move easily to a technical college opening the path to higher education.²⁸ Consequently, Makary Dostatni could step-by-step develop his professional career (ultimately leading up to a doctor’s degree in chemistry). Moreover, as a young promising sportsman, he was awarded several grants and was given advantages placing him in a better position. There is no wonder that at that time the state socialism (rather being a social frame of his experience than a consciously accepted political system) seemed to him as a world of countless opportunities in which every man is the architect of his own fortune. Accordingly, with a high degree of probability, we can describe his attitude towards everyday life then as “uncritical” and “unreflective.” Even later when Makary Dostatni as a husband and father had to struggle with the scarcity of goods at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s he still used to treat all the impediments in everyday life as a “normal” challenge that has to be faced in a skilful and resourceful manner.

Only when Makary Dostatni got to know Gutek Mochnacki at work did his attitude start to change. With time, their acquaintance turned into a strong friendship. Thus, Gutek Mochnacki, who was a well-known and recognized member of the Solidarity Movement both in his local *milieu* and in Poland, became a significant other. He guided Makary Dostatni through the complexities of the apparently “normal and fair” social system. He pointed out and explained to him the paradoxes, contradictions, and abuses of the system, how communism limits people’s freedom et cetera. This is how Makary Dostatni remembers those times:

And, err... and if anyone talks about the communist time, aaa, it was the time of my studies and so on, it was when I got closer with Gutek Mochnacki. He was also a student at the Polytechnic and he graduated in 1974 I guess, he often visited us, came for a glass of milk, because as a chemist I had to drink milk obligatorily,

²⁸ Note that the system of education in communistic Poland was very much different for instance to the GDR system in this respect.

so he came for a glass of milk or a cup of tea or to talk. So we got closer and we became friends. [...] He hiked, climbed while I practised running. We both got married at that time. And we became even closer because we lived close to each other [...] So, we met more often. He was my true friend until the time of *Solidarność*. Frankly speaking, I didn't know much about what was going on around until that time. I can remember '76 when there were food coupons, for sugar, when it was necessary to deal with the everyday reality, you know, at all costs. If there was a need. I never searched for alternative access to anything, like knocking at the back doors, no, I didn't. The authorities wanted us to live like that, so we got used to the situation. And then Gutek started to indoctrinate me: "listen, the *Solidarność*, here, here, no, not *Solidarność* only, we must kick the communist system." Err, I was rather sceptical about it. Because I didn't mind Gierek, there were some problems, but the way out was to learn to deal with the new reality or eat a little bit less (laughter). Err, and it was a big surprise for me, that Gutek was so involved in *Solidarność*, you know, he became [an important figure in its structure] Gutek Mochnacki was the person who knew the facts best and knew how to convince people.

It seems obvious that this relationship shaped Makary Dostatni's biographical attitude and political orientation to a large degree. He joined the Solidarity Movement and was ready to put his life in danger in order to support Gutek Mochnacki. But, first and foremost, he started to see the political system with the eyes of his friend – he eventually noticed its paradoxes and oppressive character. It must be stressed in the end that even though Mochnacki died many years ago, he is still a significant other in the life of Makary Dostatni.

Conclusions

Although this chapter did not explicitly deal with the dynamics and processes of social movements, let's look at the quote in which Bill Moyer writes:

Social movements are collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated, and mobilized, sometimes over years or decades, to challenge the powerholders and the whole society to redress social problems or grievances and restore critical social values. Social movements are a powerful means for ordinary people to successfully create positive social change, particularly when the formal channels of democratic political participation are not working and obstinate powerful elites prevail (Moyer et al. 2005: 111).

However, the question remains: how does it happen that people join specific social movements? Where do the supporters of their activities really come from? It seems that the considerations made in this chapter indicate one

of the possible resources “cumulating over years and decades” and perhaps not the most obvious ones. In this way, they show how it happened that the (considered by many to be) communist system in Poland was overthrown also due to a kind of accumulation of encouraged antagonists of the oppressive system.

In other words, assuming that every social movement needs not only a “definite” number of leaders, but simultaneously and necessarily an “infinite” number of (usually nameless) secondary supporters. These supporters should not only recognize and legitimize the social problems raised by it, but also mobilize their action and participate massively in a collective biographical action plan (cf., Blumer 1971, Moyers et al. 2005, Schütze 1992a), the chapter shows the mechanisms and processes that “transform” the former opponents, the morally compromising beneficiaries of the system or the passive bystanders into emotionally involved and motivated boosters. Consequently, they became engaged in the developing of a collective action scheme (Schütze 1989) which is related to an intentional mode of experiencing events in life and has its source in the inner spontaneity of individuals.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the modalities of the alternation process associated with the change of political and life orientation described in this chapter based on the analysis of five life stories are not at all isolated. For example, the fate of Wanda Nemec seems to have similar dynamics and many common features with the experiences of Zofia – a social reformer described in this book by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (see Chapter V). The role of a significant other and the commitment to the world of the academia can also be found, for example, in the autobiographical account of Krystyna Lutyńska, for whom her husband – an outstanding sociologist Jan Lutyński – became the one who taught her to look critically at the political reality of post-war Poland and became a guide to “alternative” reality (see: Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015).

Joanna Wygnańska

CHAPTER IX

A NEW LOGIC OF POWER, OLD BIOGRAPHICAL PATTERNS OF ACTION. CASE STUDY OF WERONIKA'S LIFE HISTORY

Introduction

This text focuses on an analysis of the autobiographical-narrative life history¹ of Weronika born in 1980, who is biographically entangled in the experience of the transformation process in Poland. The undertaken analysis is an attempt to confront the autobiographical-narrative interview in which the narrator's life story is divided into two stories. The main thread in the analyzed life story of Weronika is the biographical experience of migration, and the recessive thread towards it, is the story about her biographical experience of transformation. Thus, this text, like the analyzed interview, is characterized by a certain fracture. This chapter is then an analytical assumption of showing how I, as a researcher, struggled to combine these two important threads in the narrator's life story and to capture their impact on Weronika's biographical decisions.

The case of Weronika was chosen for further analysis due to the aforementioned specificity of the narrator's autobiographical story. As it will be seen in the analysis below, by dividing her life story into a migration and transformation thread, Weronika, on the one hand, makes a certain biographical obscuration, which can only be visible during a deeper analysis of both main topics of her life history. On the other hand, this interview is an analytically interesting text in which fractures play an important role, both those dividing the narrator's biographical story into individual threads and those reflecting her biographical problems.

¹ The text in a slightly different version titled "Migration as a source of suffering in the context of the biographical experience of the process of transformation in Poland. Case study of Weronika's life history" was published in *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4) 2019.

The research problem raised in this chapter therefore concerns, first of all, the presentation of the situation of studying an autobiographical narrative interview, in which the narrator struggles to combine in her biography two important threads that affect her biographical experience. The construction of the chapter and subsequent analytical steps taken in this text is therefore a consequence of following the narrator's life story. Therefore, the first part of the analysis introduces the reader to Weronika's story about the time of transformation in Poland, about her childhood and adolescence. An important role in this part of the text is played by showing the influence of collective transformation mechanisms on the change in the status of the narrator's family after 1989. This part of the autobiographical story of Weronika is analyzed through the prism of the difficulties experienced by Weronika's parents during the transformation process, which lay mainly in the deterioration of their social status. The reader can see that in the new logic of power, the political (belonging to the party) legitimacy of the privileged Weronika's family, which was important during the communist era, stops playing the role assigned to it and, as a result, stops securing the lives of its members. In this situation, the interviewee's parents are faced with a deepening problem of unemployment, resulting from their lack of adaptation to the new rules of the labor market. An obstacle to finding employment is not only the lack of education² and competences, but, above all, the immersion of the narrator's parents in following the "old" rules. It is expressed in their efforts to use patterns of action which were developed during the socialist times (e.g., "systemic arrangement" understood as benefiting from unofficial connections), which were inadequate in the new social transformation reality.

An additional research problem of the text is also the study of the way Weronika tells the story of the time of transformation. The narrator does not attempt to capture her own individual story in a wider perspective, focusing mainly on a nostalgic description of her family's situation before 1989. There is not any macro social commentary on the subject of social change, nor any attempt to inscribe individual good memories in a broader narration about the period of the People's Republic of Poland and the time of transformation present at the level of public discourse. The lack of such references in the history of Weronika is analytically interesting. Therefore, in this text, I try to show how the interviewee talks about the transformation process in Poland, how she reconstructs it in her life history.

On the other hand, this chapter is following the second and as it will be visible – main – thread of Weronika's life history, her experience of the

² In the interview, the narrator explains that her parents did not graduate from secondary school and did not take the Polish school-leaving exam (*matura*).

migration. It's important to stress here that the change in the status of her family during the transformation is connected with the necessity of emigration of one of her parents. In this optics the analyzed interview is presenting the context of transnational motherhood (Urbańska 2008, 2015), and thus the story of a child of a migrant woman. The influence of this experience on Weronika's biography and her family history is the second important axis of this text.

Moreover, Weronika in her life history focuses on the experience of being a migrant inscribed in her adult biography. The narrator has lived in Italy for ten years³ with her husband and two daughters. The case of Weronika thus presents a combination of two threads: the experience of migration and persistence in trajectory. Both of these important analytical aspects are explained in a more detailed way in the analysis, but in this part of the text, it can be briefly pointed out that, for the narrator, migration is a source of suffering. In addition, in the case of Weronika, the suffering is of double character. First, it is caused by the emigration of her mother to Italy in the 1990s, then it is connected with the decision of the interviewee to live in exile herself.

In this optics, the text aims to include the migration of Weronika's mother and then the migration of the narrator as consequences of the transformation, and to perceive them as such. I also show both experiences of migration in the dimension of the biographical costs incurred, and not within the framework of the story of success. The text is, therefore, an attempt to derive a reflection on the migration of women based on the analysis of the experience of this phenomenon from the perspective of a migrant's child and from the position of being a migrant. At the same time, both contexts present in the history of Weronika's life are linked to the above-mentioned aspect of the narrator being in trajectory (Riemann, Schütze 1991, 2012, Schütze 2012, Waniek 2016).

The research decision to study Weronika's biography can be justified by the multitude of socio-historical phenomena mentioned above, which affect the history of Weronika's life. As Nevâl Gültekin, Lena Inowlocki, and Helma Lutz (2012: 660) point out in their text on the analysis of a biographical interview with Hülya, a Turkish worker in Germany, the proper basis for the theoretical generalization of an individual case is based on the understanding of the case within its social and historical context. In this way, while interpreting the biographical story chosen in this text for analysis, it must be considered as one of the biographical relations reflecting certain biographical and social processes, not forgetting the social, political, and historical context in which this account takes place.

³ At the time of recording the interview in 2015.

Moreover, as Roswitha Breckner stresses:

Qualitative biographical approaches share with qualitative research that they are case-oriented. The emergence, constitution, and construction principles of social phenomena are analyzed by empirically and theoretically focusing on single cases. The perspective of research which undertakes case studies is aimed at reading the complexity of social processes, from which individual patterns of action and interpretations of experienced social reality emerge (Breckner 2007:115).

It is about extracting from the analyzed material the ways of reacting to the problems, which are subject to scrutiny, in individual life contexts. By entering into an in-depth case study, it is possible to interpret patterns of conduct and reconstruct their legitimacy in a specific social field.

From this perspective, the analysis of Weronika's story should be treated as an attempt to interpret this biography in its historical and social dimension. In other words, the case study in this text is based on a conclusion immersed in the biographical analysis. This research approach aims primarily at capturing the relationship between the individual biographical experience and the mechanisms of collective influence and the reconstruction of macro social processes in the story of individual life (Schütze 2008a, b, 2014, Kaźmierska, Schütze 2013). In this view, the relation between individual biography and collective processes and mechanisms of joint influence is therefore crucial for a deeper analysis of the case. Moreover, assuming that this relationship is a tension between the standardization of lifetime (through the institutionalization of life course) and the subject's aspirations to develop and manage his/her own life independently (i.e., the tension between socialization processes, on the one hand, and individualization processes, on the other hand), the analysis of a single case also allows us to show the correlation between the control of life course and submission to the compulsions of the external world (Rokuszevska-Pawełek 2006: 41). It is also important to point out here the meaning of life history told by the interlocutor. As Fritz Schütze claims:

We can say that the autobiographical narrator or "autobiographer" is retrospectively shaping her or his own biographical identity, but the task of the meaningful ordering of pieces of biography originally evolves from life historical experiences. She or he is the biography incumbent or the carrier of the history (or story) of her or his own life, and by telling it, or at least episodes of it, she or he is bestowing it with an elementary and systematic layer of meaningful order – offering a partial integration of chunks of meanings originally stemming from the formerly actually ongoing involvements within the concatenation of life-historical events themselves. The meaningful order of one's own life history has at its center the unfolding of one's own biographical identity in relationship to the overall "*Gestalt*" of concatenated and coexisting life historical processes (Schütze 2008a: 164).

In this understanding, the narrator in the process of telling the life history gives meaning to the facts of his/her life. The life history can be recognized as “a narrative *Gestalt* that must be envisioned as an ordered sequence of personal experiences and that orderliness implies the inner identity development of the biography incumbent” (Schütze 2008a: 168).

Thus, in analyzing Weronika’s life history I will focus on two important analytical figures: trajectory of suffering⁴ (Riemann, Schütze 1991, 2012, Schütze 2012, Waniek 2016) which is one of the biographical process structures⁵ (Schütze 2008a, b) and biographical work.⁶ As it will be visible in the further analysis the concept of the trajectory of suffering in the biography of Weronika is a key component of her biographical memory and identity. Thus, the concept of biographical work understood after Fritz Schütze (2008a, b) with the reference to the reflections of Anselm Strauss, assuming that biographical work is done through reflection on alternative interpretations of the course of one’s own life, in the analysis below, is used in terms of an explanation of the reasons for Weronika’s inability to undertake it.

Migration phenomenon – the perspective of women’s migrations

As a separate part of the introduction to the analysis of Weronika’s case, I decided also to present the perspective of women’s migration studies. This decision is dictated by a certain difference between Weronika’s case and the other life stories analyzed in this book. In Weronika’s autobiographical story it is the migration thread that is the most important line of her biographical experience. Therefore, I considered it necessary to place this text in relation to the theoretical references to selected research studies and texts analyzing the problem of women’s migrations from the Polish perspective. The selection of the presented approaches to this subject does not, of course, illustrate the whole variety of texts and research projects that describe this problem. Rather, it is an attempt to present those research approaches to the topic of women’s migration that touch on similar female experiences as the ones described by Weronika in her biography.

This text is showing that the study of the history of Weronika’s life is also part of the research on the subject of women’s migrations. On the one hand, this

⁴ See *Methodological note*.

⁵ Apart from the trajectory of suffering Schütze distinguishes: biographical action schemes, institutional expectation patterns, and creative metamorphoses of biographical identity.

⁶ See *Methodological note* and introduction to Part 4 of this book.

biography is marked by the context of being a migrant woman's child. This is related to the migration of Weronika's mother to Italy in the 1990s. On the other hand, the narrator at the time of the interview has also been permanently living in Italy for ten years, and is therefore involved in the biographical experience of being a migrant herself. These aspects make the analysis of the case of Weronika part of not only the perspective of migration studies, but also, and above all, of the interest in women's migration which has been growing since the 1970s.

Krystyna Slany (2008a: 9) states that: "migrations...temporarily or permanently destroy the canonical world of social order for women and construct it anew." Migration in this sense is defined as a social change manifesting itself, *inter alia*, "in the assuming of and bearing the economic responsibility for the fate of the family by women," as well as "familization, but also defamilization" of family ties (Slany 2008a: 10). These aspects are related, among others, to the phenomena of transnational motherhood and euro-orphanhood. Transnational motherhood "refers to a situation in which a mother temporarily or permanently resides in another country, but despite the territorial separation, becomes involved in the care and upbringing of the child; she is present *here* and *there*" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Avila 1997 as cited in Urbańska 2015: 12). Additionally, the perspective of motherhood at a distance concerns individuals functioning within the framework of "social expectations, cultural values, and social interaction patterns shaped by more than one social, economic, and political system" (Glick-Schiller 2003: 189 as cited in Urbańska 2008: 82).

The second phenomenon mentioned above, euro-orphanhood, derives from the discourse on motherhood "at a distance," and is created mainly by the media. This discourse seeks the negative connotations of maternal absence, emphasizing the blame for the child's upbringing problems on the part of the emigrating mother. It also highlights the shift of the educational role in the traditional approach assigned to mothers and to other family members, as well as aid institutions. It focuses on emphasizing the destructive dimension of migration of women, who, in a way, leave their children behind. As Sylwia Urbańska (2015: 300) points out, "migration of a parent thus becomes an act of abandonment," while all other social phenomena affecting the fate of a child cared for at a distance (e.g., poverty, unemployment of the other parent, alcoholism, violence) are not included in the diagnosis of the fate of migrant women's children.

In the analysis of Weronika's case, I present the perspective of transnational motherhood with reference to her mother's emigration since the 1990s. Thus, I focus on the dimension of Weronika's fate in the context of her adolescence inscribed in the motif of maternal "absence" (Urbańska 2008, 2015). On the one hand, I am trying to show the migration of Weronika's mother as a consequence of the transformation. On the other hand, I try to reconstruct the influence of the phenomenon of transnational motherhood on the biography of the narrator.

The experience of living in exile in Italy shared by Weronika and her mother is presented with reference to Krystyna Slany's (2008b) research on Polish migrants in the United States and Italy.⁷ In this context, the dimension of biographical costs deserves special attention, which I try to reconstruct when analyzing the life history of Weronika. At the same time, the context of being a migrant manifested in the biographical experience of the narrator's mother is an intermediate story; therefore, it is impossible to fully interpret her feelings about the phenomenon of migration. Nevertheless, the analyzed narrative allows us to place the fate of Weronika's mother in the perspective of the analysis of the migration stream of (Polish) women after 1989 (e.g., Zamojski 2005, Slany 2008b, Urbańska 2015).

In this part of the text, it is also worth noting that the biographical method enables capturing the dimensions and levels of migration processes. Following Roswitha Breckner (2007), one can also point to the importance of biographical research in the analysis of complex migration experience. The author mentions four perspectives of the "image" of migration in the biographical story: "(1) migration as experience of suffering, especially as loss of orientation and existential security (e.g., Maurenbrecher 1985); (2) migration as experience of transition between traditionality and modernity (e.g., Schiffauer 1991); (3) migration as experience of intercultural learning (e.g., Apitzsch 1990 and Lutz 1991); (4) migration as experience of transcending (national) borders – that is, of transnationality (e.g., Kreuzer, Roth 2006)" (Breckner 2007: 119). The analysis of the history of Weronika in this text is an attempt to present migration as "an experience of suffering." Migration in this sense is "an event that brings loss, fear, and horror in the face of traumatic migratory experiences" (Slany 2008a: 10).

At the end of this outlined theoretical and methodological perspective, it is important to stress that the analysis made in the text touches upon three dimensions emphasized in the studies of the phenomenon of migration, which are: (1) the individual dimension manifesting itself in "linking the subjective experience of migration with the axio-normative sphere"; (2) the microstructural dimension understood in relation to the network of relations created in the

⁷ This research was part of a wider project entitled *FeMiPol: Integration of Female Immigrants in the Labor Market and Society: Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations*. It was a STREP Project of the 6th Framework Program of the European Commission Scientific Support to Policies SSP4 – Contract No. 022666. It was conducted in 2006–2008 by the Institute of Sociology at the Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland), University of Florence (Italy), Intercollege Cyprus, Institute of Social Research at J. W. Goethe University (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), Center for Research on Women's Issues (Athens, Greece). Project summary and research report are available at: <http://www.femipol.uni-frankfurt.de/>.

country of origin and the country of inflow; (3) the macrostructural dimension presenting global processes and social phenomena connected with them that affect the experience of migration (Slany 2008a: 11–12).

**Weronika's case – a study of the autobiographical story
divided into two analytical threads
Research commentary**

The analysis of Weronika's life history should begin with a short ethnographic commentary on the situation of the interview. I met the narrator, who permanently lives in Italy, during her visit to Poland in 2015. We both participated in international research workshops, during which Weronika had an opportunity to listen to a presentation devoted to the project: "Biographical Experience of the Transformation Process in Poland. A Sociological Comparison Based on Biographical Analysis," (supervised by Professor Kaja Kaźmierska, University of Łódź), on which I was working. On the last day of the workshops, Weronika asked our team if she could take part in our research and tell her life story. This is not a typical situation encountered by biographical researchers. The way of recruiting interviewees is fundamentally different and rarely do the narrators know the exact aims of the research. In addition, at that time, Weronika was finishing her doctoral thesis at one of the Polish universities and was scientifically connected with the field of social sciences. This aspect could have influenced her preparation for the interview, focusing her story on specific topics.

Despite the fears that such a situation may hamper the spontaneity of the narrator's story desired in a narrative interview which is supposed to be improvised, we decided to record the story of Weronika. In this way, I managed to conduct the interview, which is in the focus of this text.

Very soon the doubts I had about the interview with Weronika turned out to be unnecessary. The narrator treated our meeting rather as an opportunity to share her story. Thus, the subject matter of the indicated research project, although undoubtedly resounding in the interview, was not the main axis of the narrator's account, which she clung to as she was familiar with the assumptions of our research.

As a researcher, I did not feel that Weronika had prepared for the interview, that she had been wondering what to say, and had planned in some way how to present her biography. In the interview, we find many moments in which the interviewee talks about her feelings by presenting subsequent detailed fragments of biographical events (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2006: 19, Schütze 2008a, b: 2014). The motif linking the successive phases of Weronika's experience is a structure of

trajectory which involves the narrator in undertaking a reflection on herself in relation to her life difficulties. Thus, in the analysis below, I try to show the reasons why Weronika is unable to work through her biographical experience of crisis. I also observe here the connection with the events that marked the narrator's biographical identity during her education and early adulthood

Old patterns of action and the new logic of power – a biographical story of transformation time in Poland

Weronika was born in the early 1980s in one of the largest cities in Central and Eastern Poland. Until the beginning of the 1990s, she was brought up in a privileged family. Her grandmother on her father's side was a high-profile party activist, which at that time enabled her to provide her relatives with economic and social capital. Using this resource, Weronika's father and mother worked in a large state-owned company operating a chain of stores throughout Poland. In addition, thanks to the kindness of one of the friends of the aforementioned grandmother – aunt Ida, the narrator's parents had the possibility to live (with this aunt) in her spacious three-room apartment. This provided Weronika and her sister with the comfort of growing up in very good economic conditions, and the work of her parents meant that the family had no shortage of material goods.

The interviewee often emphasized in her interview that an end to this "good life" situation came in the year 1989. At that time, the narrator's parents, due to the free market competition for the state enterprise in which they were employed, lost the possibility to continue working in its structures. They also encountered great difficulties in finding a new job and experienced the inadequacy of the patterns of conduct adapted during the communist period to the new post-communist social reality.

Anita Miszalska, referring to the optics of the first half of the 1990s, comments that it was characterized by:

First of all, internal polymorphism, resulting from the co-existence of elements of the old and new order, that is, continuation and change, in the collective life, in its institutional and conscious dimension. Both in the economy, the political sphere of life and in the system of values, in the attitudes and habits of people, in the public custom, et cetera, on the one hand, there are phenomena genetically related to the over forty-year history of real socialism, on the other hand, we observe a slow formation of institutions, patterns of action, and interests related to the rules of the market economy, to the ethos of a democratic society (Miszalska 1996: 8).

In this perspective, the experience of Weronika's parents can be considered on two levels. Firstly, from a broader perspective, as a result of a change in social

relations after 1989. In other words, as a consequence of a shift towards the elimination of the deficit economy and the development of political and economic freedoms. Secondly, it points to the “genetic” rooting of the mental resources of Weronika’s family in the rules of the socialist system. Miszalska (1995) sees the difficulties in the implications of the new “transformational mentality” as micro-obstacles or micro-blockades of transformation. Bogdan Mach (1998: 37) points out that “such reasoning assumes that there is a negative relationship between mental resources derived from state socialism and socio-economic achievements in the new system, and the development of attitudes expressing support for the political principles of the new system.” I will now quote a longer passage from Weronika’s narrative about the situation of her family after 1989.

N: A tragedy at our home, because I see it in terms of tragedy in general, well, our whole world had collapsed. In 1989, when the Communist regime collapsed and [the name of the place where parents were employed] no longer existed. So my father lost his job and my mother lost her job. And there was a very big problem with working anywhere for my parents.

I: Yhmm.

N: Because my grandmother no longer, I mean, she was still alive, but she didn’t have those rights to protect them anymore. Because, I think, she had a lot to say here... that she was protecting her children... And I think it was a big problem for the whole family. Because they, all the brothers, including my father, could not find themselves in this new reality, they were not prepared for it. Because there was always this grandmother who helped them in case they needed. And then it turned out that the grandmother no longer had any power, of course, proverbially speaking, and so she cannot help them. And so, came the search for a job for my parents... It was also very, very painful for me because there was a lot of talking about it in my family. Because my father couldn’t find a job anywhere, my mother even more so. Especially since the past haunted them, so, you know that at the beginning everyone separated themselves from it as much as they could. And here many things couldn’t be hidden, like the fact that my dad couldn’t manage in the army, so my grandmother got him some papers [which let him leave the army due to an untrue psychological opinion, written on the request of his mother]. And that’s what’s haunting him. Despite the fact that he was not mentally ill, but in order to get him out of there, one had to have such a bypass. And today it resonates that my father couldn’t get a job. Besides, he didn’t finish school, he didn’t have a high school diploma, my mother didn’t graduate from high school either, because she was eighteen years old [when she got married and started a family]. And she didn’t have the Matura exam. And I think it had a great influence on our family, because my parents, especially my mother, did everything to make sure we had the Matura exam. And that’s how the problem with work arose, my father didn’t have a job. And I remember how he looked for a job. And the discussions were quite heated at home: “So, I should have experience, I am supposed to be young,”

because he was already in his forties, “So, I’m supposed to have experience, speak five languages” [he was saying]. And, for him, it was such a terrible shock... So he didn’t find this job. And they had to make a decision, so my mother said that she would go abroad [to work there].

The quoted fragment can be referred to the assumptions which Mach (1998: 25) makes about family categories or family resources in the context of researching the transformation process. The author emphasizes that: “In the period of departure from the system of state socialism, the influence of family resources shaped in the outgoing system on current achievements and attitudes becomes particularly clear” (Mach 1998: 25). This concerns economic, organizational, cultural, and psychological (in other words, mental) resources. Considering Weronika’s family experience in such a way, in the passage of her biography quoted above, we are dealing with a story about the elimination of the significance of family resources in the period of leaving the system of state socialism.

The feelings of loss of stability and helplessness resulting from the initiation of transformation processes are transformed into the experience of real consequences of functioning in the new logic of power. In the case of Weronika’s family, they are connected with the degradation of their social status. The loss of their long-lasting privileged social position is linked to the growing problem of unemployment among the narrator’s parents. It also manifests itself as a disturbance in the transfer of mental resources, immersed in the ideas of the past social formation. In the case of Weronika’s life history, it is clear that the (political) party’s support for her grandmother, which was important until 1989, allowed her to “play out” the associated benefits in accordance with the rules of reality in the People’s Republic of Poland. The time of transformation, on the other hand, is a “*meta-game* whose subject are the rules of the *transformation game*” (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000). In the new reality, the narrator’s grandmother’s connections not only lose their meaning, but also cease to function within the whole family. Other members of the family, like the parents of the interviewee, lose their familiar access to social and economic resources.

The consequences of the time of transformation in Weronika’s biographical experience are the lowering of the social status of her family and the aspect of unemployment faced by the narrator’s parents (especially her father). That being said, the transfer of transformation capital, which is a barrier to the functioning of Weronika’s parents on the labor market, translates into the necessity of labor migration of her mother. I will develop this topic in a moment.

First of all, it should be noted that Weronika’s mother, who, in the narrator’s story, seems to be more responsible and resourceful than her father, after unsuccessful attempts to find a job in Poland, initially went to former socialist countries where she was involved in petty trade on street markets. Then, while maintaining this livelihood, she and her husband were engaged in itinerant

trade, but in small towns and villages in Poland. This was an attempt to break the deadlock in their experience of impoverishment and unemployment, but at the biographical cost of the lack of time for the family's everyday life.

As a result, when her parents were absent, aunt Ida took care of Weronika and her older sister. In this situation, she played the role of a foster grandmother, being not only the carer of the girls, but also a significant other during their socialization. Katarzyna Waniek (2016: 121) notes that in such a situation, grandmothers play the role of significant others, not only taking over part of the burden of busy parents, but also “reducing tensions between two almost mutually exclusive orders – modernity and postmodernity.” For Weronika, aunt Ida played a similar role. The narrator repeatedly invokes her in the interview, emphasizing how many of the features that define her identity today she owes not to her parents, but her aunt. She also attributes to this aunt her safe and idyllic childhood, which ended with the advent of the new logic of power connected with the ideas of capitalism (Czyżewski 2009a, Waniek 2016).⁸

In this part of the text, I would like to show how Weronika relates the period before 1989 as her good memories. Below I quote an analytically important fragment of her narrative.

N: I had Mars, Snickers bars, Donald bubble gum, tons of them in my house. I remember that there was a big container in the corner room and Mars bars were lying there. And nobody ever explained to me that the children on the street didn't have that. And here funny situations emerge, because my husband, he was also born in the early 80s, a completely different case, a completely different story, that his father would go to Hungary and bring chocolate-like products, and until now he tells me: “And here the lady had Mars bars, Snickers, Donalds,” because it was all over at my place. I still remember the price tags with the sign [name of the company in which Weronika's parents worked].

I: Yhmm.

N: And he just didn't have it, so such a comparison till today, when we talk about those years, he says: “But, what do you know about communism, my dear, you didn't have to stand in queues.” For example, I remember perfume at home. For me, that was really commonplace. Ehm and like ehm...I remember that my mother used to wear one kind of perfume. Such a specific smell, and I ask mom, what was the smell. And she tells me Poison by Dior, yes. And I walked

⁸ Marek Czyżewski (2009: 91), whose deliberations Katarzyna Waniek (2016) refers to, writes about the special role that “economizing” rhetoric plays in the new reality (here the author puts emphasis especially on the second decade after the fall of the People's Republic of Poland), which translates into a sense of the need to be creative, efficient, and consequently entrepreneurial. Those issues are also discussed in Chapter X written by Katarzyna Waniek, included in part III of this book.

around the perfumeries I was looking for it and it's not the same smell I remember anymore. It was such a huge purple bottle with such press, such... swish! Not like today, but such, such pressed. And I remember this and I try to recreate it in my memory, I remember that smell, but it's not what I'm looking for in perfumeries anymore. Ehm and life was good, I'll tell you honestly, life was good, although I didn't understand this world... For example, a lady from the countryside came to us once a week and brought us meat. And there was also a lot of this meat in our house because you know that barter trade was going on, and today I know that. I didn't know before and I didn't understand why she was coming to our house... Ehm and these were the most beautiful times/ well, of course, I didn't tell anyone at school, because I didn't know about it. I thought it was normal, that these Snickers, Mars bars/ That it is OK and so every child has it. Besides, my parents never gave me these things for school, I had it at home, but outside it was as if I was protected. And I didn't realize that, and I lived that way, yes, I lived. I went to school. I didn't like going to kindergarten, I always preferred to stay with this aunt, with this aunt Ida. And I really remember those times as fantastic ones.

Weronika's biographical memory of her childhood is full of symbolic references characteristic of people manifesting nostalgia and longing for the past. That is why the narrator focuses mainly on evoking further snapshots of memories in which she seeks familiar images, smells, but also feelings she would like to return to. She is also strongly emotionally connected with the places of this memory. In another fragment of the interview, she devotes a lot of time to describing her attachment to the city she grew up in, to its streets, buildings, history. At the same time, what can be seen in the above-quoted passage of her biography, despite the presentation of her safe and the truly beautiful experience of those times, in the narration, there is no wider perspective. By talking about that period from the biographical perspective of "now," Weronika does not refer her history to the specificity of the social change that took place in Poland. I do not mean here the need for her to build a commentary in the shape of a scientific reflection, but rather the lack of any attempt to relate her story on a wider scale to, for example, the issue of her family being privileged.

In order to show a comparative perspective, I would like to quote here a fragment of another narrative in which it can be clearly seen that a world full of material goods, hardly accessible to the general public during the PPR, and the biographical experience of Weronika's childhood was associated more with the prosperity of the West than with the Polish everyday life of those times. Hanna,⁹ a doctor born in the early 1980s, recalls the following story about her childhood experience:

⁹ A comparative analysis juxtaposing Hanna's case with two other female autobiographical narratives (Inga and Julia's) is presented in Chapter X written by Katarzyna Waniek, included in Part III of this book.

N: Me and Agnieszka, my sister, went to Denmark with my mum alone because we have an uncle there. (.) So first we took a bus somewhere to Hamburg, spending the whole night on that bus was quite entertaining, and they played movies so we could watch. Then we switched to a different bus, then took a train. Well, so the expedition was quite, (.) well unusual. Usually, it would take shorter to travel and with adventures on the way. Anyway so there was this clash with all the welfare. Because (.) everything was there. There were the markets that we now have everywhere. There was a whole wall of crisps, a whole wall of candy of some sort. Colorful, it messed with your eyes, and it was so amazing to us. When we finally got a penny to buy ourselves a packet of crisps, then it took us really long to choose something from the plethora of flavors, to choose the best ones, and the ones that / (.) the most attractive ones. And we both remembered the ice-cream, because there were the Schoeller Algida ice-creams, served at these stands so that you could choose which ones you wanted and we would spend hours standing there / choosing which one wanted which, simply because we did not have that in Poland. You could get ice-cream scoops at most, or those from the machine. The greatest dilemma was which ones / I am not saying they were not tasty, but they were certainly not that colorful. What else was there / I was always geared for food, so this is probably why I remember that so well, but there were also hamburgers and hot dogs. This is something I remember to this day. Usually, when I see my uncle in Denmark, or when I speak to him I always recall how he bought me my first hamburger and hot dog and my first ice-cream.

I: Yhmm.

N: He pampered us in that way and drove around that place and this was a clash with a completely different world.

Against the background of the autobiographical narratives in our collection, it is much more often the Western world, as in the story of Hanna, that is placed on the side of experiencing prosperity, having unlimited access to and the possibility of choosing products. Speaking about her experience of childhood in Poland before 1989, Hanna refers primarily to the concept of a scarcity economy. In one of the passages of her biography, the narrator emphasizes: "I also remember [...] the time when many things were lacking in Poland. I still remember these empty stores. And really long queues for God-knows-what, and then there were these ration cards. I have a slightly vague recollection of that, my sister remembers it much more vividly." However, unlike Weronika, Hanna (and her older sister¹⁰) were not brought up in a privileged family favored by the system due to the party involvement

¹⁰ In our project we also collected an interview with Hanna's sister. She is anonymized as Agnieszka and a more thorough analysis of her interview can be found in Chapter XIV, included in Part IV of this book.

of their grandparents or parents. This would be a key thread if one attempted to compare the ways in which both interviewees talk about the time of transformation in Poland, to show a certain uniqueness of Weronika's perspective. Her biographical experience presents a certain reversal and suspension of the comparative perspective of the Polish People's Republic versus the Western world, as shown through Hanna's narrative. The uniqueness of Weronika's life history emphasized here is only such in relation to the other biographical stories collected in our project. Thus, I do not assume the lack of similar biographical experiences when contacting further narrators, I just point out that in the study we conducted, the biography analyzed in this chapter stands out significantly from our collection. However, the narrator's lack of reflectiveness regarding her privilege is a very interesting analytical thread. Referring to the fragments of the interview with Hanna cited above, one can see in a clearer way the significant lack of Weronika setting her biography in a wider context and the narrator's difficulty in conducting some self-reflection regarding her biographical experience.¹¹

Although Weronika attempts to show this comparative perspective, the reflection associated with any macro-structural commentary is missing. The only point of reference for explaining the difference between her everyday world and other people's experiences is the reference to her husband and his different memories of that period. Here the interviewee agrees that she did not experience many hardships of the reality of the People's Republic of Poland. However, this reflection remains here only on the level of quoting the different optics in which her husband and his family functioned. The narrator turns this important thread more into an anecdote and shortens it considerably, without taking up the perspective of her husband.

¹¹ In the collection of interviews gathered in the project, one can indicate, as a reference point for Weronika's lack of reflectiveness in relation to her privilege, an interview with Teresa, born in 1964. The narrator, who has been running her own business in the confectionery industry in one of the largest cities in Poland for several years, while telling her biography also does not reflect on the situation and the structural conditions in which she became the owner of this business. The narrator merely mentions that this is a legacy received from her parents, but she does not perceive this economic capital as, for example, a certain uniqueness of her biographical experience compared to the life stories of other people from her generation. Additionally, referring to this category of reflectiveness, while looking at the products of symbolic culture one can also point to the autobiographical story of Monika Jaruzelska titled: *Towarzyszka panienska* (2013). The author tries to remain reflective in "the story of a normal, though historically entangled family" as she puts it herself. Yet, sometimes she loses a certain reference perspective and fails to place her, after all, privileged position against the broader context of the PPR and transformation in Poland.

Again, in order to introduce an additional comparative context, I would like to quote here a short fragment of an interview with Paweł, a manager born in the early 1970s.¹² It should be briefly mentioned that Paweł, like Weronika, comes from a privileged family, but the fate of his grandparents and parents are not marked by the transformational reality and the phenomena of unemployment, poverty, and the need to emigrate, as it is the case of Weronika's history of life discussed in this text. Additionally, Paweł, being aware of his childhood experienced privilege, due to the good financial situation of his family, and his father's work in the trade industry, undertakes a reflection on the situation in Poland. In one fragment of his narrative he comments:

N: I still remember the years, let's say/ because my dad was working in trade, so I was never affected by problems of standing in the queue. So thanks to/ it's probably a thing which distinguishes me from people, even from those years, who remember standing in long queues. Currently, I am obviously aware that only some products were available in stores, but I know that if something was available/ then my dad could ask to put it aside for us, yes. Ok, it was rationed, it was tough, I know, but we didn't have to stand in the queue from let's say at night, on the queue list and take turns. So I wasn't affected by it. I can't, so I can't, I can't boast that that system hurt me considerably and that I remember it as a big disadvantage. Well, I don't remember it because thanks to the place of work of my dad I didn't struggle with such problems. However, I remember those years [...], and my friend who lived in the block opposite ours and I remember that my/ but it must have been really some time before the changes, 'cause he said he had to go and buy some meat and they are going to stand in a queue for a few hours with his brother. There were two of them and they would take turns with his brother because he had to stand in a queue at the butcher's. Anyway, I remember I went to my dad then, dad worked not too far away, half a kilometer away. I went to him and I say to him 'listen there's going to be this and this and then he's like 'ok, tell him to bring his rationing cards, cause without cards it wouldn't work', and then he'd take care of it. So I can remember such things that that system harmed people by forcing them to look for solutions in ways, which didn't look as they should or weren't honest/ didn't have anything to do with an, anything to do with an honest attitude to life. So you know [...] there are such moments which make me wonder whether the man acts wrongly or well when they act like that. It wouldn't change the situation if I hadn't taken those opportunities, which were presented thanks to my dad's place of work, my situation wouldn't have improved, the situation of other people wouldn't have improved either. It was the economy of eternal shortages and if it wasn't me then somebody else would have used it.

¹² A more thorough analysis of the interview with Paweł can be found in Chapter XIV, included in Part IV of this book.

Therefore, in the quoted passage of Paweł's biography a comparative perspective and a certain self-reflection is present, which places his individual biographical experience in relation to the collective mechanisms of interaction appropriate for the socialist system. Like Weronika, he is aware of the "good life in those times" and the biographical security that his father's work provided for his family. However, when telling his life history, he places a much broader perspective on this "wonderful" experience of childhood and adolescence before 1989, exposing also the negative impact of the structures of that system. Weronika, referring to her husband's experiences, remains only at the level of briefly recalling them, rather than telling them in the form of anecdotes. Paweł, however, recalling the experiences of his friend, tries to show, on the one hand, a certain uniqueness of his individual biographical experience. On the other, he tries to reconstruct those situations in which the described system failed. Thus, in Paweł's narrative, his commentary on the macro-structural perspective places his way of talking about that time beyond the nostalgic tale so visible in Weronika's account.

The lack of such a deeper reference in the above-quoted passage of the interview with Weronika means that this fragment, showing a certain uniqueness of her biographical experience within the framework of the People's Republic of Poland, is treated very superficially. Thus, Weronika does not problematize her life history before the change in the context of the biographical experience of the time of transformation. It is only in the moment of the aforementioned experience of the 1990s that the narrator, although she does not say much about the social change, points to its consequences for her family.

In both quoted passages of the narration, the main axis is the distinction between the pre- and post-1989 period, without a broader reflection of the narrator. This division is determined by historical and social contexts. The first one is the duration of the communist era, which was dominated by disciplinary power. The second is a period of dynamic transformations initiated after the collapse of the People's Republic of Poland and connected with the implementation of the free market economy and neoliberal ideology. In addition, Czyżewski, referring to the reflections of Michel Foucault,¹³ comments that neoliberalism:

Aims to create a society that is neither fully disciplinary (enforcing regulatory submission and motivating the zeal of workers, officials, soldiers, students, and other groups of subordinates of various institutions) nor normalizing (based on a strict distinction between what is normal and what is abnormal), but it is a new type of society which leaves a large margin of freedom to individuals,

¹³ Czyżewski (2009) refers here to the text by Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.

respecting the principle of tolerance of various types of minorities, does not want to influence the participants in the game, but only its rules, and intervenes not through internal subordination of individuals to the institutional plan, but taking into account their own social environment (Czyżewski: 2009a: 88).

In this perspective, it can be said that Weronika's parents, when confronted with a new type of economy, are experiencing the beginnings of "governmentality flourishing under neoliberal forms of ruling" (Czyżewski 2009a: 90). The counter-proposal of a new social reality for the already recognized principles of functioning within the framework of state socialism is to deprive the state of the power and control of the market and to turn towards the subjectivization of the market as a "principle organizing and regulating the state" (Czyżewski 2009a: 90). In such social conditions, as can be seen from the example of the history of Weronika's family, the narrator's grandmother's valuable anchorage in the state apparatus of power, which generates a field for managing family resources, does not bring the desired results.

Due to the inability to act without a lack of connections and education, Weronika's parents face the consequences of transformation. The methodology selected in the text gives the possibility of insight into the processuality of an individual's experience. Therefore, in the analysis of Weronika's case, one can see the relation between the experience of transformation time in the history of her parents. What is important, however, the example of this biography shows that it is the narrator born in the 1980s who experiences (which I am trying to show in further analysis) a much fuller repertoire of difficulties related to her biography being embedded within this new (neoliberal) logic of power.

This is evident in the adult life of Weronika when the narrator is entangled in the inability to take up a permanent job at the universities of Italy. This is due, first of all, to her problems in implementing the biographical scheme of action associated with emigration. Here, as I will show later in the text, the experience of Weronika related to her mother's emigration to Italy in the 1990s plays an important role. The second reason is that the narrator has to face the context of being a migrant (also in Italy). In addition, Weronika, still strongly located in the symbolic universe¹⁴ of the People's Republic of Poland, encounters difficulties in constructing her biographical identity from the perspective of a new "governmentality" perspective, whose rhetoric in the field of economy is represented by elements of the neoliberal "newspeak" (Czyżewski 2009a: 93, Waniek 2016: 119, 123, 140).

¹⁴ According to Berger and Luckmann (1966: 88–90), the symbolic universe shapes the elementary premises of attitude towards the world and provides integrated meaning for individuals and collectivities. It also frames the dependencies between a person's collective life and individual biography.

Summarizing this part of the analysis, which is an attempt to combine the biographical experience of the time of transformation in the history of Weronika's life with the collective mechanisms of influence inscribed in the process of transformation which took place in Poland after 1989, one can notice that this time caesura plays an important role in the biographical story discussed here. Referring to the still available symbolic cultural products reminding Weronika of her "good childhood" as she says herself, the narrator comments: "It is fantastic for me that I will sit down... I will turn on a cartoon, a film... and I am in my past." A moment later, referring to the situation in Poland after 1989, she states: "[But, now] I'm not coping, nobody taught us, my parents couldn't cope with this different reality and I can't cope." Despite the good memories of the first years of her childhood, the narrator, in the final phase of her spontaneous improvised narrative, says: "So, this is my story... but this past... of my parents, my grandparents, I think it has a big influence on who I am today and why I am coping or not."

The context of being a migrant woman's child as a biographical cost of transformation time

As I tried to show in the previous subchapter of this text, the costs of transformation that Weronika talks about in relation to the history of her family after 1989 concern: the change of her social status, unemployment, and also what will be the subject of this part of the text – the necessity of migration of the narrator's mother. Due to the limited account of the subject of Weronika's mother's feelings about migration, and the more elaborate thread of the experience of a migrant woman's child present in the analyzed biography, the text focuses on the development of the second aspect.

According to Sylwia Urbańska (2015: 26), transnational motherhood in the context of the migration experience of Polish women is part of the history of the period between 1989 and 2004. The author emphasizes that:

These migrants' biographical trajectories are shaped by social change in Central and Eastern Europe and emerge from the socio-economic context of Polish transformation, which consists of: disparate experiences of different social groups, new phenomena such as mass unemployment, inflation and related inability to pay off loans and debts, rapid impoverishment of many social groups, pauperization of peripheries, difficulty in finding one's place in the new market reality (Urbańska 2015: 26).

The biographical experience of the migration of Weronika's mother is inscribed in the socio-historical context of the migration of women from

Poland between 1989 and 2004. Additionally, Krystyna Slany (2008b: 330) notes that at that time “women constituted over 70% of Polish migrants staying in Italy.” The author, making a comparative analysis of the research on Polish migrant women in Italy and the USA, emphasizes that in the first socio-cultural context, Polish migrant women are often assigned to the possibility of working in three spheres: care for the elderly, childcare, or sex work (Slany 2008b: 334–335).

From Weronika’s biography we learn that her mother has been working in Italy for 20 years as a cleaner and caregiver. She, therefore, belongs to migrant women “who do hard work for the benefit of women from the host country in the name of a *kind of reciprocity* – I give you remuneration for your work and you give me your services” (Slany 2008b: 334–335). As I stress in the next subchapter of the following text, Weronika tries to fight against such attribution of migrant women to physical jobs. She tries to break the status, which, in her opinion, is assigned to Polish migrants, of the women who are necessary to satisfy the needs of the host country.

Returning to the history of Weronika’s mother’s emigration, she decided to go to Italy in the mid-1990s, first for short stays of up to three months. With time, due to the unchanging unemployment situation of the narrator’s father, the stays in Italy become longer and longer. This combination of events strongly influences the biographical experience of transformation in the history of Weronika’s life. On the one hand, the narrator comments and remembers that her “mom was not there,” which contributed to her experience of suffering. On the other hand, the methods of taking care of daughters living in Poland, in the case of Weronika’s mother’s conduct, were in line with the old patterns of action already mentioned in the text. Their use in the process of remote care of Weronika and her sister deepened the trajectory experience of the narrator. What I mean here are such kind of arrangements connected with using unofficial ways of “getting things done.” This does not necessarily mean that in the new logic people were not using such ways to deal with their issues. It must be emphasized, however, that the narrator’s mother did not follow the patterns connected with the new logic, but she was trying to organize her activities in a way which had brought her profits in the socialist system.

Discussing the context of being a migrant woman’s child during the transformation, I will look at the fragment of the interview linking Weronika’s childhood and early adulthood experience. Analyzing the narrator’s biography we can see that in this phase of her life history we are dealing with a “cumulative disorder of biographical trajectory” (Riemann and Schütze 1991: 349). Thus, the main rhetorical figure in the biographical memory of Weronika of that time is suffering. I quote here a passage from the interview:

I started primary school as a very good student... Later, I was doing worse and worse, because my mother was not there for me, and I am such a sensitive and gentle child. And I was attached to my mother. I'm saying I was because we have drifted apart. But, yes, I was here and she wasn't there for me. And I had trouble coping with it, so somewhere there was this need for motherly love. And, well, it had to be vented somewhere. My father didn't make sure that Weronika, for example, read something or did something. My father was, well, he was/ although he is such a big fan of history and I think that what is happening to me today is also thanks to him. But, then he couldn't do it with those children... I am grateful to him because I came from school and I always had a warm dinner on the table. And I appreciate it very much and I am very grateful to him for that. But, for example, all the trips around [the name of the city in Poland where she was born and lived until she emigrated], or the cemetery [the name of the cemetery], I went to collect chestnuts at the cemetery [the name of the cemetery] before it was fenced off and you could still go inside. Dad showed me a lot of things in [name of the town], he taught me this place. That's why I have such a great love for this city today. I say that nowhere is there such a good place to live as in [the name of the city]. But, hmm this primary school, I was later falling behind, I had only D marks from top to bottom. But, my mom said that we had to have high school diplomas. And I don't know how it happened, but she came to some/ I don't know if it was through her friends that it turned out that there was a teacher in high school, of course, I'm saying it with great/ for me it wasn't a teacher/ to whom my mother paid money. I mean, maybe not real money, but she gave her gifts like gold rings so that my sister would first get accepted to that high school, then she would stay in that high school and graduate. And the same situation occurred in my case, when I was in high school/ later when they moved me to [the name of the street] to the primary school, it wasn't high, it was just/ well, people went there. I don't want to say now that it was an area, but [the name of the part of the city] here was an area that didn't fit my vision of the world. Because in my family it was always said that studying was always such a strong topic, that my father didn't have the Matura exam and, "Look how he ended." My mother didn't have the Matura exam, and she was wandering around the world. And it turned out here that I didn't like this world, this [name of the street], I didn't feel it. Girls in primary school would cut themselves, yes, on their hands, I didn't fit in at all. I, I'm saying, this is not my world, these are not my circles. And I never had any friends in this matter, I didn't feel good. And then, of course, I followed in the footsteps of my sister, because I wanted to go to art school. I was even quite gifted, but my mother said that she had no connection there and no. And that I would not go to art school, because I was told so, because I always had problems with my back. I am now after surgery, I mean ten, almost twelve years ago I was operated on and I have implants in my back. Now it turns out that I have problems with my eyesight. And it was because I was born prematurely. But, then nobody thought about the rehabilitation of the newborn, everyone only prayed that the child would survive... Later it turned out that my mother pushed me into the same high school as my sister, because, well, for her, she wanted me to have the Matura because she hadn't succeeded and she was

afraid that we might also fail. She didn't trust us at some point. And, today, I'm not judging her harshly for that. I am grateful to her, but... she locked me up like this, I mean, maybe she didn't lock the doors for me, because I later opened up these doors myself and on my own account, but she didn't give me such a benefit of trust.

The quoted fragment shows, first of all, the embedding of Weronika's mother in the rules and patterns of action attributed to state socialism. She acts by subordinating her concern for the education of her daughters (which is important in the new logic of power) to the action pattern of "getting things done." It means that the action pattern she uses is the form of an unofficial arrangement which she considered as the only option of providing the social benefits for her children. However, such an emphasis on support has a highly destructive effect on the development of Weronika's identity. The traumatic situation for the narrator, deepened by the years spent in high school under the "eye" of a school teacher, results in her failure to pass the Matura exam. She still – at the time of the interview – connects the reasons for this event with the activities of the pedagogue who "took care" of her education. The motif of the necessity of retaking the Matura exam and the physical absence of the narrator's mother at that difficult time impacted her persistence in the trajectory. In the course of this process structure, Weronika's "organization of everyday life" and her "orientation towards herself" collapsed (Schütze 2012: 429).

At the beginning of the above-quoted fragment of the narration, Weronika notes that she was a good student and that it was the absence of her mother that was the first reason for her situation at school to deteriorate. Unfortunately, the mismatched methods chosen by Weronika's mother (such an important figure in the biographical experience of the teenage girl) to support her education directly resulted in the inhibition of the development of her positive biographical identity. Losing her aunt Ida, who died at that time, and her mother who was far away, Weronika becomes more and more lonely, unable to count on her father's or older sister's support.

In the quoted passage, the narrator also refers to her illness. At this point, it should be explained that Weronika was born as a premature baby with osteopenia. The failure of taking immediate action against this disease while Weronika was physically growing resulted in the necessity of conducting several surgeries on her back to prevent the loss of her ability to walk. What is important, based on the knowledge of the whole interview with Weronika, it can be concluded that the thus far stages of the disease have been normalized by the narrator. For this reason, this aspect of her biographical experience is not marked by trajectory potential.

Returning to Weronika's educational experience, its processuality can be indicated by a short interpretation of her mother's intention to "take care" of

her children's education. The interviewee's mother, who, in her biography, pays the price associated with the difficulties of taking up employment in Poland, strived at all costs to protect her daughters from such experience. In her understanding, the stake in the "transformation game" was education, which she and her husband did not have. Thus, the relationship between actions resulting from the recognition of the principles of the new neoliberal logic and, at the same time, the lack of reflection on the change in patterns of action, can be outlined as an interesting phenomenon. In this way, the behavior of the narrator's mother derives from the rules characteristic for the previous system. In this constellation of events, Weronika bears the biographical costs of her mother's behavior. It should be pointed out that the mother's actions are also the consequence of her emigration, and it can be assumed that they result from the fact of doing "distant care." This can be understood as a situation in which the obtained economic benefits compensate for the separation. At the same time, Weronika's mother's behavior and her migration to Italy in the 1990s are the consequences of her mismatch with the new logic of power.

In order to describe the narrator's story until her emigration to Italy (in 2005), I will clarify a few important issues. It was not until the time of her undergraduate studies, which she successfully pursued having passed the school-leaving exam, that the narrator was able to make attempts to free herself from the trajectory. The narrator was a very good student and, as she emphasizes, "finally felt that she was doing well." Unfortunately, the practical "gaining control over trajectory and/or trying to break free from its ties" (Schütze 2012: 430), which was possible at that time, was disrupted by her decision to migrate to Italy. In this view, Weronika not only fails to work through her sense of low self-esteem and the difficult past, but also falls into a new dimension of trajectory experience. In the new situation, it is caused by the suffering connected with everyday life abroad.

The context of being a migrant in relation to biographical tensions and costs. Weronika's adult biographical problems entangled in her previous biographical experience

The experience of migration to Italy is another very difficult stage in the narrator's biography. The moment and the way Weronika decided to leave the country deserve analytical attention. Despite her plans to continue her Master's studies in Poland, the interviewee agrees to her husband's proposal to go to Italy for a few months. She was convinced to choose this location by the possibility of spending time with her mother, perhaps making up for the years of separation and, what is important, by the assumption that they are leaving Poland temporarily and not permanently. In this optics, Weronika was

convinced that she would only temporarily postpone her scientific plans and would soon return to Poland.

Weronika's husband, however, as she emphasizes in the interview, "from the very beginning he planned to stay in Italy for longer." In addition, unlike his wife, he fit very well into the Italian culture and labor market. The versatility of his profession – working in the IT industry – enabled him not only to quickly find a well-paid job, but also to develop professionally. In the interview, the interviewee comments that the experience of her husband's emigration is positive, without any difficult situations or suffering.

Investigating the context of Weronika's decision to emigrate, it can be pointed out that she was motivated by her significant others (husband, mother), who introduced Italy to her as a place of living a better life. At the time of her departure, she believed that she could return to her childhood sense of security, the "good past," as she puts it. In addition, this apparent sense of security at the time of departure was provided by the idea that she and her husband were going to see her mother, who had been living in Italy for years. This was due to the belief that she had a network of contacts and was able to support Weronika in finding her way in a new country without any knowledge of the language or the cultural codes. At the moment of her decision to leave, although Weronika has plans in Poland (Master's degree and academic career), she decides to emigrate, seeing this idea as an opportunity. In this perspective, referring to Andrzej Piotrowski, Kaja Kaźmierska, and Katarzyna Waniek's (2011) reflections on the biographical experience of gainful employment outside the country of origin, one can notice that Weronika is not driven by the traditional impulse to go abroad for better earnings. In this case, work is a secondary motif. This decision is rather characterized by the desire to meet her mother and the belief in a temporary framework of staying abroad.

Looking from the biographical perspective of "now" at this episode of her life, Weronika comments on it thusly: "I got married too early, I left [for Italy] too early." Moreover, she feels that this trip was necessary, to a large extent, for her husband and that despite being assured of a temporary stay in Italy, he did not intend to return to Poland. Overwhelmed by the new reality, she sinks into loneliness. I will now quote a long fragment of interview showing her experience as a migrant:

N: So, after the wedding, I was in love, I loved deeply, I left for a completely different reality, I couldn't find myself there. And, and I felt like my parents at that moment, who also couldn't find themselves in their own country at that time [time after 1989]. I was in another country, this language barrier, those stereotypes of women. He, as a man, managed to cope without any problems. And the world of information technology is governed by different laws than the humanities one. I could not find myself there, I wanted to go back. I was crying, he was shouting that I was no good

for anything, that the worm had come out again, that I'm a parasite, that I didn't have a job, I'm doing nothing, and so on, and so on. "You're like your father," because my father didn't find a job in the end. My mother went abroad, my father stayed at home, took care of us. And my mother's whole family was resentful of that fact. And that's what they called him, a parasite, that he doesn't do anything, and so on. And it was all like that, like a bomb that dropped on me.

Being abroad is not easy. I always say that this is a terrible country, terrible people. To go on vacation for two weeks, yes. But, to live there, it's especially for me, as a woman/ because they have a stereotype of the woman at home. And when she goes out and goes into education, it's a completely different story. And here, too, there was a problem with me. My husband was used to his mother working in [name of place], his father in [name of place], so they had those state jobs. And they never had this problem with the job, so he doesn't know what it means to look for a job. So he has those other values in his head and he got a good contract because he's a computer scientist, so he got it without a problem. And he got a permanent contract, just like his parents. And I didn't, because I just got to the point of what to do. Because I am seen as neither a babysitter, or a caregiver for the elderly, or a prostitute. And there's no month I would not receive such proposals of prostitution. And, and this is so hard to go through... And I couldn't find my place at work as a nanny, because I don't like children. I love mine, but they are children who know the rules. But, to raise someone else's children in such a way, it's beyond my strength. I don't like them screaming, crying, being so bad, no, no, no, it's beyond my strength. My children, yes, because they are my children who are longed for, loved. But, not other people's children. They exist, because they exist, someone wanted them, so let them do the childcare. I have more feelings for older people and I have a lot of respect for older people because I was raised by an older person. I was with her when she died, I know what it looks like [she means aunt Ida here]. And I'm not put off by the fact that something goes wrong with the human body. But... I have no health for that, I had spine surgery, so I can't carry someone, and the [old person's] body is much heavier, it looks different. So, in such jobs/ not that I think they're worse, God forbid, I have great respect for the people who do it. But, I can't, uh, I can't, uh, I can't, uh...

I: Do this kind of job.

N: Do this. And what happens, and what happens is that after my bachelor's degree I realized at some point that my husband and I were arguing a lot, especially since we bought a flat there [in Italy]... And, in our house, there are arguments about money because my husband requires me to do this kind of work. I worked as a nanny, I worked, I cleaned houses, and I was also a companion for the elderly, but these were never contracted jobs. Yes, it was an unofficial job market. And I understand that he is afraid of what will happen to me. I'm in my thirties and have no experience. I mean, I have experience, but I don't have it documented, so, at some point, I'll probably be starving when I'm an old grandmother, and I'm aware of this if nothing changes. Or, I don't know, I will work for the rest of my life.

In the experience of migration, Weronika's main theme is the difficulty in taking up a permanent job. Very soon it turns out that the narrator does not have sufficient competences nor professional experience. Like her parents in the 1990s, she fell into the trap of a mismatch with market rules. However, there is also a barrier to Weronika's assimilation of two cultures: Polish and Italian. Krystyna Slany (2008a: 23), referring to the concept of cultural valence of Antonina Kłosowska (1996), describes the model of the migrant's identity developed in this way as a two-way identity. It generates: "Double integration. The migrant's strategy consists of searching for new values so that they become useful and own, and, at the same time, do not force a leave from the original heritage" (Slany 2008a: 23). Weronika, strongly connected with Poland and considering returning to this country, is not inclined towards the integration of the Italian and Polish cultural contexts.

At the same time, she struggles with having to fit in the Italian labor market as a caregiver for the elderly, as a nanny, or as a sex worker. In her life's history, she confronts the professional roles assigned to her by the Italians with a desire to pursue academic work. During her ten-year stay in Italy, she obtained a Master's degree at an Italian university. At the time of the interview (the year 2015), she is a participant of a doctoral course at one of the Polish universities. She justifies her decision to get a doctorate with the aforementioned intention to find an academic job in Italy. This stage of her biographical experience is also connected with the need to eliminate tensions between the aspirations of the narrator and the attitude of her husband, who requires her to "go to normal work." Moreover, her obstinacy in her efforts to take up employment at a university in Italy is confronted with the Italian academic reality, in which obtaining a full-time contract is not easy, according to Weronika.

In addition, it should be noted that Weronika gave birth to her first daughter during her Master's studies in Italy. The second one was born when the narrator started her doctoral studies. In this way, the biographical experience of being a migrant fits into her life history, as well as the biographical experience of being a mother. What is important, Weronika's story about migration in the context of having and raising children, despite the hardships of motherhood abroad, is also full of positive references. All the other dimensions of her biographical experience of migration: marriage, work, family, and friendship ties, integration with the new historical and social context, are connected with building a narrative about the costs of migration. In the interview, we often encounter difficult fragments in which Weronika emphasizes that she is suffering. Below I quote one of such passages.

N: I had Professor T. here, he is here, I mean, he was a translator of literature... It was he who pushed me like this and he says to me: "Mrs. Weronika, I'll help

you, because I see the potential, I see that you want and know how." I owe these studies to him, that I got there at all and that I finished them in time... Because, in July, I graduated from these studies [Master's studies] so that he could push me for a doctorate. He says: "You have to go to Poland for your doctorate." And I promised him this, and promised that my daughter would speak Polish. Because then I had only one daughter. And I didn't attend classes later, because it was difficult for me having a child. I was alone, my husband didn't help me either. And it was terrible because I really wanted this child and suddenly I got a small, small/ small baby in the hospital, I don't know how this human works. A foreign language, strange/ which bothered me very much at first, not today, but for me, it was, how does it work? What's going on? So, a strange environment, here a husband, who has to sleep, because he goes to work, there me, doing my Master's thesis. Everything at once, I decided that I would manage, yes. Although I had moments when I was standing on the balcony with my daughter and saying and, "It will end soon, yes. This emigration will end." I'm sorry. [The narrator is crying]

I: No, it's okay, it's okay...

N: That's how it turned out.

Shortly after Weronika took up her doctoral studies, Professor T., unfortunately, died, leaving the narrator without the much-needed support in her academic career. In the above-mentioned fragment, the interviewee also points to her feeling of loneliness in Italy. The final passage of the quoted story in which the narrator admits to suicidal thoughts: "Although I had moments when I was standing on the balcony with my daughter and saying, and, 'It will end soon, yes. This emigration will end,'" proves the destabilization of the new precarious balance in the sphere of everyday matters maintained by Weronika. The narrator's experience also manifests itself in "using the energy to somehow sustain this precarious balance" (Schütze 2012: 428–429). This can lead to a growing state of biographical disorder in the presence of suffering markers.

Weronika, as a migrant, finds herself at a time when an overwhelming amount of duties is coupled with clearly visible issues in her biography: marital problems, lack of support for her aspirations, inability to take up permanent paid employment. What is significant, the relationship between Weronika and her mother, which was to be revived by their living together in Italy, has not significantly improved. Therefore, the context of being a migrant woman's child, which the narrator mentions in terms of suffering and longing for the mother, has not been worked through by Weronika. This multitude of complex and difficult aspects causes chaos in Weronika's biography, which "is sometimes even more intolerable than the mechanisms that set the trajectory in motion" (Schütze 2012: 425).

At the end of this part of the analysis, it should be stressed that the narrator first experiences the trajectory of her mother's emigration to Italy in the mid-1990s, and then the one in which her personal experience of emigration is involved. In the context of her biography, the difficulty of undertaking biographical work also plays an important role. In the case of Weronika's life history, I see the narrator's attempts to shape her reflection on alternative paths of her own life, but they do not lead to an interpretation of her own biography within the framework of her own ideas about herself. They are rather suppressed by her strong sense of deprivation and loneliness. Also, taking up biographical work is difficult due to the loneliness felt by the narrator most of the time in her biography. Such a state of affairs not only makes it difficult to control the experience of trajectory, but also to construct a positive image of one's own biographical identity. At this point, it is worth referring to the beginning of the interview, to the preamble, which is formulated by Weronika:

I was born in the first half of the 1980s, and that's a story too, because I'm from the end of the fifth month, the beginning of the sixth month. I don't remember those times, of course, it's from my family's story, especially my mother's. I'm from the end of the fifth month, the beginning of the sixth month. So it was a struggle for life in my case and I'm really fighting all the time, for everything. Nothing comes easy to me, I was not born under a lucky star, and, indeed, even my husband, who met me later, noticed that in everything I manage to do ehm how much work I put into it and I'm always struggling.

The "eternal struggle" referred to by Weronika is connected with the above-mentioned difficulties of the narrator in constructing her biography. Her trajectory experience is visible in her life history on three levels. First, the physical one, connected with an illness due to which the narrator underwent many difficult spinal operations, has problems with lifting, and now (the time of the interview) learns that she is losing her eyesight. Secondly, the mental one, connected with her illness, but also with low self-esteem, which began at the time of Weronika's education and socialization, when she strongly felt the lack of support of meaningful others and their faith in her potential for "being talented." Thirdly, it manifests itself in her experience of being a migrant and in her efforts to get used to the new Italian social reality. This feeling of a certain mismatch and the need to fight for oneself, especially to increase one's self-esteem in the eyes of others, accompanies Weronika even in the present perspective (at the time of the interview). Thus, the narrator, in the context of the biographical experience of migration, makes a constant effort to keep a "precarious new balance of everyday life" (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349).

Conclusions

Studying the autobiographical narrative of Weronika was a certain analytical challenge. Therefore, the purpose of the presented text was the integration of two threads organizing the narrator's biography: the experience of transformation and the experience of migration. At the same time, this research difficulty was associated primarily with following the way Weronika is telling her life history and at the same time presenting it in a way, that the transformation thread, which the narrator treats as recessive in relation to her experience of migration, was shown in the fullest possible way. This research decision was a consequence of the wish to show a relation between the experienced biographical processes and social processes in the case of Weronika and biographical consequences of following old patterns of action which are not adapted to the new reality. Therefore, the analysis conducted in the text aimed to show a certain connection between Weronika's experience and the history of her parents in the dimension of the difficult experience of the transformation period in Poland.

The time of transformation resounds in Weronika's biographical experience as crucial for shaping her biographical identity on several levels. First, because of the aforementioned change in the logic of power, whose consequences are: the loss of a sense of stability in the life of her family in exchange for the precarious professional situation of her parents, and the extreme transition of her family from affluence to poverty. What is important in this perspective is the aspect of deprivation of the possibility of satisfying the need for work, analyzed in the text, which is clearly visible in the fate of Weronika's parents. Secondly, Weronika's mother's decision to emigrate in the mid-1990s contributed to her taking economic responsibility for the fate of her family. This put her in the role of "distant mother" (Urbańska 2015), while the father of Weronika was delegated to taking care of the house and bringing up the children. Thus, the role of the breadwinner of the family is transferred to the mother of Weronika and the traditional marriage roles were reversed. The mother's migration also coincided with the narrator's period of education and socialization. In this view, the analysis of Weronika's case correlates this dimension of her biographical experience with the impact of the transformation process and the motif of being a migrant woman's child. As I tried to demonstrate in the analysis, the narrator did not manage to take control of the experience of the trajectory, which, due to the migration of her mother, she experienced during her education.

This stage of Weronika's biographical experience was connected with the disturbance of the ontological security (category used by Anthony Giddens [1991]), the essence of which is the sense of order and continuity of events, including those outside the direct experience of an individual, external to him.

For Giddens (1991: 53), the essence of individual's ontological security is "trust in existential attachment points, in an emotional and, to some extent, cognitive sense, based on the certainty acquired in a child's early experiences that others can be relied upon." For Weronika, who had experienced a strong sense of alienation and trauma from the lack of such "others" for many years of education, the sense of ontological security was undermined at that time.

Moreover in the case of the analysis of this biography, an important rhetorical figure is the metaphor of imprisonment. In a physical sense, from the corset that Weronika had to wear for many years because of several serious back surgeries. But also, in the mental sense, imprisonment: (1) in exile in Italy, where it is clearly difficult for her to function; (2) in her memory of the past – in the interview she repeatedly returns to the time before 1989, perceiving that time as when "being truly happy"; (3) in the difficulties associated with her undertaking academic work in Italy and integration with the local culture.

Additionally, my intention in this text was also to capture the processuality of transformation in the narration of the migrant woman's child and in the context of women's economic migrations after 1989. In such a perspective, we obtain an account of the phenomenon of transnational motherhood supplementing the previous reflections on "distant mothers" and the euro-orphanhood discourse with the analysis of the biographical experience of a migrant woman's child. Additionally, an interesting aspect of the text is the fact that Weronika has entered the same migration context as her mother has been functioning in for 20 years. At the same time, the costs of being a migrant in the life history of the narrator may be an interesting case for the researchers of the problems of the migration of women.

Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Katarzyna Waniek

PART 3

TRANSFORMING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES: BIOGRAPHICAL CHANCES, HOPES, ILLUSIONS, AND DEAD-ENDS

Paraphrasing the words of Alfred Schütz referring to the social distribution of knowledge (1946: 463), we may say that: “There is a stock of opportunities theoretically available to everyone.” But, if they are to be practically used by individuals, they must not only be extricated from their settings (Blumer 1969: 80), but also taken into account; not only must they be seen, but also noticed (Garfinkel 1967: 36, cf., Cloward, Ohlin 1961); not only must they be given meaning, but also carry out certain values; not only must they create favorable circumstances, but also be real in their consequences (Thomas, Thomas 1928: 572); not only must they offer new pathways, but also ensure a sense of dignity. To make things more complicated, all these conditions depend on biographically sedimented and constantly modified individual schemes of interpretations, systems of references and biographical orientations, hierarchies of importance, and a (shared collective) stock of knowledge at hand. These can be analyzed in the sequence of events in autobiographical narrative interviews and argumentative commentaries related to them.

The analytical category of opportunity structures proposed in this part is an abstract concept used already by some sociologists to describe social reality, but for us, it is primarily a category generated from empirical data. In both cases, it is of etic character (Pike 1965), however, in the first one, it is a construct imposed on observed reality, and in the other one, it is an attempt to describe a class of phenomena subjectively perceived and experienced by an individual. In other words, in the latter case, we are dealing with the analysis of socio-biographical phenomena “using the narrator’s language, taking into account the categories he/she uses, on the other hand, using sociological categories which allow interbiographic interpretation and a generalized explanation of the same processes” (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2006: 24).¹

¹ Andrzej Piotrowski, analyzing the communication ethnography proposed by Dell Hymes, explains that “the actual description, taking into account the distinction

Here we will relate them to a special socio-historical period, which is the political transformation in Poland. Therefore, our focus in this part will be on the interplay between individual biographical experiences and the opportunity structures changing along with rapid systemic transformation in Poland, intense modernisation and globalisation process and the introduction of a new (mainly imported from the West) logic of power based on “governing through freedom.”² Some of these opportunity structures have been closed, disappearing, or expiring, others have been unblocked, still, others were wide open or initiated.

It should be stressed that especially in the first years of the new order these processes of the economic transformations were extremely dynamic. Adam Mrozowicki notes that:

Poland was the first among post-socialist countries to apply a radical strategy of economic reforms, or “shock therapy” inspired by neo-liberal ideology [...] The main architect of the reform, Polish minister of finance Leszek Balcerowicz, indicated its three main pillars to be macroeconomic stabilization, microeconomic liberalization, and a deep institutional restructuring which included political democratization, the restitution of civic freedoms and, in the long run, political and economic integration with the European Union. Quoting Eyal et al. (2000: 37).

He adds that:

the assumption of reformers was that with the right incentive structure, people would become entrepreneurial market actors and active citizens (Mrozowicki 2011: 34).

This dynamic is reflected differently in individual life histories. Initially – as Andrzej Piotrowski points out – a specific “hope-based pattern of thinking” prevailed, carrying the message that “the abolition of anti-order brings order

between ‘emic’ and ‘etic,’ is two-step. The researcher, using a general analytical framework brought in from the outside (etic description I), describes real phenomena reconstructing categories used by native members of a given culture (emic description), and then subjects the initial analytical categories to re-analysis in light of the results of the emic description, creating etic description II (cf., Hymes 1978: 9 in Piotrowski 1997: 120, footnote 9).

² This subtle and sophisticated ‘neoliberal variant of the art of government’ – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains following Nicolas Rose – “aims at [...] ‘governing through freedom’ – managing actions of subjects convinced of their own autonomy, independence, and self-determination” (Stachowiak 2013: 144, see also: Czyżewski 2009: 87).

in itself because it simply restores it” (Piotrowski 1997: 329). Consequently, for many Poles, the changes of social worlds and symbolic universes³ which took place after 1989 brought the longed-for freedom and enabled people to implement the thus-far blocked life plans (the case of Zofia described in Chapter V), giving people an opportunity to develop an unexpected career path and achieve a high standard of living (see Robert’s example described in Chapter XII). Others were deluded by the prospect of improving their position, hoping for a better, richer, and calmer life. Attempts to change were often made at the cost of hard work and biographical costs, as was the case with Inga’s parents or the young doctor Hanna from Chapter X. For a significant portion of Poles, however, transformation became the beginning of the path to nowhere, taking away the possibility of a decent income, pushing them into poverty, and sometimes even taking away the possibility of an honest or independent life.⁴ Such experiences will be discussed in the chapters devoted to the case of Hubert and the case of Pola⁵ (see Chapter XIII and XII respectively).

For many years the symbolic elites (including some sociologists) remained in the belief that since specific opportunity structures were created, restored, or democratized “top-down,” the sole cause of individual and collective failures (and thus social discontent) were the “inept, unable to adapt numpties” (Buchowski 2008: 101). Those “guilty of themselves” “ordinary citizens” turned out to not be rational, creative, flexible, autonomous, responsible, and resilient enough to meet the challenges of the free capitalistic labor market.

³ Fritz Schütze explains that: “According to Berger and Luckmann (1966: 88–90), symbolic universes provide ultimate and integrated meaning for a person’s collective life and biography. They are the integrative structure of the collective stock of knowledge shared by the members of an inclusive (group, *milieu*, societal) life world. As social facts and social forces (*faits sociaux*, in the sense of Durkheim), they provide the ultimate meaning and ‘logic’ of the collective stock of knowledge since they deal with the relationship between the course of personal identity, on the one hand, and the course of society (as well as other inclusive collectivities) and its (their) collective history (histories), on the other” (Schütze 2014: 263, footnote 24).

⁴ In 1988, 2.1 million Poles lived below the poverty line (USD 120 per capita), in 1993 there were almost five times this amount – 9.8 million. Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (2000) “Introduction” [in:] Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (ed.), *Ryzyka transformacji systemowej* (Risks of systemic transformation), Łódź: Absolwent Publishing House, pp. 5–10).

⁵ The analyses of the first biographical interviews collected after the transformation with the so-called “losers of the transformation” the reader will find, for example, in the study of E. Tarkowska, W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, K. Wódz (ed.), *Biedni o sobie i o swoim życiu* (The poor about themselves and their lives), Katowice–Warsaw: Śląsk Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Politicians, journalists, and social scientists rather did not take into account other points of view (“of non-subjective” mass) and either simply ignored them or – defining them as unwise, wrong, distorted, or immersed in the mental legacy of communism – granted themselves the right to lecture and rebuke the “rebellious ward,” reluctant to “do up modernizing backwardness” in reference to Europe (cf., Piotrowski 2005: 338).⁶ As a result, as Sergiusz Kowalski already wrote in 1997, the process of decomposition of the former state socialism order was spreading: “it was the work of the elite, in which the masses had little to say, and even less to do” (1997: 295). Along with the decomposition of state socialism, the transformation also brought about the collapse of the working class – a significant collective co-author of social changes and the political success of the people’s opposition, after 1989 deprived of the driving force which characterized the workers in the process of overthrowing communism. This was accompanied by the disappearance of the discourse regarding social inequalities in class categories (Ost 2010: 250–260, 272, see also: Ost 2015a, b), and the few researchers of poverty and growing social problems were then referred to as the “lamenting sociologists.” A couple of years later the situation seems to be much harsher. As Michał Buchowski in his critique of Piotr Sztompka’s analysis claims:

First, it divides societies into winners and losers,⁷ ultimately translated into those wise and able to adapt and those half-witted and unable to adapt, apt and inept. Of course, the first group defines the modes of adaptation and criteria for evaluation. If individuals or groups cannot follow suit, they simply deserve their poor fate. They have proven to be “civilizationally incompetent” (Sztompka 1993), show a “general lack of discipline and diligence” (Sztompka 1996: 119) and obstruct the efforts of those who are accomplished and the progress of whole societies in the region on its way to becoming “normal.” The incapacity to reject old mental

⁶ A critical reflection on such perception of social reality appeared initially among researchers of poverty and social exclusion (e.g., Tarkowska 1999, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (eds.) 1998; 1999; Tarkowska, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Wódz 2003), who looked for the reasons for the “failure of the individual” in (macro-)structural conditions. However, a critical reflection on the “support” of sociologists for the discourse promoting “agency” and “creativity” of the individual at the same time blaming him/her for the failures came much later (see Giza-Poleszczuk 2018, Król 2015, see also: Chapter II by Kaja Kaźmierska).

⁷ The division into winners and losers was characteristic of the rhetoric of the first post-transformation sociological analyses (including Czapiński 1995, Rychard 1995). However, as early as in the 1990s, authors such as Mirosław Marody, who wrote about “three Polands” – living from capital, full-time employment, and unemployment benefits, pointed out that this categorization is greatly simplified (including Rychard 1995, Marody 2002).

habits forms a complex of the legendary *homo sovieticus* (Sztompka 2000: 55; cf., also Sztompka 2004) which is characterized by such phenomena as egalitarian and demanding attitudes, “disinterested envy,” anti-intellectualism and aversion towards the elite, double standards for public and private life, and the acceptance of a meager performance. These people do not know how to make sense of the new symbolic order and cannot fit into the new institutional design in which “civilizational competence” is king (Buchowski 2006: 469–470).

This part aims to criticize, in particular, this schematic, and, in consequence, fictitious picture by showing and discussing biographies of people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s who, in different ways and with various degrees, were entangled in the process of transition and positioning between panopticism and “governmentality” (Czyżewski 2009: 95). They also intensively multiply social worlds with their divergent stocks of knowledge at hand, clashing ideologies, conflicting moral standards, dissonant rules of conducts, and expectations (Clarke 1991, Schütze 2002). Our main frame of reference here will be the concept of opportunity structures.

Some initial notes on the concept of opportunity structures

The term of opportunity structures relates to the most classic debate in sociology: structure versus agency/choice, or opportunity versus constraints (e.g., Racko 2008, Loudon 2010, Cullen 2015). This etic concept appeared in sociology at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. Its origins should be sought in structural and functional orientation, primarily in the theory of social anomie as in Merton’s approach. The intention of Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, the authors who were one of the first to analyze opportunity structures was, however, to create an inter-paradigmatic theory, and the very term opportunity structures was to become a kind of “glue-concept” linking different paradigms. In *Delinquency and Opportunity. A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (1961) Cloward and Ohlin wrote:

In addressing these themes [social pressures and deviance, the impact of social *milieu* upon the types of adaptation], we have drawn principally upon two theoretical perspectives. The first, initiated by Emile Durkheim and lately extended by Robert K. Merton, focuses largely upon the sources of pressure that can lead to deviance. The second, developed by Clifford R. Shaw, Henry D. McKay, and Edwin H. Sutherland, contains germinal ideas about the way in which features of social structure regulate the selection and evolution of deviant solutions. [...] [W]e attempt to integrate these to streams of thought as they apply to the problem of delinquency. The task of consolidating them required that we redefine the unique contribution of each, that we reconceptualize elements in

both, and that we develop linking concepts. The result is what we call the theory of the differential opportunity system (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: x).

The authors, who were closer to Durkheim and Merton rather than symbolic interactionists and the Chicago school, questioned the assumption of equal opportunities available to everyone in the American social system, indicating that the chances of success depend on the social status of the individual.⁸ Currently – based on many works based on the concept of opportunity structures emerging in subsequent years in social sciences, including sociology – we know that the course of individual and collective biographies is embedded in sets of opportunity structures conditioned by systems of factors far more complicated than the social position itself.

The term opportunity structures is usually applied to the analyses of mass behavior, including the dynamics and transformation of social groups and movements with their macro- and meso- (rarely micro-) conditionings (Jeydel 2000, Suh 2001, Loudon 2010, Cullen 2015, Gleiss 2017).⁹ In this study, the concept of opportunity structures is used in the analyses of the lives of social actors – witnesses and participants of the systemic transformation, as well as the social phenomena and processes reflected in their biographies. Following numerous definitions,¹⁰ we treat opportunity structures both as subjectively experienced (consistent) aspects, components, and institutional arrangements, but also as dimensions of the political/institutional systems or environments which frame activities of individual and collective social actors (cf., Tarrow 1998 as cited in Bondaroff and Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000, Giugni 2009 as cited in Gleiss 2017). Rewriting Bondaroff and Burke's statement we maintain that "[social] actors make history, but they do not do so in circumstances of their own making. Instead, they encounter constraints and are presented with opportunities configured by the institutional arrangements and the prevailing patterns of political power which are the inescapable contexts" of their life and actions (Rootes 1999 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014: 168, Swindler 1986, Joachim 2003 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014). We assume that every life history is produced in a specific arrangement of opportunity structures

⁸ Cloward and Ohlin stress that: "There is every reason to think that persons located in the social hierarchy have rather different chances of reaching common success-goals despite the prevailing ideology of equal opportunities" (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 85).

⁹ In terms of "constraints, possibilities, and threats that originate outside the mobilizing group, but affect its chances of mobilizing and/or realizing its collective interests" (Koopmans 1999: 96 as cited in Suh 2001: 441).

¹⁰ Similarly to other terms in social sciences, here we are dealing with a considerable number of definitions and with the difficulty to draw sharp boundaries of the phenomenon to be defined.

ingrained in a dynamically changing reality (along with the course of life, historical processes, and structural factors) (Roberts 2009, Staunton 2015, Thompson 2017). We also assume that in every socio-historical context and in every collective and individual history, opportunity structures assume the shape of a “surprise box” – macro-level opportunity structures frame the meso- and micro- level structures, and at the same time, individual constellations of opportunity structures interact with each other.

The narratives presented in this part of the book clearly show the importance of opportunity structures for the dynamics of life stories. In the description of transformational processes one can consider the issues of the relative openness/closure of a political system with its institutions, presence of influential allies, and changes in political alignments and conflicts, the stability/instability of the set of elite alignments undergirding a polity; unity level among elites, the presence/absence of elite allies, powers granted to politicians, a state’s capacity and propensity for repression or even mass opinion (Gamson, Meyer 1996 as cited in Gleiss 2017, McAdam 1996: 27 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 234; Bondaroff, Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000: 15). Discursive opportunity structures, also transnational discursive structures are connected with political and institutional structures (we will discuss the latter later), they are pre-given and fixed structures, which cover political and legal texts, socio-cultural discourses, and mass-media discourses (Koopmans, Statham 1999 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 235, Motta 2015). Discursive opportunity structures trigger processes of valuing phenomena, mechanisms, processes, and social problems in terms of sensibility, pragmatism, legitimating, et cetera. Basic political, economic, and social issues, even in conditions of the relative stability of political systems, are becoming the subject of “discursive struggle.” The ongoing discussions take place in relation to the interests, needs, and attitudes of participants of public life. Especially in the periods of intense social changes, the basic systems of meanings of the “previous epoch” are articulated in a completely new way, reconceptualized or rejected and a “discursive struggle” on transformation or preservation of historical opportunity structures – influences not only meanings, but also attitudes and behaviors (Racko 2008, Koopmans, Statham 1999 as cited in Gleiss 2017: 235).

Opportunity structures also operate on the level of formal organizations. It is within their framework that an individual can have access to institutional resources – both material (e.g., places/institutional systems in which one is educated, works, acts socially, and is subject to impact and influence, infrastructure, and equipment of these places), as well as symbolic – such as organizational culture: knowledge and ideologies, work methodologies/methods and their transfer strategies, interactions and contacts, apprenticeship opportunities, learning, mentoring, coaching, and consultancy shaping

subsequent self-identification of the individual (Strauss 2012, Reger 2018, see also Loudon 2010). It is also important that certain categories of social institutions (educational and helping institutions) actively participate in the processes of social valuation of individuals and communities, embedding social actors in successive constellations of opportunity structures or structures on non-opportunities (e.g., through the system of allocating badges of ability and inability) (Sennett, Cobb 1972, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014) and thus deciding on the further course of their biography, an example of which we see in the history of “drifting” Pola (Chapter XIII).

While in the literature we can find relatively numerous references to political, institutional, or discursive opportunity structures, we can speculate about their functioning at the level of small social groups rather than formulating certainties. Obviously, access to opportunity structures is related to the functioning of primary groups such as families and neighbourhoods. One can wonder to what extent primary groups also create specific opportunity structures and whether these structures should be treated as external determinants towards social actors (external opportunity structures, i.e., Loudon 2010), or rather as the basis for creating internal opportunity structures,¹¹ which could be understood, for example, in the categories of internalized cognitive constructs and the disposition for activities associated with agency or resilience.

Between biographical resources and opportunity structures

In individual experiences, the relationship between biographical resources (see Part 4) and opportunity structures can take different shapes and configurations. However, while the former are primarily rooted in biographical experience, the latter are associated with the social framework (primarily with the individual’s belonging to different social worlds). As we learn from numerous autobiographical accounts, in the course of life each individual is involved in various social frameworks, which constitute one of the cognitive figures (see Schütze 1984). These are, among others, daily routines, institutions, social units, organizations, institutionalized environments, social relations, social worlds and their arenas, interaction and action situations, and living environments (Schütze 1984, 2008). These social frameworks can create favorable conditions for socio-biographical processes and outline (imagined) action horizons (for the implementation of the expected career courses, as is

¹¹ It seems that the term of internal opportunity structures scarcely exists in sociological literature. However, it does not apply to the individual, but the internal settings of formal organizations (Catherine Begnoche Smith 1979).

the case with the institutional pattern of expectations, or for one's own lifelong development, as is the case with biographical action plans). But, they can also be an obstacle for them and trigger the process of "shrinking the world" (as is the case in the trajectory). In the first case, we will talk about opportunity structures (their opposite will be biographical constraints often constituting trajectory potential or mechanisms which dynamize the process of a growing disorder). They can also transform into the other ones.

If, in the course of one's life, a person will (in a more or less conscious way) define this social framework as significant for the course of their life (e.g., family, embedding in social structure, social networks, friends from the neighborhood), then we will talk about biographical resources (see Part 4). At the same time, some of the biographical resources may be unconscious or "seen but unnoticed." An example of this may be a middle class child who (at least at the beginning) does not realize the benefits of his or her position in the structure; that, through the specific educational environment, through the language he/she uses, the schools he/she attends, the lifestyle patterns which are offered to him/her, he/she has different access to the opportunity structures.

Social worlds and opportunity structures

Opportunity structures are present in various spheres of social life, but – to paraphrase Alfred Schütz again – "they are not distributed equally," and – to emphasize the issue clearly – not perceived and defined by individuals in the same way.¹² There are those which emerge from large-scale social processes and decisions made at state, European, or even international and political (macro) levels. In post-socialist Poland, they have mainly resulted from the dynamic processes of modernization, transformation, the introduction of the free-market economy, democratization (also of higher education), or joining the European Union (i.e., free movement of people, access to EU funding and grants, a system of agricultural subsidies, etc.). There are those connected with public institutions, local organizations, non-government organizations, social (resistance) movements, working *milieus*, et cetera. And still, there are those which stem from one's origin, family background, cultural and social capital, and social networks (see the case of Robert in Chapter XII).

¹² Opportunity structures are subject to interpretation and framing grounded in cultural and structurally based "filters." As Doowon Suh (2001: 442–443) states: "change becomes an 'opportunity' only if it is perceived as such by movement agents," and indicates that only apparent opportunity can be described as casual. A specific way of perceiving and interpreting structures themselves and chances for success linked to taking advantage of them determines if or how they are to be used by social actors.

Another perspective in which we can place considerations regarding opportunity structures are social worlds and their processes. In this understanding, the transformation of opportunity structures will be a derivative of numerous processes occurring both within the social worlds themselves and the interaction of separate social worlds with each other. According to Tamotsu Shibutani, Anselm Strauss, and Adele Clarke social worlds are processes of interpretation and communication focused around specific basic activities, matters, or topics (Clarke 1991, Shibutani 1955, Strauss 1978: 119, 1982, Schütze 2002). Adele Clarke defines social worlds as “groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business” (Clarke 1991: 131). The social world is based on common experience, mutual interest, shared symbolization, shared perspectives on “reality” and, what follows, constitutes its own universe of discourse. It neither has its formal boundaries¹³ nor is connected with formal membership and authority relations among participants, but is bound “by the limits of effective communication” (Shibutani 1955: 566).¹⁴ Clarke stresses that “[t]hrough extended communication, participants in social worlds characteristically generate, or adapt ideologies about how their work should be done and debate about both their own activities and others’ actions that may affect them.” (Clarke 1991: 131–132).

Each of the social worlds is associated with a specific universe of discourse, “a common, shared, symbolic system covering an extensive set of categories and classifications, used for interpreting the world and necessary for effective action” (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002: 24–25). It also has characteristic attributes which create specific opportunity structures such as basic activities, membership, places, technologies, or internal organization (Strauss 1978: 121, Kacperczyk 2016). These issues, and as we claim, opportunity structures, are created, discussed, and negotiated on respective arenas of discourse (Clarke, Star 2003: 539, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). Social worlds are subject to numerous

¹³ As Fritz Schütze emphasizes, social worlds are in their creation, organization, and change [...] immensely flexible (Schütze 2002)

¹⁴ Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, therefore, shows that: “There are countless social worlds, small and large, local and international, openly public and hardly visible, separated in space and connected with others, well-organized and more amorphous, whose activities and communication are focused around various matters: politics, art, religion, recreation, sport, science, etc.” (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002: 24). In this understanding, a social world can be a national or religious community, a political party, a non-governmental organization, music connoisseurs, postage stamp collectors, subscribers to certain YouTube channels, vegetarians, anti-vaccine supporters, social movements, et cetera.

processes of overlapping, intersection, segmentation, budding, merging, or competition. As a result of progressing globalization, multiculturalism, and developing information technologies, these processes have intensified significantly. Not only are these worlds constantly growing (often competing for members), but they become more and more fluid (their borders are blurred) (Schütze 2002).¹⁵ Hence, in the modern world, people participate in many intersecting and deliberating social worlds¹⁶ and their segments, defining collective resources and ways of building identity and “regulating” access to specific opportunity structures (Piotrowski 2006: 250).

Basic features of opportunity structures and its paradoxes

Regardless of the theoretical and methodological framework applied, based on the literature findings, one can indicate the basic features of the theoretical construct, which are the opportunity structures. Above all, they constitute (as well as constraints constituting their reverse) dynamic, relational processes. They are shaped on all the levels of social life through convergences resulting not only from historical processes, but institutional, individual, collective behaviors, as well as dominating or marginal social discourses. In certain political, institutional, and biographical configurations, opportunities fluctuate, open, or close. History indicates that especially in times of systemic change both processes can be noted – simultaneous closure and opening of political and institutional opportunity structures throughout all levels of social structure and social categories. Characteristics of such transformations may be final and irreversible. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that transformations of opportunity structures are conditioned by a variety of factors, but processes and agents maintaining them can remain the same (Roberts 2009). Opportunity structures can also be characterized in relation to their innate properties affecting social actors’

¹⁵ Thus, nowadays people not only have to deal with various (often contradictory) styles, the logic of behavior and moral standards of social worlds to which they belong, but also with the dynamics of internal changes and disputes regarding the authenticity of core activities in each of them. In addition, all of them – requiring specific knowledge resources, creating their own “We”-culture and awareness (Schütze 2002: 63) – create a sense of moral commitment to achieve common goals and obligation to loyalty. In individual experiences, this “dissonant concert of social worlds” (Schütze 2002: 75) results in growing chaos and systematically deepening irritation.

¹⁶ It should be noted, that being a member of a certain social world may result either from institutional expectation patterns (e.g., various only money-making job worlds), biographical action plans (e.g., the social world of art, non-governmental organizations) and the trajectory of suffering (e.g., the social world of medicine, social *milieu* of homeless people).

capabilities and their *modus operandi*. Open opportunity structures facilitate and promote human activities encouraging social actors' responses to "favorable openings in the social structure," increasing the impact of people, groups, and social movements exerted over institutions whereas closed ones – constrain such activities through differentiated barriers: means, techniques, or strategies of discouragement (Reger 2018: 560, Tarrow 1998 as cited in Bondaroff, Burke 2014, Jeydel 2000, Suh 2001, Gleiss 2017). Transformations of opportunity structures can be linked to the introduction of new themes, absent from the discourse until now, the appearance of new forms of actions, or the emergence of counter-movements against those proposed by social actors who make use of current structures¹⁷ (Bondaroff, Burke 2014: 168, see also Thompson 2017, Reger 2018). Finally, opportunity structures are subject to acts of individual and collective interpretations, which are influenced by both the course of history, current political events and processes, social discourses, and the individual's personal experience (Gamson, Meyer 1996, McAdam 1996 as cited in Gleiss 2017).¹⁸ Such a conceptualization of opportunity structures sets them clearly in the domain of cultural phenomena and it seems hardly justified to differentiate between "objective" structural opportunities and "subjectively" experienced opportunities. It must be emphasized that opportunity structures may remain unnoticed, regarded as too requiring, interpreted as not important for an individual line of development, defined from the very beginning as a deceit/fraud¹⁹ – or on the contrary, they may be treated with enthusiasm, fascination, as a finally given deserved chance.

The analysis of biographical interviews used in the preparation of this study reveals several important paradoxes related to the way narrators define and experience opportunity structures.

Some opportunity structures can be taken advantage of at a given historical time (they are available, for example, to one generation). That is why it seems so important in the project *Experience of the Process of Transformation...* to isolate three different cohorts, each of which operates in slightly different arrangements

¹⁷ For example, anti-hunt movement causes counter-protest from hunters objecting against being portrayed as killers and murderers of the animals (i.e., Bondaroff, Burke 2014).

¹⁸ In the analysis of social movements, the concept of cultural framing is used here. It is defined in terms of conscious, collective, strategic efforts to construct shared understandings of the world and of the groups which will stimulate and legitimize supra-individual activities (which also means negotiation of meanings) (McAdam et al. as cited in Suh 2001: 442, McAdam 1994 as cited in Gleiss 2017).

¹⁹ For example, the farmer Tadeusz, whose interview is part of the EuroId collection (Miller, Day 2012) claims that, in fact, every system is oriented towards exploiting and cheating farmers, and therefore he also treated the EU subsidies as an attempt at fraud.

of opportunity structures. People born in the 1960s were socialized by primary groups (family, neighborhood, peer groups) functioning differently to those who shaped the cohort born in the 1980s. The processes of cultural change in the individual experience of the oldest narrators entering adult life in the times of the People's Republic of Poland meant, among others, discovering a new world previously inaccessible to them. Travelling abroad was associated with "familiarizing" themselves with new practices and new realities, and the transition to an open, not centrally-controlled labor market in the early 1990s which was often a cognitively shocking and emotionally difficult experience. In the case of the narrators born in the late 1980s, such experiences are treated rather as "ethnographic pictures," they belong to family tales, at school often casually dealt with as a period in the history of Poland – distant history, "not ours." The process of economic, political, social, and cultural change, opening various opportunity structures (those related to education, the labor market, foreign trips, unrestricted expression of one's views) happened at different periods of our narrators' lives and therefore framed their experiences in many different ways.

The collected narratives also point to another temporal aspect of the opportunity structures, namely, that some of them can be used only at certain stages of the life cycle. For example, the yard (see Chapter XV) as an obvious element of reality, can only become a formative experience connecting the world into a whole during childhood. In turn, the biography of Pola discussed in Chapter XIII shows that barriers created by parents and the inability to accumulate educational capital during childhood and adolescence significantly blocks not only a successful start into adulthood, but also has long-term consequences for the personal development of the narrator. That is because many (especially young) people do not see the connection between education and biographical career; this was already noticed in 1960 by Cloward and Ohlin who explained: "Some youths become hoodlums instead of businessmen, not because they lack the ability to succeed legitimately... but because they find out too late the relationship between school adjustment and [upward social mobility]" (Toby 1958 as cited in Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 101). From this perspective, one can look critically at the life-long learning concept declared as widely available, which is an important element of the ideology of knowledge-based management of contemporary democratic societies. It may turn out to be an empty slogan for individuals and groups limited by socio-economic status, family situation, or health condition.

Some opportunity structures have a sort of vague moral character, as, for example, in the case of American soldiers taking part in World War II who used it as a possibility of going to Europe, to travel, and see places and/or as a way of maturation, departing from the state of mama's boy and of gaining

college education just after homecoming (cf., Schütze 2014). The same attitude may be found in some life histories of Polish people who recapitulate the war as the (only) positive and adventurous experiences in their lives (Marciniak 2016). In this context, it is also interesting to look again at the Chapter IX written by Joanna Wygnańska in which she describes the case of Weronika who thoughtlessly shows the transition between the historical and social formation of socialism to the period of transformation as a kind of reversal of the experiences of many other narrators from the same cohort. While most show the period after 1989 as the (coveted) opportunity to buy Mars and Snickers bars, Weronika is deprived of this opportunity because her parents – previously politically engaged – lose their jobs and fall into poverty. This seemingly trivial example, however, shows a certain mechanism in which opportunity structures are treated as obvious and thus almost “unnoticed” until the individual loses (privileged) access to them.

Again, regardless of the political system and dominant ideology, some opportunity structures are of illusory character and owing to their “delusive mechanisms” often misguide those who use them. For instance in Chapter VII: *Paradoxes of ideological privileges – a case study of a female textile worker from Łódź* Kaja Kaźmierska points out that during the period of state socialism in Poland, allegedly favoring the working class, there was a systematically growing tension between the opportunity structures proclaimed by the system and the ones experienced by individuals. Consequently, as she adds: “Social changes, which entail modernization changes and manifest themselves especially in the processes of industrialization and urbanization, have actually taken place at the expense of, and not through the workers” (Kaźmierska 2014: 139). The same applies to the access to higher education in post-war Poland, which Agata Zysiak writes about in her book *Points for Class Origin* (2016). A certain social project, which, thanks to the reforms of higher education, created preferential conditions for access to universities for the working classes (workers and farmers) and thus opened for them the possibility of social promotion and implementation of career paths other than before, for various reasons (described in detail in the fourth and fifth Chapter in the aforementioned publication), in fact, turned out to be an illusion or phantasmagoria (Zysiak 2016).

There are also many “seducing” opportunity structures which offer people great possibilities, but never fully reveal their possible consequences. They may also be observed in post-transformation Poland. They usually promise the development of personal potentials and individuality, but – as Ulrich Bröckling notes – simultaneously make people solely responsible for their failures (cf., Bröckling 2016: 5). To put it simply, the inefficient, irrational individual is always and exclusively guilty – or, to use the offensive words of Manuel Castells – “selfish parasites of history-making” (Castells 2013:

300). It is particularly worth considering this issue in relation to the case of Hubert (analyzed in Chapter XII), a civil engineer involved in the labor market of the early 2000s and the paradoxes of this market (while Hubert is on a downward spiral, Robert – having an almost identical family background, cultural resources, education, and professional experience is spectacularly successful). In this respect, an interesting autobiographical account is also the story of Julia born in the 80s last century (analyzed in Chapter X), who started university in 2003.²⁰ For many years, she had been developing her educational and later academic career under the ‘mythicized’ conviction (not only present in parental pedagogy, but also dominant public discourse) that education guarantees work, allows one to achieve a certain and permanent social position and thus guarantees a better material situation and stability in life. It turned out, however, that the efforts and involvement in both the process of studying or acquiring new qualifications supported by certificates (see also the interview with Czesia mentioned shortly in Chapter X) do not bring the desired stability, but lead to precarious balance of everyday life and are associated with an increasingly painful blockade of one’s life plans.

Another type of paradox is associated with the coercion/pressures which coexist within a specific opportunity structure, resulting in tensions and dilemmas which the social actor cannot avoid. Participating in social worlds usually means the conclusion of a certain type of unwritten agreement. Accordingly, the use of the opportunity structures and the connected payoffs and privileges is associated with costs²¹ such as formatting the course of personal and professional careers and the related identities, and even the loss of some scope of freedom. Clear examples are found here in the case of people pursuing professional careers framed by the logic of temporary project work – for example, Julia (see Chapter X) postponing, against herself, parenthood plans when the employment conditions changed. Therefore, the implementation of the seemingly autonomous biographical action plan or following institutional patterns is accompanied by the danger of activating the trajectory potential, and the opportunity structures may turn out to be a biographical trap.

²⁰ We are talking about the massive growth of higher education students in the early 2000s, which was associated with the creation of private universities, as well as specific requirements of the labor market (the requirement of a master’s degree or later a bachelor’s degree for people performing a given profession or applying for promotion).

²¹ These costs may also mean financial outlays, which suggests the relationship between the chances to use specific opportunity structures and the socio-economic status of the individual: “the middle class person can take advantage of educational opportunities despite their costs,” whereas the educational career of the working-class child entails significant effort on behalf of its family, also a financial one” (Cloward, Ohlin 1961: 102).

The individual also faces dilemmas regarding making life choices due to conflicting opportunity structures. Some narrators encountered such structures in their biography. This is illustrated by the story of Hanna, who is considering leaving the country (Chapter X) (she is functioning in two competing social worlds – a traditional Polish family and in the neoliberal reality, confronted with the image of the working conditions of doctors in the ‘Western’ medical system).

Some opportunity structures available in a political and economic system may be used regardless of its prevalent ideology. This feature may be difficult to grasp, as the order and output of the previous epoch is completely questioned in the newly-binding, post-transformation discourse. The opportunity structures existing in the PPR are illustrated in the chapter on social reformers written by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (Chapter V, see also: Golczyńska-Grondas 2019). It is thanks to the access to the configuration of opportunity structures available in the socialistic state, social reformers became not only active beneficiaries, but also creators of political and institutional opportunity structures in the neoliberal order.

Summarizing, it should be emphasized that, especially on the individual level, the use of opportunity structures may involve not only certain benefits, but also costs, since it is related to the socio-economic status of a person. Opportunity structures are not objective conditions or arrangements of certain social units and their meaning and structure is not permanent. Although, people tend to perceive them as real, routine, stable and “taken for granted,” as well as a “seen but unnoticed background of common understandings” (Garfinkel 2002: 44). They are questioned and reflected usually only if they are not able to play their nomic function in everyday life anymore.

Katarzyna Waniek

CHAPTER X

BIOGRAPHICAL TRAPS OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS – COHORT 1980. THE POTENTIALS OF DISORDER AND SUFFERING IN THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG POLISH WOMEN ENTERING SOCIAL WORLDS OF ART, MEDICINE, AND ACADEMIA

Introduction

A lot has been said and written about systemic transformation in Poland examining it mainly from the macro level and subjecting it to analysis in the theoretical-methodological frame of the normative paradigm.¹ The description categories and definitions related to the process of changing the political order for which 1989 was agreed as a breakthrough date (although this issue is also debatable) were often uncritically and carelessly accepted and included in public discourse, and thus in social awareness. These, superimposed by politicians, journalists, but also sociologists' categories, have been "glorifying" those who were able to cope with the systemic change in Poland after 1989 and criticizing or even "disregarding" those who could not handle it (easily). But, many of them (for example these related to the distinction into transformation "winners" and "losers" or "being accused" of having a *homo-sovieticus* mentality) in their simplified version do not really reflect extremely complex, multi-layered, and ambiguous biographical processes and their feedback to social processes. Still, they had and still have a real impact on social policies, media ways of explaining social reality, and common-sense knowledge. A meticulous and rigorous analysis of narrative interviews gathered as part of the project in which cohorts born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. were studied, basically verified these binary, schematic

¹ See for instance: Krzemiński 2010, Leder 2014, Rychard, Federowicz 1993, Ziółkowski 2015.

images and allowed the capturing of paradoxes, tensions, ambivalences, and biographical traps, which often resulted from a more or less conscious inability to deal with the expectations which people had to face while dealing with the new rapid and comprehensive changes after 1989.²

The contrastive analysis of interviews collected in all cohorts allowed, however, the showing of a special constellation of experiences in the biographies of people born between 1980–1990.³ Most of the collected data verified the common-sense knowledge and “state of the art” for many years. This was supported by social scientists and “abused” by politicians. Those who grew up after 1989 and have lived their entire conscious life fully in conditions of freedom were able to take full advantage of the benefits offered by the free-market economy and the democratic organization of the state. Sociologists also hardly ever took into account that the generation entered their adolescence period (and at the same time – labor market) in a very specific socio-cultural context. This is framed by the dynamics of interrelated processes of political transformation, entering the European Union, vibrant modernization, globalization, and, last but not least, development of neoliberal ideology. Their experiences were particularly associated with some difficulties or inabilities to meet the requirements of culture located between panopticism and “governmentality” (Czyżewski 2009: 95), which promotes and legitimizes (inter alia through public and media discourses) specific life attitudes mainly articulated in the form of ubiquitous discourse of agency and self-responsibility, as well as their participation in intensively multiplying social worlds with their divergent stocks of knowledge at hand, clashing ideologies, conflicting moral standards, dissonant rules of conducts, and expectations (Clarke 1991, Schütze 2002).⁴ In many autobiographical renderings, such social frame conditions contributed to the sense of a growing disorder and, in fact initiated the process of the trajectory of suffering.⁵

Summing up, therefore, the special connections of social processes with their own specific biographical experiences often led to the chaos of orientation typical of contemporary complex societies which results from “the dissonant concert of social worlds” (Schütze 2002: 75) and irritation caused by the inability to see one’s own life as a whole (Schütze 2002: 75). Thus, although

² See Part I.

³ Clearly, the assumptions of the project included individuals’ positioning in social, historical, and economic processes and structural conditions framed by them. For it seems crucial in which stage of one’s life course the process of moving from the discourse legitimizing the oppressiveness of the socialist social formation to the language promoting the attributes of the neoliberal subject took place.

⁴ See Part III in this book.

⁵ See *Methodological note*.

the cohort, born in the 80s, is said to be the first full “beneficiary” of systemic and political changes in Poland. It is also the first one exposed to such deep and overwhelming biographical changes. For this reason, the frequent “accusations” that young people are unable to take advantage of the opportunity given to them or disregard their freedom, often seem unfair.

Particularly interesting from this point of view turned out to be life histories of three well-educated young Polish women: Inga – a visual artist (b. 1984), Hanna – a medical doctor (b. 1981), and Julia – a doctor of political science operating also in the coaching and training industry (b. 1984).⁶ The detailed and minimally contrasting⁷ (Strauss 1987) analysis of their autobiographical accounts showed exactly that their experiences have been oftentimes connected with the experiences of losing control over one’s life and the feeling of being caught in a biographical trap. All the narrators bear biographical costs related to the sense of having to meet the (imagined) expectations of the family and the implementation of the way of organizing the course of life and life orientation motivated by external pressure (although often mistakenly recognized as their own). Consequently, the basic mode of their adult life is sustaining the precarious balance of everyday life.

When it comes to family relationships, here we are dealing with particularly strong and emotionally connected bonds of a community rooted in modernity, which sets institutional patterns dominating the narrator’s biography and thus partially (more or less consciously) suppresses their own biographical line of development. However, paradoxically, it is also a kind of “safety valve” – a mechanism that allows you to control the trajectory potential. As for the labor market, the narrators operate in the field of specific and contrasting professional social worlds (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). The first of them is associated with the elusive and vague concept of “talent” (art world) (cf., Becker 1982) and, one could say, the eternal immanent problems of

⁶ All interviews were conducted by Joanna Wygnańska. They were already discussed in two papers: Katarzyna Waniek (2016), “Potencjały bezładu i cierpienia w biografjach młodych kobiet wchodzących w świat sztuki i medycyny” [The potentials of disorder and suffering in the biographies of two young women entering the world of medicine and art], *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* 12(2): 114–144 and Katarzyna Waniek (2019), “The precarious life situation trap. The case of ‘zealous’ Julia – A Proponent and a Victim of Neoliberal Reality,” *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 164–193. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.08>

⁷ The minimal comparison strategy – next to the maximum comparison – is a key element of the analytical procedure aimed at building a theoretical model. It involves a very detailed and insightful cross-reference of similar cases in order to show the nuances and diversity in the course of specific process structures and their connections with a specific social framework.

employment instability and income insecurity⁸ related to this field. The second with a “prototype profession” requiring not only “esoteric knowledge” (Hughes 1963: 655) and special technical skills, but also a calling (medicine) (Strauss 2001 [1975]: 11). The third, and supporting the adaptation of individuals to free-market realities or “producing compliant subjects” (Foucault 1988: 178) based on staging practices in the sense of Goffman (1959).

At the outset, the common dimensions of the experiences of all three narrators will be outlined, resulting, on the one hand, from their embedding in similar social, cultural, and historical frames,⁹ and on the other, from similarities in their individual biographies. Then, the specific differentiating features of each case will be identified, so that each case can then be discussed separately.

Frame conditions of the narrators’ life course

Among the most important common features of all three biographies is the fact that the narrators belong to the cohort of people born in the first half of the eighties of the last century. First of all, this means that their process of socialization within an educational career was no longer based on ideological messages related to the socialist era, but still was not strongly rooted in the “project me”-self (Bröckling 2016: 189–191) idea. Both Hanna (born in 1981) and Inga and Julia (both born in 1984) were still attending an eight-year elementary school, which they had started in 1988 and 1991, respectively. Therefore, one may risk the claim that they, at this stage of their life cycle, did not experience the “upbringing in the socialist spirit” and escaped the ideological indoctrination with the ideas of socialism (already weakening). Their early educational career took place in an experimental attempt of education reform according to the western model already partially implementing the logic of “entrepreneurship” and competitiveness. Their early youth fell in the period of Poland’s entry into the European Union and the promotion of various forms of civic activity. Moreover, the process of their adolescence and entering into adulthood, and thus the labor market, was no longer shaped in a socialist social organization, but during a period of intense socio-economic and modernization changes in Poland oriented towards the

⁸ What I mean here is the artists’ dependence on the ability to recognize their artistic activities as valuable by patrons or sponsors, which has its roots in antiquity. Artists were almost always a precarious group, that is, an unstable life situation, which depended on the “whim” and taste of the patron (regardless of whether it was a king, pope, magnate, wealthy entrepreneur, state, or international institution).

⁹ Fritz Schütze argues, influence sometimes even conditions the course of the biographer’s experience and, in turn, are shaped by the biographer (2008a, b).

development of the capitalist market economy (this is the period from the mid-nineties of the last century till the present day). Undoubtedly, the childhood experiences of the Polish People's Republic "backward" reality have only an ethnographic character in the stories cited here, manifesting in such pictures as, for example, the one from Hanna's account: shops which were rather empty. And long queues no one knows what for.

Common to all three biographies is also that while the parents were absent, absorbed with work, grandmothers took care of the narrators, all of them have siblings, all of them were good students, active volunteers, and all of them got higher education. None of them has children, though Julia – married as the only one of them – thinks very seriously about motherhood. However, if the cases of Hanna and Inga (in a certain simplification and with caution in adapting Bourdieu's statements to Polish reality) can be considered as examples of parents' social position reproduction (Bourdieu, Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 1986)¹⁰ in the conditions of a vividly changing political and social framework, then Julia's case shows a strong orientation to improving social position thanks to the education and the possibility structures offered by a capitalist market economy. In contrast to both narrators, Julia was not born in a big city and does not come from an intellectual family, and spent her childhood and early youth in a small town.

Thus, the life histories analyzed in the chapter show (minimally contrasting) theoretical variations of the biographical entanglement in neoliberal reality giving an illusory sense of freedom and control over one's own life, while in fact it only blots increasing disorder, anomie, and alienation towards oneself (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]). They reveal many features typical of modern complex societies that are a consequence of entanglement of individuals into numerous social worlds. Not only are these worlds constantly growing (often competing for members), but there are more and more of them (Schütze 2002). Consequently, the narrators – like many of their peers¹¹ – not

¹⁰ Later I will show on what I base my assumptions about the narrators' origin. This supposition is important because it is associated with a particular type of cultural transmission (Giza-Poleszczuk 2005: 42–43).

¹¹ It seems that this process intensifies significantly among people born in the 80s. Their life histories are dominated by the sense of confusion, tension, disorientation, and irritation caused by the cacophony of logic, moral orientations, standards, and ways of organizing work, criteria for assessing undertaken actions, ideologies, values, or obligations characteristic of different social worlds (cf., Clarke 1991, Strauss 1993, Schütze 2002). It does not mean that such phenomena did not occur before, but only that the autobiographical narrative interviews collected in the autobiographical research projects show that in the years 1980–1990 there was a significant change in both the content and the form of the story.

only have to deal with various (often contradictory) styles, logic of behavior, and moral standards of social worlds to which they belong, but also with the dynamics of internal changes and disputes regarding the authenticity of core activities in each of them. In addition, all of them – requiring specific knowledge resources, creating their own “We” – culture and awareness (Schütze 2002: 63) – create a sense of moral commitment to achieve common goals and obligation to loyalty. Interestingly enough, Julia goes a step further, unlike Hanna or Inga, who are subordinated to the expectations of the new capitalist order in their professional social worlds, she also becomes an expert who actively promotes and implements this order.

A special dimension of their experience is the expansion of a specific European mental space,¹² that is, a process in which Europe becomes an important frame of reference not only symbolically, but is increasingly becoming a real field of activity and an open structure of opportunity. Not without significance for the stories of life discussed here is the gradual opening of the Polish borders and leaving the isolation of the Eastern Bloc (the turning point is both 1989 and 2004). Europe is increasingly being considered not only as an element of a contrast set, but also as a place to realize one’s life plans or a place of escape (cf., Waniek 2015). For Hanna, it will be, for example, a Danish hospital and social care or an image of medical practice in England as mediated by a friend. For Inga, on the other hand, it will be a place of studying and the opportunity to compare Dutch and Polish universities, including, first of all, the relations between students and lecturers, but also the possibility of financing various forms of activity and cooperation (e.g., artistic residencies or Inga’s projects). For Julia, this will be a space for seasonal labor migration to Germany, allowing her to support herself as a student and then a PhD student.

¹² I am referring to the concept of the European mental space, which is produced and modified as a result of *encounters* with Europe in the process of personal experiences of individuals including face-to-face interaction with a culturally different Other (in the sense of G.H. Mead). The processes of acquiring knowledge about European affairs from significant interactive partners (Schütz 1946), peer groups, educational contexts and all types of media communications, and the need to struggle and comply with the requirements imposed by the European Union. This usually entails: expanding and transforming common knowledge resources, reference schemes, and relevance systems (in the sense of Alfred Schütz) following the acknowledgement and consideration of the Other’s point of view, and also entails the need to compare different performance standards and criteria and tools for their assessment (as Anselm Strauss describes in the concept of “social worlds”) (Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen 2012, Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen, Nagel, Treichel 2012).

Framework conditions for disorder and anomy potentials

In the light of the narrators' "common" biographical profile presented above, it may seem puzzling that the structural analysis of their narrative reveals that the potentials of the trajectory of suffering (see: Chapter I: *Methodological note*) are clearly related to the family and the field of work. I am not saying that these are the only areas of possible danger of suffering and chaos in their world of life, but these – as the empirical material shows – are dominant. It is interesting at the same time that the reference systems provided by the parents shaping the hierarchy of the narrators' values are at the same time a kind of "protective mechanism" against the full and uncritical acceptance of "governmental"¹³ reality, constituting – at least forcing reflection on their own experiences – the opposite.¹⁴ Thus, they allow one to master or mitigate these potentials and balance the precarious equilibrium of everyday life. In the cases discussed here, we are dealing with the initial stage of this process, in which the "trajectory potential" plays a huge role. This, as Fritz Schütze shows: "usually has a component of biographical dispositions to be hurt and a component of a set of key contradictions within the current life situation [...]; both of these components interact with each other, reinforcing the tendency to fall into a trap [...]" (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 428).

The hypothesis which emerges from the analysis of all three interviews is that the first component has its source primarily in family relationships, while the latter most strongly activates when entering the labor market. Remembering that both these elements dynamize each other's influence on the individual's life – they will be separated below for analytical purposes. It should also be emphasized that at many moments in the life stories discussed here the trajectory process becomes dynamic and the narrators actually have to deal with the need to maintain a state of precarious equilibrium, balancing on the edge of a total loss of control over their lives.

¹³ "Governmentality" is understood as a "neoliberal variant of the art of government," which – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains after Nikolas Rose (1998, 1999) – "is oriented [...] to governing through freedom" – managing the actions of entities convinced of their autonomy, independence, and self-determination." (Stachowiak 2013: 144; see also Czyżewski 2009a).

¹⁴ Contrast sets are one of the significant structural elements of the autobiographical narrative interview. Their occurrence and insight can reveal the narrator's way of seeing the world, but also reveal his reflective biographical work (see, e.g., Schütze 2008a, b). From this perspective, it would be interesting to compare the interviews discussed here, in which the narrators are in tune with their own family with the stories of people whose relationships with their parents are conflicting and have led to a break in contacts. The question would then be: do and to what extent do they become aware of the subordination to neoliberal ideology, and what role does it play in their lives?

However, a supplementary commentary seems to be necessary here. In understanding the mechanisms of the development of suffering, the key issue is not only to determine *what* causes them (it can be a serious illness, educational failure, or unfulfilled love), but first of all *how* the individual experiences and gives meaning to specific events at a given moment in their biography and what impact this experience has on their further fate (and hence, how they later reproduce them in a spontaneous story). There is, of course, a fundamental difference between a situation in which a person is unexpectedly faced with an overwhelming, unexpected, and irremovable fate, and a situation in which the institutional pattern of expectations becomes unbearable and blocks one's own line of biographical searches (including the process of transformation). Or, when the biographical action scheme (associated with intentional attitude towards one's own biography) as a result of a fateful coincidence leads to disturbances in the order of everyday reality and drives a person (even for a moment) into a dead end. In the first case, we are dealing with the appearance of something indelible and irreversible, and in the other two cases with something that seems to be possible to eliminate with sufficient and systematic effort and thus restore control over one's own life. All these events, however, are experienced as uncontrollable external circumstances which introduce disorder into everyday reality and in an individual experience characterize the trajectory of suffering.

The hidden component of the trajectory potential in the family

It will certainly not be anything new to say that the "biographical background" of childhood and adolescence – and thus primary socialization (Berger, Luckmann 1967) is usually crucial to understanding the individual biography (cf., Rosenthal 2000). Let me begin my analysis from, as Daniel Bertaux describes, "the level of lasting relationships with the parents and the close ones (significant others G.H. Mead)" (Bertaux 2012: 312) because this is where the first possible source of disorder is revealed. In the chosen biographies, an extremely interesting issue is the absence of the busy – though loving – parents, who are largely "replaced" in their caring and educational functions by grandmothers. They introduce their grandchildren into the world of life and "set the rules of the game" (Beger, Luckmann 1967: 154).

In general, in the life stories analyzed here, the original trajectory dynamics finds its source in the family relationships, which are created according to traditional patterns:¹⁵ marriage is "for life" (Marody 2015: 141), it has (despite

¹⁵ Some clarifications are needed to avoid misunderstandings. By "traditional family" I mean the colloquial use of the term. In sociological understanding, however, I refer to the model of a family typical of modernity.

the difficulties) linear, stable, and harmonious character, children (not a child) appear, but on the other hand, the requirements of modern times put this pattern to the test – above all by the need for paid work of both spouses.¹⁶ A special role in this system is played by grandmothers, whose function is not limited to taking over part of the burden of overworked mothers (taking care of children and maintaining the household – “existential facilities for working time” (Marody 2015: 143),¹⁷ but it manifests itself in supporting, against the socio-cultural trends, the model of life based on a traditional family. Thus, on the one hand, the grandmother allows the narrators’ parents to create a strong image of a coherent family, and on the other, it sort of eliminates tensions arising from the special moment of transition between two (almost mutually exclusive) orders – modernity and post-modernity. Let’s note that, in the case of Hanna and Julia, the grandmother appears in the story immediately and in the foreground, which is related to the parents’ professional activity during the PPR, whereas Inga’s grandmother “enters” when the parents’ absence intensifies after (and as a result of) the political transformation in Poland.

Let’s take a look at the childhood memories of the narrators. Inga recalls: “Well, somehow by accident a doctor of technical sciences and a psychologist began to run a coach and tourist company to the Netherlands. And then I remember that I didn’t see my parents at all because they worked a lot and grandmothers raised us.” Hanna says: “And my parents, they always worked a lot, so they were often not at home, so it was early childhood, it was mainly grandmother.” Finally, Julia says: “Actually, my grandma brought me and my older sisters up [...]. My mum was at work all the time, my father was at work all the time as well. And to tell you the truth, my childhood/ I’ve got vivid memories [...] only of having tea with my grandma.”

The analysis of all three autobiographies clearly shows where the sources of possible tensions are located in the family: first, in the strenuous efforts of the narrators’ parents to maintain a specific family model in the face of the necessary

¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that the inclusion of women in the world of paid work should not necessarily be explained only by the enthusiastic emancipation of women, but one must remember that the constraints resulting from the war, which always “reduces the resources of men” (Marody 2015: 139–145), as well as the requirements of modernization processes and the need to ensure economic security for their own family. In the latter case, it is worth mentioning the triple burden on women (wife-mother-worker) in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (cf., Kenney 1999, Kaźmierska 2014, Schröder-Wildhagen n.d.).

¹⁷ Using the help of grandmothers and not external institutions (nanny, babysitter, school dayroom) has two advantages grounded in two different orders: firstly, they guarantee growing-up in a sense of strong emotional bond, commitment, and unconditional love; and secondly it is help free of charge.

paid work of both of them,¹⁸ and secondly in the often not explicitly expressed expectations as to the direction of the development of their children, and thirdly in the hierarchies of values and orientation systems transmitted by them, which seem to conflict with the requirements of the neoliberal labor market and the nature of late modernity. Undoubtedly, the strength of influence of family ties – in the stories cited here – is of considerable, formative importance for the narrators, but – paradoxically – it is also a kind of barrier. Well, a sense of order and stability created “against all odds” and constituting the basic dimension of the process of socialization, in which “the child internalizes the world of his parents” (Berger, Luckmann 1967: 161) rooted in such values as durability, responsibility, loyalty, trust, reciprocity, commitment, or community (often built in opposition to the outside world)¹⁹ seems to hinder the process of gaining autonomy and independence and entering a capitalist reality. Such understanding of the family can become counterproductive in the face of challenges of the modern world and the temporality, episodicalness, contingency created by it, and a jungle of equal (or lacking) values, reference systems, and moral responsibility – no matter how we evaluate them. In the adult life of the narrators, the tension between the commitment to the family home (defined as a secure base, which always offers not only food, maintenance, and psychological support, but also financial help) and the desire to be an independent person following autonomous biographical plans is clearly visible. For example, Hanna says that when it comes to parents, even when she was already a student she *had the conditions created on their part which were optimal for her to function at home. And also financial help, et cetera*. Therefore, the narrators are shaped, to a large extent, through their homes as good schoolgirls, engaging in various types of voluntary activities, are hard-working, conscientious, have a sense of duty, but are also sensitive and open to the world (thus filling an institutional pattern of expectations). Meanwhile, they face the world of other values and

¹⁸ Very often, as can also be seen in many other life stories of people whose parents both work hard, maintaining such a state of affairs requires a huge organizational effort (and you can't always count on the help of grandparents) and work on feelings. This must be aimed at maintaining intimate ties with spouses and children so that all family members continue to remain integral parts of their biographies (see Schütz 2008). Undoubtedly, there is a huge potential for disorganizing family life, because many times parents do not have enough time or strength to build and maintain common everyday practices and lasting, trust-based relationships with children.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that both families – thanks to grandmothers – keep their children under protection, supervising the space of freedom (e.g., by an unexpected visit to a camp trip, as is the case with Hanna) and largely directing their biographical activities (e.g., by offering extracurricular activities). Grandmothers themselves not only play a protective, but also a controlling role – limiting the narrators' contact with alternative outside worlds.

“virtues” that must be strictly sought. Their repertoire is outlined by both modern specialist and daily dictionaries to quote only some of them after Marek Czyżewski: “creativity,” “activity,” “innovation,” “flexibility,” “quality,” “perfection,” “success,” “fluidity,” “participation,” “project,” “responsibility for yourself,” “knowledge,” [...] “team spirit,” and “personal development” (Czyżewski 2009: 93).

The field of work as a potential for chaos and suffering

The sphere of work is undoubtedly an important frame organizing the lives and renderings of the narrators (empirical evidence in the content of the interview will be shown below when discussing individual cases). It is influenced by processes and phenomena, which will be discussed below, but first of all, attention should be paid to the specificity of their professions-jobs, which do not close in clearly defined working hours, as it is difficult to stop thinking about it. In addition, the autobiographical accounts analyzed below reflect the socio-cultural tendency of organizing all the areas of social life according to a neoliberal pattern, and therefore a society subordinated in all manifestations of its existence to the supreme market laws (mechanisms of competition and rivalry), losing sight of man.²⁰ As Czyżewski emphasizes, the point is to be entrepreneurial, competitive, and profitable with our actions. Therefore, triumph is celebrated by “economizing” rhetorics and “economizing” validations (cf., Czyżewski 2009: 91). From this perspective, it is worth looking at the specificity of the professional careers chosen by the narrators, and thus: in Inga’s seemingly “socially useless” profession of artist, which, as it were “by the nature of things,” fits into the spirit of neoliberalism – it requires creativity, agency, it is based on temporary, project work logic;²¹ in the case of Hanna, the

²⁰ It is Hanna who mainly talks about it, comparing her work as a doctor to the work of her parents – also doctors – for whom the patient was in the first place, while now bureaucratization and proceduralization push the patient to the background. Let’s look at this comparison: “[...] they have already told us about it at university that the first thing to think about, before one thinks about the patient, is to think about documentation. And this is something that was totally not there when they [Hanna’s parents] started working / or for a large part of their work.” In this context, her work at the clinic is particularly difficult (I will return to this thread in the main text), where – as she herself shows: “you sit these seven hours and take one patient after another [...] you can barely keep up with filling in papers [...] and writing prescriptions. [...]. After going out of such work, you are totally stupid.”

²¹ Magda Nowicka points out that, unlike poetry, “visual and applied arts are harnessed to the neoliberal rhetoric of creative industries.” M. Nowicka, “The discreet charm of non-fulfilment or what poetry does not do,” <http://wakat.sdk.pl/dyskretny-urok-niespełnienia-albo-to-czych-poezja-nie-czyni/> [12.12.2015].

invariably “useful” medical profession, which, when we consider the ageing of the society, as well as the increasing medical perception of people, turns out to be extremely useful and necessary for the smooth functioning of society; or finally for Julia, who becomes a zealous propagator of alleged universal attributes of neoliberalism both in the social world of academy, non-governmental organizations, or multinational corporations. Project, task-oriented work, highly proceduralized, and consisting of drifting not only from employment to employment, but also between several simultaneous jobs. Demanding constant acquisition of knowledge and development of competences becomes the ordering principle of the entire biographical experience of all three narrators. It seems that in their lives there is no place, time, or strength to implement other lasting (and therefore requiring constant effort, commitment, but also emotional outlays) life plans.

Let's start analysis of three minimally contrasting cases

Inga's life history

It is all so precarious that it can just be blown down by a gentle breeze.

Inga was born in the large Polish city of A. in 1984. Currently, after undergraduate and graduate studies at Dutch universities, she is developing her artistic career in the Netherlands and partly also in Poland.

Inga was born in an urban family (as evidenced by the stories opening her narrative about her grandfather, the manufacturer, or a huge apartment in a tenement house, still vivid stories and even family secrets, artistic interests of her father, which influence the course of her own biography). Her parents, seduced by the possibilities that emerged in Poland after 1989, abandoned their professions (engineer and psychologist) and started to run a travel company. This required them to be extremely committed and dedicated, and thus completely “absorbed” their “private” time (Marody 2015: 143). It can be assumed that – like most people at that time – they counted on the possibility of an amazing improvement in material conditions and an escape from the PPR mediocrity. Initially, they put the childcare (Inga and her older brother) in the hands of grandmothers and later also in extracurricular art classes.²² These,

²² Anselm Strauss, in his book *Professions, Works, and Careers* in the chapter titled *Some aspects of recruitment into visual arts* (2001 [1975]: 101) draws attention to the fact that, initially, children treat art as fun and most probably many talented young people will never begin to approach it seriously unless there is a person (biographical carer) who makes them realize that different meaning. In Inga's case, it is her father who plays that role.

as it turned out, played a significant role in the development of the narrator's interests and constituted her artistic and professional path constituting next to her father who instills in his children a longing and probably even a love of art, an important element of "initiating rhizomes."²³

Let us return, however, to the parents and the biographical consequences of their getting lost at work and the persistent maintenance of a precarious balance between home and work responsibilities. The first "victim" of this lifestyle was the father who, as a result of the activation of a genetic disease, came close to death and never returned to work again. While he devoted himself to writing books and achieving his passions in a country house, her mother became the "breadwinner" of the family. As Inga says: "my mother always worked so hard to ensure a good start for her children and to maintain a good standard of living." Such, perhaps extremely high in this situation, good levels for both them and her husband, the narrator's assessment in this passage shows that her mother most likely worked excessively in the face of her expectations. Thus, she inscribed in the "symbolism of sacrifice" often (over-) used by women working abroad and allowing rationalization of their absence with children left at home (Urbańska 2015: 234-236).

The action plan implemented by the parents – establishing a travel and coach company – resulted from the structural possibilities brought about by the socio-historical change in Poland after 1989. In fact, they appeared to be satisfying – on the condition of hard, demanding huge sacrifices – work – the "American dream" (repeatedly being just a pursuit of illusion) paid for in this case by the serious illness of the father and overworked mother. This undoubtedly influenced the narrator's decision to quickly become independent, grounded in her biographical orientation, which is determined by the conviction that "since my mother works so hard, I have to as well." Paradoxically, however, the constant accumulation of economic capital (with social and cultural capital stored during the Polish People's Republic and later restored and developed) thanks to the hard and time-consuming work of the mother allowed the narrator to enter the capitalist reality and "condemned" her to a multitude of choices (which she read about in college):

²³ I am referring to the metaphor of Piotr Szenajch, who, searching for supra-individual sources of "genius" and "talent," reaches for the concept of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the considerations of Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Foucault. Compare Piotr Szenajch's material presented at the conference "Creative Applications of Biographical Research: Theory, Practice and Policy" at the University of Durham, September 2014 based on his unpublished doctoral thesis *Supra-individual conditions of "talent," as well as cultural sources and social costs of omitting them* prepared at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. See also: Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak (2015).

I just wanted everything. I couldn't decide what. This is also probably one of the biggest problems of modern times. I read about it everywhere and think to myself: yes, it's about me! The simple choice is not to choose something. And the hardest part is [...] To deprive those opportunities that are and choose only one.

Let us now take a closer look at the biographical moment which the narrator commented with the quote above. Inga, following her biographical plan (and her brother²⁴) wanted to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, where, however, she was not admitted at first. However, she could study at the Faculty of Artistic Education of the same university, which, however, she treated as a "waiting room." A year later she did get to the dream faculty, but her situation was already completely different then. Her aunt, at whose place Inga spent her holidays in the Netherlands,²⁵ persuaded her to study there, and the narrator got admitted. Tempted by "the promise of commercialism, being responsible, and a chance to earn money" (the order of arguments specified by the informant), Inga decided to study illustration abroad, where – as she still believed – "everything is better."²⁶ The father, let's add, did not fully accept his daughter's decision (using his words) to go to some idiotic school. Her "pragmatic and functional" field of study at a Dutch art college seemed to be a huge opposite of Polish, "nineteenth-century and romantic" perceptions of art, which Inga puts in the neat slogan of "brushes, paints, and turpentine." Unfortunately, as it turned out, the profile of this school was strictly professional and therefore it did not offer any lectures on philosophy or history of art. Inga felt that her cultural capital in this area – acquired and shaped in Poland (both by the parents, as well as at school) – is significantly greater than that of her classmates, who undoubtedly could impress others with "useless" knowledge. She defines it herself: "I was such a total snob there."

Implementing the main premise organizing her biography at the time, Inga tried to free her mother from the obligation to support her during her studies and earned her living working as a waitress. Only after half a year, she moved out from her aunt, who she initially stayed with. Inga attributes great importance to her waitressing work (although she thinks it sounds like a cliché when she talks about it): "thanks to that [...] I learned Dutch" and adds: "it [...] will sound completely ridiculous, but I learned life, really, because I couldn't do

²⁴ Her brother started studying at the Academy of Fine Arts earlier and Inga was impressed both by what he was doing there and the environment in which he was mingling.

²⁵ During which, let's stress, she works illegally washing dishes, and describes that experience as "nightmarish" and "heroic."

²⁶ Inga reproduces here "the stereotype placing Poland towards the West in civilizational (but not cultural) inferiority positions" (Piotrowski 1997: 359).

anything. In general, when I lived here [in Poland], I had it all served on a tray, and there [in the Netherlands] I had to deal with it myself.” This last sentence takes the form of a contrast set, in which the narrator’s transformation from a full-fledged “feathered chick” into an independent adult and mature woman is shown. This type of construction in which the narrator shows who she was and who she became as a result of subsequent events in her life captures the process of identity change – here subjected to reflection and biographical work. This process of transformation was undoubtedly accelerated by almost total immersion into the Dutch culture and contacts with its representatives,²⁷ who, as Inga shows, were “very nice,” but their “Protestant mentality, common sense, withdrawn nature” caused that at first, she did not completely find herself there. The process of “familiarizing” another culture was marked by suffering and loneliness,²⁸ and according to the narrator, it lasted four or even six years. One could say that we are dealing here with the liminal phase of her life cycle and the experience of *communitas* (van Gennep 2006, Turner 2010), during which she abandoned the routine of things and subjected herself to tests in order to prove to herself and, above all, to relatives that she is able to organize her everyday life independently, she is able to meet the challenges posed by her fate, she can be independent in both her actions and thinking (cf., Waniek 2015). However, a problem arose when she did not know what to do with her life, choosing to go to Switzerland with her boyfriend at the time, return to Poland, or stay in the Netherlands. What’s more, as we learn from the construction in the background having the character of fading out of awareness,²⁹ her father died during this period. The mother no longer ran a transport company, but became the owner of a dental clinic, she returned to her profession as a psychologist, who not only began to practice again, but also lectured at private universities – most likely all the time feeling responsible for the material sphere of life of her already adult children. The death of her father played a huge role in Inga’s

²⁷ Inga spent the first four years at the university, where only the Dutch studied and she was the only *foreigner-freak*. This situation is completely reversed when she gets to the Master’s level. Then in her student group “everyone is from somewhere” and only one Dutchman.

²⁸ These processes can be identified in some of the narrator’s biographical experience – at university, Inga was in a relationship with a Swiss, who wanted to return to his country immediately after obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Inga then faced a dilemma: whether to follow him or stay in the Netherlands. Her reconstruction and projection for the future of her experiences related to entering a foreign culture look like this: “Again, not understanding the language, again not having your friends. I just felt that I could not stand it a second time – isolation (language), loneliness (no friends), unpleasant, suffering (I do not want to experience it a second time).”

²⁹ See *Methodological note*.

life, but – as demonstrated by the analysis of her narrative – has not yet been worked through. This is probably why the narrator describes her studies at the Institute of Fine Arts several times using the metaphor of being saved and shows them in very interesting optics. Comparing the relationships between students, lecturers, and the art field in the Netherlands and Poland, it essentially reflects the Bernstein distinction between the integrated code and the collection code, respectively (Bernstein 1975: 160–162, 171 onwards)³⁰ and processes typical of the social worlds (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978). She emphasizes that people treat themselves there as partners, everyone learns from each other, often tutors (mentors) also have their own artistic practices, students are constantly visited by working artists and sums up:

Well, it is so completely partner-like, err [...] These are more or less relationships, I mean, I had to learn it, because I was brought up in this system, Sir/Madam Professor, and there is simply no such thing there. You just address your wonderful teacher by first name. And it is, it is difficult, it was quite difficult for me too. How can I say to [name is given here], who is just a great art critic who lectures at all the world's universities, how can I just call him Jan? Well, but it was like that there.

The hierarchical and ritualized educational attitude at the home university (reflected in the communication rules imposing the obligation to address the lecturer as 'Mr/Ms') is contrasted with the world of the Dutch academy, where distinction seems to be fading and the student has the impression that he/she has more control over his/her moves, actions, and style of communication, and that he/she has much more autonomy as to the choice, organization, pace, and time allocation of the knowledge acquisition processes (Bernstein 1975, Hernik 2007). Also, Inga shows that 'weak classification' and fluidity of boundaries between individual contents, openness to the external context – typical of the integration code – are accompanied by the interpenetration of various social worlds for which the basic activity is doing art, so the world of curators, students, lecturers, practising artists, or art critics.

This world of foreign academy, appearing to Inga as fascinating, almost idyllic, and certainly allowing to "free oneself" from the growing disorder and confusion has some traps, however. This lack of hierarchy and a sense of freedom of movement between specific worlds are often illusory and manifest themselves only on the surface of semantic structures. This code – clear for the "insiders" – often seduces and misleads the "outsiders." The former see not only

³⁰ The collection code, the integration code refer to two different practices related to the way knowledge is acquired. And so the types of collection codes are associated with a strong separation and impenetrability of teaching content, with a strong classification.

the communicated at-face-value message, but also see the hidden semantic structures.

Inga believes that by staying in the Netherlands and undertaking her master's studies she did the right thing. The rightness of her choice seems to be confirmed (based on the principle of contrast) by her assessment of the artistic career of her brother, who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Poland and at the beginning could not find a satisfying job. However, this situation changed when he opened an art gallery – we will come back to this issue later.

Let us now stop at the earlier reflections regarding transformations in the sphere of work. Inga's attitude towards this issue seems particularly interesting. First of all, one is struck by the naturalness (perhaps resulting from the specificity of the profession she practices) with which she speaks of *precariousness*. The first attempts to deal with this topic can be found in the proper narrative sequence, and therefore when Inga passes from the moment of graduation to the story of work. This fragment is of a dialogical nature because the narrator refers to and compares her position as an artist to the position of her interlocutor – a PhD student working on a research project.³¹ Comparing her projects to a doctorate, she classifies them as *shorter ones* and continues:

[...] but every time I just explore a topic and try [...] to somehow tell it, somehow critically approach it [...]. And [...] I don't know, I suppose that, that [...] and I like this freedom as such. This is obviously very difficult, because you also have to apply for scholarships, grants, so we know it. When I listen to you and your work, or other PhD students, it seems to me that this is a very similar situation, so very precarious, such a fashionable word now. But, this is, this is me, yet, after all, it is quite fascinating. Well, you never know what will happen, but everything else is possible somehow.

In turn, when answering the additional question of the researcher – asked shortly after the main narrative line – who asks her to clarify what exactly her work consists of, Inga explains that her activities focus primarily on seeking funding for her artistic ideas, among which he mentions such forms such as grants, residences, projects, being an assistant to another (recognized) artist, et cetera. This requires, as she says later: “some luck and a lot of work.” She adds that: “of course, sometimes it will happen that someone invites me” and then she has the opportunity to make her own exhibition. However, Inga uses her social capital in a very interesting way, which makes her perform very well on the artists' job market. Mainly, as she puts it herself, she “connects the worlds.”

³¹ She is probably referring here to the topics discussed outside of the recording which belong to the phase introducing the potential narrator to this form of research (See Schütze 2008a).

Firstly, she does this by inviting her colleagues and lecturers from the Dutch university to the gallery run by her brother (and which – presumably to a large extent – is maintained by their mother), and secondly, having the opportunity to apply for financing projects not only in Poland or the Netherlands, but also throughout Europe (and even around the world). Thus, she defines her and her brother's professional achievements as we may have succeeded a bit. In turn, she talks about herself in the context of her mother who is constantly working hard and worrying about her "artistic children." She emphasizes her independence and the fact that she is no longer using her help "at the moment." And then she adds: "And now I can finally manage to make a living from what I do." Only that this success is impermanent, shakey, dependent on the situation, goodwill of sponsors, and requiring work in many places. This is clearly captured by the narrator's comment, who talks about her joint achievements with her brother in such a way: "It is all so precarious that it can just be blown down by a gentle breeze."

In the end, it is worth mentioning that this suspension between the worlds and the position of a "marginal man" (Stonequist 1961 [1937]) seem to be a ready material for artistic work, but also artistic work itself can be a way to control disorder and suffering or to work through one's own difficult biographical experiences. Incidentally, there is also a great potential for disorder here.

Hanna's life history

[...] I suppose it is also mentally exhausting when you suddenly realize that you have stepped into something that will last properly until the end.

Hanna was born in 1981 in the city of A. She is an internist. Both of her parents are doctors who, being retired and in their late 60s, are still professionally active. She has a sister, 5 years older, who is a Master of Arts, started her own family and has two children.

The main principle organizing Hanna's biography seems to be a desire for security (Thomas 1976) expressed in the repeated statement that each place and situation requires a certain degree of familiarization and recognition, in theoretical comments in which she openly states: "I find it hard to get used to new circumstances or I am a coward," in the description of new experiences as clashes with reality, but also in the features of the surrounding reality which suit her best, such as silence, peace, or a pleasant smell (vs. noise, the rush which she is experiencing). It also manifests itself in her approach to the medical profession, where the feeling of duty and fear of harming the patient comes to the fore. Let us take a closer look at the fragment in which Hanna talks about

a milestone in her (but in fact in every) doctor's career which is independent duty: she is accompanied by the fear of the unknown, but at the same time a sense of great responsibility: "Oh Lord! It was terrible too. Before entering the hospital you had to cross yourself, even if you were not at all religious, but just to make sure nothing terrible would happen, to survive it somehow, so as not to hurt anyone." This last formulation: in order not to hurt anyone is semantically almost identical to the Hippocratic "firstly do not harm" (*primum non nocere*).

After this general characterization of Hanna, let us now proceed to a more detailed analysis of the two biographical dimensions distinguished for the aims of this article, that is, family relations and work. In Hanna's story, the family (parents, sister, and grandparents) constitutes a particularly important – grounded in a coherent system of values and associated with huge stability, but at the same time outlines (and thus may limit) her biographical horizons. Being a member of this "we" community is associated with devotion, loyalty, and mutual support, which is to maintain internal order and ensure peace.³² The description of the relationship between its individual members reflects some features of the modern family (which I will come back to), but at the same time – after Mirosława Marody – it points to some archaic, that is, non-contemporary features which are familiar to Hanna. Marody writes: "Sacrifice for the good of the family is treated as a symptom of a lack of assertiveness rather than a proof of maturity and responsibility of the individual" (Marody 2015: 145).

In early childhood, Hanna was provided with a sense of security and order in the everyday reality by her grandmother. It was in her small apartment, where she had been living with her parents for a while, that the narrator felt at home and had a sense of freedom. She allows her granddaughters "to do different hairstyles and wind their hair on rollers, but also to let off steam on a hated toy: she stood up to the challenge and came up with ideas for things which could be done to make the doll suffer, so the doll had salt put in her eyes [...], pins stuck under nails [...]." Hanna gained a sense of "a close-knit family" from that period. This pattern, as the narrator shows, was recreated in the relationship of her parents with her sister's children. When the grandmother died, the narrator was less than 9 years old and this is what she says about her passing-away:

And it was such a breakthrough moment because everything started to get re-evaluated at home. Especially that from those earlier memories and so, it's all about grandma. And the parents are somewhere on the margins, of course, they are remembered, although this, such a main core was the grandmother.

³² Peace does not mean stillness, but the opposite of the often senseless pursuit of something (a thing, a feeling, a desire, meaning).

The grandmother's illness and death forced Hanna's parents to abandon the routines of life organized around work and focus on the family. When the mother looked after the sick grandparents, the father went away with his daughters on winter holidays, which put him in a new light – this man, eternally absent from home, turned out to be a great and ingenious companion of fun. The narrator recalls it in this way:

[...] winter holidays spent with my father, who, at that time, had already been working so much that he appeared at home very sporadically. However, when he did appear, which irritated my mother terribly, he was the biggest attraction and this trip was also such an attraction that until now is present in my and my sister's memories. We come back to this very often [...] He invented great games for us, because if there were frozen puddles, for example, he could say how to lift a puddle. And he would pick up the puddle with a piece of branch, so we were fascinated by how ingenious he was. He invented fitness exercises for us, meaning that when we would go for some long walks we had to hold a stick of suitable weight in outstretched arms in front of us, I had a smaller one, my sister a bigger one, and our father the biggest one, and in this way we would walk around. [...] Anyway, it was extremely nice. There were no restrictions there, no one ordered anyone around. It was really nice, and in the evenings our father read "A Bear Called Paddington," "The Adventures of a Bear Called Paddington." And then we ate powdered milk, dry milk, powdered milk with sugar. Now I can't imagine how it can be eaten [...].

This passage is a description of a fascinating and joyful time which allowed both daughters (Hanna repeats that in her and her sister's memory these holidays have left a significant mark) to discover their father and the suspension of everyday rules (revealed in the text by a default contrast to the prevailing rules at home: "there were no restrictions, no one ordered anyone"). The narrator defines both the appearance of her hard-working father in her life and the trip with him during the holidays as an "attraction." A certain analogy can be drawn here to the transformations of the modern family described by Marody – mainly, the changes in relations between parents who are no longer in a relationship (divorced) and their children. Although Hanna's parents are married to this day, their intensive work and the related absence from the narrator's childhood leads to consequences similar to those characteristic of a broken family. One may get the impression that the parents at that time being "on the margins" were not part of the everyday routine, but rather a kind of "celebration" whose task is "emotional gratification" in the form of time "spent as attractive and intense as possible" (Marody 2015: 176). It can, therefore, be said that, paradoxically, a family for which its durability and coherence is a value, due to the intense work of both the father and the mother, it can be described using the characteristics typical of postmodern relationships between parents and children.

In many places the analysis of Hanna's life history shows a peculiar biographical tension, which is largely due to the collision of these two competing worlds: a traditional family and a neoliberal reality. The first, which has already been mentioned, is associated with extremely strong, emotional ties with a family which bears an intellectual trait.³³ It is thanks to the family that the narrator gains cultural capital which could also be successfully used outside of Poland: she is a well-educated doctor, knows French (and perhaps also English), has "familiarity with the world,"³⁴ but on the other hand – paradoxically – the same community seems to be a barrier to the use of the potential (e.g., European) structures of possibility. From her narrative, we learn that she is not ready to take up a job abroad, which she explains by the fondness of her family (here she mentions both her parents, sister, and her zoo). She adds later: "And besides, I'm a coward to leave completely on my own and suddenly deal with everything from scratch, no, no, definitely not." These declarations seem particularly intriguing in relation to the contrastive comparisons she introduces which show the preparation of young doctors, as well as the organization and working conditions in domestic healthcare in comparison with Denmark and England. Let us take a closer look at how the narrator draws the "absolute gap" between medical and social care in Poland and Western Europe.

The first contrasting set is based on her own observations while visiting her uncle in a Danish hospital:

When you go inside it actually looks like a museum, there are paintings on the walls, some sculptures exhibited in the showcases. And also what catches the eye

³³ Looking at the account created by Hanna, we can approximate her position in the social stratum. We are given information about it through its interpretation framework, semantic resources, and hierarchies of values. Other indicators can also be a prestigious secondary school which she attended or scout membership. Also, the narrator herself shows that: "My parents made sure that I try everything" and mentions: mountain hiking, sailing, swimming, ice-skating, callisthenics, ballet. Her attitude also manifests itself in her attachment to certain values and perceptions of the world, as well as in her attitude of responsibility and loyalty to specific "we" communities of helping and having a sense of mission rather than passion in the chosen profession. But, perhaps the most important, though seemingly trivial indicator here may be a description of a tourist trip to Vilnius with parents in the early 1990s – while all its participants engage in commercial activities upon arrival, her parents tirelessly sightsee the city (by an empty coach), which shows some other system of relevance and orientation of her family. The set of elements listed above, and even their configuration, cannot obviously be regarded as irrefutable proof of its intellectual origin.

³⁴ Hanna mentions not only trips to her uncle in Denmark, but also a "trip around friends in Europe" (to do this, you just need to have these friends), holidays, and ski trips abroad.

is the silence. When you enter a Polish hospital, it is hustle and bustle, there are those, those food delivery carts, everything is clacking, it is so disgusting. However, there – there is peace and quiet. Nobody is running, no one is shouting to each other through these corridors. [...] Well, what also catches the eye [...] or in the nose actually, there it smelled nice. What can't be said about Polish hospitals, unfortunately. Everything is organized when it comes to [...] helping the patient to carry him, to wash him, groom and dress him. In Poland, it is that two or three nurses come [...] and they just have to manage, lift somehow [...] the patient. [...] They have their own techniques, but everything is forceful anyway. However, there [...] each room has a sheave on the ceiling [which] can be adjusted by remote control in which place the lift should be placed. A tape is placed under the patient, of course, this is all safe so as not to injure the spine, et cetera there and the patient is lifted without using force.

Another one refers to the experiences of a friend from university, who then had already had emigration plans motivated mainly financially. This fragment appears as an answer to the question of the researcher who is trying to exploit this thread which barely mentioned in the main narrative regarding the possibility of emigration:

[...] there is a different mode of work there [...] the specializations and scope of duties are slightly different. What she says is that there is a gap between the people who graduated in England and who graduated here [in Poland]. We are quite well-prepared in terms of theory, but when it comes to practice, it is rock bottom. We actually have these clinical classes/ they started from the third year. Well, it was also usually the case that a group of, let's say, ten people got one patient, so if there was a procedure to carry out, even from the patient's point of view, so as not to torment him [...] it was done by one person, maximum two, depending on what was supposed to be done. And the majority were just such onlookers.

It seems that the image of the West – shown as civilizationally much higher in terms of the social world of medicine (regarding technology, organization of work, care for the sick, and care for the working people – including doctors) is extremely tempting. And yet, leaving the country is not considered by Hanna as an alternative to the Polish healthcare system exploiting young doctors. Let us mention here only a few descriptions of the narrator relating to the internal states accompanying her working mode: “washed out of all kinds of emotions, strength, and everything; the growing frustration inside of me; terrible torment.”³⁵ Hanna, therefore, is working on the borderline between

³⁵ Let us add that this experience refers to the period in which the narrator had to combine her career with caring for her sister's child. She speaks of it: “It was a moment that was hard for me to go through.”

physical and mental exhaustion, fully realizing that this is not good for her or the patients.

Therefore, here we are dealing with a growing disorder and alarming exhaustion, that is, clear symptoms of the biographical process of trajectory of suffering (more about this below). In the meantime, we will return to the contrast between Poland and Denmark, outlined by the narrator, which she visits for the first time in 1993. She describes her experience of that time as “a collision with prosperity,” with “walls of crisps and sweets,” she is impressed by the range of colors and various flavors of ice-cream. With hindsight, however, she states that the availability of all goods and the possibility of purchasing them have become commonplace in Poland too. Additionally, she shows that although the Danish town she visits because of her uncle still remains charming, clean, and orderly, yet – unlike Poland – nothing has changed there. This is a very interesting comparison of the two countries, which, on the one hand, shows Poland’s entry into the process of mass-consumption, and on the other, its civilizational backwardness (primarily in the dimension of medical and social care).

Let us now move on to the confusing and intense experiences of the narrator, being the markers of a growing trajectory potential, and often an attempt to maintain the precarious balance of everyday life), which result from the hypertrophy of professional duties and the associated responsibilities. It is necessary to take into account the specific biographical moment in which the interview with Hanna was conducted. At that time, she was preparing for the State Specialization Examination, which completely excluded her from professional life and thoroughly organized her daily routines. It can be assumed, therefore, that some ways of presenting reality are exaggerated or “overblown.” Nevertheless, there is still empirical textual evidence that chaos and suffering have entered her life, and that she devotes great effort to try to control the disorder in the circumstances of an extreme workload, which also “exhausts one’s energy” (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349) and leads to a loss of control over the everyday world of life. I will recall here a long fragment of the narrator’s account, which will be divided into two parts: the first one refers to the (dis) organization of the growing obligations towards various workplaces, the second one refers to the loss of control over her own emotions in the interaction with patients. Both point to the trajectory character of the narrator’s experience at that time.

The first alarming signal of the growing chaos and the emergence of a professional trap can be found in the narrative reconstruction of the situation in which Hanna registers her own company (becomes self-employed) and combines working in different places, knowing that while preparing for the specialization exam she will have to focus only on learning. She describes this

experience as “a marathon, actually, a little bit pushed to my limits...” Her calculations show that she worked 500 hours in the first month. She further explains how her duties were organized at that time:

So, it was that one would actually sit on the night shift somewhere in some NMA [Night Medical Aid], then one went to the clinic, then from this clinic one went to the next NMA, from that NMA to the next clinic. And actually, if I were to calculate, then I had a job in two outpatient clinics in A., in two such NMAs, one in W., the other in D., and I was also going to an outpatient clinic in S., and I was on duty in hospital at my place. And this is a total of six jobs, of which there is partially, one clinic in N. which is treated as one, but I was physically in two places, so in total it was three places in A. Well, it actually happened that with such a schedule you could get lost a bit because it was impossible without a personal agenda. And it happened to me once during these few months of such hard work to arrange two night shifts [at the same time]. I was prepared to go to the hospital on duty at 8 pm, so I was enjoying a short moment of being in my flat, so when I entered, I just immediately fell asleep. And suddenly the phone rings at 6:40 p.m. from the town of W. I answer: I say: “What’s the matter?” “And where am I?” I say: “At home, and where should I be?” “Well here, because everyone is waiting for me.” I say: “How is it possible that in W.? I am [on duty] in hospital today, it’s absolutely out of the question.” I look at the calendar and say: “I have definitely written down that I should be in the hospital.” I open the hospital schedule, well, I am in the hospital, which means that they had to be wrong. And then something dawned on me, I checked a text from a month before. And I say: “Well, you’re right, I am also on duty in the town of W.” In this W. it was hard because we are three people working there on shifts. There is one doctor on call, no one is from the town of W., everyone commutes from A. So I started calling people to the hospital. And finally, I managed to find someone to replace me in the hospital and I came late to that W. So well, these were such unpleasant things. But, once it did happen to me, afterwards I was very careful to check everything two or three times each time. But, I would not like to go back to that, because [...] it’s already a little bit beyond one’s strength. [...] But, I am not saying that it is good for my health, nor is it good for these patients. Because you know, if you work non-stop, you can’t focus and pay attention, despite really great efforts.

Here we can clearly see that the narrator has ceased to control her agenda and obligations in various workplaces. Let us first pay attention to the way in which she talks about the situation in which her shifts overlapped in two different, distant workplaces – it is recalled in the form of a dialogue, vividly and in detail reconstructing what had happened then. This means that Hanna really deeply experienced the loss of control over her life and immediately made attempts to counteract it, that is, she increased supervision of her schedule: “then I was very careful to check everything two or three times each” time and additionally she announces that she does not want to have to deal with such

organization of work (many faraway places, exhausting shifts, etc.). It should be emphasized that the strategy introduced by the narrator aimed at controlling the chaos, did not consist of giving up the excess of professional duties, but intensifying control over their distribution, which in fact did not eliminate the trajectory potential, but could intensify it. Luckily, it was a temporary period in her life, which she was certainly aware of when trying to control the trajectory by introducing the institutional pattern of the course of life.

There is another very interesting linguistic indicator in this passage, which allows us to confirm the narrator's declaration regarding her preferred workplace, which is the hospital, and at the same time her reluctance to work in an outpatient clinic.³⁶ Namely, at the beginning of the account quoted here, Hanna uses, in relation to this last professional activity, the impersonal forms of verbs "one would work," "one would go," which signals the distance to and the automation of the performed activities. She admits that her main motivation was to accumulate financial resources (for the expected period of unemployment before the specialization exam, holiday trips abroad, skiing holidays, paying off the mortgage, etc.). Meanwhile, when talking about work in the hospital ward, she already speaks in the first person singular: for example, "I was on duty," which expresses the identification with this place only deepened in the next phrasing: "in hospital at my place." These formal features of utterance in relation to two different ways of practising the medical profession can be found in the entire interview.

The second significant trajectory marker appears immediately after the work regime cited above. Hanna shows in general terms the interactive anomy between her (a doctor) and a certain type of patient. This description largely explains the reasons for a clear violation of the basis of cooperative reciprocity in the institutional context of night medical assistance: on the one hand, patients come to the doctor with *total nonsense* or groundless claims, and on the other, she, as a doctor, is on the verge of physical exhaustion. As a result, she is easily irritated and is not always able to control her behavior: Let us take a closer look at this passage:

Well, but also the approach to people/ they can irritate terribly at some stage. This means it is also another matter that [...] well, people also have a slightly strange approach to these various health institutions. So I always have/ I am such a calm person and so I was told by the people who I worked with/ I mean nurses with

³⁶ She says, for example: Because counselling work can always be found, but [...] but it is not a thing which I'm dreaming of and definitely hospital work suits me better, I feel more fulfilled there – it is more... developmental. There is a larger cross-section of cases, the range of patients is greater – you can follow the cases of your colleagues... you can always learn something.

whom I work, or rescuers, that I am not irritable and I am very calm. But, such people can come, without thinking about it, because they are passing by, because they are coming back from a party or a name-day celebration. At two o'clock at night they come, shamelessly waking up the nurse and the doctor, because for example, they suspect having a tick [...], hundreds of times it turned out that this suspicious tick is, for example, a mole. Only why do I have to verify it at two o'clock in the morning and why should the doctor do it, since/ let's say that I can understand an elderly person who is senile and who cannot see well. But, it was often the twenty-year-olds who would come [...] such people just come with absolutely everything. [...] [they don't even take anything for a cold without a medical consultation]. And those elder people come when they really need help. And then I have nothing against it. Whatever time they would come, here you are, that's why you are there for. However, unfortunately, you can lose a lot of enthusiasm and desire and heart to/ by thousands of such people who come with total nonsense. And they come completely unnecessarily [...]. Or, for example, they come to get a prescription in the middle of the night, which you absolutely do not do in Medical Aid. But then, these are things that just annoy terribly. And it is at this stage that already after a few years of work in this NMA and after intensive work, it happened to me to shout at such people. [...] We have always had such a policy that no drugs are prescribed which are taken regularly, because this is the job of BHC [Basic Health Care], so it is refused. If someone came to prolong medication in the middle of the night, then on top of being refused, he was also shouted at, unfortunately.

The situation in which Hanna began to shout at her patient causes her surprise. In this behavior, she does not recognize herself, especially since – as she shows in the reconstruction of her “me” in the sense of G.H. Mead (1975) – among the lower medical staff she is considered to be a calm and composed person. The cumulative disorder and alienation with herself which we are dealing with here “constitute – as Fritz Schütze shows – the main aspects of the biographical trajectory of suffering” (See: Schütze 2012 [1995]: 230–231).

Finally, we come to the point where all of these experiences can be referred to Hanna's quote mentioned earlier as a motto “[...] it is also mentally exhausting when you suddenly realize that you have stepped into something that will last properly until the end,” which is the main principle organizing her life and biographical orientation at the time of the interview. It reveals most fully the feeling of being trapped, the growing discouragement, and hopelessness of the narrator's current position. These are typical experiences of trajectories connected with the fact that “even in those stages of suffering which are not dramatic, extreme situations, the existential world of the suffering person will tend to shrink, disappear” (Riemann, Schütze 1991). Let us note that the narrator's sad statement cited above is the result of her biographical work, in which she, first of all, relates her professional experience to the work and life

of her parents-doctors and, secondly, compares the organization of the Polish and Western health and social care system. In the first case, the narrator realizes that, on the one hand, despite the relatively worse working conditions, lower income, and having two children, her parents “managed” while she is already now on the verge of physical and emotional exhaustion; and on the other, she sees that – although they are already retired – they still have to work hard, suggesting that her “torments pushed to the limits” will never end. It gives her the feeling of facing a wall. In the second comparison what comes to the foreground is the huge gap (despite the constant technological progress) in the system of organizing medical care between Poland and the West, which makes the narrator aware that the chances of levelling the standards allowing a doctor to have a good and decent job are slim. This increases her frustration, and with the conviction that she stands no chance to settle abroad, it intensifies the feeling of entrapment.

Finally, it should be noted once again that in the case of Hanna we are primarily dealing with the initial stage of the trajectory process, that is, the accumulation of potentials of disorder and suffering, sometimes falling into the stage of having to balance the equilibrium. These experiences can be temporary and change their sense under the influence of new life circumstances which would rearrange the current hierarchies of significance and reference systems, overshadowing the pressures of external expectations and constraints.

Julia’s life history

I always thought I didn’t know enough... I still had to learn, I had to [...]. And he [Julia’s friend] showed me I didn’t. People take money even if they can’t do something, they just devote their time, so they work.

Julia, was born in 1984 in Nałęczów (a small town ca. 230 kilometers away from Warsaw) as the penultimate of five of her parents’ children. She graduated from the faculty of political science and sociology in Warsaw. Her biographical experiences constitute another extremely interesting variant of the collision of expected and propagated (in family pedagogues, curricula or public discourse) attitudes and life orientations,³⁷ which changed dramatically along with the process of political transformation in Poland.

³⁷ Referring to the method of autobiographical narrative interview, we can talk here about the different normative and procedural requirements of institutional expectation patterns (cf., Schütze 1981, 1984).

As much as for a socialist social formation based on disciplinary power the pattern of an obedient, amenable, diligent, and zealous man was useful in the “marketized” neo-liberal reality and the “governing through freedom” domination, creativity, flexibility, innovation, self-responsibility, and social commitment are required from the empowered individuals (cf., Czyżewski 2012a: 118, 2012b: 90).³⁸ The course of Julia’s life history is distinguished by – leading to increasing trajectory potential – disharmony between the zeal gained while in her family home and a lack of self-confidence: the tension between faith in reliable knowledge and the requirements of the external world in which creation of illusion, dramatization of own actions, and creating one’s own image counts (Goffman 1990). However, the paradox in this case is that being a member of the social worlds of trainers and coaches working in favor of “moulding and producing compliant subjects” (Stachowiak 2013: 142) desired in the “knowledge economy” and propagating allegedly inalienable abilities³⁹ she began to notice the game of appearances in this area, but not so much in the key activities and ideologies of this world as in executive technologies (Strauss 1993: 212). We will return to this issue later.

The interview with Julia took place just before her 30th birthday, which the narrator says herself at the beginning of the 49th page of the transcription.⁴⁰ She states that she had earlier talked to her husband Andrzej about taking part in this research and she told him: “well, OK, we will close a certain period of life.” This is an atypical situation of starting an autobiographical narration in a double meaning. First of all, we deal here not so much with the “standard” preamble,

³⁸ Moreover, Marek Czyżewski emphasizes that in the conditions of the multi-faceted “governmentality” complex a rapid problematization of identity takes place and their fundamentally impermanent and uncertain “social construction”; the term “identity,” which appears only in this syndrome, is often used in scientific discourses (including “sociology of identity”), journalistic and political; in the social sense, the narcissistic focus on one’s own identity may be accompanied, on the one hand, by the fear of permanent identity and, on the other hand, by the sense of the disappearance of identity. The liberation of identity from the obvious, imposed reams and the flexible outline of the preferred identities paradoxically lead to the formation of a limited set of “licensed” identities (“a creative worker,” “an active citizen,” “a responsible parent”) (2012a: 118).

³⁹ When explaining the concept of coaching, Tomasz Bogolebski writes that: “on the declarative level [...] it is – based on a collaboration and cooperation model – a way to extract their potential from individuals in order to maximize profits (understood broadly and without limiting them – explicitly – only to the financial perspective)” (2014: 180).

⁴⁰ The entire translation includes fifty-one pages – 50 lines each. It means that the first part of the interview based on a spontaneous autobiographical narration was extremely long.

in which the narrator usually tries to describe – yet not entirely clearly, even for him- or herself – the general global form of his or her own biography, as with a kind of metacommentary concerning the summary “function” of this event for – and this is the second extraordinary element – their (i.e., Julia and her husband’s) previous life. On the basis of the form of this preliminary statement, we can conclude that to a large extent the course of her life has been shaped together with or in relation to Andrzej, and that undoubtedly he is the key figure of the drama (*dramatis personae*) (Schütze 2008a: 173–174, 182), an important event carrier and the significant Other in the sense of George Herbert Mead (1934).

Julia’s childhood memories revolve mainly around her father’s alcohol problems, which most likely led to the fact that shortly after her birth he lost his job as a construction manager and looked after his little daughter (which, in her opinion, resulted in a much stronger bond between them later in life).⁴¹ At that time, the mother became the main supporter of the family. Three or four years later her father left for France, where his family lived, to look for a job there. The goods brought from there, shaped the image of the West she had – as the land of *milk and honey*.⁴² Julia recalls the return of her father from France: “I saw them for the first time in my life, Mars bars, Bounty bars, such tiny ones in the boxes and French cheese [...]” And then she mentions three colorful school backpacks, and how her father talked about “huge areas with shops where you just walk around and you look at them, yes. And there were so many of them and everything was so colorful and you could buy whatever you wanted ((laughing)).” A counterbalance to the colorful world of all sorts easily available goods (of course those important for the child) was the image of the PRL⁴³ queues “to everything,” in which Julia as a child had only one task “to stand in a line and look at the shop assistants with big eyes, take the goods and come back to the queue again ((laughing)).” This experience of contrast between the sad reality of the real socialist economy and the colorful world of capitalist prosperity may have had its repercussions on the image the majority of contemporary Polish society had of the “betterness” of the Western world and the unproblematic, thoughtless acceptance of its patterns.

⁴¹ However, one should take into account that in episodes of biographical meaning, or in situations requiring support, the narrator speaks of parents in general terms, and in a while the mother appears to be as an interaction partner, a commenter or a supporter.

⁴² It was typical for many people whose childhood fell in the late 80s and the early 90s (cf., for instance memories of Hanna in this chapter).

⁴³ The Peoples’ Republic of Poland: the post-war Polish republic existing till 1989, economically and politically dependent on the Soviet Union.

An extremely strong and emotional relationship with her grandmother and elderly people in her family is evidenced by the passage in which the narrator talks about the traumatic period in her life related to primary school (further on) and says:

when I look at my life now, the most, the most important was uh the most the most [...] the most difficult time was the time of primary school between '95-'96 when my grandma died. Uhm my grandpa died. And five months later my grandma died and five months later my uncle died. He was the only man with whom I had close relations. And the loss of these three people made my relations with people weren't so deep any longer [...] Actually, I stopped mourning my grandma [...] oh, wait, I think, I haven't yet. And I stopped mourning my uncle last year. And it's strange that their deaths affected the whole family, because it was, you know, like a set [she snaps her fingers], wasn't it? When you get / the only granddad, the only grandma who raised us all and the uncle who was a part of our family.

It should also be mentioned that at that time Julia's parents were building a house for which they "didn't get a loan, but they had to build [it] with the money they had earned. They didn't have time for their children. And later they had to earn money for every renovation of the house." In spite of significantly different political and economic conditions, Julia always tried to keep to the principle that all goods should be bought with the savings, not the money borrowed from the bank.⁴⁴ Let us note that the narrator does not problematize, firstly, that obtaining credit in the period of the PRL in the form in which it is presently possible was unrealistic and, secondly, that the work involved parents to such an extent that "they didn't have time for their children."

The first issue – especially in the light of later narrator's decisions – seems particularly interesting, as it is the proof that (leaving aside any assessment) a certain fixed pattern of acting and understanding how the economy works did not undergo profound changes, as the symbolic elites of political system transformation wished for. Let us add that this is just one of several areas in Julia's experience, in which she almost "stiffly" refers to principles internalized in the family which order the world, when she has to face the contemporary free-market reality and the pressure of capitalist rationality.

Let us look at the way the narrator talks about her primary school experience and difficult relations with her peer group, which contributed to the sense of inferiority, lack of recognition, and a sense of isolation. She talks about this period: "and primary school is not easy when you are a good student. I remember I didn't have many friends." This theoretical-argumentative commentary is often repeated

⁴⁴ It is interesting to compare the argumentation of Robert whose case is analyzed in the book (See Chapter XII).

by her as the explanation of a lack of sympathy among classmates and reproduces the simple condition that being considered “nerdy” is associated with lack of acceptance among peers. But, when the narrator mentions enigmatically “in the fifth grade, when there were/ there were strange relations between the girls in my class,” she adds: “some of them laughed at other people’s clothes, that they are poorer which eventually cost her a nervous breakdown.” This suggests another, though not yet under reflection, account of the existing state of affairs. In other words, Julia sees, but does not notice (or does not want to notice) (Garfinkel 2002) other or additional reasons for being disliked and postponed. However, looking at her biography as a whole and applying the procedure of pragmatic refraction⁴⁵ these imperceptible conditions can be (partially) uncovered. We already know that the family was large, the mother worked “in budgets,” Julia’s father struggled with an alcohol problem, which probably (as the narrator admits herself) was the reason of his dismissal,⁴⁶ he had a tendency to give money away; and when Julia was born, the family moved to a newly built, but not fully finished house. Undoubtedly all this contributed to the significant impoverishment of the family. Julia portrays her parents as those who didn’t spend money on rubbish and the children wore clothes one after another, but perhaps they were just poor at that time. In this perspective, we should look further at Julia’s relationship, in which her desire to be recognized and accepted was devastated in a dramatic way. It is reflected in the analytically significant linguistic phenomena that interrupts the flow of narration – the background construction.⁴⁷ It contains a story about her 10th birthday party, at which none of the invited guests showed up. This distant in time event has an unusual emotional charge – recalling it during the interview the narrator begins to cry:⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Mieczysław Marciniak writes: “It means the necessity of analytically binding these formally separate units of expression with those reproduced on the basis of “proper narration” with biographical processes. This allows us to better understand the biographical process itself and sometimes penetrate what is consciously and unconsciously obscured by the narrator, which created deeper sources of tension in the biography – and thus makes it easier to penetrate into the biographical process” (Marciniak 2016: 192).

⁴⁶ He was working as a plumber-installer on the construction site which was *strongly allied with alcohol*.

⁴⁷ In this passage, a background construction takes the form of a documentary (Belegerzählung), which is to justify the narrator’s claim that *she remembers every purchase of a new thing* (cf., Schütze 1983). In order to do this, the narrator must go back in the chronology of the presented experiences and recall the traumatic event related to the purchase of shoes that she originally wanted to neglect.

⁴⁸ Apart from crying, detailed recapitulation, accumulation of pauses, and finally the reconstruction of internal dialogue are the formal markers of the significance of the mentioned event for the overall *Gestalt* of her biography (cf., Schütze 2008a: 206–208).

I remember, I still remember [...] When I was in the fourth grade of primary school my mum let me have a birthday party. [...] And it was the first time I could invite my friends to the party. [...] But, it is such a strong memory, because [...] nobody came (she cries). Mum took me in a car/ [...] we were waiting in front of the school. Nobody came to my party. [...] (she cries) And mum went with me to buy shoes for me and I remember till today what the shoes looked like. [...] But, it is such a memory which, you see, which hurts even today. [...] But, it was a bit like this: it was the fourth grade, I was a good student, so nobody liked me. It was clear and obvious. I was able to say to myself: OK, I can't help it [...] I've got my first new shoes then. They were bought in a very exclusive shop in a sense, you know, it was a shoe shop opposite my primary school. So, I said it was exclusive, because it was. I guess it was in '96. Yeah, it should be? My fourth grade, '95-'96, more or less. And I remember this feeling: "new shoes," Well, you know [...] later I/ you know, I don't have nice memories from primary school. No warm feelings. It was a normal, mainstream school, where you got rejected if you were a good student. You just got rejected. And I couldn't share it at home, imagine what could I say? – that my friends didn't like me?

Let us concentrate on what happened then (her friends didn't come to her birthday party, she was disliked by them) the narrator again explains it referring to the common sense rule: "I was a good student, so nobody liked me." However, we should ask once again if this is the only possible explanation of this situation and whether there were any other reasons for which the classmates disliked Julia. The most likely seems to be, as we have already mentioned above, the negative image of her family in the local community. We can deal here with "the tendency of stigma to spread" (Goffman 1986: 30–31), a situation in which people avoid relationships or completely break up not only with stigma bearers (the parents), but also people from their closest surroundings (Julia) (Goffman 1986: 30–31). However, we can only speculate whether this stigma was related only to poverty, alcoholism, or other factors. Another intriguing issue in the above quotation is how her mother compensates Julia for what had happened. She did not make any attempt to explain this difficult situation of humiliation to her daughter, nor did she suggest how to deal with it emotionally, but she bought her the first in her life new pair of shoes. It will later become Julia's only acceptable form of justifying spending money on new things: a kind of substantive compensation for moral and emotional losses (buying a flat for example would be a reward for the hardships of writing a PhD).

However, coming back to the school period: Julia was in the sports class (according to a quite controversial idea of gathering the best students in it) and she suffered constant failures in this field, which was associated with the incessant experience of humiliation and exclusion: "I was terribly bad and nobody wanted to play with me. They didn't choose me for their teams, and

you know, I couldn't catch the ball at all." She also took part in the mathematical group meetings (she gets there – as a result of the “experimental” educational policy of the early 90s – as a person who cannot cope with mathematics). Here again she was the worst one, but later she did very well in the competence test. Initially, these poignant feelings were reinforced by experience at the music school, to which her parents sent her, when their financial situation stabilized (it was around 1993). The first piano teacher was so horrible that Julia had nightmares and her sense of inferiority increased by being constantly repeated that she was “stupid and hopeless.”⁴⁹ Fortunately, the next music teacher turned out to be nice, thanks to which the narrator stayed in this school. Today she is convinced that attending the music school allowed her to gain specific skills such as, for example, “the ability to share your attention, to share concentration between things, to do many things simultaneously” and general development in these classes that caused “stimulation of the brain.” It is worth asking a question here: if she were not a diligent, hard-working person, with divided attention and managing her time skilfully would she be able to complete the music school? Julia is convinced that the acquired (or rather improved) competences constituted her present knowledge, which can be used to train people in neoliberal virtues such as: entrepreneurship, self-discipline, creativity, innovation, responsibility, or personal development.

The sequence of events in Julia's life brings us to the seventh grade of elementary school and the epicenter of the maturity process. At that time the narrator found a soul mate – a friend with whom she created a tandem as she recalls it: “We were mean bitches [...]. Everyone was afraid of us. And we did what we wanted, you know. I was very much concerned with what others thought of me. But, since they thought bad, I stopped being interested in their opinion. I just did what I did.” It becomes clear to us that the main youthful concern of Julia (mitigated slightly only later) was her image in the eyes of others and the fear of failed performances (Riesman 1989, Goffman 1955, 1990, Gergen 2000). So, becoming an adolescent (as most teenagers) she decided to take a rebellious attitude, different from the role of a polite, good student assigned to her so far. Her new identity was first manifested in a vulgar judgmental commentary (we were mean bitches) and then with regard to more and more arrogant or aggressive actions which can be detected in the hints given by her interactive partners (“Everyone was afraid of us”). It was

⁴⁹ She adds: “but, damn it, I've learned to play the piano. I've learned it from her anger [...] I've really learned. [...] And I was pretty good at it, although she kept on repeating I was hopeless.” This excerpt is noteworthy because of the specific formal feature of Julia's story: whenever, due to the narrative dynamics, the narrator again experiences situations of humiliation and helplessness or extreme competence uncertainty, her language becomes vulgar.

also a period when Julia's situation in terms of establishing relationships with people began to change significantly: she joined the school's self-government (teachers appreciated her communication skills), prepared discos, fundraising, and she was engaged in voluntary work, because – as she emphasizes – “I liked when something was going on around.” She took part in the competitions in the Polish language, history, but also in physics – she never won any of them. As she comments now she had some successes in science: “didn't prevent me from choosing a class of humanistic profile.”

And that is how Julia went to high school, which she comments: “it was one of the most amazing periods in my life where she met people who wanted to develop, people who appreciated intelligence. People who had crazy ideas, and they realized them.” It seems that she finally found a group of friendly people with whom she shared an interest in rock music and liked (with mutuality) to spend her free time with. She became a member of the social world which was based on the sphere of her authentic inner spontaneity (Schütze 1984). It was only then that her desire “for securing a recognized, enviable, and advantageous social position” (Thomas 1969: 31) was fulfilled. She still went to music school⁵⁰ and she was active in volunteering, where she looked after elderly people. Since she was seventeen she spent weekends, holidays, and days off working at a guest house (she found this job herself). She was constantly busy. She was only worried about insufficient knowledge of English, which she realized during the competition organized for high school students from European Union candidate countries. She persuaded her parents to provide her with a very expensive English course.⁵¹ As the narrator claims, education was “the only thing on which my parents didn't skimp money.” It is worth stopping here to pay attention to the parental pedagogy, which was based on a systematic message that education guarantees work, allows for achieving a certain and permanent social position, and thus guarantees stability in life. In its clues and instructions, this message was to prepare for middle class life. That is why they supported their children financially even if it was through a considerable effort. This theme repeats throughout Julia's story, starting from elementary school, when she explains that: “I was quite a good student, because my parents used to repeat education was important. That if I studied hard I'd get/ I'd get a good job. And I believed this illusion ((laughing));” till the time she completed doctoral studies (which we will look at further). Let us take a look at one more principle Julia learned in her family home and, what's important, the principle she mentions talking about the

⁵⁰ Julia graduated from the second degree of music school, to which she had to commute 30km. While she was studying and working in Warsaw, she regularly commuted to her hometown, where she sang in the choir.

⁵¹ Most probably it concerns widely advertised on the Polish market, at the turn of the century, sets (books and CDs) for home language learning.

events of her teenage life: “In general, uh my parents taught me one more thing, namely [...] what you do actually depends on you. And it was/ uh they trusted me a lot.” This principle has, however, a hidden implication (common with the rules of “governing through freedom”): it involves taking almost complete responsibility for one’s own actions, or at least carries a sense of such necessity. Returning to the period of Julia’s high school, we must mention two important issues that affected her whole life. Firstly, she went through a difficult experience with her boyfriend, future husband – Andrzej, who suffered from eating disorders, was emotionally unstable, and had suicide attempts. These problems were later subjected to therapy, but they still have influence on their life. Secondly, she was diagnosed with diabetes, for which she mainly blames stress related to the complicated relationship with Andrzej and extreme fatigue (she was still in a music school, worked in a guest house, volunteered, organized school events and trips). Her attitude of that time towards the disease is expressed by the following statement: “fuck you diabetes, I’m going to live my way anyway. I mean I’m going to do thousands of things, I’m going to be active, and I’ll show you I can.” As we can see, Julia expected a kind of disorder in everyday life (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 342), which, however, she did not intend to give in to. Most probably it was related to an attempt to trivialize or fade out the destroying trajectory potential (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349), which increases the feeling of losing control over one’s own life and intensifies the threat of exclusion from the normal world of everyday existence (Schütze 2012: 420). The above statement can be read as an attempt to preserve the narrator’s active attitude towards her own life and identity, but the vulgarity of language she introduced (“fuck you diabetes”) seems to reveal the trajectory of suffering. Vulgarity of the narrator’s statements – which we have already noticed – always appears when the recapitulated memories “draw her back to the orientational principles and the emotional mood” (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991: 342) related to the irritating sense of helplessness and irritability as a result of deepening alienation towards herself. Another empirical evidence for destabilizing trajectory potential of the disease will be obtained by looking at all of Julia’s biographical experience. Then it turns out that diabetes forced a specific way of organizing everyday life (especially in terms of meal quality and regularity) or a hierarchy of importance in a modest student budget: (financially) “diabetes killed me, you know. I could spend the money on cigarettes and vodka or insulin. [...] You know, you can either go to a party, to the cinema, or buy insulin. And the strips.” Moreover, whenever the narrator disregarded the constraints imposed by the disease and lost herself in stressful and manifold activities, she ended up in hospital “in a rather poor condition.” Such a situation took place at the beginning of studies and when she started another commissioned job, this time for a large State-owned company P-Poland. We will come back to the latter situation later.

To sum up this part of the narrator's life course, we can say that from the family home, school, and out-of-school experiences connected with the need to combine activities in general and music school and other social activities, she mastered the ability to save (to manage money in a rational way), self-management, efficient and effective time organization, and the belief in the necessity of constant self-development and civic engagement. The disease increased her ability in self-discipline, resourcefulness and resilience, and – last but not least – awareness of the need to bear (biographical) costs and “optimize” the attitude to herself. At this point, attention should also be paid to seemingly minor details in her statements. Regarding the music school, Julia recalls: “I was a student who learns, but has no talent,” and about her Matura⁵² exam (passed in 2003) she says: “one more form of an exam, which we were not prepared for, as it was based on reading texts and understanding them.” In fact these are strong signals related to the narrator's competence uncertainty, lack of self-confidence (evoked and sustained by the teachers), and an error caused by the education reform of that time, which subordinated the education system (in its assumption reflecting objectively the level of education and equalizing students' chances) to the test exams. Leaving aside the assessment of the education system and the direction of its change, we must take into account that Julia passed the Matura exam, and then went to university without being fully prepared to read the texts with understanding and we may risk an assumption she was not prepared for a more abstract way of thinking. The biographical situation of the narrator brings to mind the reflections of Basil Bernstein over the developed code and the restricted code and their relationship with the middle class and the working class respectively (1971).⁵³ And so, while Julia's origin would indicate a certain – conditioned by her parents' origin – form of the restricted code, in the cases of Hanna and Julia, used as a reference here, we would talk about the developed code. The question arises, how do these speech systems determine the way of understanding the complicated contemporary world of life and influence the way the individuals act? We must leave it unanswered here. However, we can question the reasonableness of such a direction of the reform of the education system, because, contrary to expectations, it still gives an advantage to middle class children (cf., also Zahorska 2009).

⁵² The secondary school exit exam in Poland that must be passed in order to apply to a university.

⁵³ As a result of harsh criticism (often emerging from misunderstanding), this concept has been repeatedly modified by Bernstein himself. The categories themselves: the restricted code and the developed code, considered mistakenly as evaluators, have become extremely controversial. However, Bernstein wanted to indicate the sources of failure of students with lower socio-economic status and to show why the school system still favors middle class children (Bokszański, Piotrowski, Ziółkowski 1977: 107 and on).

Let us look from this perspective at the sequence of events in the period when the narrator had to choose her studies. Julia talks about the process of making a decision on choosing the faculty:

I was a member of the [youth] Lublin voivodeship sejmik. And we had trips, workshops, meetings, voluntary work, et cetera. It was a great experience. Political studies graduates were our leaders. And I thought it must have been a cool faculty after which people have such a cool job, running these workshops.

Already at the starting point, the narrator shows that in choosing political science she primarily took into account the cool way of communication in the form of training and workshops, not the substantive content of the university's curriculum – “she did not know anything about politics” as she says, she “could learn it thanks to her studies.” Her choice of UKSW⁵⁴ reveals also a huge competence of uncertainty: “I was afraid to take entrance exams to UW (University of Warsaw). I thought I was too stupid to go there.” It may be a consequence of Julia's social origins – although her mother completed extramural studies after the birth of her first child and both she and her husband – which we have signalled repeatedly – supported the education of their children, they certainly lacked the (Bourdieu 1986, Zarycki 2009) insight in the field of the academy typical for intelligent culture capital. According to their view (at least partially transmitted on Julia), studying was first of all supposed to raise the professional qualifications (translated into life stability and better material situation), and only secondly, if at all, widen cognitive horizons, provide intellectual and moral development of the individual, teach deep reflection on one's own attitudes, and express a critical opinion on the existing social reality (cf., Czyżewski 2009b, Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015). The very way of choosing the field of study shows that for Julia much more important was the external form than substantive content, which could have its source in a variant of the restricted code. However, political science did not fully meet her expectations, and following her friend's advice after the second year of studies, she decided to apply for sociology. This time, having gained some knowledge in the logic of the university's world, she decided to study at the University of Warsaw, where she was admitted under the condition of making up for two years which meant twenty-seven subjects in a year. At that time, she made a strategically important decision: “I'm going to get a scholarship in Political Studies, and actually learn something in sociological studies.” Despite such an aggravating plan of duties, Julia continued to engage in the activities of many youth organizations associated with the idea of developing a democratic state

⁵⁴ UKSW is an acronym for Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University) – one of state universities in Warsaw.

(let us remember that these were the years just before and just after Poland's accession to the European Union) both in her home town and in Warsaw. At the end of high school, for example, she started to train for the association operating at the City Council, as she says: "I would say I absolutely don't know why." And she adds that she prepared the first training at the request of one of the officials:

about how to deal with stress. And seven people came to my first training. Among them there were six teachers. So, I had a very demanding group I'd say. I got a real brainwash at the start. But, I managed somehow. Other training I ran was about stress, managing oneself in time, because it was, I mean, it was something that fascinated me.

For our further inquiries, two pieces of information from this part of her autobiographical account seem valuable. First of all, that the beginning of her experience in the field of "selling" so-called soft skills took place without any professional preparation, but most probably on the basis of imitations of training in which she had previously participated in and in relation to the knowledge acquired thanks to pop-psychological tutorials giving the illusion of being an expert. This is an interesting point, because later Julia clearly stigmatized such an attitude, that is, running training based on a minimum knowledge and maximum "art of impression management" (Goffman 1990). Secondly, this event was a turning point, in which the narrator became convinced that she could make a confession, which resulted in (re)creating a sense of personal independence and positive self-identity (Strauss 1969: 89–118).

Coming back to studying, it seems that in sociology the narrator could finally spread her wings: she began to cooperate with a scientific group, she was fascinated by qualitative research, she began to participate in scientific projects that later translated into marketing and image strategies of the university, she was delighted to be working with the team, which she was training in "*soft skills, time management, and knowledge verification.*" She also dealt with training of project teams, ran workshops to activate the civic attitude of young people, including the ability to write European projects, and finally she was involved in the Youth Democracy and Self-Government project for a few years. Her understanding of social sciences (political science and sociology) was in line with the dynamics of transformations that Marek Czyżewski follows with concern. He says that contemporary cultural, economic, and political changes are supported by:

A compliant and opportunistic transformation of sociological discourse, which does not focus on a critical analysis of reality, but tries to serve it. In sociology, but also in economics, pedagogy, and many related sciences, there is an avalanche spread of research projects, theoretical considerations, expert recommendations,

and directions of education regarding creativity, responsibility, trust, flexibility, innovation, autonomy, and the like (Czyzewski 2013: 16).

Talking about her educational career again, Julia decided to undertake doctoral studies in political science, which she considered “humiliating and withdrawing in development,” and in her work she intended to combine qualitative sociological research with political science issues. At the same time, she began a two-year work in a research project based on qualitative research. Julia considered the group analysis of the data obtained in it as “a big plus, which in a sense combines quality with training, research with running workshops.” Again, we meet the motive of combining or mixing orders (or, in other words, social worlds, intersecting with all the consequences of this process): the teaching method typical of a traditional “dusty” and “old-fashioned” university and “modern” strategies taken from the field of organization and management when the narrator talks about the possibility, accepted with joy, of running political thought classes as a substitute teacher with students at UKSW:

For me [i.e., a former student] these classes were like this: the seventh page of the eighth text of the thought this and that, you know. So, I said to myself: wait, you’ve got the whole training workshop at hand. Let’s take it and use it in the classes. So, I started group work uh many types of cases. There was work based on Oxford discussions or debates. And uh preparing drafts, schemas, fitting various thoughts in schemas. Sometimes, we worked on a chosen article and we analyzed it on the basis of political thought. And we did other things, you know, what came to my mind.

Again, we deal not only with – in no way problematized – the colonizing of the scientific research language by the language of entrepreneurship and human resource management, but also with admitting uniqueness and priority to certain, in fact, transformed, but developed at universities, forms of education such as debates or workshops. However, she states this experience was of great importance: she was convinced that if she could work at the university and thus fully engage in the world of science, “it would have been like a fairytale and her PhD thesis would be much better then.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Julia was ultimately very disappointed with the supervision of her doctorate: initially her doctoral advisor had only comments on typing and punctuation errors and in no way referred to the content of the thesis. Later, in an almost complete thesis, he noticed only the lack of reference to his publications from the 90s. The narrator assesses it this way: “on the one hand, it was just funny, but on the other hand it was tragic.” And embittered, she adds: “I have a wild impression that nobody – except a friend who made her language correction – read it. I mean, you know, there are many controversial points. My whole professional work. I feel that nobody read it.”

However, it did not happen. Julia, like thousands of doctoral students in Poland, had to work to be able to maintain herself. She carried out commissioned research, conducted various types of trainings, was a research project evaluator at the Warsaw University of Technology, had a small position at the University of Warsaw, in the summer she left for Germany⁵⁶ to work as a carer of elderly people, but only in primary school near Warsaw, where she worked for one-third of the full time teacher of social studies, she had an employment contract. In this sense, Julia became the victim of an external structural lack of possibility of full, long-term, and stabilizing employment. In this sense, she suffers from precarity (Standing 2011). Jan Sowa defines it as:

the state of uncertainty, consistency, and stability is the chronic impossibility of predicting the future and constant fear that it will bring only a worsening of the current situation. It is the condition of the fragile and uncertain existence which is experienced by a large part of the world's population, also in the countries of the capitalist center. It concerns people who are temporarily unemployed, living on casual or undeclared employment, employed for short-term contracts, migrating in search of income, working part-time or forced to sign in blanco a notice of termination together with a contract of employment (a practice quite common in large corporations). It means a life full of uncertainty and difficult to plan, a life in which you have to change not only your workplace, but also your profession, and even the best position can be lost from day to day (Sowa 2010).

This situation – contrary to what the narrator's parents assumed – also affects people, such as Julia, young and of high educational resources (Mrozowicki 2017: 42). This unstable and precarious condition – which Adam Mrozowicki pays special attention to – is surprisingly often normalized, that is, considered obvious and not subject to problematization, or not always consciously, rationalized (cf., Mrozowicki 2016).

⁵⁶ The comparison of the money earned by a physical laborer in Germany with the “scraped up,” very low income of a white-collar worker in Poland was a source of depression for Julia. She comments: “Thanks to the work in Germany I could save some money. When I came back I could buy a computer. It was quite interesting, you know, the difference between how much you could earn in Poland for hard intellectual work, where you really needed a lot of knowledge and experience, and how much you could earn in Germany cleaning floors and making dinners. / it was [...] I think I was in the second year of my PhD studies [...] So this difference shocked me.” This contributed to re-contesting the career path she had chosen. Luckily, later she took part in a conference in Great Britain and got to know another way of doing science, related to the fact that at the university “you just talk about the methodology of how to do science, and you do not actually talk about how you do it.” This restored the sense of her efforts in completing her doctorate studies.

Characteristics of work precarization, dynamics of its course, as well as the way of impacting the whole human life in its essence is extremely often the experience of the trajectory of suffering. It takes the form of a trap set by overwhelming external structural forces. Their impact paralyzes the individual's actions to undertake or implement long-term biographical plans, exhausts its physical and psychological forces, and finally makes it apathetic and unable to engage life energy in any counteracting of cumulative disorder dynamics. In the case of Julia, firstly we deal with the phase of the trajectory of strong attempts to maintain the unstable balance and, secondly with a vicious circle of interaction of the trajectory resulting from a difficult position on the labor market and her and her husband's chronic illnesses, which significantly worsens her life situation.

Let us note the narrator's experience when the only mainstay that gave her a sense of stability, supporting the fragile construction of life (an employment contract in a primary school) was shaken. However, it is necessary to mention that for Julia the work at school was a huge organizational effort: first of all she had to commute 20km, and secondly she had to write it into her busy schedule. At first, she treated this job too idealistically and she collided with a disappointing reality, as many beginner teachers do:

I always had such an idea / because as I was writing a thesis in political science, it turned out that it is really bad to teach social studies and kids knowledge about how the country and the society function, their own role in society is none. And I had such a fixed idea to be a great teacher, and that I would prepare people for being active. And it turned out that I won't, because there's the school curriculum the head teacher watches me. And I, the kids don't want to do anything. And all my attempts to encourage them to be active, maybe not all, many of my attempts to encourage them to be active failed.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above and the initial disappointment, Julia worked as a passionate, loved-by- her- students, and respected-by-their- parents teacher for three years – that is, till the headmaster indiscriminately decided to change her employment contract to a commissioned work contract. In this way he destroyed her biographical action scheme,⁵⁷ made just after her

⁵⁷ The biographical action scheme (or plan) is one of the ways of experiencing events in life in Schütze's concept. It takes its origin in impulses from the inner sphere of the spontaneity of an individual and takes the form of a long-term plan in which both the goal and the manner of its implementation are of an autonomous nature. This structure is expressed by the systematic and active attitude of an individual to his/her own identity of the "I" and the world of life (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 2008a, 2008b, Prawda 1989, Kaźmierska 2016).

marriage to Andrzej (which took place a few months earlier) – namely becoming a mother. The narrator herself says: “I really needed to plan my life somehow, you know.” She felt not only cheated, but also extremely aggrieved: just after leaving the headmaster’s office she just burst into tears. Again, without her fault, she had to revise the concept of her life and postpone her motherhood for later. Admittedly, Julia’s decision coincides with the strategies of Polish women described, for example, by Anna Matysiak, which in general may be expressed by the formula “job position comes first and only then a baby” (2009),⁵⁸ however – as we have already mentioned – an additional aspect that must be taken into account while considering the temporary suspension of parenthood by Julia (made by the narrator herself), and that is the trajectory of her (and her husband’s) illness intensifying the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. It should be also mentioned that since the beginning of studies in Warsaw, after a short episode of renting a flat with friends, until the time of completing her doctorate, Julia lived in a dormitory. Every now and then she shared it with her partner Andrzej, who overcoming some obstacles (related to his psychological state at that time) eventually graduated from ethnology, and later – basing on skills springing from his passion and not knowledge – he got a job in a company that sells professional music equipment. In the segment preceding the coda (pre-coda segment), the narrator speaks about the purchase of a flat (of course without a bank loan, but thanks to the huge effort of long-term systematic savings supported by loans from family and friends) which stabilized her biographical situation and set her in a positive, optimistic mood typical of a biographical action scheme, here in the form of a “nest building” (see excerpt below). If we make the life course of their acquaintances a reference frame, the decision that ended her and her husband’s long-term “wandering” was made relatively late. Julia says: “And you know, all friends of mine already had flats. All of them. It was so depressing, a lack of the feeling of safety and comfort, fucking shit.” This prolonged the terrible period of living in a dormitory, however, the narrator rationalizes referring to the current situation of many of her colleagues who “took credits in the boom [...] and now have credits amounting to 600–800,000. In euros or in Swiss francs.” First of all, Julia states that they are not jealous of this situation, and secondly, she is glad Andrzej decided to “wait for

⁵⁸ To determine how much these strategies result from the imposed institutional pattern of expectations, and how much the intentional plan of action or the mutual interactions of both of these process structures a subtle and sophisticated analysis would be required. Ryszard Szarfenberg is right in stating that there are many hypotheses that recognize a decrease in fertility of women in precarious work conditions (2016: 11). However, it should not be forgotten that the family planning, so strongly subordinated to the work was possible when the issues subjected mainly to fate began to be controlled.

a while.” Eventually, as she emphasizes: “We didn’t get into debt like idiots. We had our own contribution and we could have some loans on quite good conditions [...], but I’ve got the feeling of safety, I mean, you know, nobody will take the flat away from me.”⁵⁹ This balance, however, has an incomplete or shaky character conditioned by work instability, illness, and above all the need of suspending a strong desire to become a mother. Let’s look at the narrator’s statement:

And you know, I’m happy that I could buy a flat. It’s essential. And here further problems appear concerning having a baby with not being permanently employed. I’m 30, I’ve got diabetes, and I should have had a baby three years ago. I finally have the place to raise it in. But, I have no physical possibility to do so because I don’t have a private business, only a start-up. So, in fact nobody would pay ZUS⁶⁰ premiums for me. I’d be happy to pay them by myself, but I can’t. According to our law I may be self-employed, but I’m not sure if I want to do that.

In light of this statement, it is worth looking at a certain event in Julia’s life, which illustrates – as it was pointed out earlier – the unexpected necessity of undergoing the dynamics of diabetes. It seems, it took control of her life, especially when she ceased to look after herself when she had too much work and too many duties. Such a situation happened shortly after Julia had received a job as a trainer at P-Poland:

When I started working for P-Poland, at the end of May I felt terribly bad. We had a lot of work. Actually, I worked 12–16 hours a day. And at that time I was finishing writing my PhD thesis, doing three projects, you know, I needed to earn money to pay for the refurbishing of the flat. We had already bought the flat in April. And I had a health breakdown. I had food poisoning. It destabilized the sugar levels and as a result of this my kidneys stopped functioning. I realized that after five days. It was a free day so we went to a GP. She said: Don’t worry, it’s only food poisoning. Take this and that and it will be better. It wasn’t, I went to hospital for an emergency, they kept me for 6 hours. I had my tests done, et cetera. And the doctor said: Your kidneys aren’t working, you have to go to a nephrologist. The next day he let me go home with some medicine. I went home. My mother-in-law is a nurse and when she saw me she said: Julia you look bad. It turned out I was all swollen and I weighed eight kilos more. Eight kilos of water. My kidneys stopped working and I was taken to hospital in Lublin. I didn’t go to work. When I didn’t work there was no money. And they didn’t pay me for the whole month. I mean they paid me only for two days. And I didn’t get a bonus.

⁵⁹ To some extent they represent an anti-consumption attitude and the minimalist lifestyle (Dopierała 2017).

⁶⁰ The Polish Social Insurance Institution.

Because it is granted on the basis of questionnaires results. And I didn't have any questionnaires because I didn't do any training. So, I didn't get a bonus as well. I really have nothing against paying ZUS premiums. If somebody would like to employ me on a permanent contract I would start up a business, because as I say if we want to have a baby we have no other option taking into account the character of my work, the way I function, my diabetes.

This passage shows clearly that – in addition to employment instability and, consequently, income – in her plans to have children, Julia had to take into account many interrelated factors, in particular the disease that could unexpectedly disorganize her routines of everyday life. It can be assumed that given the current situation, the narrator very cautiously tried to keep a minimum of social and financial security. She took into account all “for” and “against” in a manner typical for implementation of the biographical scheme of action, considered alternative paths, and possible biographical consequences. To sum up, the narrator's life is a continuous, often parallel interaction of two process structures: an intentional biographical action scheme and a paralyzing (double) trajectory. Admittedly, the dynamics of suffering had a recessive, receding character, but its destabilizing potential constantly influenced the organization of everyday reality.

It should be stressed again that the period of Julia's studies and subsequent entry into the labor market fell in the period of a dynamic transition from the socialist social formation to the capitalist free market economy, which is based on principles other than those internalized in the family ordering the world of everyday experience, other life orientation models or other personal patterns (Schütze 2012: 440–441, see footnote 22). Although, the narrator was familiar with neoliberal values in her thinking, the conviction persisted that, even in work based on communicative skills and interactive work knowledge is most important, and techniques of presenting yourself and manipulating impressions remain in the background (Goffman 1990). Her conviction – repeated consistently (rooted by her parents) at many points of the rendering – expressed by the formula: “if I learn well, I'll gain knowledge, then I'll get a good job” has been severely verified by the mechanisms of the capitalist economy. At first, Julia did not understand the rule according to which “knowledge,” in her opinion – still insufficient, can be sold. An idea suggested by a friend to earn from training is commented as follows: “I always thought I didn't know enough... I still had to learn, I had to [...]. And he showed me I didn't. People take money even if they can't do something, they just devote their time, so they work.” This excerpt shows not only other “recognition” rules that exist in the field of training and projects, but once again, Julia's enormous competence uncertainty. The narrator talks about this issue again in the coda ending her biographical recapitulation (we will return to it in a while), which shows the importance of this problem in

her life and her personal identity. Analyzing the principles of the contemporary Polish labor market in the theoretical commentary she reveals that: it favors not so much those who have knowledge (but who are also aware of its shortage), as those of great confidence. As she says: “unaware incompetence is worth much more than aware incompetence” (see also the excerpt of the coda cited below). On the other hand, promotion of attitudes and skills required by the capitalist free market economy gave Julia great satisfaction, especially when – as in the passage quoted below regarding the trainings for P-Poland – she felt that as an “engineer of souls” she put someone’s life on the right track:

But, the work is amazing. I work with people from the tool-room, people from the roundhouse, with people who have never had any training, ever. At my last training a man with 35 years of working experience in telecommunications came and he said with tears in his eyes: Julka, I’ve been working here for 35 years now, and it’s the first time in my life somebody’s taught me something. I realized a few things which have always influenced my work. And I’ve learnt it here with you. Thank you very much for this. I’m sure I’ll call you and I’ll want to meet you again. Thank you very much you’ve let me develop.

This excerpt seems to confirm Julia’s thoughtless, even missionary faith in the content and sense of coaching and training in the field of communication. However, we already know that she assessed very critically the behavior of many people working in this industry. This leads us to the conclusion that she saw fiction and deception in the way of “selling” knowledge of specific competences necessary in a free market economy, but its essence, functions, or usefulness have never been questioned by her – quite the contrary, she treated them as an inalienable element of contemporary people. In this part of Julia’s story, we find many symptomatic terms typical of the institutional pattern of action, which, on the one hand, seduces thanks to the opportunities offered, and on the other hand imposes the obligation to give it energy, mind, and soul. In other words, her criticism and resentment never concerned “what” she sells, but only “how” it is sold; for example, not that the content of “knowledge” about stress management is a banal commercial “releasing” of common sense knowledge, but that it is conveyed by people with poor knowledge while being full of faith in themselves and their presentation (Goffman 1990). It is not possible to decide whether it is due to their carelessness or cynicism, but we should ask whether a contemporary (postmodern) world does not just sell one illusion after another illusion, appearance after appearance, or fraud after fraud? (cf., Baudrillard 2005).

Again, what Julia sees and evaluates, and what she does not notice and what she regards as obvious makes us perceive her biography as an intense process of clashing values and attitudes socialized in childhood (and in the system of

real socialism) with neoliberal virtues (Czyżewski 2009a). Looking at it in this way, one may risk the statement that what was defined in the public discourse – recalling the words of Andrzej Piotrowski – as the abolition of anti-order and restoration of order, in individual life history (or certain areas of experience) could be perceived conversely: as a transition from values to anti-values. In the case discussed here and in the narrator's opinion it would be a transition from solid, deepened knowledge to theatrical ignorance cover, or in other words, from a game that goes according to certain rules known to all participants, in which every player can use the instructions he needs. To sum up, in the course of biographical work during the interview, the narrator discovers that the knowledge and acquired life orientations in fact became counterproductive to the requirements of the contemporary complex world of work, which largely limited the possibility of giving personal meaning to her professional experience and became a life trap.

This issue is particularly visible in the coda, which is one of the key cognitive figures of autobiographical narrative interview, where the informant usually summarizes and evaluates the course of his/her own life history and tries to determine whether the decisions made by him/her and which follows the chosen development path were correct. Most often, it closes the biographical work, the key element of which is not only to think about the past, but also a prudent look into the future (cf., Schütze 1984, 2008a, 2008b). In Julia's case – what should be noted – this closure does not take place, and the coda looks like this:

The joy of having your own flat is incredible. You sit on the floor. When we moved in there was nothing there, only the bathroom, nothing else. You sit on the floor and you think: God, at last I've got the place I may come back to, where I can come and sit down. And I don't have to move every year. Change places, apply for students' hostels, wait to get the room, move from one room to another, you know. The good thing was we didn't have many belongings. We were moving constantly, so there were not many things left. We haven't bought a lot. We've got eight plates, we've got all the mugs as gifts. We use the cutlery used by the people who used to live here before us. [...] My parents say that for them my life seems to be very difficult. They can't understand it. They want to make our life easier, so my mum brings all the lamps and sheets, and she always brings some food. She says for her everything was easy. She graduated from school, went to work in the meantime she got married, she got pregnant, started her studies, had a baby, then she had the second baby, she completed her studies, they started building the house. And you know, everything was easy then. They had work and the feeling of safety. And when she hears what I tell her, that I don't have a job, that nobody will sign a permanent work contract with me, that everything I do is on the basis of a deal, I mean, now you do this and that and we'll pay you this much. Such a system promotes people who are self-confident about their

skills and knowledge. In fact, not necessarily they really can do something, but they think they can, and that's enough. And they will earn more than those who are aware of their incompetence. If you know you're not an expert yet you are in a worse position than a person who is unaware of his incompetence. Unaware incompetence is worth much more than aware incompetence. You know, I mean this conviction: I can do it, I am able to do everything, why not? OK. That's it. Enough. Isn't it too much. I've talked too long.

Bringing her story to an end, the narrator talks about stabilizing and emotionally positive experiences connected with having her own "place on earth" (the flat) being in fact, the only factor stabilizing her unstable life situation. But having in the head a "fresh" overall picture of her biographical experience, not so optimistic in all dimensions, the narrator must place an additional comment that breaks the coda.⁶¹ Interestingly, she evaluates her life looking at it from the outside – from the point of view of her parents, who (especially mother) compare their own biography (linear predictable career based on well-defined achieved identities) with their daughter's life history ("ragged" professional career simultaneously interweaving many paths of various temporary jobs, filled with uncertainty and anxiety caused by a vague identity). Let us note that this "mediated" reference to her whole life means that the narrator is not able to directly summarize and assess the course of her own biography – and thus carry out (looking into the future) a full biographical work. She would have to refer to problematic areas of her life and admit to the interviewer and, above all, to herself that she is unable to cope with difficulties in establishing and implementing future life plans in a cognitive and emotional sense and, therefore, she has been placed in a destabilizing situation of suspension (limbo). To say it in other words: Julia makes an effort to push back from herself the need to work on the destructive potential of an unstable career, which determines and limits her decisions in the private sphere. Since

⁶¹ An autobiographical recapitulation should end with a sequence that puts off the narrator's memories and leads him/her to the "here and now" of the interview and then a closing statement "and that would be all" usually occur. However, if his/her experiences were extremely difficult or painful, then before the final expression, a theoretical and argumentative commentary (in which the biographical manager attempts to close his biographical work) appears (it is often extensive). In such a case we talk about a split-coda, which is an important interpretation indicator. It provides the empirical evidence that, firstly, one of the process structures in the narrator's whole life was the trajectory of suffering and, secondly, that he/she either got over it and tries to present his/her own attempts to go through its dynamics theoretically and practically, or – if the explanations, assessments, or justifications appearing in it have a chaotic, foggy, ambiguous character – reveals an inability to close the biographical work, and thus still strong in his/her current life situation suffering experience.

making the forced abandonment of motherhood plans, the object of reflection could be too painful and considering that existing opportunities would expose the overwhelming situation of the trap.

Finally, once again the concept of social worlds should be considered as an alternative to multi-jobbing and precarious work approach or to the discourse of late modernity prevailing in social sciences (e.g., Beck 2005, Castells 1996, 1999, Giddens 1991). It is worth looking at Julia's biography and trying to consider her life situation from the perspective of belonging to different social worlds, which are competing, conflicted (but demanding loyalty of those involved), have different sources of meaning, use different logic and the criteria of authenticity. In the contemporary complex world, as Schütze writes, the biographical horizon of the sense takes the form of bricolage, which can lead to many important problems resulting from discrepancies, contradictions, or mutual devaluation of meanings related thematically to fragmentary biographical orientations and a lack of credibility of the general structure consisting of these fragmentary thematic orientations: which means it can lead to chaos in biographical work (Schütze 2002). He also adds that disputes about the authenticity of actions or moral standards, collisions of interests, constant processes of segmentation, and budding, struggle for symbolic and material resources within the social world itself, as well as external disputes make them lose their approximate power and the function of making sense of an individual's biography.

Julia – a political scientist and sociologist has (unconsciously) become an expert orientated to “producing disciplined – and even self-disciplining – subordinates” (Scott 2016). Her work was about “producing” creative individuals capable of managing themselves and their time, controlling stress, working in a team, and writing and evaluating projects. To put it briefly, being herself a product of the discourses of governmentality, she reproduced them and – thanks to her missionary activity (as a trainer running trainings and courses, but also as a university lecturer) – she contributed to their strengthening and development. However, she herself fell victim to this form of exercising power, whose external conditions, interweaved with the internal dynamics of her life, significantly began to limit further positive development of her life history. Many of Julia's experiences – as shown by the analysis of her autobiographical statement – bear the trajectory traits: being overwhelmed by many diverse professional duties, chronic instability, and uncertainty of the current life situation, a feeling of pressure from employers and dependence on their “goodwill,” or finally the necessity of suspension her life plans (motherhood). Her education was acquired at the expense of hard work, for which she paid with a lack of acceptance (at least at the elementary school level) and many sacrifices does not translate into the expected social status, prestige,

or – last but not least – financial profit. The promise of stabilization becomes an illusion. The biographical scheme of the narrator's work is constantly being suspended, which leads her to abandoning biographical work – if she consciously takes it up it would be a threat the ominous truth could confirm, and that every year it becomes more and more complicated or even unrealistic. Biographical structures in the current life situation do not guarantee a fully positive development of the biography and are in fact a trap threatening the autonomous development of identity.

Actually, Julia's story shows growing uncertainty and confusion resulting from the overwhelming arrangement of various social worlds, where participation, it should be noted, is the consequence of either institutional expectation patterns (e.g., various only money-making job worlds), biographical action plans (e.g., the social world of academy, non-governmental organizations, the world of trainers and coaches), and the trajectory of suffering (e.g., the social world of medicine). It can also be said that an increasingly intense feeling accompanying the narrator of being pushed as a consequence of both precarious and precarious life situations (Scharfenberg 2016) resulting from the special configuration of her own and her husband's trajectory of illness (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012) and unstable, multi-format employment forms. Thus, her autobiographical account is not a story about the path to success, but about continuous efforts to maintain the state of unstable equilibrium (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]), controlling (often excluding) logic and moral standards of different social worlds and attempts to remain (at least to a minimal extent) loyal to each of them, as well as the constant necessity to suspend her own biographical plans, which require huge amounts of physical and emotional work, and bring the potential of an unexpected breakdown of an everyday life organization (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]).

Finally, it is worth noting that in many life stories collected in the *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland* project we will find different variants and modalities of a specific belief in the power of education and self-development as a necessary element (success-oriented) of managing one's biography. This belief is quite common, and although it is particularly clear among the narrators born in the 1980s, it can also be found in the stories of people from earlier decades. An example would be the narrative of Czesia (1964) a nurse by profession. The institutional pattern of activity imposed by the changes in the healthcare system has pushed her and, it seems, most people practising this profession, to a precarious situation.⁶² The narrator, together with

⁶² It should be noted, however, that in this sector the situation is very dynamic and that maybe today (three years after the interview) Czesia's professional situation is much more stable and financially better.

a group of friends, used adaptive strategies, “anticipating,” efficiently preparing for subsequent restructuring in the healthcare system, which imposed on them the raising of professional qualifications. For this reason, she completed several post-graduate studies and successfully took up the model of life-long learning, thus inscribing herself in the framework of (post)modern society described here, requiring constant (self-)development and a sense of responsibility for her own career. When undertaking this game, Czesia became a “post-graduate collector” and, although she was open to education, at the same time she admitted that most of her studies were fictitious and in fact (with one exception) in no way enriched her knowledge. The way she tells the story (whose detailed analysis goes beyond the scope of this text) clearly shows that it is a kind of “game” in which the stake is to meet the institutional requirements, and the “reward,” on the one hand, are social relations (nice time with a peer group – friends with whom she enrolls on subsequent studies) and collective action (Czesia tells the story usually in the first person plural – we), and on the other, a sense of efficient “management of post-graduate studies” and the creation of a “culture” of postgraduate studying.

Conclusions

Discussing the concept of trajectory, Fritz Schütze showed that it gives us “the possibility of analytical and systematic illumination of the night, the dark side of social reality” (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 452), which is disregarded and often even neglected in the area of sociology (also by the one related to the interpretative paradigm). Following this belief, the purpose of this chapter was to draw attention to and sensitize the reader to the “non-rationalist and not oriented on normative certainty of expectations concepts of interaction, situation, biography and identity, action [...] of social worlds, and processes of social change” (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 453).

The lifestories discussed above have shown that the resources of huge potentials of suffering are hidden behind the “incompatibility” of patterns of behavior offered by parents rooted in a certain system of values and setting specific biographical expectations for orientation systems typical of modern complex societies and the logic of the neoliberal labor market. Both of these sources of external pressure seem to block the biographical search lines and limit the autonomy of action. Paradoxically, however, the family is not only a force that determines a specific line of biographical development, but also a kind of “safety valve” that allows the easing of tensions resulting from the oppressive conditions of functioning on the free market thanks to emotional and financial support. The minimal difference in Julia’s experience is that while the institutional pattern of expectations directed Hanna and Inga’s actions to the continuation of the economic and social position of the parents, in her case it was about her improvement.

It is worth noting one more time how exceptionally fragile and brittle the arrangement of various “systems” and jobs seems to be in all three cases – in Inga’s it is primarily due to the “natural” precariousness of her profession, in Hanna’s resulting from the necessity of multiple forms of employment, and in Julia’s because of the need to combine a series of temporary and uncertain jobs to maintain a minimum of financial security. Maintaining both mental and physical balance seems extremely exhausting in this situation and can lead to uncontrolled biographical “shocks” (breakdown of self-orientation and organization of everyday life) (breakdown of self-orientation and organization of everyday life). Thus, analyzing the experiences of the narrators, we could see how neoliberal mechanisms promoting or even forcing continuous (self-) development, rationality and responsibility for one’s own actions systematically create a situation of a biographical trap and disorder in everyday life (see: Czyżewski 2013: 22). It became clear that within the defined social and biographical framework, the need to cope with the pressures of being efficient and creative can trigger the trajectory of the suffering process. As a result of its absolute dynamics, the neoliberal “values” take the form of “anti-virtues.” And thus, for example, the sense of agency turns into passivity, activity into apathy, creativity into powerlessness or paralysis, rationality into irrationality, resourcefulness, helplessness, autonomy into a sense of dependence on unspecified external forces, trust into fear and the feeling that you can no longer rely on yourself, flexibility into a sense of a shrinking world and limited possibilities of action, openness into isolation, et cetera.

Finally, when comparing the experiences of Inga, Hanna, and Julia referring to Europe as a certain mental space, it is worth paying attention to the different consequences they lead to. For Inga, connecting the Polish and Dutch art worlds seems to open new spaces for artistic cooperation and opportunities for action. Even if artists arriving from the West are attracted to the peripheral or cultural difference of Central Europe, there is still room for fruitful cooperation and, above all, liaison work (Hughes 1972: 303 et seq.). For Hanna, the civilizational achievements of the West in terms of care for the patient and the elderly (Denmark) or in terms of working conditions and a doctor’s remuneration (England) are an unattainable ideal contrasting with the belated modernization and social backwardness of Poland. Finally, for Julia, it is the possibility of a quick “injection of cash” (incomparable to any of her work in Poland), which her physical summer job consisting of taking care of seniors in Germany brings. Thus, as a mental space, Europe allows Inga to control the trajectory by initiating a biographical pattern of action and implementing her own life plans in the sense of “connecting worlds” in the artistic sphere. While for Hanna it is an example of a model health system, yet unattainable in Poland, which intensifies her frustration and bitterness. For

Julia, she is able to maintain a certain minimum standard of living which she cannot achieve as a well-educated woman in Poland.

It is also worth emphasizing that materials collected using the autobiographical narrative interview method as part of the *Transformation...* project showed multidimensionality and multilevelness of individual experiences of systemic transformation in Poland intertwined with rapid modernization and globalization processes. They proved that subjectively seen and experienced new or changing opportunity structures⁶³ offered both at micro and macro (including discursive) levels in individual experiences may not only have positive consequences, but also lead to a biographical disappointment or even a trap. Consequently, the analyzed life histories deny the common schematic and stereotyping distinctions, which entails discrediting those who – in the conditions of “governing through freedom” – have not become enterprising enough to face the necessity of “taking life into their own hands.” And as Ulrich Bröckling says: “Forcing people to develop their own individuality also means that ultimately they are to blame for their failures” (Bröckling 2016: 5). The three life histories discussed, however, show a certain and yet not that rare modality of the dynamics of experience based on the maximum use of biographical potential of an individual by the neoliberal labor market in its Polish version. This becomes possible due to the strong alluring embedded mechanisms that obscure (or expose it only to economic logic) other areas of the individual’s life, as well as thanks to the commonly promoted and accepted, by virtue of a taken-for-granted necessity for empowerment.

⁶³ See the chapter on *Transforming opportunity structures...* in this book.

Jacek Burski

CHAPTER XI

TRANSFORMATION AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Introduction

In the chapter, I focus on one of the mechanisms which drives the transformation process. I am interested in the introduction of the elements of market logic and its impact on the biographical experience of Poles. For obvious reasons, such a definition of the text's aim requires greater clarification and embedding both in the context of the current struggle with the subject of marketization and reference to the main assumptions of the book. At the same time, due to the limited amount of material (although the collection of 90 autobiographical narrative interviews is a major set of data), I decided to focus on one characteristic social group – the healthcare workers. This choice is supported by an assumption that among other public services healthcare system plays an extremely responsible role in maintaining social life. Moreover, looking at the year 2020 and the struggle with the coronavirus pandemic, an analysis of the biographical experience of healthcare workers seems to be expected and important. It is from their perspective that I undertake the topic of analyzing marketization processes affecting the sector of the economy in which they pursue their careers.

The introduction of market logic to Polish social reality after 1989 can be analyzed in terms of various aspects, from economic, legal, cultural and even to social issues. For obvious reasons, the latter are in the center of my interest, although the reader will find the most extensive analyses in economic literature (Kołodko 2000, Kaliński 2009, Olesiński 2000, Jarosz, Kozarzewski 2002, Dobroczyńska, Juchniewicz, Snopek 2000). These types of analyses focus on issues which we could consider as a reflection from the macro level, conducted with a specific direction of scientific view, which in turn can be described as the use of a top-down perspective. Analyzing marketization is inherently associated with the description and assessment of the transformation processes. Here, it is particularly worth paying attention to the texts of Tadeusz Kowalik (2009) critically referring to the chosen direction of reforms.

From a sociological perspective, a review of the literature on transformation can be found in Part 1. Supplementing the list there, one should recall the work of Jacek Tittenbrun (1992; 1995; 2007a–d) analyzing, among others, the issue of privatization from the position of historical materialism. In turn, in the field of reflection which could be described as the sociology of biography, it is worth emphasizing that the topic of marketization has not yet been analyzed. However, in some cases, marketization can be considered as one of the elements forming the social background for the phenomena described (Mrozowicki 2011, Waniek 2016, Biały 2015, Biały, Haratyk 2018). However, this was only one of the several elements creating a broader perspective in which the authors dealt with various problems embedded in biographical material. In this chapter, what is in the center of my interest are the threads related to marketization.

In the analytical part of this chapter, I focus on several cases of biographical interviews, which are a reference point for reflection on the described phenomenon and its social consequences. The context created by the fact that, for maintaining the coherence of argument, all the key interviews were conducted with the representatives of medical professions is of vital importance here. Thanks to access to the narrations of both doctors and technical employees, I can follow how the process of gradual subordination of the public health sector to the logic of market rules impact, in both the positive and negative way, on the biographical experience of the interlocutors. The bottom-up perspective used here makes it possible not only to analyze how the macro-level is reflected at the micro-level. It is also possible to reconstruct particular life strategies of individuals which translate (or not) into the use of the emerging opportunity structures. These, in turn, are at least partly related to the process of marketization intensifying in the sphere of the narrators' professional experience.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the empirical material, I would like to devote some space to a reflection on what the concept of marketization means in the Polish cultural and social context. The meaning of this term is primarily associated with the privatization processes, which was one of the pillars of the transformation of Polish socio-economic reality after 1989. However, these two mechanisms are not the same. I understand the first as a broader phenomenon related to the introduction of the market logic into various processes, one of which includes the privatization processes. This, in turn, is a key element in the transformation of the Polish economy after 1989 and refers primarily to the activities of the Polish governments concentrating part of the economic policy around the implementation of the plan to privatize public property. The significance of this activity is growing especially when we consider the fact that the Polish People's Republic period regarding the public and private relations was the time of dominance of the public ones:

[...] the deepest changes in ownership took place in the first decade of the People's Poland, which was particularly reflected in the nationalization of industry and the nationalization of trade, transport, and banking, reaching the peak of regular employment and monopolization of the Polish economy in the 1970s. Its organizational concentration of production and trade was favorable, with further limitation of small-scale production and craftsmanship (Kaliński 2010: 325).

At its peak (1979), the employment structure between the public and private sectors was 72% to 28%, and despite the increase in the number of employees in the private part by the end of the 1980s, the Polish society was entering another decade – crucial from the point of view of the change – working mainly in various types of public plants and enterprises.

The beginning of the political, economic, and social changes in 1989 systematically altered the principles of functioning of both institutions and individuals in the field of the economy. The emergence of a much larger role of the private sector as a party in economic relations (while in the PPR the system limited private economic activity, it did not completely eliminate it (see, among others: Knyt, Wancerz-Gluza 2006) was, on the one hand, an expected process, on the other, it was associated with changes which radically changed the working conditions. The starting point, being in the center of free-market changes, was the beginning of the Balcerowicz Plan in 1990, followed by consistent privatization of state property in the subsequent years. On the one hand, this allowed the Polish economy to quickly move to the capitalist system, on the other, it was associated with dramatic social costs (primarily the collapse of many state-owned enterprises unprepared and unprotected by the state when entering an unregulated market and the associated dramatic rise in unemployment – to almost 15% in 1995).

One of the sectors of the economy which was completely dominated by public entities in 1989 was healthcare. We can look at the processes related to the transformation of this part of the public service and its adaptation to the requirements of functioning within the capitalist system from the legal regulations perspective. In 1993, a regulation was introduced enabling the transfer of funds outside the public healthcare system to a private entity providing medical service. In 1995, independent health clinics were created. On top of that, in 1997, the system of financing the Polish healthcare changed. Previously, financial resources were provided directly from the state budget. The government of Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz led to the adoption of the law introducing universal health insurance, which meant that from that moment the scale of financing was linked to the mandatory contributions paid by taxpayers. However, what turned out to be crucial were the changes related to the so-called health care reform, one of the four great reforms introduced during the government of Jerzy Buzek (1997–2001), involving the creation of health insurance funds. The aim of introducing this type

of organizational unit was to adjust the healthcare system to the requirements of the capitalist economy. The assumed goals were not achieved, inter alia, due to changes on the Polish political scene. After the takeover of power in 2001 by the Democratic Left Alliance, the government of Leszek Miller abolished the health insurance funds and established the National Health Fund, which is still functioning today. The state of the Polish healthcare has become the subject of various types of analyses, from which it is worth recalling, among others, the report of the Supreme Audit Office from 2019. In this report the opinion on the organization of the system, the quality of treatment, and, among other things, the state of the staff was critical, to say the least.¹

Researchers dealing with the transformation of the public sphere after 1989 in Poland refer to the concept of New Public Management (Zawadzki 2002) as a source for new operating logics: flexibility and restructuring, which were to ensure the success of public enterprises understood as increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and a client-oriented approach (Kubisa 2016, Kozek 2011). From the perspective of healthcare professionals, the changes described were associated with the implementation of solutions that deregulated labor relations, reduced employment and increased outlays on those who remained (Kozek, Radzka 2011). Bad working conditions over the last three decades have been repeatedly protested (Kubisa 2014) (e.g., nurses protested in 2016, and in the following text refers to the protest of young doctors in 2017).

After 30 years of change, we can see that the Polish health service suffers from various problems and contradictions. On the one hand, access to free health care is a right consequently guaranteed by the constitution. Still, the stratification between what is offered in the private and public part of the medical sector is becoming clearer. Poles are increasingly paying more on additionally health insurance in large medical networks such as LuxMed or Enel-Med². Paradoxically, the scale of this phenomenon is so large that the private sector is also becoming inefficient. Moreover, its treatment options still do not match what the public sector can offer – in extreme cases, patients still go to public hospitals. It is not profitable for private institutions to treat the most severe cases – these generate the highest costs. Added to this is emergency treatment, when again public institutions are specialized on the one hand (they have, among others, the appropriate infrastructure and staff), on the other, they are free, and in the event of a threat to life, they can perform complicated procedures practically immediately.

¹ <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,20223,vp,22913.pdf>

² Within the three years from 2015 to 2018, the number of people paying extra for health insurance (in addition to the public health insurance premium) increased from 1.4 million to 2.6 million (<https://subiektywnieofinansach.pl/juz-26-mln-polakow-placi-z-wlasnej-kieszeni-za-dostep-do-lekarzy-co-dalej-prywatne-leczenie-tez-zaczyna-pekac-w-szwach/>).

This short description summarizing the most important events from the transformation process of the Polish healthcare is only intended to outline the institutional background for the issues discussed later in the text. However, what is most important from the perspective of the issues discussed in it is related to the effect which all these changes had on the whole system – they slowly and irrevocably introduced elements of the market logic directly and indirectly transforming both the legal and institutional environment, as well as everyday working conditions of thousands of people. Thus, biographical accounts from medical personnel included in the analysis gain additional value. From the perspective of research using autobiographical narrative interviews, it seems particularly important that in all the cases cited, the issue of work in healthcare plays a key role in understanding the life histories described in them.

Empirical cases

The collection of interviews contains biographical accounts of people working in various positions in health care (from doctors to technical staff), and one of the key threads in their narrations is professional experience. For them, one of the most important phenomena was, on the one hand, the processes of marketizing the health service related to the introduction of new organizational ways (e.g., outsourcing of tasks outside institutions such as hospitals). On the other, focusing on the emergence of new forms of employment (the introduction of the so-called contracts which changed the relationship between the employee and the employer, but also affected the relationship between the employees themselves). Finally, it should be emphasized that one of the most important threads related to the marketization of health care, and at the same time focused on the employee experience is the opportunity to work in private institutions, which is of particular importance for analyzing the medical narrations.

Interviews with doctors Hanna (1981), Dobrochna (1988), nurse Adam (1974), and medical technician Ada (1965) were selected for analysis. The last two work in one hospital. There is no mentioning of each other in their interviews. The first two narrations about the biographical experiences of young female doctors in the sphere of professional career concentrate on entering the profession and the first period in which both interlocutors learn not only what is related to the treatment itself, but above all, what relates to the rules of the professional social world which they enter and where they see their future. Adam and Ada's accounts are the contrast set for the first history. First of all, in the professional sphere, these are interviews with employees who are not doctors. Adam, a nurse, occupies a place in the middle of the social structure of the hospital in which he works. Ada, in turn, is a representative of a group of administrative and technical employees. In her case, the best job description will

be a medical technician, that is, the person responsible for the basic tasks which need to be performed with the patient (including personal hygiene). What is more, Adam and Ada have a different place in the general social structure in relation to Hanna. They are older, have their own families, children, they live in a small town as opposed to the doctor who comes from and works in a big city. This difference in perspectives clearly reflects on the overall interpretation of interviews, but is also crucial for analyzing the professional sphere. Adam and Ada are connected with the only large public institution operating in their town. Moreover, the hospital is the most important employer, which translates into the fact that starting work in it is, on the one hand, a kind of professional success in securing a career (especially when you are not a doctor and are vulnerable to unemployment). On the other, the long working time (especially in the case of Ada) allows the interlocutors to present various types of theoretical comments and arguments related to the working conditions and changes taking place in recent years or decades. The case of Hanna is somewhat different in this context and is a good example of the challenges faced by a young professional who is yet to work out a strategy for adapting to difficult working conditions (burden of work, financial pressure, uncertainty associated with the need to take further professional exams).

It should also be added that this chapter, like several other parts of the book, is not a classic case study in which each case is analyzed comprehensively. This is somewhat different from the method of analyzing the autobiographical narrative interview of Fritz Schütze, in which the goal is to interpret the entire narration in the spirit of *Gestalt*. However, what I consider to be the main task in this chapter is an analysis focusing on the description of the relationship between the marketization mechanisms of certain elements which make up the healthcare system and the biographical experience of the narrators. For this reason, it should also be added that in all four cases we can observe how the institutional changes leave their mark on the social reality in which the interlocutors function. Thanks to the juxtaposition of different perspectives presented by Hanna, Dobrochna, Adam, and Ada, we can see how certain parts of the system are being modernized and thus create previously non-existing opportunity structures (the cases of Adam and Ada). On the other hand, we can also observe how the culture of work found and institutionalized by the PPR system builds socio-cultural background for post-transformation health modernization processes leading to the creation of an extensive professional environment and exposing the individual to serious biographical costs (the case of Hanna). The stake in both situations is maintaining control over one's own biography and the most effective use of the emerging opportunity structures (not only in the sense of material profits).

The case of Hanna and Dobrochna

I will begin the empirical part with the interviews with Hanna (1981) and Dobrochna (1988). They are an interesting contrast-set built primarily around the tension arising from being at different points in their career. Hanna is much further in her career development compared to Dobrochna. Besides, unlike the younger interlocutor, she comes from a medical family, which translates into having a more critical approach to the profession she practices. What connects both narrators is the idealistic approach to the role of a doctor, for whom the objective is to maintain the ethos of work despite the dilemmas that both of them have to deal with. These, in turn, are related to various issues: Hanna is under the pressure of trajectory potentials associated with hard work and the need to combine it with studying for the specialization exam. Dobrochna, in turn, is in suspension regarding her professional career – she is on maternity leave. She maintains a high level of enthusiasm for the medical profession, although her narration contains tensions which are related to the uncertainty of what awaits her at further stages of her career development. I start the analysis with Hanna's case, which is richer in the topics of my interest, related to the transformation of healthcare. I supplement it with introducing Dobrochna's case.

The reader will find a detailed analysis of the first narration in Chapter X, where it constitutes the basis for reflection on the potential for disorder and suffering faced by young women entering the world of social art, medicine, and science. Not wanting to repeat the observations and conclusions, in my chapter I will focus on the thematic thread related to the problem of marketization, which is of my interest. I just want to emphasize that Katarzyna Waniek, who describes this case, notes that, among others, work is a source of serious risk of falling into a trajectory, generating extraordinary pressure associated with financial security and being overloaded with duties. Hanna is somewhat prepared to enter the destructive work system beyond her strength due to her cultural capital. Both of her parents are doctors, which gave her the chance to at least get to know the scale of the effort which needs to be put into this type of professional career. However, the opportunity structures which develop in connection with the changes in healthcare (in this case also allowing at least partial control of the trajectory potential) are much different for their daughter. Yet, this does not mean an easy way out of the situation for the narrator, who during the interview is before the specialization exam, which further intensifies her precarious professional and biographical situation.

One of the markers of uncertainty which can be found in Hanna's account and which can be associated with gaps in the employment system in healthcare is the issue of difficulties which the interlocutor encounters in the context of ensuring accounting liquidity at the early stages of work as a doctor:

And this job of mine/ because I got into a specialization in internal medicine, the internal. I worked as a resident doctor, so I was paid not by the hospital, but by the Ministry of Health. This is the best hospital workforce because this is a doctor who works the hours and does not get money from the hospital for it, so hospitals like residents very much. Even now there are several different work systems, because [...] Now, theoretically you cannot do such a duty as one did before. That you are on duty 24 hours, and then you stay at work like my parents did, for example, they had to earn, whether they wanted or not. However, we don't have this anymore. And I worked in a hospital, by the way, two blocks away. This was one of the reasons I chose this flat, to be near. [...] As for me, I work either from 8 am to 3:35 pm, or you change into such a shift system, that is, such a 12-hour one. So duty hours last twelve hours. From 8 pm to 8 am, or from 8 am to 8 pm. However, when it comes to the issue of remuneration, it is less favorable, because I get remuneration/ I mean I got it, because it is also everything in the forms of the past, for working full time. So there are hours to be done depending on how long the month is. And this consists of Monday to Friday from 8 am to 3:35 pm. But, in the meantime, there are duty hours. Shifts can be either at weekends or during the week. And actually, if they are, for example, during the week, that is, let's assume the night from Monday to Tuesday, it is twelve night hours, but during that time I would make two seven hours thirty-five minutes, so, all in all, I am on duty, which totally destroys my two days and one night, but financially I don't even make full-time. Not only will I not get paid for the duty shift, but I will not get the full salary from the contract. So it was done this way that you could have six or seven such duty shifts per month, and you didn't get a penny for it, because you got the basic salary. Because it was arranged in such a way that it was just the normal working hours. Also in terms of some/ and as I say, the specialization lasts five years/ so five years of such work does not really give the opportunity to stand on one's own feet, such financial independence. Because the salary/ and of course, I had it better than they did in previous years/ but of course it is nothing. For example, I would not get a mortgage with such expenses, err, with such earnings. So, all the time during this period of secondary school, university, internship, I was dependent on my parents, which, however, is also such a stage which to some/ is a kind of psychological discomfort.

The first thing I would like to draw attention to is how the narrator describes time in relation to work. She scrupulously calculates – practically to the minute – how long the work lasted, what were the breaks between one shift and the other. We can assume that time is an essential resource and learning how to manage it is a key skill for young medical students. Additionally, the interlocutor emphasizes the choice of residency, which had to be close to the hospital, so as to reduce travel time. This is, of course, a need that we could consider more universal, but in connection with the gradually increasing workload, to which the narrator refers later in the interview, the issue of living close to the place of employment becomes a necessity. In the fragment quoted above, we can also

observe that the narrator refers to the example of parents who experienced a system which used free labor even more:

N: Even now there are several different work systems, because [...] Now, theoretically you cannot do such a duty as one did before. That you are on duty 24 hours, and then you stay at work like my parents did, for example, they had to earn, whether they wanted or not.

In a sense, we could assume that there was an improvement compared to the solutions applied before Hanna began her professional career. However, a second element appears which translates into building work-related tension – finances, which in the case of young doctors practically prevents independence. What is more, the negative effect associated with shortages of time and money is reinforced by the sense of exploitation, which in turn results from the functioning of unpaid 12-hour on-call night shifts. Hanna manages to survive the first period of work on the so-called residency. In the meantime, she undertakes additional work in the private health service, to improve her financial situation. She manages to take out a mortgage, buy a flat and move out from her parents. The crucial moment in Hanna's career history is the period in which she ends her residency and it turns out that she does not get a job offer in the hospital where she had been working at that time. What is more, the date of the specialization exam is approaching, which practically the entire career of the narrator depends on. In order to survive the period of unemployment, which she must devote to studying, Hanna decides to register as self-employed:

N: So I know that the minimum period of preparation for this exam is three months. You can't work at all during these three months, because you just can't combine working and studying.

I: Mm.

N: Well, so I have to collect financial resources so that I can support myself for at least three months of studying. Plus, when you think about it later, there are three months of learning, plus this one exam, it's theoretical, it's a test. Then you wait, God knows how long before you take the practical exam. And then you know that you will not start working again the day after the exam because you have to find this work somehow. And you won't really think about it between the exams, especially since everything depends on the result of the exam. So it actually takes, well, four months to half a year. And accumulating such finances for so much time is not easy. Therefore, once I started this activity, I started working, so I had to get some jobs together. So once I became self-employed, I started working, I had to work in a few places. It was such a marathon that it was actually a bit on the edge of one's limits. Because per hour/ I think I was even counting for the first month, so I worked almost 500 hours in a month.

In the general understanding of the biographical interview with Hanna, starting self-employment is not a turning point. It is only an element of the biographical action plan which the narrator must introduce to ensure financial resources for the time she devotes to preparing for the proper professional rite of passage (specialization exam). From the perspective of the issues raised in the chapter, this is, however, an important moment closing the operation of an extensive institutional pattern of expectations. In my opinion, it can be interpreted as a mechanism to internalize the logic behind the extensive work system based, on the one hand, on deepening the normalization practices and routinizing tensions and pressure imposed on the individual. On the other hand, it is also a system supporting marketization mechanisms – a young doctor with family experience of work in healthcare (i.e., cultural, social, and financial capital) is unable to protect herself against the trajectory experience of losing control and submitting to the rigour of exhausting work (based, among others, on combining work in different places). This, in turn, is a non-alternative due to the “gaps” in public solutions of the relationship between the doctor and his employer (that is, in fact, the state). In other words, the state part of the system prepares a key workforce (doctors) from the point of view of its nominal priorities (free access to health care) to function in an institutionalized system of exploitation. On the other hand, it is also a simple way to lose this capacity in favor of other health systems (foreign and private). Not all doctors will be able, like Hanna, to give up on higher wages and a safer work environment for the possibility of professional development:

N: And so I ended up studying medicine, I mean I do not regret it. I haven't really regretted it so far. And I say I have much better conditions than my parents have had until this day because they were starting from very difficult situations. One thing, that with such intensive work, which did not translate into earnings at all, I think that at the moment it translates more. And let's say there is more room for manoeuvre. I can choose that I want to work in a hospital, only for me, working in a hospital is connected with the fact that I will be worse off financially. Well, unless I work on a contract. On the other hand, working on a contract, that is, being self-employed has its advantages, it is in this respect, in the degree of earning money, there you can fight for certain things. Whether there or at this place you agree to such a wage or not and you are looking for a placement elsewhere. But, then I don't have the right to sick-leave. If I don't work, I don't have any earnings, I don't have, I don't have any holidays. Well, if I have a vacation, I just have no income. So these are things, something for something. Well, on the other hand, it is after all, as I say, work in the ward, well, this is something you would like to do, which somehow develops you more, but you just physically earn less. But, there is a choice, let's say. Of course, assuming that I can find such a job, but I'm speaking purely theoretically.

The quote above can be considered not only as a theoretical commentary regarding the possibility of choosing between working in a public or private institution. It is also an example of a regularly appearing contrast set in the entire collection of interviews in the project. The symbolic resource appearing as a reference to the experience of her parents in Hanna's case allows her to work through two issues. First, the narrator, by showing the experience of her mother and father, relates to herself and the researcher the change taking place in the institutions in which they worked and she works. On the other hand, it gives her a chance to reduce the tension resulting from her own difficult situation. The comparison functions here as part of the slogan: "It's not that bad because my parents had it worse." A key advantage of the changes which Hanna is experiencing is the opportunity to choose her own career path. It is this opportunity structure which was unavailable during the period of entering the labor market to her parents:

N: It's probably one of those main things, and what is most important, nevertheless a bit better financial conditions. It is still not as it should be, but it is a little better than it used to be when they worked most of their life. Plus, still, that if you make such a decision about such intensive work, it is at your own request. However, it is no longer imposed from the top that you work what they worked. These 24-hour duty shifts, and then you worked for another day, you had to do your work until 3 pm or something, do your share of work there, and it was completely for free, so that is gone. And it is/ well, at least in most places it's gone. But, if this is already won that it is like this, so it's probably a plus.

The interview with Hanna begins the analytical part of the chapter. It is also intended to show the perspective of a health care professional who (at least in theory) plays a key role in achieving the main goal of this sector of public services. Using it as an example, we can see what role the introduction of market logic in the healthcare system plays in the transformation process. Of course, this is not a situation in which the narrator relates subsequent legal and institutional changes. However, based on her experience, we can verify what structural framework impacts individuals who are determined to enter the social world of Polish medicine. From a doctor's perspective, it is not about how patients are treated. Instead, they refer to formal, organizational, or broader institutional issues. These translate into biographical resources which individuals use in the course of their professional career. What is more, in the process of socialization to the social world of medicine, young adepts are "trained" on the effectiveness of time management and internalize the rules of the game. In the case of Hanna, we can only talk about the adaptation strategy, which we can describe as making use of the opportunities provided by the system, but apart from the interview we also know about the social protests

of resident doctors trying to force changes both in terms of their professional situation and influence the shape of government policy on health care.³ At the time of the strike, Hanna was already after the specialization exam.

Referring to the issue of dilemmas faced by Hanna and Dobrochna, highlighted in the introduction to the empirical analysis, it is worth emphasizing that after passing the specialization exam, Hanna chose the path of a hospital doctor's career (full-time employment without being self-employed), which was associated with relatively lower remuneration.

Dobrochna's case is not only different from Hanna's life story when it comes to their career path stage. First of all, the main difference is the family issue – Dobrochna has a husband and a daughter, The young doctor clearly emphasizes that studying medicine was a biographical action plan internalized in childhood:

N: Well, at university/, actually before the studies, because I have ALWAYS wanted to be a doctor since I can remember, it is in such books, children's albums that it is written, who do you want to be in the future – a doctor.

I: Mmm.

N: “Little Dobrochna wants to be a doctor” – my mother always wrote, and I don't know, I don't know why, because we in the family – in my family from my side – there are no doctors, no nurses, no one, but I think (laughs) I came across good doctors when I was little because I remember my childhood doctor and she, she was alright. Maybe that's why, I don't know. Or/ And I always wanted to help people in some way. In fact, it seems to be a little bit now [...], maybe it hasn't changed, but now medicine is not just simply helping people, but this is a profession after all, and no one will be Dr. Quinn, as I wanted (laughs), although maybe my husband who works like a dog (laughing), but I remember that I have always wanted to be a doctor and I did everything to make it happen.

Of course, as time goes by and as she gains knowledge, not necessarily medical but about practising the medical profession, Dobrochna verifies her childhood idea about treatment as helping people. However, she still keeps the enthusiasm for the chosen life path. The crucial and formative experience leading her to undertaking medical studies Dobrochna recalls in the background construction:

³ The main wave of protests by resident doctors took place in 2017 and concerned mainly an increase in budget expenditures on health care to 6.8% and salary increases (a resident doctor earned PLN 2.1 to 2.4 thousand at that time): <http://biqdata.wyborcza.pl/biqdata/7,159116,22639417,dlaczego-lekarze-protestuja-bo-system-jest-na-skraju.html>; <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75248,22453814,glodowka-rezydentow-mlodzi-lekarze-zaczynaja-dzis-swoj-protest.html>; <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,22585407,szef-porozumienia-rezydentow-konczymy-glodowke-ale-protest.html>

N: Oh, but I told you why I wanted to become a doctor, because I was still in secondary school, just after the first grade, I was once looking for a place with a friend, to volunteer. And we were in the third grade of middle school, where I/ we were not of legal age, I don't even know if we were 16 then. I think so, but then, surprisingly, there was no interesting volunteering for secondary school students. She wanted more horses, I wanted children, but at an orphanage they didn't let any underage people work because I don't know, I think those were the rules... Well, but, later this lady from the volunteer office contacted us a year later and it turned out that there is/ looking for, such foundation "Krwinka" – which has now developed a lot and is constantly organizing something there, some nice campaigns – looking for volunteers to play with children in the oncology ward. And for me, it was just bingo! I used to go there the whole summer, to this branch, it gave me great satisfaction. And I remember that, when I said there, that I am a volunteer in the oncology ward, everyone said: "Jeeez, it's so sad." My mother cried almost every time I rode (laughs) on a bicycle, from W [name of the district] to G [street name] on the bike, it was a long way, but I always came back so terribly proud and then I thought I wanted to work there. I haven't achieved it yet, but I hope I can because there are vacancies.

In the above quote, I would like to draw attention to two elements which sum up Dobrochna's approach to the dream of being a doctor. On the one hand, we see that the narrator approaches difficult situations related to helping others in a direct way and sees them as a chance to help the needy, but also considers them in terms of experience which develops her. In this place (as well as in the further part of the interview) the connection between the medical practice understood primarily as the treatment of patients and categories such as satisfaction or development is strongly emphasized. On the other hand, the interlocutor outlines a biographical action plan which she will want to implement later. This is a characteristic feature of the interview with Dobrochna – the narrator has not yet entered the main career path. Although she has already graduated, she knows that she wants to become a paediatrician, but she has not yet taken up residency, and at the time of the interview she is on maternity leave. Her situation is a kind of suspension.

Interestingly, Dobrochna's husband is also a doctor (he comes from a medical family), but due to the birth of the child the narrator is in a sense "behind him" when it comes to the development of her career. His experience is an additional source of knowledge for the interlocutor and allows her to argue more when theoretical comments arise. Among other things, this type of pattern occurs when she is asked about connections and their impact on medical careers:

I: Uhm. Please tell me, because in such colloquial knowledge about medicine there are legends that if you have no parents, if you don't have your background, if you

don't have different, except of course/ abilities, they are in the background, very often presented in the background. What does it look like from your perspective and your own experience as a student?

N: I mean, as a student, I don't think so. I didn't have any back (laughs), no and in general I can boast that I finished this medicinal studies as the best student, and I had the highest average, and somehow [...], I just took my husband's name after university and it did not stop me from learning everything, and when you get to specialization, then maybe there are some connections (speaks more slowly), but it mainly depends on the result of the exam. And for such niche specialities, that's probably a problem, but in general, if you want to become a doctor and pass, well, this exam, you should get this residency, but there is also a problem, because of these residencies, that is, such full-time jobs (the noise of a teacup), Oh, sorry, from the pool that the ministry funds and they are for people to learn, well, they are fewer less than the students, than people who finish this medicinal study, and there is also a bit of a race, because then, because if you don't get a residency, you have to apply for a full-time job, and it is difficult. Hospitals are not so willing to employ, if so, they do not want to employ internists, surgeons, some specialists such as gynaecologists, and endocrinologists, but rather such general, like paediatricians, internist, yes, maybe they hire. And if, for example, you would like to, in a more special, more interesting way, to tell you the truth (laughing) specialization, then you have to/, for example, my husband throughout all his studies went to his department and is currently employed full-time. Err, so [...] but he didn't have a background there (laughing), none. However, it was worked out, because he was stubborn, and he learned that he was simply talented and knows a lot about it.

Dobrochna assesses the system, in which she functions, as generally fair. She has heard of abuse or nepotism, but giving her experience as an example shows that she had achieved everything through hard work at university. It is interesting how she emphasizes, however, that she took her husband's surname only after graduation, which may suggest that coming from a medical family does matter (as has been said, Dobrochna, unlike her husband, has no medical family roots). Then, however, the narrator stresses the role of the individual in going through the next stages and again recalls the example of her husband who procured himself employment in the specialization which was of his interest. However, it seems that the answer to the question is not so simple, because after a while Dobrochna adds:

N: Well, I heard some stories that a father helped someone to do something, to pass some exams, but it is more like a sensational story, maybe it was like that, but you didn't talk about it like that. In my/ my student groups there were no such things, and I really had a very good student group. Hmm. One friend did have doctor parents, but she was also very talented, very hard-working and never

used such things. Maybe/ I mean, it seems to me that people who have doctors in their family and graduate are so a bit more aware of what is next. So, for example, my husband (laughs) knows it because his parents are doctors, I listened to something there, but nevertheless, I had a slightly more idealistic approach that I will graduate and it's going to be great, I'll be a doctor, and they already knew a bit that it is not always so bright and later it is always so that [...] one reads in the press about horrible doctors, and it does not always depend on this terrible doctor, however, that for example something goes wrong there, or the patient is dissatisfied, but it depends a little on the fact that this top-down health care is not so well-organized, let's say. But I/ I think that knowledge is what really matters at university.

After her husband's experiences, the narrator recalls another contrasting set – her in-laws who are doctors. She does this, on the one hand, to show her own – separate to some point – opinion which can be summarized as the result of her own experience – you do not need to have contacts or doctors in the family to get a medical education. On the other hand, which is particularly interesting from the point of view of the chapter, the husband's parents are a source of knowledge about the entire system, not just the medical studies and the first period after graduation. Dobrochna also recalls her in-laws when asked about difficult situations (including ways of dealing with death):

N: Well, but it's already progress that one talks about it, right? That doctors, they work a lot and that they are overloaded, that this is hard work and the very fact that this can/ I think help. Because, as I observe, I hear stories how doctors once worked, but from these stories only my in-laws, or older doctors, it didn't use to be like that, I mean, that you just worked on a treadmill and didn't think about it. Anyway, well, it was generally so everywhere, that now there is this stress, and that you need to relax and so on, and in the past in Poland, generally (it can be that) you just worked hard and that's it (laughs), no one bothered about relaxation (laughing).

So we see that the narrator uses a mediated resource of knowledge and experience which allows her to comment on the questions asked. On the other hand, in a broader plan of the narration, it has a contrasting function, allowing her to overcome her fears and tensions related to what she experienced, and above all will experience in the future. It seems that concerning the topic discussed in the chapter, the key element of Dobrochna's narration may be the answer to the question about how she sees her nearest future:

N: Since we are already talking of emigration, there are such opinions that a doctor in Poland works for peanuts, speaking colloquially. You can't splash out (laughs), no splashing, no, especially at the beginning. As for now, you

cannot set up this private practice, because who will come to you, if you cannot do anything yet, also some of my friends say, I don't know, (thinking) 5% let's say, that they went abroad, maybe a little more. A lot leave/ if they returned to their places of living and I think there are better earnings, there are certainly better earnings in Warsaw, but generally in/ unfortunately, I have to say this impolitely, but outside big cities, even in such suburban, smaller towns, you earn better money in a hospital and it's easier to get a job there than in a large center. Well, because here, there is a terribly large supply, after graduation everyone, after settling down here, would like to stay, there is also competition, and you have to be prepared for the first, I don't know, 6 years, that's for sure it won't be crazy that you will have to work a lot to earn well. But, [...] either earn less and only then start working somehow for yourself. Well, we agreed that we do not want to leave, that maybe for adventure, somewhere for a year, as part of some scientific exchange there, but due to the fact that my husband, however, he is fascinated by the field that he chose and here he thinks that he will learn the most, including in the hospital in which he works, and he must also do some scientific work, doctoral studies, but for now we have stopped thinking about it, especially that there are small children, then, in general, it is harder. But, well, well, you know, if someone is so oriented that they want to earn a lot from the beginning, so it's best for them to go to Germany, because there/ as I've heard, they really need doctors and good conditions, but you have to consider the fact that you have to leave your family, and we didn't want to do that. Because we were on Erasmus for a year and [...] it was fun, but it was a bit empty, but (with laughter), for me at least, and I think my husband thinks that if it was such a great idea, he would insist, and we agreed that only maybe someday for another year, for adventure, we will go to some completely different country.

The recalled quote shows the possible paths for Dobrochna's further career (or at least those paths which the narrator sees). The interlocutor outlines them not regarding the specialization of her interest, but focuses on the institutional action patterns which she can follow. In her commentary, we see that actually, the path she will probably follow (a doctor in a large urban center, but not in Warsaw) is the least promising in the context of earnings. From the other parts of the interview, we know that the narrator herself is a talented and diligent doctor – so she assumes that she will manage to achieve a position which will ensure her material success and will be a chance to fulfil her professional ambitions. Interestingly, it is clear that the decisions regarding Dobrochna's career are taken in consultation with her husband. It remains an open question to what extent his professional career is subject to joint control. However, they definitely decide to stay in the country together, although, for at least some of their colleagues, emigration is an attractive choice.

Adam's case

As in the case of Hanna, the interview with Adam was also used for analysis in one of the chapters (this is Chapter XIV reflecting on the symbolic biographical resource of the yard). At this point, however, I would like to devote more space to an in-depth reflection on the sphere of work and its place in the interlocutor's biographical narration. For the record, I will recall the most important information about Adam's case. Born in 1972, he spent most of his life in his hometown or in a small town where he works as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital. He comes from a poor, multiple children village family with whom he still has close relations. He is married. He also has two children.

In order to reconstruct Adam's entry into the profession, it is worth returning to the moment when the narrator finishes his education in secondary school and decides to obtain a post-secondary education, which is supposed to provide him with a real chance of getting a job:

N: The next period is the period of such education, in my case is post-secondary – I finished medical school in S. Err, nursing department, err, two and a half years of school. And then a year after receiving the diploma, the next year, well, a year intensively.

I: Mm

N: Because practically, practically I had intense first months looking for a job. And another disappointment in life. No work. And a condition set. Which was very, very, which I remember to this day, wherever I would go asking for a job, whether my military service was regulated.

Here we see how, although Adam started realizing his biographical action plan, he must give up his original idea for his professional career due to objective barriers (no jobs available) and institutional patterns of action operating in a different order (the requirement of doing military service). This is one of the first crises which the interlocutor faces in this field. Therefore, he reports to the Military Supplement Commission to remove one of the above obstacles. One of the potential motivations for military service is the possibility of leaving the family area. Here again the narrator's profession – he is delegated to serve in a nearby city and spends almost 9 months near home. After serving the statutory period, Adam tries to stay in the army, but after a few months he decides to leave the job:

It wasn't for me. For me this was just, as I later stated, it was one big mistake. Simply unlimited working time, available 24 hours a day. I was going to the unit, my parents asked me when I would get back it was the answer: I don't know. And

so it happened. That I could leave on Monday and come back even in a week. I had 25 kilometers to go home. Well, unfortunately, I-I / (sighs) I managed there for over half a year, but, okay. Then I came here – I said I will see, I will try here in the hospital in W. In the hospital in W., well, it was a coincidence that they were just admitting boys, men, very, very willingly, so basically I came, I asked, the next day I had a job. On the basis of an agreement of the parties, I quit there and got employed again here. I started work in 2001 in W. ... in W. in the psychiatric department.

Entering a new workplace is therefore based on the development of another biographical action plan in the sphere of a professional career. The interlocutor, despite working close to home, cannot cope with the expected unlimited availability. This allows us to make the assumption that his main motivation to change the place of employment was not material issues, but the predictability of work and the possibility of its proper balancing in relation to free time. The fact that the interviewee had nursing education which could help him in the recruitment process (although Adam himself does not say this in the interview) is also quite significant. In retrospect, we can see that the educational investment made a few years earlier had a positive effect. Let us return to the post-secondary school and nursing school for a moment:

N: I mean, at first, I didn't, at all, I didn't think about this, to do, but one of my friend who lives, among others, in my village, was working here. He was working here, presented it, we talked once, he was here/ there were once such structures/ he was nursing help. There was not such a school, they later got qualifications, some courses, they were not such typical ones. And so, we were talking once, talking, he says: "listen – [Adam]," he says – "in your case, if you wanted, you know" – he says, "you can try, you know, to go to nursing school, then there is a chance then, in our area, among other things, there is a chance that you can get a job nearby."

I: Nearby.

N: This is a fairly large workplace. Virtually, the only workplace today. Because back then, there was also such a thriving, thriving workplace such as the cooperative, it was AGS (name of the cooperative – Author note). The so-called GSs.

I: Mm

N: I think it was AGS then, although now there is something, although I'm not, hmm. But, I say, in the area here, in the radius of ten, ten to twenty kilometers, the largest workplace was the hospital. But, such an obstacle was secondary school graduation, and nothing more. Well, practically I/ or studies, unfortunately, my parents could not afford to send me to study, err, the financial situation in the family, too – the six of us, needed to be educated, at least these basics, so as to. Well, later, it also has to be somehow different, for the school to be also somehow

unpaid, or somewhere within this, to be able to commute and live at home. And there were such workshops, such meetings, with schools from the Sieradz region, err, here promoting a given school.

I: Mm

N: It was fashionable already then.

I: Mm

N: Such recruitment, such promotions. And at some point, I don't remember anymore, but I think it was before the final exams, it had to be before the final exams, err, there were such meetings/lectures organized in secondary schools.

I: Mm

N: And then, and on this basis, a lot of people decided about this and that. And there were more or less presented pers-pec-tives, perspectives of what the employment opportunities are in a given region.

I: Mm

N: It also gave a lot to-to-to undertake such a profession and not another. Well, for example, well... I suppose so. Yes, that's it. Well, as I say, these were such two realities the most, because I say, well: hospital in W., hospital in S...

I: Mm

N: There were two. Although at one point I was a witness, I was a participant, but I was also attending, I don't know, second, third grade, second grade probably. Third. Secondary school. Err, when I had to resuscitate a pat- / somebody out there, among others, in W... And then thanks to this patient I learned what this man lived off. Maybe it was also a plus, maybe some incentive that I was not afraid there, I was not afraid, although, I say not everyone/ I, starting a medical school – I'm going back to another one here – err, starting a medical school in 1996 six boys started our year. One made it to the diploma. From the year.

I: So few.

N: Few. After the first internship, after the first entry to the hospital, you drop out. Out of the 36 students, 20 finished school. Adam\

In the quote above, we can observe the structure of the background construction characteristic of the autobiographical interview (for more on the importance of background construction, see Chapter XII, among others: Schütze 2012), which in this case allows us to understand the process of entering the interlocutor's career path. The choice of such additional education serves as a direct preparation for the profession. A detailed narration referring to the conversation outlining the chance to get a better education, and thus good work in the region (which at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s was extremely

difficult, due to very high unemployment not only in Adam's place of residence), supplemented with a story of resuscitation of an accidental patient, which proves to the narrator that he is suitable for the work of a nurse. In addition, the interlocutor emphasizes the difficulty in finally obtaining qualifications, which is a kind of prelude to being a nurse, which is hard work. It also turns out that employment in a psychiatric hospital carries additional risks. On the so-called general ward (for adult patients) Adam worked for nine years. After this period, he decided to change:

N: I wanted to try something new, a department for children and youth was opening up. And very cool, well, you have to change something in life, the next, the next stage, changes, another something there, I say, well, you can try, why not, I think, I am, I risked it. After two months I was disappointed. When I ended up in hospital. As a patient. After an intervention here in this ward. Well, unfortunately, we got colloquially speaking "beaten up," because the patients attacked the staff, right. Well, but surely it is like that, the realities are, these are psychiatric wards, I don't know, you don't know what's happening with the patient, right? (*breathing in*) I had such a breakdown, I was about to quit my job at some point, but somehow, slowly, slowly, I returned to this job, to the same position, to the same department. And I've worked there to this day. To this day in this ward. And speaking today, I would not like to change, it's all right. In the meantime, I met my wife. Current wife, who is also a nurse. We met here, at work. In one ward, we worked, I was starting work, mm. After two years, we got married. Got married. After a year, we got the flat where we are now.

I: Mm

N: Later that year, a daughter was born to us. Err, later, after five years, we had/have another son.

I: Mm

N: And that's what it looks like my... short biography.

I: Ok.

Sentences closing this quote can be considered a broken coda (a detailed description of this structure can be found in Chapter XI). As we can see, Adam closes the narration twice. First, he does it in the context of his professional career, which he apparently succeeds in, but after a brief mentioning of family life, he finally sums up the first part of the narration. This kind of situation may indicate unprocessed elements of the biography – the inability to deal with the problems which the narrator encountered on his way (Schütze 2012). In Adam's case, the topic of being beaten by patients in the quote indicates a serious crisis in the vocational calling (that is, the aspect which the interlocutor previously indicates as an important reason for choosing this particular occupation).

Moreover, the memory of a difficult situation returns in the part of additional questions, in which the researcher raises the issue of dealing with this crisis:

I: You had such a breakdown. And I would like to ask – of course, if you agree to speak a little bit about it – what could it result from and how did you deal with it, because I understand that it somehow, somehow passed, yes. Whether...

N: I mean I got over it, although it bothers me from time to time, honestly, somehow, as I mention, how such a crisis situation really happens in the ward, but you come back. However, this is an experience, I don't know, it did not happen without injury, right. I say, well, that's not why I took this job, that's not why I serve someone, because I say, it used to be, err, it was called – I don't know why – health service.

I: Mm

N: Because come on, service, so nicely named, right, service. Well, you serve someone, so as to. I say, it happened exactly on January 3. 2010. 10? 10. By the year. We were attacked... by patients. Female nurses, male nurses. And there was a fight.

I: Mm

N: Well fight, well, it's hard to call it a fight, because they charged at us, and we – unfortunately, we had to take some revenge too, no one is like that, just to give up/ to let yourself be hit, no.

I: Surely.

N: Well, but if there were 19 of them, nine of us, guys at the age of 16-19, then such chances are a bit no/ but I know, I understand that if they were kids at the age of 10, you would have taken them, they would have just flown. Well, but that's the reality. Well, after this incident I went to hospital, examinations and so on, it turned out that I had one of the... cervical vertebrae twisted. Ok. And everything's O-K. I've suffered my part. Although, err, you feel it to this day, you really feel this-this injury. And what really matters to me is maybe the attitude of the management.

I: Mm

N: Because at some point such accusations were made that the staff were guilty. Which hurt. It really hurt. It hurt, but unfortunately, that's the reality, with the management, it was. Later, of course, a case was filed to court ex officio, because, ex officio, because we filed a case for violation of the integrity of a public official.

I: Mm

N: We are protected by law, ex officio, and so on and so forth. 19 extrajudicial cases were held. Everyone had default cases... Everyone, default cases and all decisions – 19 – it was written: occupational risk.

I: So rejected?

N: Yes. Virtually yes. And it was probably such a stimulus and such that I really thought, I say, why should I risk my health and life?

I: Mm

N: In the name of what? (pause: 2s) A man wants to help someone, because everyone understands, err, mental illness is also a disease like any other somatic condition, although – what annoys me the most, when I meet my friends and-and-and is the term “working at the madhouse.”

I: Mm

N: I say, and where have you been? How to call it that you were in surgery, for example, right?

I: Mm

N: This is, it most/ it is also like that/but it is how it is/ Well, maybe a little less of this now, because I say, this environment is already so closed. Hardly anyone enters this environment there, those friends with whom I just have this contact, with whom I, you know. Well, it’s probably because of age. But I say, well, coming back to this ward, I think it was just the last straw, at some point I say: what for. No-no-no/ I even wondered, I say yes, maybe, indeed – take up a course, take a course or do some studies generally in another field. Maybe something, maybe change the profession altogether, right?

I: Mm

N: But ... but later, mm, and at that moment, my grandfather got seriously ill.

I: Mm

N: And it was another turning point, that no, why should I, for example, quit and give up when I can really help. Once again, I say – I will try, it’s worth trying, I say, I finished school, I say, the work is cool, the work is nearby.

I: You are not far away.

N: I don’t commute far. So as I say, but we’ll probably come back to this, err, later and say, I’ll try. Well, I’ll try, right?

Adam reconstructs in detail the various emotions and threads related to being beaten by patients. This is a key moment – a classic turning point that could have started a completely new path in the narrator’s career (metamorphosis). The interlocutor, however, remains with the chosen biographical plan – he is helped by a situation outside the professional sphere, in which his education and experience prove to be a real help. In some ways, the experience of caring for his grandfather repairs the broken relationship between Adam and patients and rebuilds the narrator’s faith in being a nurse. This is a consequence of the biographical work done by Adam, who has to deal with a sense of disappointment,

as well as a loss of security and trust in the employer. In a broader perspective, the issue directly related to the topic of the chapter is not without significance. Adam decides to switch to the so-called contract, that is, a situation in which, as a sole proprietorship, he provides nursing services for the hospital. It is a financially more advantageous solution for the employer (who does not have to pay health and pension contributions) and to some extent for the employee (the net wage received is higher due to the lack of contributions):

I: Well, and as far as/ Me too, err/ I mean, I know, err, a bit although I won't say that I know well the situation related to this change that took place in the health service and with this, err, the appearance of, err

N: Contract possibilities.

I: Contract possibilities. How would you assess it? Because probably most people in Poland assess it positively.

N: I mean, I'll tell you this: there is definitely fear here. This is something new. I mean, with us, I still think that such activity, I'm not saying that a lot of people (unclear), only generally – setting up your own business, even sole proprietorships, just... all the more here in this environment. I think, in big cities, it may be different. It is maybe more developed and so on, err, it is fear and anxiety. I say, at the moment/ I have been on a contract since 2011, that is, three years.

I: Mm

N: Three years have passed since I've been on a contract. Before me there were already people, it wasn't, they were individual people, I don't know, maybe four people who were a year ago on this contract. We talked with them, err, we asked – what does it look like? Well, nobody will tell you that it's cool, it's great, I earn so much and so on. It is just/ It's like this and that, I work, I earn, enough for me. These are just, err, general statements that simply give you something to-to-to think about.

I: Yes.

N: I say, I thought about it, about this situation, a good month. About this decision: what to do. Whether to switch to a contract or remain full-time employed. The last days like this before, err, before the decision was made, it really was – you did not sleep at night: what to do. What are the pros, what are the cons? What will I gain? What am I losing?

I: Mm

N: Well, because you gain and you lose, something for something, unfortunately. And I say, okay, you live only once, you can try, let's see. I say, one can/ we are both working. At this point. It would be a different situation if only one of us worked. It would be risky: I have a contract today, I don't have it tomorrow.

I: Mm

N: It is also like that. Well, the more that it was already known that the contract will be only, the first one will be signed only for half a year. Well, all the more so. And I don't know what after this half-year, how-how-how this. Well, so we went, I say, well, three such people were the first who tried, and later it was a little better. Well, we already went about 10 then. Of 150 people who/ About 150 people who worked full-time, nurses. It was something like, well, well, we are going, we will try, there are 10 people, well, I think that the management will not sack us out from day to day, after so many years of work – so, such criteria that we chose, most of us. For sure. Certainly such criteria one chose... protective shield. That's what it can be called.

I: Mm

N: Well, this security, that we've known each other, we've worked so many years and we are staying. And so we signed the contracts and that was it. Later, the contracts were extended for three years. They are lasting until today. Still. And I say, there were different issues, well-well, issues, well, there were different issues with the management. There was also a crisis in this hospital, the management changed, the debt, God knows what, because it was their fault, blaming nurses again, employed nurses, contracted nurses, there was a conflict in general, at some point, there was a conflict- / There were 18 people who were on a contract.

I: Mm

N: And a conflict arose that we – the contracted, are taking hours, taking the work, taking it, and that the debt results from our, from our contracts.

I: Mm

N: Only no one looked at the fact that all the doctors were on contracts. There was no fault in the doctors' environment, it was only in our environment.

I: Mm

N: Nursing. But later-later-later somehow it was quite calm, calm, it went away.

Departing here from the elements of the method of analyzing autobiographical narrative interviews, I will focus on the topic of the consequences of introducing a characteristic element of the market environment into the public healthcare system. From the biographical perspective of Adam's case, it is a solution which clearly improves the financial situation of the narrator and his family. From other parts of the interview (see Chapter XIV), we know that the interlocutor had experienced poverty, especially during adolescence. Among other things, that is why he uses the example of his children as a contrast set to present the scale of his material advancement, which is directly related to the decision to change the ways of employment. In a broader sense, which takes into account the systemic aspect of the appearance of contracts, we can see that this is a characteristic of the market logic shift of costs from the employer

to the employee. The essence of work does not change – it is the distribution of tangible and intangible costs that looks different. From the moment of transition to self-employment, it is Adam's responsibility to insure himself and pay health contributions. It is also a situation encouraging one to abstain from holidays and sick leave (in the new formal and legal situation these are periods for which Adam simply does not receive a salary – he invoices the hospital only for the period of his work). So we can conclude that in exchange for an increase in revenue, the narrator gets rid of a number of employee rights which are the basis of the classic relationship between an employer and an employee. We are not able to assess the scale of the consequences (positive and negative) which the decision made by Adam brings in the long run – we can, however, note that while this is an attractive solution in the context of individual profits, it is also associated with increased tension at work. The conflicts in the team required Adam (and other people working on contracts) to be flexible and adapt to the expectations of full-time employees:

N: As I say, I work in the youth ward. We are on a contract/ three of us started on a contract, they immediately introduced the contract in the ward. We didn't have a problem with the other people who worked full time. We even got to this, even, err, our superior, we got to the point that, for example, we, as the contracted ones, although we shouldn't do it, maybe today I will, mm, one day someday, someone may say that someday we will regret what we had done. We just shook on an agreement that we stopped doing the holiday hours, night hours, that we work only at weekends/ err, weekdays.

I: Mm

N: Working during the week in psychiatry and working at weekends or nights – this is like chalk and cheese.

I: Mm

N: Because it looks like that, unfortunately.

I: It's more difficult, I understand, the one at weekends and at nights, right?

N: I mean, it's easier. It is much easier because if the patient goes to sleep, you have/ all you need to take care of are the potential admissions. Well, but it is, but I say, ok, so that there was a good atmosphere in the ward, that there would be no quarrel, that there would be no tension, that we the contracted had joined.

I: Mm

N: Well, there are three of us, we are in the minority, unfortunately, let's face it. Mm, we joined them. Well, but of course, at some point, we were the bad ones, like everywhere, right? But, as I say, you know, somehow I don't regret the decision that I switched to this contract three years ago, three and a half years ago.

Perhaps a good summary here will be recalling another quote from the interview in which Adam summarizes the conversation with his supervisor:

Well, I say, and to this day I work, work, as I say, recently we even talked at work and my superior asked me such a question, I don't know what he had in mind to this day, although I asked him. I say, listen, Marcin, will you finally tell me what you had in mind? Would I change jobs, no? I say listen, you know work? It is not difficult to change it. It is only difficult to earn well even in this job, right. I say, I'm not complaining yet, I'm on a contract, I work for myself, so far I'm not complaining. I don't know what will happen in a year. When my contract ends, when the management talks to us, maybe then I will tell you that I'm really changing, because at the moment what I have is enough for me. And... That's it. I don't know what I really/ we were still laughing about this the day before yesterday when I was at work.

I would like to draw attention to one important issue raised by the narrator, which illustrates well the change occurring in the healthcare system not only in the context of the systemic transformation symbolically rooted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The introduction of various mechanisms related to the market logic may rather be considered (especially in the third decade after the change of the system) as a consequence of the globalization processes (on the other hand, is transformation itself not one of these processes?). The sense of this change would be visible in underlining the element absent in previous system solutions – uncertainty. The work of a male nurse (but also a doctor or female nurse) in addition to different types of workload had one important feature – stability of employment guaranteed by the employer, that is, the state. Particularly after 1989 and the dramatic rise in unemployment affecting the whole country, the former job in the public sector was extremely attractive. In this context, Adam's account shows that the situation is now quite the opposite (of course, in the case of people working on a contract) – job security is not ensured at all, and the main gain, in this case, is a significant increase in income.

Ada's case

The fourth interview selected for analysis is the case of Ada, a medical technician working in the same hospital as Adam. Born in 1963, the second oldest child among five offspring and has spent almost all her life in a small city in central Poland. When Ada is seven years old, her father dies, and the grandmother becomes the proper family caretaker (and also the biographical guardian of Ada). Ada finishes a trade school preparing for the profession of a seamstress and at the age of 18, she immediately starts working in a psychiatric hospital:

N: Primary school, trade school. After trade school, I went to work, very early. So, I was 18, I completed this trade school, err, and I went to work straight away. It was my first job, it was the time when it was very hard. I couldn't be employed in my profession, it was also because it was the time of Martial Law.

I: Mm

N: It was just imposed then. So they ceased, they weren't hiring new workers, err, but by the skin of my teeth, I got a job in a hospital. And the first thing I did in the hospital was the hospital orderly training. And that was it, all these years, well, well, coming back to the story then I got, I got married, I gave birth to my first child. Then I had the second child. And so, I've spent so many years in hospital.

In the first, interrupted part of the interview, Ada describes the next stages of her life. She adds to her history a two-year trip to Wrocław (most probably at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s), which was due to the work of her husband – a forester by profession. The return was associated with the death of her mother and the birth of her son. Ada couldn't get used to living elsewhere. We can also guess that the professional plans of her husband, who set up his own company around that time, had changed. After a rather enigmatically outlined life history, Ada opens up “narratively” only after being asked about choosing a trade school, and not a secondary school:

I: Mhm. I'll ask you, as if, actually I don't know, what made you choose a trade school and not to try to go to a secondary school.

N: I mean, frankly speaking, I think that you also weren't sure when you finished primary school, where to/ what you would like to be. It seems to me, it was my mum's decision. I guess she chose it because you graduate from school with a certain profession. Err, I think, it was important to start work as soon as possible and help mum, it was also/ I faced the decision, you know well, I had to I had to be obedient, no way, it wasn't like today that a child says: I have my own opinion, I'd like to go to and/ It was different back then. Especially that we also had to help mum, you know. It wasn't that easy and maybe it wasn't a job of my dreams, as I'd be working in this job today., But, I never have, apart from the training period and completing the school, I have never worked in this job. I've never seen myself in it, today I sometimes sew something, but only for myself. I've never pictured myself in this job (pause 2s). That's why I didn't continue it. And later life went on, yeah. I think... maybe I didn't want to, maybe, mm, I wasn't ready to leave W. It was also, it was why I didn't continue my education.

I: But, I understand that you found a job here.

N: Err, well, thanks to my mum, because my mum worked in a hospital. And it was just in such times/ they weren't hiring new workers. I found it in such a way that the manager himself offered it to me, I mean my mum organized it.

And, I brought the demand for a new worker to the employment office myself, a vacancy for a cleaner. It was a vacancy for a cleaner. And after a year, I took a course to become a hospital orderly.

I: Were there such training courses in hospital, or/

N: It was an away training. You had to, in the past, it was like... we were the right hand of a nurse, we did everything, you know, a hospital orderly. We were responsible for taking care of patients, as it used to be in the past. Just after the war, when I didn't work yet, there were so-called assistants. They had the same training as we had to become an orderly, so-called hospital orderly. It was, well. It looked like this: a nurse came, we were interested in/ we were responsible for taking care of patients, looking after them, their hygiene and also cleaning the room. Well, these were such additional duties. It is still so, although today we are, we are called differently.

I: And what are you called? (laughter)

N: (laughter) Well, you wouldn't like to/ Now the manager converted us from hospital orderlies to, err, caretakers.

I: I see, so a bit/

N: Well, well, he's put us into a different category. Well, allegedly I am still a hospital orderly, I am still paid for this job, but I am a caretaker.

Ada, by going to a trade school, implements the institutional pattern of action imposed by her mother, who expects help from her daughter, mostly by starting to work quickly. At the beginning of the 1980s, this is guaranteed by acquiring a profession. However, this opportunity structure closes just as Ada finishes school. Information about the lack of admission ("they weren't hiring new workers") refers to the period of Martial Law (Ada mentions this in another part of the interview). In retrospect, it is difficult to verify the information about the suspension of recruitment for work (perhaps this was due to the limiting of the opposition by the PPR authorities). Nevertheless, the job Ada gets being urged and directly helped by her mother seems to be a great opportunity for a young girl. The narrator sees the potential risk which was associated with going to work in accordance with the acquired profession, and maybe that is why implementing the externally imposed pattern ends after years with Ada adopting a biographical action plan, which in her case is working in a hospital. A comprehensive summary of the narrator's biographical experience is another issue. Not having too much room here for conducting an extensive analysis, it is worth noting that the interlocutor in the further part of the interview devotes a lot of space to her relationship with her husband and non-professional activity.

Returning to the topic of work, Ada's case shows changes in a broader perspective than transformation processes. The narrator enters the institution of a psychiatric hospital in the early 1980s and has been observing its transformation

over the past three decades. Compared to the narrative of Hanna and Adam, Ada's account has the most cross-sectional character. Also, the interlocutor presents the insights of an employee who has a low position in the hospital's occupational structure. This, in turn, makes this experience unique – a person who throughout all this period has a close relationship with patients and treatment methods:

N: Maybe it was also difficult for me at the beginning, and there was the time I complained to my mum that I didn't want to work. Because, the first, the first ward which I got was a restless ward, and it was very big, there were 75 patients and all of them were aggress-aggressive.

I: Mm.

N: Obviously the conditions were terrible, worse than/ Now, the very drugs. Back then there were only two drugs. Haloperidol and scopolamine. There weren't any. And they were used to pacify patients. Now there are a lot of drugs, it's known medical restraint is not in much use now. A patient must be really aggressive, back then, patients were often tied up.

I: Mm.

N: Nowadays the hospital looks completely different, it's colorful. In the past there were bars on the windows, every section/ every section was locked, err, you had to go to a section or to a ward, there were so-called three sections: a restless section, a working section and there were patients who went to work on the hospital site. Because in the hospital grounds there used to be a kind of a farm. So, there were patients who went during their therapy to work there, you know. And the restless section was a completely locked section.

Like Adam, Ada first experiences a crisis related to the hardships. We can only guess that again the mother, who knows the daughter's manager, convinces the narrator to stay at work. Without much information, however, we can try to interpret what appears immediately after information about conversations with the parent. The work in a psychiatric hospital resembled another total institution, that is, a prison. The strict division into wards, the physical threat from patients and violent methods of controlling them translated into a sense of threat. Additionally, the organization of space did not help in the situation – bars, door locks, strict control created difficult conditions not only for patients, but also for employees. This in turn translated into the creation of a kind of community based on similar, extreme experiences:

I: And, and you, as I get it, you were appointed to work in one of these wards?

N: From time to time I was sent to a different ward. And it used to be like this, that if there was the need we went to other wards. It didn't matter if you were a woman or a man, you went to the restless ward to work.

I: Mm. And you regularly took care of the patients.

N: All of us did. We did everything, also tied them up. Also tied them up (*laughter*). Everything.

I: Mm.

N: I still remember, till today.

I: Mm.

N: So, you see, it's not easy work as you might expect.

It might seem that the changes highlighted by the narrator with the phrase “colorful hospital” should be assessed by her as positive. This is actually the case, but only in relation to the patient’s perspective. Ada is much more critical regarding her position. She refers in her comments to both the organization of the working time, the work of individual departments, the range of measures which can be used to calm patients. In this context, what appears in the first quote and which, at first glance, seems to be a positive assessment of changes, turns out to be a somewhat inverse statement. Ada believes that there has been a dangerous imbalance for medical staff. Importantly, the narrator introduces the perspective of employees who are between the doctor and the patient. It seems that one could risk the assumption that in her opinion it is the middle and lower staff in the structure that are losing due to the changes, in comparison to doctors and patients:

N: And now I say, well... well, I don't know how to tell you this (*laughter*). These changes entirely, all this, it is bad both for the patients and for the staff. Everything which has happened, these changes which have been introduced. Well, I preferred it the previous way, those, mm, this this, all this/ The whole, err, organization, mm, also for the patients, they used to have more activities, patients cooperated more with us, more than now. Now, the patients are... so... well, I don't know how to explain it to you.

I: As if you were explaining it to a child.

N: As if to a child (*laughter*). Nowadays, a patient has rights, doesn't he?

I: Mm.

N: A patient demands from us. We have no right to demand anything from a patient because a patient is ill. He may do to us whatever, whatever he wants. We have no rights. Today we have to wait until a patient really deserves to be under medical restraint. And he may do really a lot of harm to you in the meantime. But, it is the doctor's decision, who has to come, see what is going on and then decide if the patient/ can be tied up. We are less safe, I would put it like this, less safe. In the past, it was a nurse on duty who decided. She took the,

she knew what was going on in the ward, she reacted quicker to eliminate the danger for other patients or for the staff, so there was a quick decision, and only then a duty doctor came, he recognized the case, yeah. But, he had to come, it's different now. At present, as I say, so many unpleasant situations that took place here... and-and... for me it is just, what has been done, it's just/ there are wards, where they still keep, but it's not the specificity of every psychiatric ward, where, well, different people are admitted. And the danger is at a different level. Well, lack of security, lack of safety. We avoid security guards, we were told about the specificity of such hospitals where they are necessary, well, there are certain rules, well, we don't say we would like to keep people in cages, or so. But, to make a patient a bit... to make it just the same/ patients have got the rights and the staff as well.

In a way, in Ada's case, the situation she experienced at the beginning of her hospital work repeats. For her, the physical threat from patients is a real trajectory potential, which, as we know from Adam's report, can be activated even in the case of an experienced employee.

As has already been said, the narrator's experience allows her to reflect on a long time perspective. It is also a chance for the researcher to look at the process of institutional and structural changes and their consequences translating into the daily struggles of individuals:

I: I see. And when did it start to change? Can you remember it?

N: You know, well...

I: More or less.

N: (*pause 2s*) I think it started from the manager T., it was ...mm... in '90, in '98-9, maybe then. Well, the changes started slowly, you know.

I: Mm.

N: And they were already assigned, various wards were created.

I: Was it at the time of the health service reform?

N: Yes, yes, yes. It started to go all wrong. We just got the shaft, excuse my language, it was about the money. And they started to give us less, the same as now, that's right, very slowly. Yet, Mr. T, the manager, err, so I say they introduced, a drug rehab ward was created, the addiction ward was specially financed. It still exists. And it has the highest expense, everyone knows there isn't enough, they finance themselves. Err, but despite all the staff / he took care of the staff and you know. And later it went one by one, there still was the manager P who actually was the real manager of the hospital. Because later we had, before, we had doctor G, who didn't manage at all, we only heard: learn, use the funds to learn and in fact all nursing associate professionals ended up with MAs. I think it is absolutely. And we forgot that a patient needs an ordinary nurse to take care of him, to wipe his

nose and so on, because there are such situations, or just to clean. Today, we are far from this, today we just wait for a cleaner to do it. It's very good to make a list of orders (*not clear*), but to take care of the patient and go – it is disgusting.

I: Mm.

N: Today we have hospital orderlies, everybody wants it, because it is, really, whether in a general or our hospital – as soon as we see it, today everybody would like to have an extra, err, person to do the work for them. In the past it was a nurse's job to wash patients, make beds, err, care for a patient, feed if necessary. And who does it today? Nobody. Nobody (*pause 3s: a talk with the daughter – 15s*) I think that the reform and all that followed was a disadvantage.

Ada's theoretical commentary above shows the subsequent stages of the reform, which on the one hand (in the narrator's opinion) deprived the hospital of funds. On the other, it introduced a new institutional pattern of expectations based on the requirement to educate staff. As a side note, we can see that the ability to capture a comparative perspective – in this case showing the narrator's reflections on the economic and social change is the undoubted advantage of the autobiographical narrative interview. The limitations and the facade of the solution imposed by the management have become the target of the narrator's further criticism, which shows that while the medical staff of middle level (e.g., nurses) had real access to the realization of this task, the lower one was practically deprived of this possibility.⁴ In fact, this allows Ada to introduce the thread, which from the point of view of this chapter is perhaps the most interesting one – the gradual degradation of the lowest personnel. It was a mechanism based primarily on revoking the status of the professional group involved in the treatment process:

I: I just want to ask you, as you've said for all these years you've been doing different things. I mean, I just want to know, if the duties change as you are moved in this structure. Or whether it's only the specificity of the patients that is different, but your duties stay the same?

N: Mm no, I'm saying as an orderly my responsibility was to take care of a patient, help a nurse with the surgeries, too. And dead bodies, I used to do different things there. Because it was my duty. And now, err, cleaning and cleaning, and cleaning.

I: Mm.

N: Now, at the moment we are as cleaning ladies.

⁴ This thread can also be found in Chapter X, which mentions the case of Czesia – a teacher teaching in postgraduate nursing studies. To be able to stay on the labor market, she keeps doing new studies and obtains certificates.

Ada, in the further part of her account, extends not so much the scope of duties as the description of the role of a medical technician, which in her opinion once (before the changes) consisted in building trust relationships with patients. It is particularly important for her in the context of the previously discussed security-related threads. In turn, for the research reflection, Ada's experience is extremely valuable, showing the complex processes and mechanisms which constitute the creation of the hospital social world (in this case – psychiatric), which combines the interests, responsibilities, and the agency of various professional and social groups. The issue of finance was also important in the criticism of change, which was particularly sensitive in the case of lower staff:

I: Actually, I've wanted to ask about the money, well, you've said it started after '99/

N: They were taking it away from us slowly and gradually/

I: coming down/

N: and finally, they liquidated us. We are separate medical workers, it was also illegal, but unfortunately, nobody could support us, and the manager decided we were not medical workers, so they had to change it. And it was very quick (*not clearly*), obviously people need to work. Some of them have been working here for too many years to look for work somewhere else now and maybe if the majority had gathered at that time, we could have won and she would have had to give us everything back. As it was all illegal. There are many illegal aspects which are practised only inside our hospital. Well, probably the manager is allowed to cha/ make some changes. Although according to the law he shouldn't. But, everything is done so quietly.

In the above quote, we can observe how top-down changes (though as Ada emphasizes having a local dimension) affect not only the financial condition of the affected staff, but above all affect the group's agency. On the one hand, we see some uncertainty related perhaps to the insufficient legal knowledge regarding the legality of the management's actions. On the other hand, Ada shows that there was a potential for resistance, but due to the lack of self-organization (later in the interview she talks about the passive attitude of the trade unions), this potential did not manage to get transformed into collective action. The narrator ends the theme of work in the hospital with a depressing reflection:

There have never been, err, people here who would speak in favor of the lower staff. We have always been, and these relocations and our money was taken from us. They've always called it "the hospital's saving," but the ones who are disadvantaged most are the lowest staff, who earn the least.

Conclusions

Due to the choice of cases in accordance with the logic of maximum contrast, I was able to capture in the chapter the perspective of individuals being in radically different positions, also within the structure of the social world of the Polish medicine. The differences in origin, education, place of residence, or social position have left their mark on the professional careers of Hanna, Dobrochna, Adam, and Ada. However, the main emphasis was placed on the reconstruction of the impact of changes related to the introduction of market logic elements to the aforementioned healthcare system.

It should be emphasized, of course, that it was not possible to capture the entirety of the reforms. This was a consequence of their complexity and, above all, resulted from various directions which subsequent activities and changes within the healthcare system were taking. Starting from the first decisions to “open” a completely public system to the interactions with private entities, through a number of organizational and institutional reforms, to the expansion of the sphere of private healthcare – the area which could be covered by the study is simply huge. In this context, the only sensible solution was to entrust the material and follow the biographical experiences of the interlocutors.

With regard to all four accounts, I would like to emphasize the topic which was not necessarily clearly marked in the analyses above. From a thirty-year perspective, and based on the biographical material, it is a very difficult task to trace specific transformation processes. This is not just about issues related to the factual reconstruction of subsequent ordinances, laws or decisions of the management of specific hospitals. It seems even problematic to say that the modernization of the Polish health care is a transformational phenomenon. The further away from the symbolic date of 1989, the more clearly it can be seen that at least some of the processes are simply global in nature, and Poland is just one of the next places where the market logic begins to involve the spheres once traditionally reserved for state action.

However, this is not only connected with establishing new relations in the field of economics, in other words, the stake of the reform is not only money. It seems that one of the key issues is the reconfiguration of power relations, which takes place at both the macro and micro social levels. In the first case, as it was pointed out a moment ago, the state begins to give its prerogatives to the market – partly it is related to pharmaceutical concerns or private consortia and treatment companies, partly it simply concerns the lack of agency at the level of setting new directions of the reform. A bit like in Beck’s risk society, the system you are trying to manage is so complicated that every decision has unforeseen consequences. In turn, the micro-level is becoming an arena for games between various interest groups – in the context of the analyzed cases, it is, *inter alia*,

relationships with hospital management, supervisors, or colleagues employed on a different type of contract. In this context, we can find different aspects in an interview with Hanna, whose history shows how much pressure is put on young doctors, and whose source is not at all in professional work, but in the effectiveness of routine and self-management practices.

Finally, it is worth posing the question about the costs of the reforms (whether they are considered as part of transformation or globalization processes). All four accounts are the stories of people who are not directly involved in decision-making processes. Hanna, Dobrochna, Adam and Ada need to develop adaptive strategies which will allow them to make the best use of the emerging opportunity structures. The stake in every case is maintaining control over their own lives.

Jacek Burski, Katarzyna Waniek

CHAPTER XII

“TWIST OF FATE”: DECLINING AND RISING LINES OF OCCUPATIONAL CAREER IN THE BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES OF TWO ENGINEERS

Hubert:

The company [a large state-owned construction company] said it was cutting our wages [...] So keeping in mind that my wife was jobless, our baby was already born and I myself had hardly any time for my private life, I worked non-stop and with my 8-year experience, all possible certificates et cetera. I earned 1200 zlotys a month... /I decided to look for some other job. At that time I sent out 200 applications, I was invited for 2 interviews and received no answer from the remaining 200, since it was generally a hard time, and there was no work, 2 interviews and I found out that they had been looking for someone with lower qualifications [...] So – hmm – I decided that something should be done about it, \and there was no other alternative, because there were simply no jobs, no other solution /and so I decided to go abroad. [...] At the time when a man just works all day long, he does not see his child, so you just had to play somehow... *vabanque* and there was no way out. So I took this parental leave, bought a plane ticket and went to Ireland/

Robert:

[...] I started earning good money, and she [the narrator's wife] was also doing well, so we could afford to change the flat and pay off the mortgage quickly, because nowadays it is nice to show off that you have a flat, a car, and some other things, it doesn't mean that you have [...] that your status is ok, because you just have to look at the loans you have taken out and for how many years you will be paying them off.

My parents had a lot of these holidays, in fact, I did as well, but we went away for two weeks, maximum three, and I always remember that these were very economical trips, because it was difficult to collect so much money during these

10 months of work so as to splash out during the holidays. Now, with my children, it has actually become a standard that we go away twice in the summer, plus some long weekends, and twice in the wintertime skiing somewhere.

The year 1989, all these ownership changes in the country. And here I think that I did all right in these transformations, even very well – I owe myself a little, a bit of luck, that I was somewhere at the right moment and time and took advantage of this opportunity. But, the way I see it, it is the generation of my parents that has been terribly mistreated by these changes, even I, working in this bank, Universal Economic Bank, as part of some, err, nationalization of this bank, as an employee I got, err, stocks and maybe that money was not great, but somehow it was enough for my first second-hand car, right? And my folks, who had worked for quite a few decades, err, in the previous epoch, got absolutely nothing, except that now they get some pensions, from which they try to live, err, a better or worse life. So, the perspectives of those changes that have happened, well, I can also see myself as a beneficiary.

In this chapter two life histories of Polish engineers (Hubert¹ and Robert) born in 1972 will be put together and compared.² In doing so, we apply open logic of the theory building strategy in which either old and new data or materials coming from different collections (projects) may be confronted. Consequently, the emergent theory may be supplemented, backed up, and respecified (Corbin, Strauss 1991: 451–452, Riemann, Schütze 1987: 11–12). The two life histories are very similar in terms of their family background, social origin, cultural capital, (foreign language) competences, course of education, occupation, and current civil status (both are happily married and have children). They both entered the labor market in swirled conditions of the transformation process in the late 90s marked with modernization and globalization. But – and this is what makes their experiences significantly different – Hubert’s line of occupational development gets involved in a systematic decline of large state-owned enterprises in Poland

¹ The interview was conducted by Katarzyna Waniek in May 2009. It belongs to the collection of “EuroIdentities – the evolution of European identity: using biographical methods to study the development of European identity” project implemented as part of the 7th Research Framework Program of the European Commission. Originally the case was discussed in: K. Kaźmierska, A. Piotrowski, K. Waniek (2012), “Transnational Work in the Biographical Experiences of Traditional Professions and Corporate Executives: An analysis of Two Cases,” in: G. Gray, R. Miller (eds), *The Evolution of European Identities. Biographical Approaches*, Palgrave Macmillan UK.

² The power of contrastive comparison was discussed by Kaja Kaźmierska in the *Methodological note*.

and, therefore, leads to a sort of a dead-end, while Robert's career is rather embedded in global changes and emergence of new market opportunities for certain products and services. Although we may say that for both storytellers the basic frame of their biographical experiences were very rapid changes resulting from the introduction of the capitalist economy, still it will be argued here that it is nothing more than a quirk of fate (being in the right place, at the right time and knowing the "right" people) which favors and lifts some people and marginalizes and humiliates others. Consequently, the social action paradigm, as well as some symbolic interaction approaches (Riemann, Schütze 1991) will be questioned here. Hence, our aim is to show that a course of events in one's life is not always intentionally and rationally planned, but in many cases it is a result of a weave of (outer) frame conditions and coincidences that may either destroy or seriously limit one's development line. Or, contrarily, it may suddenly open new opportunity structures and give one the chance to "spread his or her wings." We draw on some deliberations of Piotr Filipkowski who, in his quasi-philosophical essay, concludes that "they appear as if out of nowhere and hit on the spot, though not always individually. Seen in the perspective of an autobiographical narrative, they show life as a response to, ipso facto, random events" (Filipkowski 2018: 48). To put it simply, there are a great number of (outer) contingent events in everyday life which are beyond the control of an individual, which operate for good or bad in one's biography. In our understanding, they are hidden or unnoticed mechanisms of social and biographical processes. In this light, an attempt will be made – as in many previous chapters in this book – to strongly oppose stigmatizing classifications present in the dominating public discourse in which "it is your own fault" if you are unable to cope with the new capitalist or (post)modern or global reality. Moreover, a certain tendency in the liberal and left-wing media described by Jerzy Stachowiak according to which the determinants of one's success (career development) are exclusively located "inside" the subject, and not in "external" factors (2013) will be criticized. We will thus invalidate the assumption that if only an individual is equipped with a certain set of features, his or her way to prosperity and well-being is open.

After 1989, as Andrzej Piotrowski shows, a specific "hope-based pattern of thinking" prevailed, carrying the message that systemic transformation as "the abolition of anti-order brings order in itself, because it simply restores it" (Piotrowski 1997: 329). The image of the order was imported from the West often uncritically and unreflectively, that is, with no regard to the political, historical, and cultural differences, or the symbolic constructs of collective identity (Piotrowski 1997: 328).³ It was based on the often illusory conviction

³ For instance, Marek Ziółkowski claims that: "After 1989 Polish society became definitely more an »imitative« or »mimetic« society than before in relation to the

promoted in all the countries of the Soviet bloc after its collapse, that the free-market economy guarantees success to all undertakings based on its principles. In the public discourse, the systemic transformation was presented primarily as a collective process of change associated with the emergence of new creative possibilities, and with the unveiling of previously stifled potentials of own initiative and entrepreneurship. Certainly, for many people the sequences of events in life was of such kind, but for dozens of them that period was associated with the experience of disorder and suffering. As shown by a large body of empirical data in the form of autobiographical narrative interviews,⁴ individual biographical processes interwoven in different configurations, and with different strength of experiences of political, social, and cultural reality at that time, often led to a sense of disorder – chaos of values, interpretation schemes, or orientation systems. For dozens of people it was – if we recall Émile Durkheim’s reflections on anomic suicides – the crisis situation understood as a disturbance of balance which always appears when there are major changes in society – regardless of whether they are caused by a sudden increase or an unexpected cataclysm (cf., Durkheim 1952). Unexpectedly, the orientation structures changed, the values which had been underestimated or suppressed, such as: own initiative, competitiveness, economic success, or continuous development, became the normative rules and constraints organizing social life. As Marek Czyżewski showed, “economizing” rhetoric and “economizing” legitimation were triumphing (cf., Czyżewski 2009a: 91). They spread to all fields of social activity (including family and school) and almost “sanctified” being entrepreneurial, creative, and resilient. The routine methods of conduct known up to that time proved to be unreliable, the horizons of expectations vague, the mechanisms governing the world of everyday life unobvious (they ceased to fulfil their nominal, regulating function). This led to growing and encompassing new areas of social life anomie, which meant chaotic social processes associated with deep cracks in the world of values and expectations, disorientation in everyday life and weakening of social ties. In sum, this was the period in which a sudden social change shook or seriously destroyed the existing

societies of the Western civilization circle” (Ziółkowski 2015: 250). However, it remains debatable whether the idea was right.

⁴ This thesis is also confirmed in the collection of the autobiographical narrative interviews gathered as part of the project *The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in Memory and Biographical Experiences of People Born between 1945–1955. Sociological Comparison Based on the Biographical Comparison* by the Polish-German Scientific Foundation (PNFN 2012-03) implemented in 2012–2015 by the Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science (cf., Kaźmierska, Schütze 2013).

symbolic universe making it possible to give sense to the everyday reality and thus outlined the framework conditions for the emergence of collective and individual trajectory processes.

But still, those who – as Magdalena Nowicka emphasizes⁵ – have not accepted a vision of emancipation embracing being an efficient, creative, reflective, creatively developing individual “are brutally excluded by theorists” (2014: 239). At the same time, she refers to the words of Manuel Castells, who states in an impertinent tone:

Changes are not automatic. They result from the will of social actors, as guided by their emotional and cognitive capacities in their interaction with each other and with their environment. Not all individuals involve in the process of social change, but throughout history there are people who do, thus becoming social actors. The others are free-riders as the theory would put it. Or, in my own terminology, selfish parasites of history-making (Castells 2013: 300).

Further, Nowicka writes that Polish reflection (including the sociological one) “reveals the elitism of post-colonial emancipation” contrasting it with the post-Soviet mentality of the “non-subject” mass and thus “divides society into winners and losers, and ultimately into rational, adaptable ones and inept, unable to adapt numpties” (Buchowski 2008: 101 as cited in Nowicka 2014: 243).

The minimally contrasting comparison of the two cases selected in the process of the adductive inquiry (Schütze nd: 4–5):⁶ Hubert and Robert (both born in 1972 and both engineers by occupation) will verify and criticize these simplified and discrediting assumptions. It is worth noticing that they belong to the “in-between” cohort distinguished in the research assumptions of the *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland* project. This means that particularly at the level of secondary and higher education they rather benefited from the transition in terms of unideologized curricula, but at the same time they were still brought up in the expectation of stability on the labor market, which appeared to be more and more difficult. Although they entered their adulthood after the symbolic moment of transition, their memory and understanding of reality before this passage are still biographically grounded by individual experiences.

⁵ Her considerations are placed within the frame of the Eastern European variant of postcolonialism.

⁶ In the method of autobiographical narrative interview, individual cases are analyzed not only through the prism of referring their fragments to the whole, but also to other materials – often derived from other sources or thematically similar research projects.

Hubert and Robert obtained a master's degree in engineering (civil engineering and computer sciences, respectively). They have acquired complex knowledge allowing them to apply mathematics and science to solve technical problems and meet practical needs of society. Their educational background is, therefore, connected with institutionalized patterns of activities implying orientations towards possible and comparable paths of their career in terms of clear, internationally ratifiable expectations and standards as to its development (rules for upgrading, standards of achievements, and criteria of failure). Moreover, regularity and predictability of work tasks, as well as a self-confidence grounded in a sense of validity of the acquired knowledge and competences, seem to form here a syndrome of values and expectations typical for the modern industrial society in its classical sense (see: Kaźmierska et al. 2012).

Both were raised in families in which "being an engineer" was associated with a higher social status and open opportunity structures (regardless of the political or economic system) (see: Part 3). It is common knowledge – not only in Poland – that not everyone can cope with engineering studies based on the need to acquire scientific knowledge, that they require special skills and effort. They started working in engineering positions just after graduation and began to develop technical skills, accumulate experience, and acquire professional competences. In this respect the initial phase of their career is very similar and seems to be typical for young engineers (see: Hermanns 1984). But, due to a specific constellation of social and economic conditions (resulting from transformation, modernization, and globalization processes) their occupational career took a different turn in the early 2000s. Abstaining from any form of assessment, it can be said that Hubert has become somewhat "stuck" between the past and the present, while Robert has become the "emissary" of the future. Hubert had to constantly look back: at senior engineer colleagues, at established hierarchical relationships at work, old forms of management, which do not fit into the new market economy, and struggle with low earnings. This last factor – in the understanding of Harry Hermanns, which, based on 25 interviews with German engineers switching from full-time work to contracts⁷ (see Hermanns 1984, also Prawda 1987) – could have constituted the external factors blocking the development of his career. While Robert's biographical line was accelerated by success – the (unexpected) possibility to create, design, and develop something new (op. cit.).

⁷ In essence, this is a transition not only between types of employment, but also ways of organizing your own biography: between the logic of regular and permanent employment which offers long-term holding of posts and guaranteeing a sense of financial security and the logic of temporality, instability, uncertainty, and precariousness.

Both life histories illustrate the change which Richard Sennett observed in the field of the courses of professional life. He argues: "In work, a traditional career progressing step-by-step through the corridors of one or two institutions is withering; so is the deployment of a single-case set of skills through the course of a working life" (Sennett 1998: 22). Zygmunt Bauman's message is similar, emphasizing that: "other features than in the past are conducive to life success: not consistency in proceedings, stubborn adherence to a predetermined goal, persistent specialization, gathering qualifications with a strong profile – but flexibility of interests and speed of changing them, adaptive flexibility, readiness to learn and the ability to forget what has already gone out of use." He also adds that the post-modern context favors "no specific identity" (Bauman 1993: 14).

Hubert's case

Hubert was born in B. (middle-size city in Upper Silesia) in 1972 and raised in a Polish town close to the Polish-Czechoslovakian border as the only child of his parents. He was mainly brought up by his grandparents,⁸ since his father – a civil engineer – was constantly busy with his work and often away on business trips and it was difficult for his mother to work⁹ and run the household alone. The narrator briefly comments on his grandfather who, coming from a typical Silesian family, "being a Pole refused to sign *Volkslist*, he chose to become a compulsory worker in Germany instead of a soldier of Wehrmacht." He was liberated by the American troops and could go to America, but he came back to Poland and never used the opportunity to migrate though he had such an option. "He followed his own rules and always wanted to come back to his homeland." Although Hubert does not allude to his grandfather in any other part of his story, he may be considered a symbolic figure shaping the narrator's attitude towards his own biography, as well as implicitly influencing his decision to continue his life in Poland and to effectively pursue his goals – not always easy but defined as worth the effort. Hubert gives two arguments supporting his choice. Firstly, when working abroad he was considering the alternative of permanent migration with the whole family. Both he and his wife came to the conclusion that they probably would have better chances for professional development in Poland and that for sure they would never get rid of the status of immigrants which would also stigmatize their daughter. Secondly, at the end

⁸ The role of grandparents in raising children – when both parents are involved in paid employment – is the motif of many of our life histories.

⁹ His mother graduated from secondary school of economics and worked in the economic department of plant management. Every day she had dozens of kilometers to commute to work.

of the interview Hubert declares that he has never considered leaving Poland, he is proud of his country – especially the people’s ability to sustain national identity in times of oppression and abolition of communism.

Hubert’s parents divorced when he was 16. As a teenager he attended Vocational Technical High School for Construction (entered into technical college in a field of building construction). Though high school was more prestigious, considering his difficult family situation, he decided to learn a trade. His mother, being alone, could hardly fulfil the children’s needs. That is why as a teenager Hubert started working during holidays, which those days was not that common in Poland. He tried to earn money for new clothes for each school year and paid for private English lessons (which appeared to be a very good investment in his future professional career), since at vocational school he was learning Russian and English, but at a very low level. At the same time, he received good training concerning other subjects especially mathematics, physics, and Polish. He recalls this period of education as very fruitful – all his classmates completed higher education. Although it was still the time of state socialism, the teachers knew how to distance themselves from the official ideology and implement true values – a quest for perfection and having idealistic goals in life.

Hubert decided to continue his education in the construction sector and chose a technical university in G., which was “of a good standard and was recognized as such across Poland as far as this profession was concerned.” From 400 accepted students only 40 remained in the second year. “I struggled to stay there\ . But, on the other hand, this was a challenge and you could feel like a man of worth because you were getting there somehow, you know.” For the second time the narrator stresses the value of education and satisfaction of acquiring exclusive knowledge. Its quality is measured by high standards – the effort that must be put into the process of learning and the applicability of knowledge in the future profession. Such a mode of education is based, to use Bernstein’s terms (Bernstein 1975), on a *strong classification* of contents and a *strong framing* of both the sequencing and pace of the contents’ acquisition. As the following narration demonstrates, knowledge in these fields of sciences, valid and applicable universally, is transmitted as basically de-contextualized and isolated from culture-specific patterns of communication.¹⁰

Throughout his studies, he continued the habit of working during holidays. After the first year, having student status, he worked for 2 months on a farm in a small village in England. It was his first contact with foreigners from all over Europe. He recalls it as a very interesting and pleasant time. However, due

¹⁰ This means that potentially an engineer will find a job abroad faster than a humanist.

to a lower than expected salary and poor living conditions he decided to give up this work earlier and come back to Poland via London where he did some sightseeing.

I came back to Poland with the attitude of never going abroad again, you know... because it was a waste of time, and my goal was to be serious, I should not go against the tide, expect others to always help me and prove, that some people owe me something or that I am just like other people who keep saying: "Because you are from the East," you know.

This is the first time in his account that Hubert introduces the topic of East Europeans' inferiority. It must have been a difficult experience if he decided not to go abroad again. This first work was defined as an unskilled student temporary job, yet he could not accept breaking the rules and being treated without respect. The motive of inferiority is further elaborated on in relation to his profession.

Although he planned not to work abroad for the following few years, the very next year, encouraged by a friend, he went to Germany. He had a housekeeping job in a vocational school for one month.

I myself was assigned to floor cleaning a second-year student –((smiling)), umm- because there was a shop floor which nobody was able to clean properly ((smiling)), uhm- it was all smudged in all possible directions, and while living in B. ((N.'s place of birth)) I worked at F. for a short period of time ((big automotive factory)), and I needed to know how to use certain cleaning agents and how to apply them to get rid of the problem, you know? [...] it turned out that I cleaned the floor in two hours and there were people who spent the whole week doing it, so the Germans were very pleased, especially that the headmaster would use the main corridor when entering the school, so \... I would start at 7 a.m., cleaned the floor for two hours, then the headmaster came and was delighted with what he saw, you know and then there were some other minor jobs... I picked up some new German vocabulary, because this language is very similar to English so I somehow managed to communicate after one month of cooperation with the Germans. But the work itself was over and I came back to Poland... I came to the conclusion that it makes no sense taking other jobs than the one you learned aaaaaand doing things that have nothing to do with your education is simply a waste of time. \... Those were different times in Poland, at that time people would leave for other countries due to big poverty in the country \ when you look back and think of it /people had nothing, they drove Fiat 126p [small and cheap, but hard-to-get, car manufactured under the license of Italian Fiat between 1970–2000], to have one was an achievement, right?... Therefore, therefore you would go there just to earn some money and you would take whatever popped up in the EU that did not want us within its borders at that time, you know. On the other hand – hmm- I –hmm- came to the conclusion that it was better to earn less and

learn something more field-oriented and connected with my learned profession, but in Poland//I don't know maybe I surpassed the time I was living in because all young people nowadays do like this. You know, they accept some internship or start working in the role they have been educated to take up.

In this passage, there is a very dense and multilevel argumentation concerning the narrator's project of developing his skills and defining his future profession. Although Hubert is a young man just after his second year of engineering, he starts reflecting on the problem that will accompany his future professional life – it is a tension between gained knowledge and high competence level and poor financial gratification. In Germany, he could earn good money for floor cleaning. While discussing the phase of his life he illustrates the economic disproportions (concerning everyday standards of life and wages) between Western and Eastern Europe in the 1990s (very similar even today). The argumentative commentary is very much similar to that of Julia (see Chapter X) who compares the money earned as a physical laborer in Germany with the “scraped up,” very low income of a white-collar worker in Poland. For both, it is connected with a sense of resentment and injustice.

He did this work as a student thus he could think in terms of a temporary suspension of his future professional status. Moreover, his previous experience helped him to do the job exceptionally well. Accumulating experience, developing skills in order to enrich the professional *know-how* has been one of the main features of his professional biography. “I – hmm – came to the conclusion that it was better to earn less and learn something more field-oriented and connected with my learned profession” (see Hermanns 1984). The description of the living conditions in Poland, expressed before this statement, reflects the whole complexity and maturity of Hubert's decisions in face of his future work experiences, as well as contemporary Polish transnational workers' attitudes towards working abroad.¹¹ He concentrates on broadening his education, professional experiences, and competences, on building new personal and professional networks with the intention of self-development. What is especially interesting in his case is the fact that he defines the situation of working abroad as not always guaranteeing opportunities for developing professional skills; therefore, following student holidays, he decided to work in Poland in order to learn something related with his future profession.

¹¹ In many migrants' life histories the motif of better income has prevailed over status and prestige and resulted in consent to downward mobility compared to one's social status in one's country of origin. Such motifs and mechanisms are strongly related to a so-called materialistic value orientation, whereas Hubert consciously distanced himself from such attitudes and represents a post-materialistic value orientation in the sense of Inglehart (1977) (Każmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011).

After graduating from Technical University with high grades he came back to his hometown B. in order to look for a job. Thanks to his friend's help and the good reputation of the technical university he graduated from, Hubert got a job in the power industry, in a big city in southern Poland.

I went for an interview and there was a big man sitting in a nice office and a nice suit... and the interview itself was quite short and he said: Who was your supervising professor?... And at that time there weren't that many courses of study that specialized in building and construction engineering. I said "It was Mr. – M., PhD," "Ahhh – he said – and what was your MA thesis about," I replied "This and that," "Ok., so come to work tomorrow.." and that would be it as for my job interview ((smiling)), because as a matter of fact only three or four students supervised by the mentioned scholar would pass the tests annually and became graduates of this technical university (that Hubert graduated from)) and they already knew the kind of people this scholar liked to work with and the kind of skills that those people mastered.

And another job interview proceeded as follows:

Conversation with the CEO there at BB. [new workplace] also looked like that, there was simply a question – err – like: [CEO's question;] "Polytechnic?," [narrator's answer:] "Yes," [CEO's question about the previous workplace;], "M.?" [Narrator's reply:] "Yes," "And where did you finish school?" he asks, I say "Vocational Technical High School for Construction in B." "Oh, did you have any internships with us?," "Yes," "Then come to work with us" ((CEO)).

Both job interviews show the specificity of the transition period – suspension between old forms of recruitment typical for state socialism with the criteria for assessing a potential employee, and the recruitment model "taken over" from the West.

A very detailed reconstruction of this interaction suggests that it must have been an important experience in Hubert's professional biography. It confirmed his project of professional development: when you follow goals which are not easy but defined as worth making an effort, this results in the appreciation of your professionalism. Moreover, Hubert contrasts this pattern of applying for a job with the Irish one that will be shown below.

Hubert was delegated for a year to a small town near the border of Germany. He worked there in a multinational environment, mainly with Germans and Americans, so he could learn professional English. He also met more experienced older Polish engineers there and, as Hubert says, he could "suck knowledge" from them. Then, he worked again as an engineer for the power industry company and had to commute by train at least 2,5 hours one way. Due to the economic crisis and salary cuts he had to quit

the job. He was hired by another construction company in his hometown, again learning new skills.

So I ended up in a team of construction workers... aaand when I think about it now I have to admit that I couldn't have chosen better, because you could learn a very good building trade... I mean you could join the two skills together – design and practice... umm, there were several older employees, I mean the managers were all 50 and older, and when a freshman of 28 like me came (I could learn a lot)...

After 2 years he was relocated on assignment to the Czech Republic to be a head of a workers' team at construction sites. Due to the lack of proper management and obstacles to visiting home he decided to come back to Poland and work in the company's headquarters. In the meantime, he got married. Then, he was offered a new job by one of his former bosses. Hubert worked as a head of construction workers' team at sport building sites and motorway infrastructure in southern Poland. He worked overtime, yet, some problems with salary payment appeared. Also, his wife was pregnant at that time.

The company [a large state-owned construction company] said it was cutting our wages [...] So keeping in mind that my wife was jobless, our baby was already born and I myself had hardly any time for my private life, I worked non-stop and with my 8-year experience, all possible certificates et cetera. I earned 1200 zlotys a month... /I decided to look for some other job. At that time I sent out 200 applications, I was invited for 2 interviews and received no answer from the remaining 200, since it was generally a hard time, and there was no work, 2 interviews and I found out that they had been looking for someone with lower qualifications [...] I do not know what was the point of that interview, probably only so that someone could tick off that someone came for the interview [...], because the job had already been taken... [...] So – hmm – I decided that something should be done about it, \and there was no other alternative, because there were simply no jobs, no other solution /and so I decided to go abroad. [...] / And err, and there was a problem because a 3-month notice in the company, right?... you could expect that this 3-month notice will be a disaster [...] I was the youngest manager, right? 32 years old, everyone else was under sixty, right? [...] There was such a generation gap, besides, young people were simply not allowed to do so, you had to be good to get this manager [...] And now, suddenly, this youngest one is leaving them, right? [...] So I said that in that case I would go on parental leave ((smiling)) aaand \... Because it is a painless way of leaving the company within two weeks. There is such a possibility// At the time when a man just works all day long, he does not see his child, so you just had to play somehow ... *vabanque* and there was no way out. So I took this parental leave, bought a plane ticket and went to Ireland/

The quoted passage illustrates clearly that because of the deteriorating and unsteady economic conditions (poorly paid, though highly qualified, job)

Hubert was no longer able to provide for his family and gradually lost control over the course of his daily life.¹² In another part of the interview he adds: "Well, we were in despair, because our bills were not paid." His autobiographical rendering reveals the piling up of difficulties resulting from a series of unfortunate outer events. Consequently, there is a systematically growing and irritating sense of powerlessness and disorientation (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]) in his everyday experiences. In an act of desperation, Hubert leaves his wife and a newborn child at home and goes abroad. Due to his proficiency in English and following the already beaten tracks,¹³ he intentionally chose Ireland, and excluded the UK keeping in mind the bad experiences of his first student job.

It must be noted here that for Hubert emigration was not an easy solution, but the ultimate way out of overwhelming external circumstances – a specific biographical trap: while working in his (requiring higher education) engineering profession, he could not support his family. If we look carefully at his hierarchy of values, it becomes clear that from the very beginning education is very important for him, since it gives high quality knowledge and competencies which enable him to improve his expertise in the field of engineering. Interestingly enough, Hubert decides to change jobs only when he can no longer stand poor living conditions or develop skills. He appreciates very much generational transmission of experiences which is rooted in the modern pattern of labor relations. In Margaret Mead's understanding (1975) these are defined as postfigurative, that is, authority is supported by wisdom and experience accumulated with age. He eagerly and quickly learns from others and in a relatively short period of time becomes a very good (but very low paid) engineer responsible for complex constructions.

At this point Hubert comments on the social history of the Polish transformation of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s – the costs of economic changes experienced in different social strata. In his case, the devaluation of educational capital appeared to be the most harmful consequence. Although well-educated and devoted to his profession, he becomes one of the "victims" of the economic changes and pays the costs of transformation. Nevertheless, his background and former experiences have enabled him to cope with systematic difficulties, disorientation and feelings of total senselessness and to orient himself again. Both his previous "initiations"

¹² It is worth comparing his experiences with those described by Aleksandra Leyk and Joanna Wawrzyniak in their book *Cuts. An Oral History of Post-Socialism* (2020) in which people deal with transition from socialist factories to international corporations.

¹³ After joining the EU and open borders after 2004, new opportunity structures have emerged. Since emigration has become a very common topic in the public and private discourse, they seemed to be easily available to everyone. The UK and Ireland have been the most popular destinations among Poles.

into transnational work (work on the Polish/German borderland, in the Czech Republic), as well as his unwavering conviction about his professional value, together with a very good command of English helped him establish and implement an effective biographical action scheme. Hubert planned to work legally abroad and to only take jobs in his profession (he planned to come back within 2 weeks if legal status could not be attained). Therefore, before he left, he had contacted a job recruitment agency and had been offered a job in one of the major cities in Ireland. With just 200 euros borrowed from his friends in his pocket he left Poland, but it appeared that the job had already been taken. Fortunately, his friend offered him a place to sleep. Two weeks later the narrator found a job as a senior structural technician (not engineer) in a construction company. He worked there for almost 4 years since 2005. He recalls:

It was a totally different search than in Poland, you know. Because – hmm what was important? When you went for an interview in Poland, you would tell them where you worked, what you did, whereas the Irish would be interested in everything/ he was even interested in... Say a young man comes in, a graduate, and it is very good if he worked somewhere else, was a helper, cleaner, because then you would know that the candidate was ambitious and eager to learn, you know, and he wants to earn money, does his best, does not roam and earn his livelihood god knows how/... So I needed to make some changes to my CV, starting from bottle washing in a bottling plant up to the job connected with my education... and it was very interesting, because they could follow a candidate's career path and his approach to life and what is expected of him/ I needed to make a compilation of various technical drawings and get them from Poland, all of them were in a very big paper format to show that I have learned something [...]. I spent there around 2 weeks and the time flew really quickly, you know. Sending out applications takes time, all those Irish companies need two weeks up to one month to collect the whole set of applications, and have interviews with all the candidates... so it is a totally different story than in Poland, not that you send an application and you get the answer within two or three days, there you could wait two months and say then they would call you and tell you that your resume was stored in the database and they became interested in your application, in Poland your CV would be thrown away into the waste bin long ago, wouldn't it? And one company in U. [a small town in the middle of Ireland], a very small company, dealing with construction works made of steel... so I bought a ticket and went to U. ... Very nice people, they wanted to book me a flat and so on, just the salary was poor, right?... It was my goal to earn some amount there, otherwise it made no sense, you know. Anyway, working in Poland on a managerial position, you could earn some money, you know. So I went back to Dublin and made an arrangement that I would be back the following week, because I had to settle all the matters in Dublin... I came back to Dublin, and there was a job advertisement that an engineer was being looked for... so I went for an interview/ I mean, I drew up my CV, and they phoned me the following day and I went for an interview... a design

company, and talked with the bosses about what I had done and –hmm- they said they needed to think it over and I replied that they had no time in fact, because if it took them two days then, I was going to move to U., you know ((laughing)) / and so they were very shocked to hear that a Pole would tell them either this or that, because this is their way of thinking about us, you know. So I got on the bus, and went to U., I got off on the station in U. and I got a phone call from Dublin, they decided to give me a try ((smiling)) And so I ended up in a company, where I worked for over three and a half years... the moment I was employed, there were many job offers and few Poles working there, a position of a designer was proposed to me. I said "Unfortunately, I do not know all the Irish technical standards, and I would prefer to work as assistant for six months and then to become a designer" And maybe this was a mistake, because it turned out after some time that Ireland produced so many young designers so that they decided it was better for an Irishman to become a designer and the Polish people remained on their lower positions as technicians, assistants et cetera. ... hmm – and it wasn't so that the Irish were exceptionally good, since the level of education was far lower in Ireland as far as primary school and university education was concerned/ [...] And the job of a designer requires lots of construction work supervision, business travels, and meetings with other companies' representatives, and so they preferred an Irishman to negotiate with an Irishman, the perspective changes when it comes to a foreigner, so generally it came down to the situation that they were travelling and we were doing all the work, you know,... project, non-project work, design, absolutely everything \... and... and the company itself was quite ok...

In the above fragment Hubert describes differences in cultural patterns and schemes of action in the labor markets in Poland and Ireland starting from submitting a CV, the evaluating process, to the very work on a construction site. He compares the local and common stock of knowledge to his own knowledge at hand (Schütz 1990a). He was also confronted with certain stereotypes and learned very quickly that foreign workers are expected to follow orders and not to manage others even if their expertise and experience is better. The narrator tried to act against it by putting himself in an equal position as the locals on the one hand, and not losing the status of a stranger on the other. The feeling of inferiority, strengthened by his conviction about proficiency and universality of his knowledge; sensitivity to others combined with reciprocity of perspectives and responsibility in terms of civil society practices intensifies his biographical work (Strauss 1993, Schütze 2008a, b) and widens his European mental space (see: footnote 12 in Chapter X). The general frame for those experiences is Hubert's loneliness in terms of his family relationships, which appeared to be the most important biographical cost. He comments on this not only in relation to his individual experiences, but also other Polish goal-oriented migrants who went abroad to solve financial problems or accumulate money and then came back home. Their main characteristic is a sense of temporality, usually severely

limiting or even blocking any kind of social engagement. “Living out of the suitcase” determined people’s biographical orientation and helped to suspend social roles and affiliations. Hubert alluded to the examples of men running “double lives” – having full families in Poland and love affairs abroad.

Well, let’s be honest and say if a married person goes abroad and finishes work at 17.30, and what to do after work? You may bear it and watch TV for one year, you know? You may spend one year travelling around, you know... and what can you do next, either you become an alcohol addict or look for a new partner.

Although Hubert’s case is a remarkable example of extensive biographical work on maintaining family relationships, this passage is a sarcastic commentary on life situations influenced by socio-biographical constraints of goal-oriented mobility (see Kaźmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011). He points to the difficulty of keeping balance between the feeling of being lonely and uprooted abroad and being a homecomer (Schütz 1990a) who endeavors to sustain intimate relationships with home. Hubert claims that one has to be very self-determined to maintain close ties with the family who stayed back home, since it requires a lot of attention, determination, phone calls, and visits.

There is also another socio-cultural aspect of this situation. The social status of a guest-worker is related to the role of a stranger “who comes and goes” in Simmel’s sense (Simmel 2001). Therefore, he does not require much social attention and respect, because the host society does not presume that he would stay for long. When observing the Irish society, Hubert realized that his experience was limited to professional contacts not necessarily broadened by social and informal relationships. But, he was also aware that one had to take into account a broader social context of one’s current position in the host society. Thus, he reflects on the arguments of both the Polish and Irish workers.

so you need to be cautious here, it often happens that the Polish (there) who increase efficiency and do 200% more and there are arguments between the Irish and the Polish... because the Irish (have been working there) for 10 years whereas Poles one year, you know... so a man in his twenties will work differently than the one that is 40 years old, you know... so it is a question of matching, you know.

The comparison of the life situation of a guest worker and the local community members is a recurring topic in his rendering. It is accompanied by a sense of responsibility in terms of civil society.

When I left for Ireland, I assumed that I would look for a legal job only in my field of study, you know. You get the number, basic insurance, and the employer needs to show consideration for you, because the tax is paid, anyway, I was always

of the opinion that creating such a situation, when the country, hmm, does not open the job market, then this causes a gray area gap automatically, you know. Those people are in the gray area and in fact the supervision over the market by the local authorities does not work, and this all causes unfair competition on the market, right? Because it is no surprise that every capitalist wants to know, have the biggest income aaaaaaand earn as much as possible, you know if the opportunity arises for the company to hire somebody illegally without tax being paid and upon the agreement with the employee himself, they will do it because they don't care about the employee and the latter has no alternative so he will do it, because he knows what he's doing, right? And this will be unfair towards other employees who work in this country and who have to pay contributions to the National Health Service, pension contribution and so on, you know? So I liked it in Ireland, I liked that we paid taxes as the others did, you know taxes, social security, and so on. They would never say "because you are a cheaper employee," because I wasn't, I sometimes got more money, you know.

Working in Europe is associated here with being a citizen of a welfare state which guarantees employment, true recognition of professionalism (also in terms of income), regard and responsibility on the one hand, and expectation to respect rules on the other. The concept of Europe is not represented here by symbolic ideas introduced in order to construct European identity, but from the perspective of the socio-economic aspect of work. When expressing such an attitude Hubert alludes both to transnational workers' (also Polish) practices abroad and the Polish labor market when exploring the gray area. The narrator seems to suggest that such a defined Europe should be implemented in Poland. He also clearly distinguishes European values from a national attitude:

[...] we have to have the roots down. I really can't imagine that//I think that the Union is a, hmm, union of nations just that... you cannot deprive people of their roots, because then they would be from nowhere and having no goals, they lose, they lose things they became attached to, that motivated them and so on. I think that we hmm should live in some, some zone where we are able to be mobile, I can't imagine it otherwise, you know, so... I cannot see the reason why I shouldn't be proud of being Polish. Communism was abolished ((laughing)) and we are currently one of the most entrepreneurial nations in Europe aaaaand we have achieved so much, so if we only wanted to get along with one another, this would be great.

Being proud of his country, having strong conviction that one gets a good education in Poland, Hubert does not insist on taking an occidental perspective as such, rather implementing civil society values and rules of "well-defined capitalism" (i.e., free from neoliberal tensions). From the whole narrative we may conclude that Hubert would like to see Poland as an equal partner in the

EU though he realizes that the country has to deserve such status in the same way as he, a well-qualified engineer, deserves respect and recognition in his work. That is why the narrator is very sensible to the stereotype of inferiority of “the East” which is often taken for granted (Davies 2006).

And it came to a point, a job was to be done, a power plant of which no one had the faintest idea... ahhh ((sighing)) and so when the gentlemen engineers came up with their ideas, I was called by the boss and asked about what should be done with it, you know?... and I said “You need to do this and that, these and those pillars” And no one believed me, you know? ((smiling)), because a Pole would not be believed to know right, you know... So the English were asked for support, and there was a meeting with them ((smiling)), then they came once again, and then the third time, then went to Belgium to see a similar site, and then travelled there once again and again... and after three weeks they developed a solution similar to mine ((smiling))... And in the end it was me, a technician, who was supposed to do all the work, I did it.

This is not the only example where Hubert points out that deep-seated assumptions held by Western Europe societies about the inferior nature and civilizational backwardness of Central and Eastern Europe being the aftermath of a retrospective and an archaic image of the “wild” East, is projected onto contemporary immigrants. The narrator recalls many instances which illustrate his own experiences of being a victim of certain stereotypical assumptions about Polish engineers (or workers in general). It is often believed that they are not educated enough or less experienced than West European professionals, but this usually proves to be false. What is of significance in Hubert’s case is his creative attitude towards these challenging situations. He always attempts to take the perspective of the other and (re)work the stereotypes not by means of ideological dispute, but continuous efforts to create a field of effective communication. This means that Hubert uses commonsense strategies in order to foster symmetrical mutual give-and-take (professional) interactions (cf., Strauss et al. 1985).

Since 2009 Hubert has lived in Poland and runs his own business together with his wife based on their professional education. In his narrative, he mainly concentrates on the sphere of work, which is embedded in a larger context of his biography – mainly family life. His biographical orientation is characterized by continuity, entirety, stability, regularity, and repeatability. He presents his story in a very mature way – it is well-ordered and rich with self-reflective commentaries and evidence of reciprocity of perspectives in interactions with others. The main storyline is dominated by the narrative scheme of communication, whereas argumentation is scarcely developed. He seems to control his narration reducing a “confessing-like” style of self-presentation, which we find characteristic of professionals’ narrations.

Robert's case

We have emphasized several times in the text that Robert's case was juxtaposed with Hubert's interview due to the similarity of significant socio-demographic characteristics and at the same time a difference in the context of achieving professional success, which in the case of our second interlocutor is undoubted, and its achievement (and in a sense proving in the narration) is one of the key frameworks of the interview.

In the main part of the narration, Robert focuses primarily on the reconstruction of his educational and professional career. The latter is as follows: after completing higher education he managed to get a job at a bank where he was employed in the department introducing new technologies.

After initial successes, his company was taken over by the competition, and the narrator decided, together with his colleagues, to resign and move to a well-known nationwide clothing company. After two years, he gave up (due to the poor financial condition of the company) and decided to return to the financial sector. In one of the currently largest Polish banks, and at the time when the interlocutor started working there – newly established, he co-created one of the important segments of this corporation.

He still works at this company today. His professional position allows him to be classified as a high-level manager, although it should be emphasized that this is not the organization's top management. During his career he was never dismissed or experienced a clear demotion (admittedly, as a result of organizational transformations in the current workplace, it can be concluded that sometimes his position in the structure weakened, but these were not unequivocal situations and were not associated with, for example, lowering salary). Even if he was struggling with career problems (such as solvency problems in one of the jobs), the interlocutor swiftly managed to change the employer. So, we can conclude that the characteristics of his professional biography is a success story. As emphasized above, the first part of Robert's narrative develops primarily around an educational career and then a professional one. In the final part, the interlocutor describes his family (he has a wife and two children, a 13-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter).

Robert was born in 1972 in a small city in central Poland where his family had lived for several generations. Both of Robert's parents were teachers and until the time of his studies the narrator was in the schools where at least one of them was working. The grandfather (on his father's side) was a small entrepreneur right after the war. His role in the context of family history was important because he left capital in the form of real estate, which was an additional financial resource for Robert's family in later times:

He was, hmm, he had no education, he finished several primary school years, as it was practiced before the war, but after the war he started working somewhere in textiles, and had a few looms there. And despite this unfavorable system, somewhere on the edge of the law he was functioning somewhere, he employed a few people at his place, and there they lived too easily, unfortunately, until my time a significant part of the property that they worked out did not survive, so I could not take advantage, but some real estate is still there, so is some souvenir from grandparents.

It is worth noting here that while in the case of Hubert we emphasized his post-materialistic attitude to the world (especially in the context of work as an activity creating opportunity structures, for example, through the development of skills or acquiring knowledge), Robert presents the opposite attitude – focused on raising capital. Of course, in many places he highlights or contemplates various biographical experiences using intangible criteria. However, among others, in the quote quoted above, when he talks about his grandfather's heritage, he refers to material issues as a determinant of assessment – in this case it is about resourcefulness and efficiency in accumulating assets. He uses similar criteria when reconstructing his childhood image:

Well, but going back to school, I somehow went through it without major problems. As for the material situation, contrary to appearances, it was not good. It was as average as it was in those days, everyone had more or less equal, it was difficult to buy anything, even with money, so that the lack of money was not felt so much. Most things were done, I remember when my father got a fridge somewhere, a TV, we stood in queues for a week to buy Rubin 714P, err, but it was a standard that in no way made me feel worse or better err than this material side err, I mean probably the fact that my parents/ dad later became the headmaster, so that materially they should be somewhere above average, but the times were that, err, that any major shopping or holiday trips, somewhere there you had to scrape and organize that money.

It is worth comparing this description of the childhood period with a quote regarding the standard of living Robert and his family have:

Comparing err my material status and material err mainly, yes, with what my parents had there, although probably err... Their work seems to be as much, if not more responsible and demanding, err so as I say, I remember that every larger purchase of a washing machine, fridge, even when you could buy it, when they were in stores, well, it was a huge financial effort for them, looking for that money somewhere, collecting, borrowing from grandparents. Well, for me at the moment the purchase of such equipment, on the one hand, it has become relatively cheaper, on the other hand, that if I earn above this national average, there is no bending over backwards, I have such savings that easily allow me to

plan such purchases, without any dramatic advance. Err such a change, which is very important to me, it is a matter of such trips, rest, yes. My parents had a lot of these holidays, in fact, I did as well, but we went away for two weeks, maximum three, and I always remember that these were very economical trips, because it was difficult to collect so much money during these 10 months of work so as to splash out during the holidays. Now, with my children, it has actually become a standard that we go away twice in the summer, plus some long weekends, and twice in the wintertime skiing somewhere. Err, so this somewhere over the decades has changed so much that it was not a standard once. And in winter the children's entertainment was then a sled and err a hill on the neighboring street. Well, now everyone is skiing and actually it is only a matter of whether it is done in the country or if you go somewhere abroad to make it even better, yes. Oh ... that's probably the number of such changes that are the most, the most visible to me, right?

The role of intergenerational comparisons – which are crucial in many life histories collected in this project – will be described further. Here, we would only like to emphasize that one of the dimensions of social change and assessment of individual success is the level of consumption, which in the case of the interlocutor is not only significantly higher than in the case of his parents, but also places him above the average for the whole society.

In elementary school and secondary school, he is a distinguished student. Initially after school, he wants to study medicine, but he changes his mind and decides to study at polytechnic:

But/ I mean in secondary school I ended up in biological-chemical class, err, but unfortunately, it turned out that, err, despite the fact that my mother taught there, the set of teachers that I got, especially in chemistry, was so dramatically weak that with this chemistry I couldn't go on because there was no chance. During secondary school, err, my interests changed a little, because I started perceiving medicine as a more, err, feminine, female specialization. I mean there were twenty-one girls among thirty classmates, and they all wanted to study medicine. So, just out of perversity and desire to do something different there, I think somewhere in the fourth grade of secondary school, I decided to go to the polytechnic. Ugh, and because I was good at maths, for the last year, err, I took some extra courses, myself, to get there, in maths, physics, and language because there were five exams then. And for this polytechnic, to applied mathematics and technical physics – that's what it was called then, I got admitted.

One can hypothesize that the period spent on his studies is formative for the further course of the biography for at least two reasons. First of all, what the interlocutor clearly emphasized is the fact that it was the first moment in his life when he became more independent, which for Robert meant, *inter alia*,

learning in a place where one of his parents does not work. However, the most important issue is the fact that the university gives him an education, which is a pass to the first job after graduation:

In the fourth/ fourth year I chose some specialization – IT, but it turned out that there were not enough places in IT, so they placed me in statistics with IT. But, it turned out to be a very interesting choice, because I liked statistics and I also found such a professor, a supervisor from P, who later just helped me with, err, preparing for my diploma exam. Err, and so we also established quite a close relationship, we even met at his home so as not to go to L unnecessarily. And this fourth and fifth year, where there was more computer science, it was also fun with these statistics, I even began to enjoy it, I even wanted to be an actuary for a while. Err, but, err, later it turned out that you need to have loads of money to pass some exams there, to prepare for them, and you have to devote a lot of time to become an actuary. So I gave it up and I didn't know what I was going to do there, but I wanted to be close to IT and close to statistics.

In the quote above, we can see how little is needed to direct the path of the entire biographical career in a completely different direction. Financial restrictions blocked one of the possible opportunity structures for Robert (see introduction to this part of the book and Chapter X) and biographical paths of development. At the same time, however, the closing of one of the possible paths directed him (which of course we are not able to state at the moment of the interview) towards the main direction of his future professional activity, that is, information technology in banking.

However, entering the labor market itself after graduation was at the cost of several months of stress and, as we will see in the quote below, related to one of the key turning points of Robert's biography:

I finally found this job, and I think I had sent four or five CVs and found a job at a bank, BPG, two skyscrapers away that way, it was the year 1996/97. And there, as a young, talented but unskilled person, I was thrown into implementing a cash machine network. It was 40 cash machines in the country, the first, one of the first networks of such [blurred] cash machines, and the fact that I landed there – because my parents, as they saw that looking for work somehow was not going well, then of course my dad suggested that there in P he has such acquaintances in education that he can easily get me a job as an IT teacher at school, well, maybe every father would want his son to follow in his footsteps, because it is not the best, it is bad, but tested and it will not cause harm. Well, somehow, I managed to avoid becoming a teacher. So in retrospect, it was a very good decision, I do not know if it was completely conscious, or simply because of the desire to oppose my father there, but even if, the fact that from September 1st I could have started this job at school, because then IT professionals were also sought, I did not start it.

And after sending this CV to several places, people usually there, err, either they did not respond or they replied that they were not looking for anyone. And in UEB, err, they called back, and they said so, that in two days I was supposed to be at work, from the first of October, and in a week, I was going to go to some foreign training, three weeks. Because they wanted to quickly organize this project and wanted to send someone. Also, here, my story progressed very quickly, it was a very intense period, because I actually worked there for two years, but we were three people who implemented this network of cash machines, which was such a guerrilla, pioneering approach in banking at that time.

In the quote above various issues which require a comment intertwine. First of all, Robert is looking for a job for a relatively short time – he manages to get it without much effort and although he does not directly address the reasons behind this success, we can assume that it was at least partly related to his education profile. Secondly, we can trace the background constructions that are key to his history, in which the interlocutor emphasizes the potential alternative, which in his case turns out to be work at school. This is a striking contrast especially from the perspective of his later professional career and the position he manages to achieve, resulting from the juxtaposition of the potential of becoming an IT teacher with a high position in one of the largest Polish banks. This is also an important thread because of Robert's relationship with his parents, especially with his father, who, having a network of contacts and the position of school director, tries to use them to provide his son with a good (at least from his perspective) start. Here, we would like to emphasize the way the narrator assesses the work at school, and actually the work and achievements of his father: "well, maybe every father would want his son to follow in his footsteps, because it is not the best, it is bad, but tested and it will not cause harm."

The thread of juxtaposing one's situation, choices, outlook on life with what was and is the share of Robert's parents will appear many times in the interview. At this point, we just want to emphasize this, and the reader will find a more detailed analysis in the further part of the chapter.

The narrator decides to reject the path proposed by his father and decides to "take matters into his own hands." Although he clearly deviates from the institutional pattern of expectations, he also does not undertake a clearly outlined biographical action plan assuming a specific career path. It seems that even if Robert had wanted to work in a bank, he was not necessarily determined to follow the narrow specialization associated with cash machines. We can say, referring to the theme of this part of the book, that he took advantage of the opportunity structure, which was associated with the opening of new sectors of financial institutions, their technological leap, and the new career opportunities which followed. Motivated by, among others, the wish to become independent, he started his first job at the bank and, what is also important from the

perspective of his further fate, it was associated with the creation of a virtually new organization department and the introduction of new technologies on the Polish market (networks of cash machines). Despite the positive evaluation of this period, Robert decided to leave work after two years. Interestingly, it seems that the motif for such decision was related to his nonacceptance of the organizational changes, which, after many years, he assesses as natural processes inscribed in the logic of the market economy:

But, it was great until somewhere in the Ministry of Finance the decision was made to merge those banks that were previously separated there after 1989, to make it look more market-like. And four/ three banks, those smallest ones, including The Universal Bank of Commerce in L, another one from Lublin, from Szczecin, were to be taken over by BANK X. And the first decision of BANK X was, of course, that all the cash machine networks that were in these three banks were to be incorporated. And looking back, it was nothing unnatural, because you never respect your first job, as I watch other people too, huh. So, with our team, a three-person cash machine unit, as we learned that they were to migrate us, one day the three of us said that we don't give a shit about this job, and if so then we are quitting, having nothing else prepared yet.

We can see here that in retrospect, Robert assesses his decision as reckless. However, it seems that this was also an example of individual resistance to processes which also in his later career stages caused his dissatisfaction.

His bank (and consequently also his department and what he managed to achieve) underwent changes in line with the market logic (the decision was taken by state structures, but the motivation behind it was characteristic of the market logic). Robert does not present here the broader context of this decision, but the action he takes can be considered as a strategy of individual resistance (although he quits his job in consultation with two colleagues who together form the department responsible for the development of the cash machine network project). Therefore, he chooses independence and puts emotional issues over any profits associated with remaining in the corporate structure. Referring to the concept of a biographical scheme of action, one of the process structures characteristic of the autobiographical narrative interview (see Chapter X), it can be seen that Robert "is trying to actively shape the course of his life" (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 157) and to some extent he does it again, if we consider the decision to reject the job offer at the school put forward by his father. On the other hand, it seems important that also in the situational context of the current workplace, Robert is not satisfied with the direction of changes in the organization and again the issue of his negative assessment of following the market plays an important role (in this case it is about the increasing corporatization of the bank's organizational culture):

Err, later it started to get better again, but I think, I have been observing this for 3–4 years, that our company has already become a huge corporation and such a corporate culture here, unfortunately, is starting to dominate. Err, a lot of outsiders are employed, a lot of consultants, err, who are supposed to throw some/ I mean to give us a fresh look and let us change, for the better, err. In my opinion, they don't always change what needs to be changed, they only change what they just have an idea to change. And, err, the victims of these changes, among others, are us. Well, because the card branch was fucked up two and a half years ago, and we still see the negative consequences till this day, and think that we will still be observing them for many years.

Here we would like to draw attention to the process of transformation of a given organization into a corporation and its consequences for the individual's biographical experience. At the beginning of his professional career, Robert joins a company which has only started introducing changes (technological and organizational) which were pioneers on a national scale. His dissatisfaction is caused by the fact that after a few years it becomes part of a broader structure, and the "work" being the result of his effort is taken over by the competition. In retrospect, he understands this logic of change, but then makes a radical decision and, in an act of protest, quits his job. In the context of the company with where he is currently working (and this relationship has lasted for 13 years), he makes critical comments referring to one of many elements of the corporate life – the introduction of consultants in an advisory capacity, but his strategy of individual resistance is not as radical. Moreover, it seems that Robert, although he considers himself (unreasonably) an expert in the field for which he is responsible and assesses the changes negatively, he still tries to rationalize them:

Well, err, everyone recalls, those who stayed, that then, when we were on the fourth floor, we would meet once a week, we discussed all the topics for 2–3 hours, we planned, err, what now requires 5 meetings and some teleconferences, it once required a half-hour meeting at the desk and there then a division of tasks. Well, this has changed and this – from my perspective – is a change for the worse, but it is possible that somewhere it was a necessary change and from a higher perspective – the bank managers', err, that such a large institution that we have become, to maintain and control, then it was necessary.

Returning to the course of Robert's professional career, after handing in his notice at the bank, the narrator, thanks to networks of connections, moves to a new place. This time, he starts working in a clothing company, in which he joins the IT department:

And Company Y, just like in UEB it was a period of my really hard work, where I learned a lot and it had the greatest impact on, err, future, in retrospect. Company

Y was two and a half years of total fun. Nothing was happening there, it was, err, a typical communist company, even before the changes, it was probably the last chance, err, to see something like this up close. There were crowds of people who I did not know, after three years of working there, what they were doing. Finally, I got to, err, the position of IT boss in the whole Company Y, but after two years I would suddenly discover that somewhere in the other part of the building there was a guy who did not know what he was supposed to be doing, obviously he did not have a computer, but he needed something from me.

When we look at Robert's career in a new place, we will see the success story again. Robert reaches the position of the head of IT in the company. However, in his opinion, it would be difficult to assess the organization itself. Especially when compared to his previous work, where he was responsible for an interesting, "pioneering" project. Here, if he landed well in the team, he did not find too many interesting challenges. It is interesting that ultimately his leave did not involve the search for a new career path, but was a consequence of the problems the company encountered: "Well, but this adventure ended because of, err, Company Y – probably because of what it looked like, found itself in such para- / financial problems that it didn't pay us salaries for two months [laughs], not to mention any bonuses."

One can risk the hypothesis that Robert found himself in a similar situation as Hubert, who was looking for a way out of the difficult financial situation in which he found himself in a company where he worked just before emigrating to Ireland. However, the atmosphere created by the narrator is completely different. Robert – in contrast to Hubert's rather depressing story – presents his vicissitudes lightly, emphasizing their anecdotal value. Of course, what allows him to give such tone to his leaving the company of where no salary was paid is related to what happened next:

But here, somewhere, with a stroke of luck, it turned out that, err, the CEO of L is thinking of opening a bank. At that time, it wasn't called MegaBank yet, but it was called the Mega7 project. And I got to a very important person in my professional life, Piotr, a director who employed me there at UEB and who was also supposed to organize the cards here. At the time, he was employed in the cards, and I remember when I came to this skyscraper and talked to him there, but he knew as little as I did, so no one could tell me. Well, my decision, what made it a little easier for me was that there was no such future, err, of work anyway. We weren't getting the money there anymore, then we got it from some Guaranteed Benefits Fund, because there is such a thing. But, few things kept me there. Err, even considering some uncertainty there, I decided to come here.

Again, it is worth comparing Robert's history with Hubert's experience. Thanks to acquaintances made during the career, the first interlocutor does not

face a difficult unemployment situation at all. To be precise – he immediately goes to a new company, a bank just being created, which as a young organization needs experienced professionals. While meeting a specific person earlier seems crucial here, the issue of skills, knowledge, and education, which from the bank's perspective guaranteed that Robert would cope with his tasks, was also significant. This is what happens anyway, and after many years the interlocutor becomes a high-class specialist in the field of payment transactions, which directly translates into his social status in the organization, his and his family's material position, but on the other hand, also gives him the opportunity to watch how the organizational culture changes. In a broader perspective of the whole biographical interview, the success achieved by Robert also has its darker side, which we will try to show using the example of a detailed analysis, typical for the narrative autobiographical interview structure – coda (see, among others, (Schütze 2008a: 175–176). Its sequence begins when the narrator speaks about starting work at MegaBank:

Well, err, here, err, maybe some three or four months there was some kind of preparation, but then the hard work started and, if you think about it, for over the past 13 years, I still work my ass off here so much that there is not much time to get bored, thinking about other things. Errr, financiallyyyyy, err, as I said – better than I had thought, so from my perspective I don't think I could, err, in banking and even outside banking in L find a better paid job. Err, I do what I like, I do what I know best. Err, so if the company does not give up on me and somehow what I value does not change, I do not expect myself to change this job, right.

Referring to the definition, the coda essentially consists of two parts. The first, which has the task of closing the contents of the autobiographical story, that is, bringing the stream of life memories and experiences to an end (Schütze 2008a: 179) and the second, whose task is to re-introduce the perspective of what is here and now, in other words, return to the situation of the interview. However, in the case of Robert, after the first – summarizing coda fragment quoted above, the narrator is still trying to "deal with" his history. Initially, it seems that reaching the end of his history, he realizes that he had focused too much on the professional perspective and devoted little space to his family and private life, and that he is trying to fill these gaps: "So perhaps now a bit, because I left out, err, I followed the educational-professional path, and err now more about the family."

However, the essential part of completing his life history begins with the return to the time of working at Company Y, during which he managed to finish postgraduate studies in management of capital and state-owned companies. This passage is indeed a supplement to the previous information provided by the narrator about education and professional work. Another thread is the

relationship with the history of the relationship with his wife, which began while working at Company Y. Its important element is the moment when Robert sums up what has been achieved by referring to buying a flat and quickly paying off the mortgage:

But later, err, she came back and I started earning good money, and she was also doing well, so we could afford to change the flat and pay off the mortgage quickly, because nowadays it is nice to show off that you have a flat, a car, and some other things, it doesn't mean that you have, err, that you have, that your status is OK, because you just have to look at the loans you have taken out and for how many years you will be paying them off. That this also, also changed.

Then Robert talks about the birth of his children and subsequent moving houses, next he tries to close the structure of the coda again. However, the researcher conducting the interview does not move on to additional questions, but still leaves the narrator with a free space of expression, suggesting only that there are issues which he would like to know more about. Robert continues his account "carried" by the need to say what he calls "a curiosity," and which for our analysis is one of the keys to the interpretation of the whole of his biographical experience:

Well, so much for the family, professional, I don't know, err, I wouldn't want it to come out here, that I am bragging here, I don't know, any other material issues, what other topics to raise?

I: If you want to add something, go ahead and add, and I already have my list of questions.

N: A list of questions, OK. I mean, from such curiosities, I will say that I never had my private mobile phone [laughs]. I've always had a company one, when it became popular then I got the first one in my current job, at MegaBank, and since then. I had two private cars, but I haven't had my own private one for quite a few years, I only have, err, a company one. These are also some nice bonuses that were unattainable for my parents and for me and my children are already obvious that you get it at work, if you have a good job. Comparing err my material status and material err mainly, yes, with what my parents had there, although probably err... Their work seems to be as much, if not more responsible and demanding, err so as I say, I remember that every larger purchase of a washing machine, fridge, even when you could buy it, when they were in stores, well, it was a huge financial effort for them, looking for that money somewhere, collecting, borrowing from grandparents. Well for me at the moment the purchase of such equipment, on the one hand, it has become relatively cheaper, on the other hand, that if I earn above this national average, there is no bending over backwards, I have such savings that easily allow me to plan such purchases, without any dramatic advance. Err, such a change, which is very important to me, it is a matter of such trips, rest, yes. My

parents had a lot of these holidays, in fact, I did as well, but we went away for two weeks, maximum three, and I always remember that these were very economical trips, because it was difficult to collect so much money during these 10 months of work so as to splash out during the holidays. Now, with my children, it has actually become a standard that we go away twice in the summer, plus some long weekends, and twice in the wintertime skiing somewhere, err, so this somewhere over the decades has changed so much that it was not a standard once. And in winter the children's entertainment was then a sled and, err, a hill on the neighboring street. Well, now everyone is skiing and actually it is only a matter of whether it is done in the country or if you go somewhere abroad to make it even better, yes.

Robert, starting with a funny anecdote about phones (after all, we live in a world where everyone has a mobile phone, and the narrator does not have to buy one), he describes the scale of his success. Just as with the quick mortgage repayment, a telephone or a car which others have to buy to show off, Robert just gets it from the company. Therefore, he does not have to confirm his position through conspicuous consumption. The measure of his success is that it is the company that values him high enough to provide him with a high salary "protecting" him from borrowing money (or allowing him to pay off debts quickly), equipping him with the tools necessary for work, but also for daily functioning. Therefore, the relationship with the bank seems to be the essential framework structuring the interlocutor's narrative. The key sentence of this part of the interview is said a moment later, however: "These are also some nice bonuses that were unattainable for my parents and for me and my children are already obvious that you get it at work, if you have a good job."

We would like to highlight two issues here. First, the criterion of good work, which is receiving a number of benefits. Receiving this scale of perks is rare even at the bank where the interlocutor works. Using this logic, it turns out that almost everyone around Robert has a job worse than him. This is important because the second thread, which in our opinion is crucial in the context of the whole biographical narrative, is to use the example of his parents. Robert talks about the importance of the work they did, but at the same time shows how little from his contemporary perspective they could afford. This is perhaps one of the most important dimensions of social change which occurs between the generation of Robert's parents and Robert himself. Assuming that both he and they were professionally accomplished, both performed important tasks, and the overall measure of one's success is material position, in Robert's narrative his achievements are the proof of his parents' "loss," which the narrator himself describes as follows:

Oh... that's probably all, regarding such changes that, that are the most, most visible to me, right. A lot of everyday problems, existential problems I would say, err, remained. And if you think about it, it's, it's the same as my parents/

what problems they had, they experienced, I have similar ones, and probably my children will also do, because you will not run away and no transformations will change this, no transformations. Err, I mean, this period somewhere of my entering the job market and maturing, well, everybody knows that a lot of important things happened. The year 1989, all these ownership changes in the country. And here I think that I did alright in these transformations, even very well – I owe myself a little, a bit of luck, that I was somewhere at the right moment and time and took advantage of this opportunity. But, the way I see it, it is the generation of my parents that has been terribly mistreated by these changes, even I, working in this bank, in UEB, as part of some, err, nationalization of this bank, as an employee I got, err, stocks and maybe that money was not great, but somehow it was enough for my first second-hand car, right? And my folks, who had worked for quite a few decades, err, in the previous epoch, got absolutely nothing, except that now they get some pensions, from which they try to live, err, a better or worse life. So, the perspectives of those changes that have happened, well, I can also see myself as a beneficiary.

I: Academically it is called the “winners and losers of the transformation”

N: [laughs] Well, then I am among the first ones.

I: In this perspective probably not much will change, so probably yes. OK, would you like to add anything else?

N: Nothing comes to my mind, it is logically ordered, also if I have omitted anything from your perspective, or told you too little, I will supplement it.

Therefore, in the broken coda structure presented by Robert, the key fragments appear not in the content itself, which closes the interview, but between them. In the extensive commentary, in which the interlocutor includes the history of his marriage, or obtaining additional education, the most important role is played, however, by the parts in which comparisons between the narrator and his parents appear. This allows him to summarize his life story through evaluative statements about him and his parents history. In this perspective, Robert is a beneficiary of the changes even when the company in which he worked practically went bankrupt. In turn, his parents had to deal with a difficult financial situation even when both of them were working professionally, although they worked hard and (as we know from other parts of the interview) supported the PPR state. Many years of work at school did not translate into high pensions either. Without recalling the parents' situation and working through the difference in the material status, Robert cannot “finish” the coda. He does this only after expressing his opinion and a short exchange of views with the researcher, which allows them to ease the atmosphere.

The narrator, using the example of his parents, points to the important role of transformational change as the main framework structuring the world he

was entering at the time of his studies and starting his professional career. He interprets his biography from the perspective of the opportunity, which he used primarily through economic promotion in comparison to his parents (which can also be seen in other parts of the interview). There may be something more in this statement, which relates to the assessment of his father and mother as the victims of the transformation. Robert, as the beneficiary, thanks to the comparison sees the complexity, complication, and injustice of the change taking place. This is important because this type of utterance can be treated as a counterpoint to those quotes and parts in which the respondent creates a picture of the success of his own biographical career. This, of course, on many levels is undeniable, but also has its flip side. It turns out that the success of the transformation must also have its victims, and its winners may be concealing a sense of guilt because of their own success.

Therefore, we can say that the pair Robert-his parents is a contrast set (Schütze 2008a: 189), which, used in various places in the interview allows the narrator to show the scale of the social change which took place during his life. On the other hand, the use of this comparison is a stimulus to the biographical work which Robert has to do, in order to work through the issue of injustice not only of the transformation itself, but of more general historical processes. This work does not end with the coda in the first part of the narrative. It is also associated with the political revelation the narrator has been experiencing in recent years:

Err, so, since/ I don't know if such political issues would also be interesting, yes? Well, because my parents were probably both members of the Polish United Workers' Party. Mum certainly was, and dad probably also had to be due to the fact that he was the headmaster, so then he had no way out and, so, err, in retrospect, because then I did not see it, they had a very big impact on how I perceived these changes how I position myself with my political sympathies. Well, at home the views were as they were, we read *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Polityka* every week, and not the more alternative right-wing magazines. And, err, later, I mean, they were not some fierce communists like most people in Poland, err. My dad was one, because he had to, my mother, when I talked to her she was, because she became a complete orphan at the age of 7 or 8, and she decided, err, that if it weren't for the system that existed, err, then she wouldn't have achieved what she had, because she had free schools, free studies, scholarships that allowed her to support herself and practically without any care, she achieved what she had achieved, right? She believed that she had some debt of gratitude to that system and that she's repaying it as much as she can, with her work and commitment. Err, interestingly, my mother taught history, I didn't see it that way, but now we often talk about how much she deliberately or unconsciously falsified this history, or omitted some facts, because you couldn't say loads of things in schools at that time, many things could not be said, yes. Err, and

I think that somewhere there until, err, actually recently I began to perceive these politics differently. I don't know, maybe it's a perspective of 10–15 years. The whole studies and the first jobs, it was/ actually, it was not really that much to me: who's in charge there, from which party, err, which side. I thought it didn't affect my future, and what's going on in, err, the country. Err, it's true, that afterwards my dad even became a member of the Freedom Union, and then he was active in the Civic Platform. So somehow, after these changes, he found himself, he went in a slightly different direction, more so, err, future-oriented, reforming, yes. He did not stay somewhere in the Democratic Left Alliance, he was even a local politician in P. for a while, he also performed some local government functions, so he wanted to do something, change it. But, err, my, err, just such political err sympathies – from the perspective of these last 10–15 years – are moving towards the right.

Let us start with the fact that the issue of political worldview was not “raised” by the researcher, and the beginning of this thread was the spontaneous decision of the narrator. Thus, we can assume that after the parts devoted to education, work, and family, Robert felt a kind of compulsion to present the entirety of his biography, and in this context also an important identity element associated with his political views. Yet, he could not do this without first explaining why his political awakening in adulthood is so important in the context of his biography. This thread, however, is associated with another tension factor in the interview – his parents' involvement in the PPR system. The fact that this is an important problem for the narrator, faded out until now, would be indicated by the appearance of the so-called second-level background construction (Schütze 2012: 269–270), which not only allows Robert to explain his political choices, but also gives him the chance to try to work through the issue of responsibility for the previous political system. The importance of this problem is further raised due to the modern right-wing orientation of the narrator. Robert begins his account with a statement about the potential membership of both parents in PZPR. Then he assures himself of the mother, whose membership he knows about directly from her, and assumes that the father, as the headmaster, probably also joined the party. He says that this has had an impact on his political consciousness – he also includes the issue of reading *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Polityka*¹⁴, juxtaposing them with the right-wing magazines. At this point, it seems that the narrator wants to smoothly proceed with further arguments about his right-wing orientation, but he returns again to the issue of his parents' involvement:

¹⁴ *Gazeta Wyborcza* is one of the most important Polish left-centered daily papers. *Polityka*, in turn, is a current affairs opinion weekly of a similar characteristic. Both titles are one of the most recognizable periodicals on the Polish market and have a big impact on shaping public opinion.

"Well, at home the views were as they were, we read *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Polityka* every week, and not the more alternative right-wing magazines. And, err, later, I mean, they were not some fierce communists like most people in Poland, err."

Robert explains both his father (briefly emphasizing that he had no alternative) and his mother, who is especially important to him. The reason here seems to be the fact that she is a history teacher, which puts the narrator's mother before moral dilemmas related to what she could versus wanted to teach in class. In conversations with her son, in a sense, she repeats the teaching pattern, but this time she does so without having to fulfil the institutional pattern of expectations, which before 1989 imposed on her the obligation to remain silent or to convey a false picture of history. It seems that it is the motif of moral dilemmas and the associated responsibility that is the main stimulus for Robert's political search.

As we emphasized above, the narrator often uses economic themes to comment on his life and the world in which he operates – even when describing the changes which have taken place in Poland over the last few decades. Also, in the parts of the interview in which he relates to his worldview, the topic of finances returns:

Because, well, I earn quite well, it's such an economic dimension, so that they would take less of these taxes, yes, it's a shame to give away so much of this money, and I give away a lot, right? Especially that I still have the impression that I would be better off using my money than someone else using it for me. Err, the right is not for lowering taxes, err, although, as you said, it is very complicated here.

The argument about the advantage of the private over the public (in this case the narrator presents the postulate to reduce the taxation of his income) fits perfectly within the voice depreciating the role of the state as a social redistributor¹⁵ present in the Polish public debate. When asked about specific political sympathies, he answers:

[...] I mean, here, this right-wing nature is, unfortunately, associated with Law and Justice err, who, because of, err, its leaders, the people who appear somewhere on television, cannot be evaluated positively. But, when it comes to at least the Real

¹⁵ The trend towards limiting the role of the state is one of the characteristics of the neoliberal discourse present in Polish politics. We can find it both in the political declarations of the groups formed by the right-wing politician Janusz Korwin-Mikke, referred to in a further section of this chapter, or in the left-centered titles mentioned above. This is where *Gazeta Wyborcza* stands out, whose main economic columnists display clear neoliberal views.

Politics Union¹⁶, yes, Korwin-Mikke¹⁷ or other parties that have such a, err, right-wing approach, both to the economy and how you can shape your, err, internal policy, foreign policy in the country, I am definitely going in this direction.

The postulates of economic liberalization are supported by a strongly conservative voice referring to moral issues – especially in the context of different political options and sexual minorities:

Because for the left wing, I have the impression that the family is of little value, my perspective is due to the fact that I have two children, it has changed, I think about the future of my children, I see what is wrong in schools err, that these schools, they do not look like they should look, but err, the left is going in the direction that it is best if people were single, they do not need to have children, it is best if there was a family of two daddies or two err mommies, err, I'm, err, I mean, very negative about these, errrr, different genders (laughs).

Additionally, Robert clearly emphasizes his attachment to the national symbolic resource in this dimension, which is based on the ethnic and cultural separateness. Paradoxically, as the company where he works is not Polish, this is supported by elements of the Eurosceptic discourse:

Now, what worries me is also such, err, such total, err, submission to the European Union. Err, well, I'm afraid that it might harm our national separateness, right. We are in a great situation that we do not have any minorities in Poland, because if we were such as Ukraine or even Hungary, there are a lot: there are Romanians here, and Russians there. In Poland, after the war, they made sure that all strangers were to be displaced, and people from the other side of the Bug river were resettled here to the Regained Territories, so that we are culturally coherent and, err, I mean, I do not know in what direction this further, errr, this further unification of the Union will go, so to say, yes [...]

¹⁶ The Real Politics Union is a conservative-liberal party registered in 1990. Its best-known politician was Janusz Korwin-Mikke (see below) until the split in 2011.

¹⁷ Janusz Korwin-Mikke is one of the leaders of the right-wing political scene in Poland. Known for free-market economic views and extreme statements about sexual minorities, women's rights, and racism. He was an MP in the Sejm in 1991–1993 and is an MP in the Sejm for the 2019–2023 term. He was a Member of the European Parliament in 2014–2019. Candidate for the office of the President of the Republic of Poland in the elections in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. Founder and president of the Real Politics Union (1990–1997, 1999–2002), Liberty and Lawfulness (2009–2011), Congress of the New Right (2011–2015) and the KORWiN party (since 2015), as well as one of the leaders of the federal party Confederation of Freedom and Independence (since 2019).

This paradox, however, is not only specific to Robert's experience. Antonina Kłoskowska in her book "Kultury narodowe u korzeni" (Roots of National Cultures) published in 1996 already raised the problem of the particular tension resulting from the clash of globalization with the new wave of nationalisms. (see also: Piotrowski 2006: 244). In Polish (but not only) public discourse on national and cultural identity – intensifying recently due to the "growth" of multicultural life forms – it assumed the form of "fear of Europe" (Piotrowski 1997). We deliberately refer here to the works dating back to a relatively long time ago to show that in Polish sociology voices noticing this problem were not lacking, but they were marginalized. What is more, they do not lose their relevance – quite the opposite – many times these diagnoses apply today. Returning, however, to the narrator's theoretical-argumentative commentary, it should be noted that he refers to the "rhetoric of fear" usually used by "romantic-traditionalist" conservatives (for the record, the counterpoint for this voice is the civilizational optimism of the liberals) (Piotrowski 1997b: 327–328, Krakowiak 2014). It is, as Andrzej Piotrowski explains, "pointing out the negative consequences that the actions of certain people and groups as a whole [in Robert's case – the European Union] can have for the prosperity of the life of the collectivity in the categories of «we» [in Robert's case – the nation]. At stake here is the issue of physical security, material living conditions, and freedom of action according to one's own patterns, and thus the integrity of the cultural form of life." (1997a: 195). However, we must remember that the rhetoric of fear opposes "us" with some "others" – and the contemporary discourse (especially the political one) – somehow "conquers" their strangeness, hostility, and threats from their side, but also attributes specific motivations to them, based on their interest and uncontrolled enjoyment of benefits (cf., Czyżewski, Kowalski, Piotrowski 1997: 37, Czyżewski 2009: 12–13).

Trying to answer the question about the genesis of Robert's political views, we would propose a thesis about the complex impact of the environment in which the narrator moves in. Robert openly speaks of being inspired by colleagues, "who are on the other side" (which means right-wing), showing him websites or historical books which he should read. Nevertheless, it seems that in the course of the interview the issue of the influence of the parents' past, being entangled in the previous system comes to the fore, who in recent years have been either supporters of such parties as the Democratic Left Alliance, Civic Platform, or Freedom Union, or their members (in the case of the father).

From a structural perspective, Robert represents the case of an individual using the cultural capital of his parents, who, thanks to the right decisions, favorable coincidences, and above all the opening of institutional opportunity structures, achieves social promotion visible in his professional position and material status. In the narration, we see it especially when he uses comparisons as part of the contrast

set with the position of his parents. He directly and indirectly describes the history of the transformation of the cultural capital into the economic capital. His parents had the former one as belonging to, or at least aspiring to the intelligentsia of the socialist state. Their earnings, however, never constituted the basis for determining the social status of the family. If we can talk about such an additional (distinctive) function of financial resources in the case of Robert, it would be the legacy of his grandfather – a private entrepreneur of the post-war period. The period of the Polish People's Republic for the analyzed family is the period of building cultural capital, which in the narrator's biography will function through the education system. One can risk the assumption that the interlocutor's educational successes were possible, among others, thanks to the support and social resources of his parents. In the case of Robert, there is ultimately a shift to the position of the middle class in the neoliberal economy of a democratic state. Meanwhile, his parents in the course of the changes were (at least in the opinion of the interviewee) degraded in relation to the position they had before 1989. Along with the change in the basic criterion for determining position in the structure, it turned out that what once gave social prestige (education, profession – in the case of Robert's parents being a teacher), is now giving way to the economic factors.

Conclusions

Deciding on a contrasting set of cases of Hubert and Robert, we were interested in investigating how it is possible for two individuals, similar in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, to experience extremely different paths of professional and biographical career development. Assuming a similar potential existing in the cultural, social, and economic capital of the narrators and a similar educational path, a logical observation would be to expect similar effects – at least in relation to professional development. “Engineering education” for the families of both interlocutors, as well as for themselves (but also in the then pedagogical and public discourses) was undoubtedly treated as a guarantee of employment and a better future – everlasting practicality, a kind of social usefulness.¹⁸ They both also had features which in a free-market

¹⁸ A contrast here would be “people for shredding” “people-waste,” and thus, for example, “humanists.” “To be superfluous – as Zygmunt Baumann explains – means to be redundant, unnecessary, useless – regardless of what kind of needs and uses determine the standard of usefulness and indispensability [...]. Others do not need you, they will manage just as well – and even better – without you. [...] To think someone is better means to throw them out because they are intended to be thrown out. [...] Redundancy shares its meaning with words such as ‘discarded’, ‘outcasts’, ‘garbage’ – in short ‘waste’” (Bauman 2004, 25).

economy and the neoliberal model of "ruling through freedom" are promoted as indispensable for success.

As we know from the description of the biography of both interlocutors, their life histories are different. Robert uses opportunity structures resulting primarily from the special demand for specialists with specific education, skills, and competences. Already during his studies, he enters a field that has not yet been developed and established, and later, after entering the labor market, thanks to being in the avant-garde he achieves a high position in one of the largest Polish banks.¹⁹ Hubert, despite the specialized education and vast expertise, precisely because of the closure or fossilization (the barrier of flexibility in adapting to changes resulting from the process of modernization or transformation)²⁰ of the opportunity structures finds himself on the verge of losing control over his life. However, it would be a simplification to assume the deterministic impact of social and political conditions (understood here by the rapid development of the Polish banking sector and its computerization or crises occurring in the building industry). The analysis of both cases also leads us to conclusions relating to the individual strategies and life orientations of both narrators, although, as we did in the introduction, it is not our intention to repeat the erroneous assumption about the full agency of individuals, and thus to blame one for their success or failure in the struggle with (in this case) the labor market.

One of the potential interpretations of the mechanism of the emergence and disappearance of the opportunity structures is the assumption about the imbalance in the distribution of funds, as well as attention to and control of various sectors of the economy by the ruling elites. One of the key indicators for a country entering the capitalist system was the financial condition of the economy. The market, which developed as a result, started in the early 1990s almost from scratch, and the pace of its development was very dynamic. This was associated, *inter alia*, with the immediate need for qualified employees who

¹⁹ A similar case belonging to the "EuroIdentities" collection is the case of Jakub (cohort 1980), who, as a technical university student, specializes in a completely new field of computer science in management. He goes to France within the Erasmus program, where he not only quickly learns the language, but also becomes one of the best students. Entering the local labor market, he turns out to be one of the few specialists in online business management and, as he says, his income places him in one percent of the best paid people in France.

²⁰ The word "fossilized" is neutral and non-judgemental to us. We treat the processes of modernization or transformation in a similar way – not as the absolute and the only possible direction of social or individual development, but as the dominant form of social perception in a given historical period about the direction in which the world should go.

were to be able to work according to foreign standards. On the other hand, it was also a unique opportunity for individual success. However, the transformation process did not have the same pace in all the sectors of the economy – some of them underwent a serious crisis. Hubert's biography represents here the crisis of professional strata dependent on those industrial branches which had to pay the biggest costs of transformation; for example, the textile industry which lost the Eastern (post-Soviet) market or building and construction companies which had to implement expensive modern technologies, which required time and financial resources.

In this perspective, Robert's case is an example of reverse logic – his individual success is directly related to the civilizational and technological leap of the Polish banking industry. This translates directly into institutional opportunity structures which Robert turns into a success story using the cultural capital gained from home, the education acquired at a public university, and the social networks built during the first years of his professional career. He does not do so without incurring biographical costs, which in the narrative take the form of reflections on the injustice of the social change taking place, which lifts up some (Robert) and affects others (Robert's parents). Intergenerational comparisons play a key role in Robert's narration. They allow him to perform biographical work, within which he juxtaposes his experience with two categories of significant Others: parents and children. Parents in Robert's narration are among those who fall victim to the transformation. As teachers, they have cultural and social capital, which gradually loses its value after 1989. They fail (despite attempts by Robert's father) to convert the resources acquired in the previous system into success. The children act as a contrast to the childhood of the narrator, and their conditions of growing up are used to show the scale of social change, but they also work as evidence of the material success of the interlocutor. In a broader sense, Robert's case may be considered as an exemplification of one of the possible paths of using the emerging opportunity structures: from cultural capital (Robert's parents), through material capital (Robert) to an attempt to combine both of them (Robert's children).

One of the most interesting differences between the analyzed cases are the ways in which the narrators render their collective identifications and their feeling of belonging to various social worlds. Hubert tends to use a repertoire allowing him to mark his identification in terms of national identity, to which a sense of attachment to a larger cultural entity like Europe or the European Union may be added. This is done in a non-conflicting way through consciously experienced biographical work in which the construction of enlarged identity is something to be achieved. Robert uses nominally the same references – Polishness has become an important frame of his social identity, especially in the last years when he has tended to be more political aware. However,

in opposition to Hubert, his understanding of being patriotic is far more conservative. For example, his biographical work concentrated on correlating the experience and political choices of his parents leads him to understanding the European Union as a threat to the Polish identity and culture. Furthermore, Hubert takes on an active and open orientation towards culturally different experiences. In his case, it evinces his willingness not only to develop professional skills, but is also the readiness to take the perspective of a culturally different *Other*, to reconstruct one's own cognitive patterns and to do biographical and identity work.

It should be remembered that the sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954) presented in this article, which emerged during the analysis of the collected narrative interviews, are not binding. The interpretation threads proposed here are intended to open the arena of discussion and outline dimensions which will be the starting point for confrontation with other life histories.

Kaja Kaźmierska

PART 4

BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES: FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

In the previous part we were concerned with various aspects of opportunity structures which opened new ways of managing one's own biography, but could also become a biographical trap, we were mainly moving in the sphere of work and related education. In this part, we want to focus on biographical resources. They can be defined by taking two perspectives. The first one refers to the objective, etic categories, while the second to subjective, emic interpretations. Regarding the first perspective, biographical resources will be created by the socially inherited and developed in the course of life resources, which, if used by the individual, can be described using known concepts such as family, social, or cultural capital. "A resource is everything which is at the disposal of an individual or a group; it is transformed into capital only when there is demand for specific resources on a given market (labor, marriage, political, etc.); in other words, when the principles and rules of social life allow this resource to be used to good advantage" (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody, Rychard 2000: 28). The quote above is not only an example of the application of an external perspective, but also may raise doubts as to the scope of the meaning of opportunity structures and biographical resources. In fact, setting clear boundaries where one ends and the other begins is difficult and sometimes even impossible, especially in the perspective of the biographical approach. One can imagine a situation whereby regarding one biography as an opportunity structure, in another it will be described as a biographical resource. On the other hand, within a given biography, it is difficult to clearly define the transition between opportunity structures and biographical resources. It is, as the entire biography, fluid in the sense of processuality of experiences and events. If you consider biographical resources and opportunity structures as etic categories, it could be simplified that the former are more rooted in *Gemeinschaft* and the latter in *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies 1964). Following this lead, one could say that a family can be both a biographical resource and an opportunity structure. Therefore, treating this distinction as an analytical description of what the biographical *Gestalt* involves, we attempt to distinguish between opportunity structures and biographical resources.

In further considerations, we will be interested in the second – emic perspective, when the individual, through giving meaning to experience, interprets it as a significant biographical resource. Of course, one should immediately remark that the very concept of biographical resources does not belong to the language of the narrators. None of our interviewees used it. Its provenance is therefore etic. We rather want to show the ways of presenting one's biography in relation to its specific dimensions, which were recognized by the narrators as particularly important for shaping their lives in the dimension of *Gestalt*, sometimes arduously built. Though, the importance of these experiences can be reconstructed both based on direct declarations and the way of including specific themes into the narration. Regarding declarations, it is about the respondents' direct references in the first part of the interview (i.e., spontaneous narrative), for example, to the role of the family of origin and the family they have started, making direct declarations as to its significance in their own biography. The second very common circumstance is the reconstruction of meanings and interpretations based on narrative analysis. In many cases (this is a general remark which also applies to other research projects), the narrators speak "indirectly," they do not explicitly refer to issues of interest to the researcher, but the analysis shows that their story embodies the essence of *these* matters.¹

It should also be noted that biographical resources do not necessarily have to have a positive aspect, organizing the biography. It can also happen that they are a source of suffering and require intensive biographical work.

Therefore, using categories which are well-known and rather belong to the etic order, we will try to point to those areas which can be considered as biographical resources. The starting point is not particularly original – the two most important areas are family and social bonds.

The family

Let us start with the doubt expressed in the last sentence: recognizing a family as a biographical resource is not an original statement, after all, the family is the basic reference point, a space for the initial creation of social bonds, and in the case of the Polish society (though not only) is invariably recognized as the most important value. Yet, following the consistent trail of generating categories from the research material, we must state that the sphere of the family,

¹ For example, in our project, we never asked about the transformation. Additionally, the word practically does not appear in narrations. However, it is difficult to analyze the collected material differently than in the context of the biographical experience of the transformation and the relationship between the collective and individually experienced social process.

next to work, was one of the basic frameworks structuring the biographical stories of our interlocutors. Obviously, this statement can be taken for granted too. However, taking into account the rules of constructing a narration when the storyteller is subjected to narrative constraints (Schütze 1984, 2008), he or she chooses a line of narrative about his life. After all, it is impossible to tell everything, one always chooses a theme around which the story is built. It can, therefore, be assumed that the family will not necessarily form one of the main threads of the narrative, the interlocutor may as well concentrate on other aspects of his or her biography.² If we take this into account, the statement that in most of the narratives we collected the family motif appeared in their main plot, and even if, in the background, the narrators clearly indicated that the family constitutes one of the basic biographical resources.

Interestingly, also among the youngest group – people born in the 1980s, the family of origin and family relationships were usually in the main part of the spontaneous narration, presented as biographically significant and this had already been evident in many case studies included in previous parts of this book. At the same time, many of our interlocutors born in this decade have not started their own families, some lived in informal relationships, they rather did not have children.³ Therefore, the narrations clearly show the tension between references to family bonds, often treated as a kind of permanent (even if emotionally not easy) biographical point of reference, and contemporary trends along with their socio-cultural context. What is most important here are one's individual aspirations, pursuing a career, including education, supported by the experience of uncertainty as to the possibilities of development and managing one's life. These processes are reinforced by the expectations towards the standard of living and the desire to control it, understood as the possibility of accurately planning its various aspects. This was shown in the texts presented in the previous section. Thus, on the one hand, the collected narrations fit within the frame of modernity as described by sociologists (Marody 2014) including the characteristics of family changes (e.g., Szlendak 2010, Slany 2013, Kwak 2015, Sikorska 2019). On the other, (a bit to our surprise since we were guided by this modern diagnosis) family relationships turned out to be particularly important, although what this *importance* means, we will try to show in this part of the book.

² Also in our collection of interviews we had examples of narrations focused solely, for example, on the sphere of work. However, which was surprising to some extent, family relations and placing biographical experiences in a variously constructed frame of family references was a feature of the vast majority of life stories. On the following pages, we will characterize these frames.

³ Of course, against such patterns, one can find contrasting cases, for example, families with children or many children, belonging to the same social class. However, all studies show that the dominant pattern is the one we are describing.

Naturally, the family theme has already appeared in publications devoted to the transformation process. Researchers agreed that in a situation of radical and hardly predictable systemic change, the only certain (though not always equally effective) social capital was the family (Mach 2011). Yet, the change of the system did not necessarily force a change in the attitude towards the family as a basic social resource – on the contrary, one can look at the process of coping with the transformation as another element of activating family capital. For example, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, referring to the theory of rational choice, showed that during the PPR (Polish People's Republic) the family became

a strategic instrument of reproduction. Both, the problem of providing economic security in the moments of crisis and stabilizing conflicts (suppressing differences of interest) were to be sorted out by 'home-made' solutions. This fact is at the root of the 'familialism' of Polish society, in its demographic and normative dimension [...] The strategic role of marriage and the family has been sanctified in specific norms: the norm of church marriage, as well as the condemnation of single mothers and homosexual relationships. The exceptionally high (compared to western European countries) proportion of indications for 'having children' as a condition for a successful marriage testifies to the re-'functionalization' of the family for the needs of reproduction (Giza-Poleszczuk 2007: 305).⁴

The diagnosis presented by the author concerned mainly the period of socialism and the transfer of this pattern to the period of transformation. If we contrast this with current data, a trend change is clearly visible. A feature of modern marriages is the postponement of parenthood. Before the birth of the first child, the couple works on life and professional stability. This is especially true for women, who want to strengthen their position on the labor market and gain experience so that after giving birth to a child they can easily return to professional activity. The dynamics of changes is illustrated in Table 1, showing

⁴ In this context, it is worth recalling the considerations of Stefan Nowak, who in 1979 used the concept of a sociological vacuum to characterize Polish society. "Between the level of primary groups and the level of the national community, there exists – from the point of view of identifying people and their emotional involvement – a kind of sociological vacuum. If we wanted to sketch a gigantic 'sociogram' based on human feelings of group bond and identification, then the social structure of our country understood in this way would appear as a 'federation' of primary groups, families, and groups based on friendship, united in a national community with very weak other types of bonds than the bonds at these two levels" (Nowak 1979: 160). This diagnosis of Polish society then (and probably largely still the contemporary one) showed the fundamental importance of the family (considering the lack of other possibilities) as the most important (most active) space for building social relations.

both the average increase in the age of giving birth to a child for selected years and the age of giving birth to the first child and subsequent ones.

Table 1. The median age of mothers depending on the child order in 1980–2015

Year	Total	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
1980	25,1	22,9	25,7	28,2	30,3	32,1
1985	26,1	23,3	26,5	28,5	30,9	32,5
1990	25,8	22,7	26,2	29,5	31,5	33,0
1995	25,8	22,8	26,3	29,8	32,2	33,7
2000	26,1	23,7	27,1	30,0	32,6	34,1
2005	27,4	25,4	28,7	31,3	33,3	34,7
2010	28,6	26,6	30,1	32,5	33,9	35,3
2015	29,7	27,6	30,9	33,1	34,3	35,3

Source: P. Szukalski, „Podwyższenie się wieku matek w Polsce – ujęcie przestrzenne,” *Demografia i Gerontologia Społeczna – Biuletyn Informacyjny* 2017, nr 3, p. 2, <http://dSPACE.uni.lodz.pl> (accessed: 11.04.2019).

Another significant change is the growing recognition of marriage as a relationship vulnerable to impermanence. As can be seen from the numbers in the table below: if at the transformation threshold for 255,000 marriages 42,000 ended in divorce, which is about 16.5%, in 2017 it was almost 34% of couples who divorced, that is, 65,000 out of 192,000 new relationships. It is worth noting that during this time the number of marriages significantly decreased – by 25%.

The data of the Central Statistical Office indicate that after the intensive increase in the number of divorces adjudicated in Poland recorded until the middle of the previous decade, this trend has clearly slowed down and has remained relatively stable in recent years. This means that for the past thirteen years, courts in Poland have ruled about 65,000 divorces per year (from 61.3 thousand in 2010 to 71.9 thousand in 2006). On the other hand, after 2008, the number of concluded marriages significantly decreased. Although the downward trend in this respect has slowed down in recent years, the current number of marriages concluded annually remains one of the lowest in history. [...] The indicator expressing the ratio of marriages concluded to marriage terminated as a result of divorce, after an initial radical decline at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, increased slightly in 2007–2008 and then began to decline again. In 2013 it reached its lowest level. [...] This means that in recent years, approximately one out of three marriages ends in a divorce.⁵

⁵ Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 7/2019: *Stosunek Polaków do rozwodów*, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_007_19.PDF, p. 1 (accessed: 17.05.2019).

Table 2. Demographic data based on Statistics Poland report

Specification	1990	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017
Marriages in thousands per 1000 persons...	255,4 6,7	211,2 5,5	228,3 5,9	188,8 4,9	193,5 5,0	192,6 5,0
Divorces in thousands per 1000 persons...	42,5 1,1	42,8 1,1	61,3 1,6	67,3 1,8	63,5 1,7	65,3 1,7
Natural increase in thousands per 1000 persons...	157,4 4,1	10,3 0,3	34,8 0,9	-25,6 -0,7	- 5,8 -0,2	-0,9 -0,0
Live births in thousands per 1000 persons...	547,7 14,3	378,3 9,9	413,3 10,7	369,3 9,6	382,3 9,9	402,0 10,5
Deaths total in thousands per 1000 persons...	390,3 10,2	368,0 9,6	378,5 9,8	394,9 10,3	388,0 10,1	402,9 10,9

Source: Raport GUS *Ludność. Stan i struktura oraz ruch naturalny w przekroju terytorialnym w 2018 r. Stan w dniu 30 VI*. s. 9 <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-stan-i-struktura-oraz-ruch-naturalny-w-przekroju-terytorialnym-w-2018-r-stan-w-dniu-30-vi,6,24.html> (accessed: 8.04.2019)

Despite this clear change sometimes diagnosed as a family crisis (e.g., Taranowicz, Grotowska ed. 2015), various studies show that family relationships remain a significant frame of reference also as part of everyday routines. For example, according to the Center for Public Opinion Research findings: “Face-to-face meetings with family are invariably important for Poles. Three-quarters of respondents who have parents (75%) meet with them at least once a week. Two-thirds of grandparents (67%) see their grandchildren at least once every seven days, and 64% of parents will often meet with their adult children who live separately. Personal contacts with in-laws, siblings, and grandparents are also quite frequent.”⁶ Additionally, research shows that these habits do not change. “The vast majority of Poles maintain personal contacts with close people also without any special occasion – on weekdays (80%) and Saturdays and Sundays (78%), and over two-thirds (67%) spend long weekends, holidays, or vacations with their family.”⁷ In another of her publications, Giza-Poleszczuk shows that intergenerational flows primarily include material benefits (from parents to children) and other tangible benefits (from parents to children and from grandchildren to grandparents) (Giza-Poleszczuk 2000: 129). Parents support their children materially and help with looking after their grandchildren.

⁶ Komunikat CBOS nr 107/2013 *Więzi rodzinne*, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_107_13.PDF, para 2, (accessed: 6.05.2019).

⁷ *Ibid.*: 7.

In turn, grandchildren, but also children, support grandparents/parents in situations requiring care and in dealing with institutionalized activities, for example, handling official matters. “According to the ‘SHARE: 50+ in Europe’ study, Polish grandparents devoted three hours a week to looking after their grandchildren more than grandparents in other European countries, spending about 9 hours a week on average with each grandchild.”⁸ According to the findings of the Center for Public Opinion Research in 2012, 72% of adult Poles feel that they owe something to their grandparents. “The respondents’ gratitude most often resulted from the acknowledgement of the role that the grandparents played in raising and looking after them (65%) and for giving them love (64%). Over half owed them knowledge of family history (57%), showing moral principles (57%) and religious faith (54%).”⁹

Depending on the adopted interpretative perspective, this situation can be presented as the implementation of a well-rooted cultural pattern of ‘familialism’ of Polish society and thus the role of grandparents in the family¹⁰ can be perceived as an element of intergenerational relations in an extended family (not necessarily living together). Or the continuation (albeit in a different systemic framework) of deinstitutionalization of the biography, when the family is forced to take up activities which in modern societies are taken over by institutions (e.g., taking care of children or the elderly).

This handful of data is intended not to systematically describe social phenomena and processes affecting the image of the modern family in our society (there are many studies on this subject), but to illustrate certain trends. Against their background, we want to show the effects of our analyses. They refer to these dimensions of the relation of an individual (narrator) – family, which are difficult to grasp in other types of research and by adopting the dominant perspectives of sociological reflection in this trend. In short, we want to show how family relationships “work” in the biographical experience, when they become a biographical resource and how they are shaped within macro-social processes. In the narrations collected, the family appears in relation to biographical resources as a topic, reference frame, value system, expected pattern, and the experience of intergenerational relations.

In this part of the book, we present three texts in which the family (in different constellations) constitutes the reference frame. However, the reader will

⁸ Research by: KANTAR. TNS *Najbardziej oddani dziadkowie w Europie*, <http://www.tnsglobal.pl/coslychac/2017/01/20/najbardziej-oddani-dziadkowie-w-europie/> (accessed: 8.05.2019).

⁹ Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 8/2012 *Rola dziadków w naszym życiu*, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_008_12.PDF, p. 4 (accessed: 8.05.2019).

¹⁰ Let us note that the motif of relations told with grandparents is consistently present in the case studies shown so far and will be visible later in the book.

easily realize that the family thread has appeared virtually in all the case studies in the previous chapters and many of the analytical dimensions that we would like to discuss concerning the family have already appeared too. Additionally, a methodological remark can be made – in biographical studies it is difficult to abstract some threads without showing their context. It can be said that this is an advantage of this approach – we see a given phenomenon or social process throughout the whole *Gestalt*. Since, as we have stated, the family is a significant biographical resource for almost all the narrators, it is not surprising that references to it had to be found in previous texts. To some extent, the weakness of this method, especially at the level of presenting the results of the analyses, is, therefore, the difficulty in an orderly presentation of threads without avoiding repetition. Therefore, we urge the reader to refer to the considerations presented here to almost all the texts contained in the volume. At this point, we want to highlight a few issues which we consider to be particularly significant. Firstly, they often appeared in the accounts, and secondly, they drew our attention in the course of analyses precisely due to this importance.¹¹

The role of grandparents

When examining the role of grandparents, most often the “assistance” dimension comes to the fore – support in the process of raising grandchildren. Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 111) based on her research distinguished three forms of help – childcare and organizational support, financial assistance, emotional support giving a sense of security associated with the belief that grandparents’ help can always be counted on. Of course, this type of relationship also appeared in our research. In the narratives, it was easy to reconstruct this assistance model primarily referring to grandmothers, as Sikorska emphasizes. However, what came to the fore in the accounts of our interlocutors is the acknowledgement of grandparents (not only grandmothers) as significant Others, performing primarily a formative role, building ideas about the world, as well as emotional relationships and intimate bonds. While Sikorska’s research refers to contemporary parents who use the help of their parents,¹²

¹¹ Of course, in the theoretical and methodological approach applied here, the researchers should follow the material. However, in the course of the analysis, they have their etic categories, some recognition of the field. It does not always coincide with the perspective of the narrator. Hence the comment that our attention was attracted by the accounts which seemed to differ significantly from the stereotypical images of contemporary relations and social ties.

¹² Interestingly, the author emphasizes that the respondents used the term ‘grandparents’ much more often than ‘my/our parents’, which she claims was due to

in the collected narrations most often they concerned the relationship of grandchildren (narrators) – grandparents. Of course, in the accounts, we see images of grandmothers and grandfathers fulfilling an assisting role, but this itself is not important for the narrators. What is of much greater importance is the type of bond built then, which in many cases has been of a formative character and the figure of grandparents was part of the family landscape. The following fragment of an interview illustrates this very well – the narrator (born in 1984) talks about deceased grandparents and then the interviewer asks:

I: When did they die?

N: In 1995. Both

I: Oh. And what did they do?

N: Well, they were *grandparents*¹³

I: I see.

N: You mean you want to know what I know about what they did before?

I: Yeah.

N: Grandpa was...

The above dialogue between the interviewer and the narrator perfectly illustrates the differently adopted perspectives. Responding to the question spontaneously, the narrator refers to her granddaughter's experiences at that time – grandparents were grandparents – as an eleven-year-old she had built the relationship with them through the prism of family ties. Moving from the level of biographical experience to the level of *knowledge* – the story told she fully answers the question. This analytical distinction made by the narrator herself perfectly shows the difference between *what* and *how* in the biographical experience. For an eleven-year-old girl, the *quality* of the relationship comes to the fore. Who the grandparents were, *what* they did was secondary knowledge passed on in the family stories (perhaps also by the grandparents talking about their past). It is included at some point in her own biography and begins to be equally important. However, in the process of reconstructing biographical experiences, it fulfils a different role.

In the case studies presented in individual chapters, the figures of grandmothers and grandfathers appear as significant Others, particularly in the narration of Paweł, Hanna, or Agnieszka. Below is an excerpt from an interview

the fact that “contacts with their parents were most often mediated in the relationship grandmother/grandfather – grandchild” (Sikorska 2019: 111).

¹³ In italics – K.K.

with Róża. The analysis included in Chapter II only briefly mentions the role of the grandmother while the narrator talks about her as an important person.

Before I went to school my life was quite, quite normal, just like any other child's. [...] My problem in my school years was that I was an only child. I had always, always envied my neighbors, friends, classmates, that they had brothers or sisters. They had somebody to come back to, unfortunately, I was all by myself, alone. But, I wasn't a typical only child, who was simply an egoist. I was simply always inviting lots of friends, I was incredibly open. And my home was always vibrant, although they weren't my brothers or sisters, but my acquaintances, my friends. I didn't know my grandfathers, I was very close to my grandma, who, when I attended, err, primary school because back then there was no junior high school, was trusted with all my secrets, my first loves, this kind of thing, as she was always at hand. [...] My mum was working at the post office in the telecommunication department. It was a very busy place then, so she works shifts all holidays, so I couldn't plan, for example, with my parents as a rule, because my mum had this kind of job that she had to go to work. When my grandma passed away it happened that I spent some Christmases with my dad only. So Christmas Eve supper, incredibly ceremonial, with a lot of people. No, quite the opposite, just the two of us, so I have some bitter thoughts remembering it. [...] It was simply, just one child, you know, with dad, when, when grandma died, my mum had this kind of job.

And I associate a sorrowful memory from 1991 when the Youth Days took place in Częstochowa during John Paul II's visit to Poland, and I went to that event then, my grandma was very sick then. When I came back from this rally and my grandma died one day later. [...] As I said, I was so sorrowful, my grandma, I mean she knew about many things my mum doesn't know even today, so grandma just knew and she was trusted with my, I mean, all secrets. And when I speak about grandma tears always fill my eyes, cause she was very close to me. And when she wasn't even 70, so I reckoned it was quite young for a grandma, she could have lived a longer life. But, she died in 1991, I gave birth to Monika in 1994.

We quoted two passages. The first comes from the main narration. As can be seen, the grandma is presented in a multidimensional constellation. It is not just about the help in raising children – taking care of them in the absence of a working mother. The figure of grandma becomes a kind of substitute for extended family relationships – to some extent a symbol of the family as such. The image of two people (father and daughter) at the Christmas table is very symbolic. Of course, not literally, but Róża feels that the basic conditions which constitute a social group – in this case the family – have been broken. According to the classic sociological definition, a social group is formed by at least three people – at the table, there are only two. This experience, somewhat mediated by the figure of the grandmother, results in her efforts to build social ties – in the quoted passage they are peer ties, in the entire account of Róża this is a constant

focus on building social relationships in her environment and the decision to have a large family – the narrator has four children. Another important dimension of the relationship with her grandmother is building trust, which, as shown in Chapter II, has become one of her basic biographical strategies.

The other quoted fragment comes from the stage of answering the interviewer's questions. This is the first question after the coda and it concerns the work of the narrator's father. While answering it, Róża smoothly moves on to describing her children and the religiosity of the whole family. There is then an association with the death of her grandmother. This fragment shows a deep emotional relationship with the grandma, which is expressed from two perspectives: then – recalling the memories of the event in Częstochowa is associated with the experience of her grandmother's death, and contemporary – Róża was 16 years old then, as it turns out that soon (at 19) will become a mother. Commenting on her grandmother's death, she takes into account the subsequent events in her life and places the grandmother in the macrostructural dimension showing demographic dependencies (And when she wasn't even 70, so I reckoned it was quite young for a grandma,) and the level of micro-intergenerational relations and the appearance of the next generation – the great-granddaughter.

Intergenerational relations

As we wrote in introductory remarks, one of our assumptions was that biographical experience of transformation would differ due to belonging to different generations. Thus we searched for our interviewees among people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Yet, when distinguishing these groups we preferred to speak about cohorts, rather than generations. At the same time, we wondered if the generational perspective and Mannheim's concept of generation could be applied in the analysis. However, combining the concept of a generation with the method, or rather the biographical approach appeared to be a natural direction of research. Karl Mannheim (1952) defined a generation not only as related to the biological rhythm, but mainly as a similarity of social location, which builds the structures of opportunity to create a specific bond among members belonging to a given community. We will come back to this issue in the concluding remarks at the end of the book. Now it is enough to mention that in Polish sociology, or even more broadly speaking social sciences, the generational perspective had been hardly assumed.¹⁴ Most frequently,

¹⁴ We would also like to stress that we distance ourselves from the currently fashionable use of generation category to describe subsequent social groups, for example, those entering the labor market (X, Y, Z generation) and the common-sense attribution of certain social or even psychological dispositions to them. Such an interpretation (a reflection on social reality, often related to the field of management) is completely alien to us.

generational research was focused on the Second World War experiences, mainly Holocaust studies (e.g., Rosenthal 1998 [2011], Inowlocki 1993) and was composed of members of family groups by the kinship denoting (grand)parent-child relationship (Pilcher 1994). In the field of biographical research, the generation aspect has recently become important when analyzing migration processes. Although our empirical material is focused on different biographical experiences,¹⁵ when speaking about intergenerational relationships in the collected narratives we can find some common formal features. The researchers analyzing migration and applying the biographical approach use “the concept of transmission between generations: a concept that covers a wide range of micro-processes of communication efforts. Inasmuch as such efforts are explicitly oriented to help one’s child to shape his or her life path, they may be referred to as ‘generational work’” (Inowlocki 1993, 2013). As to the children, very often they might not respond directly to what is offered to them by their parents. However, in the long run, it may turn out that they did in fact pick up something of what was passed on to them by their parents, however integrating it into something of their own making, which serves them as a valuable resource. Such a process might be called “transmission en équivalence” (Bertaux/Bertaux-Wiame 1988). Therefore the cultural gap between generations in migrant families does not necessarily imply a break of the *transmission* (Apitzsch, Bertaux, Delcroix, Inowlocki, 2014).

To repeat once more the quotation which comments the situation of migrant families in the first, second and sometimes the third generation, yet the very idea that there is a certain potential that is being passed on, contested, problematized or activated in the next generation seems to us very credible. We could see it for instance in the presented case of Weronika and as a contrastive comparison Paweł’s narrative where relationships between parents and children (narrators) framed by the same social time and ideology are differently interpreted from the present perspective by both interviewees. In our material, in many places, we can see this, at times subtle interpretation “game” connected with the difference of perspectives, sometimes difficulties in their reciprocity.

¹⁵ It does not mean that one of the dimensions of the transformation experience, or even better, one of its consequences may not be migration. To the contrary, we know that especially after Poland’s accession to the EU permanent or temporary migration became the biographical experience of thousands of Poles. Some of us conducted research in this field using biographical perspective in the international project: EUROIDENTITIES: The Evolution of European Identity: Using biographical processes to study the development of European identity’, European Commission Framework 7 (Każmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011, 2012).

Family stories

In our opinion, the third important dimension for biographical resources, the source of which is the family, are the stories about its history. It can be said that their richness in our material is confirmed by the quantitative data. For example, research conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research in 2018 shows a clear increase in interest in this aspect of family life. “Exploring family history is more interesting and exciting than general history because it concerns ourselves. Behind its discovery are all sorts of motivations ranging from pragmatic (focused on tangible or intangible benefits associated with, for example, social status) through the need for rooting and a sense of continuity, sometimes also giving meaning or value to one’s own life by linking it to the achievements of past generations and mere cognitive curiosity. Of course, there may be other reasons for this. However, what seems important, learning about history – not only about your own family (although this is often the starting point for wider interests) – allows one to feel a certain continuity. This can be talked about in its individual dimension as an element of determining one’s own identity, but also at the community level, which we are part of by gaining historical awareness. In the study, we wanted to verify the interest in and knowledge of family history, as well as how the memory of the past is expressed” (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 1). As the research shows 44% declare that they have knowledge going back two generations, while 27% know what happened during their parents’ life, and 9% do not even have this orientation. Almost twice as many (15%) respondents knew the fate of their great grandparents, and another 4% of the previous generations (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 4). The authors of the report conclude: “Considering the last twenty or even thirty years, one can notice an increase in Poles’ interest in the history of their own families and, above all, an increase in their knowledge in this area. This is favored by the unflagging discussions about the history of Poland and Poles, and the visible renaissance of creative productions in recent years addressed to a wide audience, including films dedicated to historical issues. Knowledge of the history of one’s family is also favored by the changes in the social structure associated with the increase in the level of education of Polish society. The socio-economic status, based largely on education, significantly determines the interest and knowledge of the family history. At the same time, knowledge of the roots and family history dating a few generations back can be a status factor itself. Perhaps the most spectacular change in terms of scale which has taken place over the last few decades concerns the knowledge of the fate of grandparents or older ancestors. While at the end of the 1980s less than a third of adult Poles had such knowledge, and at the end of the 1990s – two-fifths, now it is almost two-thirds” (Roguska, Felisiak 2018: 15–16).¹⁶

¹⁶ Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 114/2018 *Historie rodzinne* https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_114_18.PDF

In our narrations, of course, not everyone has elaborated on the history of their parents or grandparents. Nevertheless, it was clear that for the narrators, family history is important. In many cases, they presented it in the main part of the spontaneous narrative. There were cases, as for example, Leszek presented in Chapter III, where the story about the vicissitudes of various family members constituted the structural axis for making one's biography meaningful and it was not a simple answer to who I am or where I come from, but as Piotr Filipkowski writes:

The most important message the narrator conveys here is not really about the grandfather's involvement (as it will turn out later, he was not his biological grandfather, but his mother's stepfather) in the defensive war of 1939, but his ability to disentangle himself from dangerous and too risky stories. History – this big one, written with a capital letter – gets people entangled in historical circumstances. The narrator will choose those characters from the family saga who were able to transform History into individual small stories – and to disentangle themselves efficiently, somehow take command of one's fate – even if the spectrum of agency was very narrow in the given circumstances.

In many of the collected narratives, family stories are a resource which can easily be triggered. We became convinced of this by asking questions about parents or grandparents when they did not appear in the main part of the spontaneous narration. In fact, this question when asked in the second phase of the interview would always resonate with extensive family stories, sometimes dating back to the history of the war of the generation of grandparents or parents.

Social bonds

A lot is said today about the specificity of post-modernity, the characteristics of which are built in contrast to modern society. Issues related to the relationship of an individual with others come to the fore. What is emphasized is individualization, a departure from the thus-far patterns of action and planning one's own biography, assuming its fluidity. A lot is also said in this context about the transformation and crisis of social bonds, sometimes presenting the image of life as a "collection" rather than a "collectivity"¹⁷ of elements. As Zygmunt Bauman writes "In our times, the world has been fragmented into loosely

¹⁷ I use these terms metaphorically in relation to their basic meaning in sociology when a collection of people is considered to be a situation in which there are no relations between the gathered, as opposed to a collectivity which is the result of a social bond.

related elements, and our individual lives are reduced to random sequences of carelessly related episodes. Few of us – if anyone – can avoid participating in more than one community of ‘ideas and principles’, real or would-be, coherent or fleeting” (Bauman 2007: 15). It can be assumed that this way of experiencing one’s biography and identity work will be translated into a narrative form, especially for those representing the young generation. Of course, young people are unlikely to make overall life assessments, like older people. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that in the collected narratives a pattern of interpreting the biography clearly emerges, in line with extreme individualization, and above all with the “fragmentation” of biographical experiences. Of course, its shape depends, at least this is the internal conviction, on the particular choices of individuals sometimes escaping social expectations. However, it is difficult to agree with the following view:

It does not seem that assembling fragments into a full, coherent whole called ‘identity’ is the main concern of our contemporaries. [...] Maybe this is not their worry at all? A *coherent*, strongly riveted, and well-constructed identity could prove to be a burden, coercion, and restriction of the freedom of choice. It could foretell the inability to open the door when opportunity knocks on it (Bauman 2007: 51).

The collected life stories, also, and maybe especially among the people born in the 1980s show that it is quite different. Contemporary fragmentation of biography does not, in fact, invalidate the pursuit of a sense of continuity. Fragmentation does not translate into a biographical story in the sense that usually, the narration of a young person is not just a cluster of diffused biographical episodes. This is due to the fact that it usually serves the role of organizing experiences, giving them biographical sense, activating a flashback through a story (Bruner 1987: 11–13). Paradoxically, an individualistic conviction of one’s uniqueness and freedom in constructing one’s own self can even promote coherence.

The most important thing, however, is to recognize your own identity as unique, having its own overall form (*Gestalt*), which matters, and is valuable in itself and deserves to be developed. This includes key issues such as: supporting one’s personal identity through one’s own coordinated and persistent actions (e.g., gaining clarity about the enormous difficulties in one’s past) on the one hand, and a huge thematic potential and basic thematic threads on the other, and incorporating both of these aspects into a main biographical form or biographical wholeness, as well as subsequently following the threads still filling the missing parts and linking this general biographical shape or overall form (*Gestalt*) (Schütze 2008a: 160).

Building bonds plays a significant role in this process. Again, we must refer to the not very original statement that bonds form the foundations in the process of building social order in both the macro- and micro-social dimension. On the other hand, as Mirosława Marody writes: “The categorical nature of the above statement seems to collide with the widespread description of modernity, exposing the image of an autonomous individual, making their own choices and constructing their biography in the world on their own, the most characteristic feature of which is the breakdown of bonds” (Marody 2014: 252). Well, we also admit being surprised as researchers of the modern-day who follow the diagnosis indicated by Marody, that in the collected narratives we have an incredible amount of references to bonds and the need to build relationships. Of course, these experiences are varied, there is certainly a turning point between the 1980s generation and the other decades. As we will show in Chapter XVI, the issue of building relationships also regarding the relation of locality is diverse and complicated. Nevertheless, the most important thing is that it is difficult to look for cases of *homo clausus* in the collected material. The narrators suffer more because of the I-without-we (Elias 2008) rather than rhetorically elaborate on it as a biographical success. Those who find it difficult to build relationships or who today perceive their crisis often build nostalgic descriptions of relationships.¹⁸ Therefore, if, in the collected narratives, one was to look for the symptoms of the present-day related to the transformation of social bonds manifesting in the we-I relationship, they do exist insofar as they are problematized and become the object of biographical work.

We use the concept of biographical work firstly after Anselm Strauss, who was the first one to introduce this concept into interpretive analyses and then after Fritz Schütze, who developed this concept by extending it to the overall process of organizing biographical experiences. Biographical work means making an effort to interpret life in relation to one’s own identity, self-images, behaviors, activities undertaken or not, et cetera. “Contradictions and dissonances of experience are specific even to the serene course of life and require undertaking ‘internal’ work to achieve a sense of *seamless* identity continuity” (Strauss 1993: 99). This process takes place through narrative recollection, reflecting symbolic ‘deep’ meanings revealing the self historical *Gestalts* of life; analytical comparisons of alternative ways of understanding; imagining one’s own future which harmoniously or contrastingly fits into the past; reflective decision making and evaluation of possible results. Biographical work is above all an internal activity of the mind and emotional psyche, and this internal activity is essentially based on an internal conversation with significant

¹⁸ For example, the story of the yard as a quasi-community plays such a role. See Chapter XV.

Others and oneself. In life situations of a biographical crisis, biographical work can become a clear and central pattern of cognitive and emotional life-organizing action. In trouble-free situations in life it can be just a fleeting reflection or a memory related to focusing on other activities, and it can even be subconscious (Schütze 2012: 149). The process of working on one's own biography is therefore only seemingly working *on* or *with* oneself, but it involves working with relationships which we build towards others. So, this is essentially a question about the type, quality, and strength of the bonds which connect us and the answer to the question sprayed on the wall of one of the tenement houses in Łódź: *Are we here together or everyone separately?*

This part of the book contains four texts devoted to the outlined issues. Chapter XIII entitled *A trap of systemic changes – Pola's biographical drift* – by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas and Małgorzata Potoczna, combines the perspective of opportunity structures and biographical resources. The authors show the biographical consequences resulting from the closure of the former and the absence of the latter. In Chapter XIV *Narratives rooted in family milieu. Case studies of Agnieszka and Paweł focused on the family thread as the biographical resource and main story-line* Joanna Wygnańska presents two case studies where for the narrators family remains the most important biographical resource in respect of both the family of origin and the family formed by them.

Chapter XV by Jacek Burski and Joanna Wygnańska entitled *A biographical experience of the yard as a symbolic biographical resource* is a kind of case study, but this time not based on a single case analysis, but on a particular issue. The backyard is shown here as one of the elements organizing the biographical experience and constituting a physical and symbolic space of transition between family relations and the network of peer and extended social relations.

Chapter XVI *(Re)creating bonds in the local environment – a contrastive comparison of two life strategies* by Kaja Kaźmierska presents two cases where biographical experiences are rooted in *milieu*. The first one is based on trust, the need to build bonds in every context, and the place of such rooting is the local community through which the individual deals with reality. The second case describes a kind of “secondary” rootedness in *milieu* based on biographical work after conscious uprooting.

Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, Małgorzata Potoczna

CHAPTER XIII

A TRAP OF SYSTEMIC CHANGES – POLA’S BIOGRAPHICAL DRIFT

Introduction – a few words on transformation, poverty and sociology

While poverty is not only characteristic of the capitalist system and this phenomenon was also present in the socialist countries, raising the issue of changing the opportunity structures in the period of systemic transformation, it shouldn't be overlooked that one of the most visible consequences of the great change was the growing economic inequality in the 1990s including the divergence of material living conditions. The processes of the systemic and market transformations had a rapid and dramatic course, changing the structure of the Polish society, framing the experiences of social categories and groups, as well as the course of individual and family life histories. In the first years of the transformation, which we write about in other parts of this book, a dichotomous typology according to which Polish society was divided into two opposing collectivities was present in the public and scientific discourse. *The winners of transformation* were defined as those individuals and groups who were successful in the market economy conditions (among others: Palska 2000, 2002); *the losers* were those who quickly slipped into the areas of poverty and social exclusion. *The winners* seemed to adapt efficiently to the principles of neoliberalism (Palska 2002, Jasiński 2002). *The losers*, according to the principle of blaming the victim, were usually assigned the attributes which prevented them from using the opportunity structures opening in the process of change and inevitably condemning them to failure (see Chapter II by Kaja Kaźmierska and the introduction to Part III *Transforming opportunity structures*).

The processes of change quickly became the subject of research and analysis. Surprisingly, however, despite many years of sociological research tradition into marginalized environments, only a few sociologists undertook projects on the negative consequences of the systemic transformation. The peculiar resistance of the academic community to these issues is evidenced

by the fact that poverty researchers (especially those representing the engaged sociology) were then informally referred to as “lamenting sociologists” and their achievements as “lamenting sociology.” Due to the obstacles to studying social problems in socialist countries (cf., Chapter V), to some extent isolated from the Western Bloc, Polish sociology lacked theoretical background and language to describe the studied phenomena. Therefore, it would apply the concepts and lexicon functioning in those years in Europe and the USA importing, *inter alia*, the concept of underclass along with its connotations imposed on the poor, or the concept of the culture of poverty by Oscar Lewis, which is still controversial today (among others: Lewis 1967, Harvey, Reed 1996, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998, Grotowska-Leder 2002: 33, 38, Tarkowska 2001: 104–109, Tarkowska 2013, Golczyńska-Grondas 2004). In the book *Życie i pracować w enklawach biedy* (“Living and working in the poverty enclaves”) published in 1998, Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, as one of the first Polish scholars, described the models for explaining poverty and conceptualizing the collectivity of the poor, indicating that they are differentiated by the subject which is considered responsible for poverty and the status attributed to the causes of poverty. Therefore, she listed the models in which: 1) the causes of poverty are “located in the individual” – they result from the personality or character defects usually associated with ethnicity, race, or location in the social structure (deficiency model, genetic/racial inferiority model), 2) “causes of poverty are in the community” socializing and equipping the individual with features, values, and norms preventing functioning in mainstream society (culture of poverty model), 3) poverty is the result of an unfavorable social or life situation in which an individual finds oneself (accidental model, situational model), 4) poverty is the result of social changes, primarily changes in the labor market, and may even be an “inherent feature of a market-based society” and perform specific functions to its advantage (ravages of social change model, cyclical model) and 5) poverty is an immanent feature of the class systems based on social exploitation (class exploitation model) (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998, Wright 1994, Vranken 1995 in Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998: 26–28). In Polish sociological “poorology,” as the years went by, other theoretical positions, paradigms, and discourses of social exclusion appeared (Silver 1994, Levitas 2005), various concepts of impoverished neighborhoods (Wilson 1987; Sampson 2009, Wacquant 2007, 2008, 2009), or theoretical and methodological positions such as those represented by Ruth Lister postulating participatory action research with partner participation of the interested groups themselves (Lister 2004, Tarkowska 2013a). Original Polish conceptualizations and models were also developed (e.g., Grotowska-Leder 2002, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Golczyńska-Grondas 2010, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013). Despite an in-depth reflection on the problems

of poverty and social exclusion. The issue of social exclusion drivers – the situations and factors excluding individual and collective social actors from participation in the life of wider society – still has not been clearly resolved (among others: Spicker 2007: 66–67).

In this chapter, we assume the position that poverty is the result of macro-structural changes affecting intermediate structures and microstructures. In addition, the results of research on poverty, social exclusion, and helping institutions conducted for over 20 years in Łódź and the Łódź Province entitle us to put forward the assumption that the phenomenon of permanent poverty is sustained by the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission of poverty, which is accompanied by a complex set of conditions (i.a., Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Golczyńska-Grondas 2010, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013). The main aim of the article is therefore to analyze systemic changes’ impact on the life course of an individual endangered by poverty and social exclusion together with the set of opportunity structures and constraints, which within the boundary conditions are available to such individuals, affect their life possibilities, facilitate or hinder their participation in the social order.¹ The impact of these conditions will be illustrated by the case study of a biography of a 40-year-old inhabitant of Łódź. The story of the narrator’s family embodies, with a certain time delay, the stories of typical migrations for Łódź “for bread and a better life.” A poor rural family comes to a big city in the first half of the 1980s. Pola becomes a representative of the middle generation of Łódź workers, in which slipping into poverty is largely the result of the peculiarity of the changes associated with the process of the systemic transformation initiated in 1989. The narrator’s biographical trajectory is exacerbated by the lack of economic, social, and cultural capital which the previous generations did not accumulate (cf., Potoczna, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009, Bunio Mroczek, Potoczna, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2016). We precede the case analysis with a synthetic description of pauperization processes from the first years of the systemic transformation to the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, that is, the time when the interview with Pola was conducted.² In the chapter, we use various materials. We reach for literature, as well as the results of empirical research (here, first of all, the team of Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, in which we worked for over 20 years). We also use empirical materials collected

¹ We assume that each biography is clearly marked by its own specific configuration of opportunity structures and limitations rooted in historical processes and structural factors dynamically changing along the course of one’s life (Roberts 2009, Staunton 2015, Thompson 2017, cited in: Golczyńska-Grondas 2019).

² The interview with Pola was conducted in 2004 as part of the project *INVITE. New Ways of Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training*, 2003–2006, Leonardo da Vinci program (project no 2003-D/03/B/F/PP 146 087).

for the needs of the project *INVITE. New Ways of Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training* (2003–2006), including an unpublished working report assessing the support system for the unemployed in the early years of the systemic transformation. The scope of the statistical data referred to in the text covers the period of the transformation up to the middle of the first decade of the 21st century – due to the date of the interview with the narrator.

Poverty as a result of the systemic transformation³

In 2000 Elżbieta Tarkowska – an outstanding Polish sociologist, poverty researcher, and an ally of the poor – wrote: it is hard to “remain silent or not to notice the existence of poverty in Poland. Today’s poverty in Poland is visible to the naked eye. In a literal sense, poverty came out on the streets” (Tarkowska 2000: 11). This “massive” character of the new poverty, seen both in big cities as in smaller towns, is already reflected in the first years of transformation by the statistics collected at that time. The first year of the new order brought a twofold increase in the scope of poverty, a clear upward trend continued in subsequent years, which was confirmed by the results of research carried out using various poverty measures.⁴ In the years 1989–2004 the percentage of people living below the social minimum increased more than three and a half times from 15.8% in 1989 to 59% in 2004. The level of extreme poverty has grown from 6.4% in 1994 to 11.8% in 2014 and the extent of relative poverty from 12% in 1989 to 20.3% in 2004. The share of people benefiting from social security support has increased from 13.3% in 1997 to 19.2% in 2004 (Beskid, cited in: Tarkowska 2000: 12, Daszyńska 2002, 2004, Balcerzak, Paradowska

³ Poverty and social exclusion are relatively rarely reported in “mainstream” biographical sociology in terms of outcomes of statistical, quantitative research. Similarly the descriptions of social policy tools are. Therefore this chapter contains two separate descriptive parts with data and information helpful in analyzing and understanding Pola’s case.

⁴ Researching poverty we use objective and subjective measures. Objective measures, used in statistical and economic research, are used to estimate the scale and depth of poverty using financial indicators, such as income, expenses including the share of food expenses, the level of schooling, health status. These include: 1) subsistence minimum; 2) the social minimum; 3) the relative poverty threshold, which is determined by income below 50% of the average equivalent monthly income or expenditures of an average household; 4) the statutory threshold, which determines the scope of administrative poverty meaning the level of income that entitles a person to receive social security benefits. Subjective measures or indicators of subjective deprivation, are based on the declarations of people who perceive themselves as poor when assessing their income and access to various types of goods and services.

2004, *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w świetle wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych/Situation of households according to the results of household budget surveys 2003, 2004*). A sudden impoverishment of a significant part of the society during the transformation period was, on the one hand, a consequence of unemployment and the resulting decrease in the level of real wages, including wages in the budgetary sphere, a decrease in agricultural income and a low level of social benefits. On the other hand, the pauperization processes were driven by an increase in consumer prices, living costs, including the expenses related to housing, and an increase in the costs of using social services resulting from their commercialization (e.g., the costs of health treatment, childcare, and care for dependent people).

The appearance of poverty was then perceived as the result of economic changes, primarily transformations in the labor market and changes in the sphere of social policy of the state (Golinowska 1996, 1997). However, it was also pointed out that the new poverty was rooted in the country’s past and strengthened by factors such as the specific heritage of real socialism, including the social structure “inherited” from that system. People who became poor “in the first place” were the ones who in the Polish People’s Republic had been excluded from participation in the so-called second economic cycle and based their existence on income from work in state-owned enterprises. Such people were entering the period of systemic changes deprived of economic and social capital and cultural skills to adapt to the new conditions of functioning in a market economy. Their limited adaptability and helplessness in the face of new rules governing paid work, the changing criteria and measures of a successful life were being depicted (Czapiński 1995). The specificity of such people’s behavior strengthened by attitudes attributed to *homo sovieticus* (among others, no predisposition to independence and activity) were to reduce their chances of overcoming problems completely new for them (Tischner 1992, Szalai 1996, cited in: Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Grotowska-Leder 1996). As a consequence: “various forms of poverty, hidden, invisible during the Polish People’s Republic [...] [revealed themselves] in the form of permanent marginalization” of entire professional categories (Tarkowska 1998, 2000).

Poverty particularly affected certain social categories. The risk of slipping into poverty was more common for women than for men, people forming large families, single (especially) young parents, people with low levels of education, employed in physical work positions,⁵ the chronically ill and disabled living

⁵ For example, in 2004 the extreme poverty rate in families in which the main income came from being employed as a physical worker was 15%, compared to 2% among the households living out of employment, but in non-worker positions (GUS 2004).

from social benefits (Golinowska 1997, Topińska 1996). The inhabitants of rural areas were also becoming poorer, especially the families of employees of liquidated state farms, even though farms and backyard gardens constituted a certain resource providing a nutrition base (Topińska 1996, Golinowska 1997, Psyk-Piotrowska 1998, Tarkowska 1998, Szafraniec 1999, Perepeczko 2002). In the 1990s three-quarters of farm families were unable to earn enough income to sustain themselves; their earnings dropped from 110% to 40%, and 15% – 20% people from farms related to agriculture lived below the subsistence minimum (Perepeczko 2002: 33, GUS 2004). Pauperization of the villages was the result of a drastic deterioration of the economic situation in agriculture, endured especially in traditional, small-scale farms and – in some families – the loss of jobs in the industry by impoverished workers, which deprived their families of additional income (Beskid 1999). The researchers' attention was drawn to the progressive process of rural marginalization in the subjective aspect: "today at the advanced stage of the systemic transformation, the belief that the village is a place forgotten by people, God and history is especially common among its inhabitants" (Szafraniec 1999: 41).

Obviously, families affected by unemployment were subject to rapid pauperization. The scale and dynamics of this phenomenon was a shock to the decision-makers and the entire society. Already in 1990 the number of unemployed started increasing very rapidly (the unemployment rate was then 6%) (Auleytner, Głębicka 2000: 272) three years later in 1993 – 16,4% (Kryńska 2000: 129). The year 1998 saw the second wave of unemployment, and at the turn of the century, it was around 18–19%. In the early 2000s, despite economic growth, employment was falling. Entrepreneurs not only withheld recruiting new workers, research carried out in 2001 shows that 40% of them reduced employment or intended to do it. Other forms of cost-cutting were also introduced, such as months of unpaid leave or the use of flexible forms of employment. The scale of unemployment was so large that it reduced the feeling of social security not only of the unemployed, but also of the employed (Szyłko-Skoczny 2002a: 1, 3).

The relationship between poverty and unemployment is illustrated by data from statistics and social surveys. The Statistical Office survey for 2004 showed that among the households which included at least one unemployed person, the extreme poverty rate was about 26%.⁶ Also in opinion polls, unemployment was indicated as the primary cause of falling into poverty. The main weaknesses of the Polish labor market at that time were: a large share of women and youth among the unemployed, a relatively low level of education, a high share of

⁶ Among the households where there were no unemployed people, the extreme poverty rate was then 8% (GUS 2004).

permanent unemployment, a consistently high unemployment rate in former State Agricultural Farm areas. In addition to explicit unemployment, there was hidden unemployment in the form of low labor productivity in state-owned enterprises, in overcrowded agriculture, and work below one’s qualifications and not in the learned profession (Gabrysiak 2003: 5, Polak 2003: 11). The situation of the Polish unemployed was also conditioned by an increase in employers’ requirements as to formal qualifications, real skills and availability.⁷ Among the factors for unemployment (including living off low, unstable income gained from occasional work), the low level of education played the most important role. Age was also a significant variable – the market was looking for well-educated young people with professional experience. Thus, on the one hand, big industry workers with long work experience were becoming unemployed, while on the other, this phenomenon affected young people with low levels of education, for whom the first experience of early adulthood was (temporal) unemployment (among others compare Rek-Woźniak 2016: 89–91, 162–165, 246–249).

Since the first years of transformation, the phenomenon of new poverty has been territorially diverse. Statistics collected at the voivodeship level reflected the pre-war division between Poland A and B. Sociological research conducted since the beginning of the 1990s revealed the existence of concentrated poverty areas. Within voivodeships (even those relatively “more prosperous”) one could indicate particularly deprived districts and in the districts of the poorest communes. Poverty affected entire cities in which researchers identified and described impoverished neighborhoods, the Wacquantian neighborhoods of relegations, which were becoming populated by individuals and families who had lost homes in better parts of urban space, and people after evictions (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska ed. 1998, 1999, Grotowska-Leder 2003, Wacquant 2008). One of the cities particularly affected by social problems was Łódź (the place of residence of the narrator of the interview analyzed here), with its particular historical conditions (constant migration of the rural poor to the emerging and solidifying industrial city, over-representation of women among the city’s inhabitants, hidden poverty, housing problems). After the Second World War “[during] industrial modernization, thousands of people moved from the countryside to the city in search of work. This was also the case in Łódź, which again became the promised land for rural emigrants who had nothing but readiness to work. These rural migrants were [...] caught in the trap of

⁷ In turn, entrepreneurs complained about the far-reaching regulation of the labour market and demanded an increase in employment flexibility, which in their opinion was to increase the number of jobs. They also criticised the extensive provisions of the Labour Code, especially regarding the protection of employees’ rights and the amount of non-wage labour costs resulting in the growth of the grey economy (Golinowska 2003: 6, Szyłko Skoczny: 2002a: 3, 2002: 223).

socialist paternalism [...], poverty was hidden under the umbrella of socialism and revealed itself after its fall” wrote Warzywoda-Kruszyńska citing the work of the Hungarian sociologist Julia Szalai (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2003a: 130). The collapse of the textile industry led to structural unemployment – the share of the unemployed in the city population was disproportionately high compared to other large Polish cities.⁸ Also, unlike these cities, the poverty rate in Łódź exceeded the average for the whole country. These phenomena were accompanied by unfavorable demographic processes such as ageing of the inhabitants⁹ and an increase in the share of single-person households (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2003a: 127), as well as the phenomenon of juvenilization of poverty.¹⁰

The state’s response to social problems – new social policy institutions

Since the functioning of helping institutions is important for the problems and crucial for the case study discussed in this chapter, we will briefly characterize the basic changes in the field of social policy at the beginning of the

⁸ In 1975 there were 548 employees per 1000 people, in 1995 only 301. Employment in the industry in this period was respectively 276 and 106 people (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2003: 127). Unemployment affected the entire voivodeship. In May 2004, when the interview with Pola was conducted, according to the statistics of the Voivodeship Labor Office in the Łódź Voivodeship there were 224,045 unemployed, including 109,972 women. 36,412 people were entitled to unemployment benefits, and 56,726 people to the pre-retirement benefits (Invite Report 2004).

⁹ The incomes of seniors receiving pensions (the traditional poor of the People’s Republic of Poland) became significant support for families affected by poverty.

¹⁰ Research conducted in the Łódź enclaves of poverty made the infamous phenomenon of poverty juvenilization known to Poland – the overrepresentation of children and young people up to 18 years of age in the poor population. Over 53% of children below 14 (constituting 20% of the enclaves’ inhabitants) lived in households supported by social security benefits. The processes of poverty ghettoization and the level of child poverty were so advanced that it was possible to designate entire zones of child poverty (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2000, 2002: 140). Although the topic of juvenile poverty is not further developed in this book, it should be emphasized here that before accession to the European Union, Polish poverty was the poverty of children. In 2005, 48% of children (0–17 years) were at risk of poverty and social exclusion, in 2012 this percentage was less than 30%. Children who were most at risk of poverty were those from multiple children families (i.e., 1/3 of Polish children) – over 20% experienced extreme poverty and 50% relative poverty. The risk of poverty for multiple-children families increased where the parents had a lower level of education, low professional qualifications. Single-parent families were also at risk of poverty (Topińska 1996; Balcerzak-Paradowska 1997, 2000, Kołaczek 1997, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2000, Tarkowska 2000a–c, Golinowska 1997).

transformation. The Polish People's Republic, like other countries of the Eastern Bloc, implemented the model known as the "socialist welfare state." A long list of social services provided to citizens (free health care, education, co-financing for housing, leisure, etc.) was accompanied by a policy of full employment. Poles, deprived of political freedom had a rather stable sense of social security (Golinowska 2002: 6). The systemic transformation resulted in the need to rebuild all the basic spheres of the state, including its social functions. The first decade of change was accompanied by discussions on the social policy model. As Stanisława Golinowska claimed then (2003: 30), these discussions were "rather weak," and among the representatives of the elite, there were supporters of all possible solutions in the social sphere.¹¹ The new Poland, in an attempt to create the basis for achieving the goals of modern social policy, limited the role of the state – a producer of social services – typical for the socialist system, while expanding the scope of social money transfers (Golinowska 2002: 6). Workplaces still offered a certain range of social benefits to their employees – for example, co-financing holidays or interest-free small loans, but the scope was significantly reduced. In these first years of the transformation, tendencies to use public-private mixed solutions and to expand the commercialization of social services were clearly visible in Poland (Golinowska 2002: 4, 30).

In 1990, in place of the former social security system, operating since 1945 still under the Act of 1923 (Broda-Wysocki n.d.: 2), a social assistance institution was established by creating municipal and communal social assistance centers, and in subsequent years further institutions (district family assistance centers, local activity centers, and social economy institutions). In 1989, the reform of state employment services was started by establishing regional employment offices, which were later transformed into employment offices. Administrative reform was carried out (1999) reducing the role of the political center and transferring full responsibility for social assistance to the local authorities. Districts and communes became responsible, among others, for education, labor market policy, supporting and activating unemployed people, and solving poverty issues (Bromber 2003: 15, Gabrysiak 2003: 6, Golinowska 2003: 32). Non-governmental organizations seeking contracts for the implementation of social services were to cooperate with the local government authorities in problem areas from which the state withdrew its activities.¹² By undertaking actions for

¹¹ The opponents of full-time employment proposing the introduction of a flat tax, the abolition of most social transfers and the introduction of private pension funds, spokespersons of the traditional welfare state and representatives of the so-called third way, opting for maintaining all the social achievements of the welfare state while strengthening the market mechanisms (Gabrysiak 2003:5).

¹² Already in 1989, non-governmental organizations began to flourish. According to estimated data, in 2001 there were 45,000 active NGOs in Poland. At that time, 40%

accession to the European Union, and then becoming its full member in 2004, the Polish state committed itself to achieving the basic objectives, values, and principles of the EU social policy (social cohesion and solidarity, subsidiarity, self-governance, increasing the role of civil society). However, already in those years barriers to the implementation of this policy were pointed out (Gabrysiak 2003: 6–7, Golinowska 2003: 32, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska: 2003: 189), such as the lack of a strategic state concept of social policy, a defensive rescue policy of overcoming social problems at the local level, the slow emergence of new social policy structures not yet able to build new mechanisms and tools, the weakness and changeability of the law, the underdevelopment of civil society, the established attitudes of learned helplessness and expectations from the state (guarantee of work, housing, free health care, and education), the institutional barriers at the local government level, including the lack of financial instruments, diagnostic tools, organizational and management skills, and the lack of procedures at various levels. Decisions in the area of social policy were made in Poland in the 1990s (similarly to today) under the influence of the current needs and pressures. Neither the government nor the regional level fully defined the principles of social policy, its concepts and directions, and the resulting documents did not act as a guide in this field (Golinowska 2003).

In the social policy strategies created at that time, the authorities declared radical goals – their implementation should form the basis of institutional opportunity structures supporting the functioning of people such as the unemployed Poles on the labor market. The priorities of the Regional Employment Strategy for 2003–2006 prepared by the local government of the Łódź Voivodeship included, for example, the introduction of policies to support the mobility of the unemployed, increasing the efficiency of the labor market, and preventive measures. This was to be achieved by developing a network of information and career counselling centers, supporting work clubs, developing training and practical forms of preparation for a profession and adapting these to the requirements of the labor market, strengthening the role of career counselling and support, increasing the availability of services for groups and people most in need of support in looking for a job, and groups at particular risk, as well as improving the professional qualifications of the staff of employment offices. It was declared that the philosophy of work applied in the social policy institutions is based on the principles of reciprocity in the assistance system, customer activation, partnership, and building local communities. The laws and

of these organizations declared activity in the field of social assistance and self-help (Marciniak 2002: 54). Churches also participated in the activities for the benefit of the unemployed and the poor.

professional literature emphasized the importance of activating techniques of working with the unemployed, the speed of intervention, and personalization of services (Gabrysiak 2003: 6, Świątkowski 2002: 16, Wiśniewski 2002: 26).

The local (later district) employment offices and their structures, such as, for example, information and career planning centers, have become the main institution handling the unemployed. It was the employment offices that were to seek vacancies, conduct and finance intervention work, public work, and conduct career counselling. Job Clubs (also created by other institutions and organizations) operated at most District Offices. At that time, they were considered one of the most important forms of work with the unemployed, among others, due to the fact that the participants were offered blocks of classes of a psychological and practical nature dedicated to issues such as positive self-esteem and self-acceptance, positive thinking, interpersonal relations, defining goals and professional preferences, job search methods, learning to write a CV and a motivation letter, and learning to talk to potential employers. The assumption was to adapt the blocks to the specificity and interests of the unemployed, but it seems that this assumption often remained "theoretical". However, at that time the most widespread type of office services was the organization and supervision of conducting training implemented primarily by educational companies with a very diverse history and legal situation¹³ using their own training programs or programs created by the offices themselves.¹⁴ Despite the multitude of implementers, the training offer which existed at the turn of the century was considered scarce. There was a lack of funds for specialist training courses for specific professional groups, more expensive and better training courses, training courses for people massively dismissed from work and for personalized training courses for the needs of a specific employer (Bednarski 2002: 10, 12). The weak point of the employment office training system was the method of recruiting participants, in which the official selection criteria were: the probability of getting a job after the course, general education, previous qualifications, health, social criteria. However, the participants were usually the people who were most active in the search and determined to obtain a place on a specific

¹³ These were state-owned companies, some operating since the socialist times, private companies and various types of schools. The best rating was given to schools, private companies operating for at least 10 years, and public companies from former Vocational Training Centers with appropriate permanent staff and their own premises. Small private companies, in turn, enjoyed recognition due to the flexibility of the training offer and greater customer care (Bednarski 2002: 11).

¹⁴ For example, standard training courses organized by one of the district employment offices in Łódź were about setting up one's own company, working with a computer, and operating cash registers (Invite Report 2004).

course, although the district employment offices were reluctant to finance subsequent training courses of the same people. To a limited extent, the training program was offered to people who barely coped with this difficult situation. From the point of view of biographical analyses, the key activity directed towards the unemployed should be career counselling.¹⁵ The work of a career counsellor is based on individual assessment and advice regarding the choice of an educational path or profession. Based on tests and questionnaires, the counsellor assesses interests and talents, and can also conduct workshops on the skills of navigating on the labor market (Skłodowski 2004, Borucka, Golczyńska-Grondas 2008/9). It seems, however, that the counsellors employed in district employment offices rarely provided real, individualized advisory assistance to the unemployed,¹⁶ limiting themselves to providing information and assistance in choosing the most adequate training course. At this point, it should be emphasized that the free services of employment offices did not enjoy a good reputation among their unemployed. The course and quality of professional helpers' interactions with clients could have been influenced by their common opinion about the reluctance of a significant number of clients to change their life situation. Thus, public employment services were rather rarely treated as the main source of information. The district employment offices became the places of "the last chance." Jobseekers would rather turn to family and friends for help (Kryńska 2003: 83).

Other institutions which were to support the "losers" in the transformation processes were social assistance centers, which were aimed at helping the people whose financial resources did not exceed the income criterion set out in the Act on Social Assistance and at the same time were in a difficult life situation. Unemployment was mentioned in the "Act on Social Assistance" as one of the basic factors entitling people to apply for social assistance. The offer of the social assistance system also included a set of services for the unemployed in

¹⁵ The profession of career counsellor was included in the Classification of Occupations and Specialties in 1995.

¹⁶ Which was caused, among others, by the number of clients per employee. In the founding countries of the European Union, there was one counsellor or job broker per 300 unemployed in those years. In Poland, in 2000 one "statistical" counsellor had been "looking after" 5,665 unemployed, and in 2002 already 7,101 unemployed. In the district employment offices themselves, the number of employees in those years fell by 9% (interview with W. Drabek-Polak, 2004). According to research (Bednarski 2002) instead of getting employed, quite often people conducting psychological training, for example, psychologists running Job Clubs at employment offices were dismissed. Some of the staff of these offices were employed as part of public works and other forms financed from the Labor Fund. There were offices where over 80% of employees were employed in this way.

the form of material, financial, and non-material assistance (psychological and legal counselling, etc.). However, in the structures of assistance systems until 2003, there were no specialized centers or their departments dealing with this group of clients. Probably the only exception in the whole country was the Non-Material Assistance Center for the Unemployed located in the structure of the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Łódź. This Center provided psychological help and career counselling services to people from all over Łódź. Pola also used its services.

The tasks of social policy institutions were, among others, protecting employees against the loss of employment, limiting negative psycho-social effects of unemployment, ensuring social security for the unemployed and helping them to find the job by improving their chances on the labor market (Szyłko-Skoczny 2002a: 226). In reality, the existing legal order, institutional infrastructure and staff qualifications meant that labor offices provided services to the unemployed only at an elementary level. Many critical comments were also made about the social assistance institutions. The audit carried out in 2002 by the Supreme Audit Office revealed numerous irregularities, including weakness in internal control and corruption. It was also pointed out that the statutory objectives of social assistance were not achieved in the overwhelming majority of the surveyed centers (Auleytner, Głębińska 2000: 278–279, Bednarski 2002: 10, Szyłko-Skoczny 2002: 2, Bromber: 2003: 16). Therefore, it can be stated that in the first several transformational years, the assistance provided by public institutions (subordinate to the same ministry, but weakly interrelated both formally and through less formal cooperation networks) was of a non-specific nature, not adapted to the life situations of the clients and their problems. There were significant discrepancies between legal regulations and practice. Despite the declarations contained in the documents, what dominated, in reality, were passive forms of curbing unemployment (material transfers) supported by a training offer (not always adequate to the current situation on the labor market and even less often adapted to the specific needs of the participants). Public employment services and social assistance were characterized by a shortage of qualified staff – social workers prepared to deal with a multitude of individual and family problems, as well as career counsellors and people competent in managing assistance systems. Experts assessed the institutions whose task was to solve social problems and support people struggling with the processes of disorder and suffering as ineffective. As Małgorzata Szyłko-Skoczny wrote: “[...] at the beginning of the new century, the inefficiency of social policy in combating the phenomenon of mass and permanent unemployment was fully revealed” (Szyłko-Skoczny 2002: 226, cf., Golinowska 2002, 2003, Gabrysiak 2003).

Poverty as a biographical trajectory of suffering

Poverty is not a homogeneous social phenomenon. It certainly has a cultural dimension – to put it very simply, poverty is different in the countries of Europe, North America, Africa, or Asia. It also has, as Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (2002) wrote, a temporal dimension. The specificity of poverty in fluid modernity is also determined by its biographical character. Entering poverty becomes an individual biographical experience which can occur at any time during the life of an individual, regardless of age, gender, or place of residence. These days, poverty does not affect social groups, strata, or classes, but rather an individual with its characteristic market conditions. Poverty or unemployment are therefore becoming the personal fate of a man (Bauman 2002, Beck 2002: 137). The first pieces of research on the new Polish poverty were statistical (Golinowska 1996, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Grotowska-Leder 1996). Nevertheless, since the mid-1990s Polish sociologists, or rather female sociologists – aware of the biographical aspects of poverty – began to collect the life histories of the “losers of transformation” and their families (Tarkowska, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Wódz eds. 2003; for more on the history of Polish biographical research into poverty and social exclusion, see: Golczyńska-Grondas, Potoczna 2013, Golczyńska-Grondas 2019a). These analyses made it possible to indicate common features of the studied biographies, their conditioning, including unopened opportunity structures, or rather limitations and unused opportunities placing people in the situation of the Schützeian trajectory of suffering. In these life histories the material, family, emotional, educational, and professional dimensions intertwine, creating individual constellations of the lives of the poor.

Obviously, the most striking attribute of the trajectory experience of poverty, noticeable to researchers, as well as the external environment are the material conditions in which a poor person lives – the lack of income to allow the individual to participate in mainstream society, but sometimes to satisfy even the basic life needs (cf., footnote 2 of this chapter). The experience of poverty at various stages of life is associated with poor housing conditions – the overcrowding of flats, their low technical standard, for example, the lack of (hot) water in the flat, no toilet, leaky windows, insufficient heating, and fungus. The result of the deprivation of housing conditions, poor diet, as well as limited access to specialist healthcare is worse health (in both its somatic and mental aspect) (see e.g.: Potoczna 1998, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014, 2014a, 2018, Petelewicz 2016). Apathy, depression, sometimes other mental disorders and illnesses, and addictions of adults trigger family trajectories. Poverty

is not conducive to a sense of security, it can contribute to conflicts, verbal and physical violence, and family breakdowns. It can push children out of the home – then they function in peer environments, more “on the streets” in the devastated space of impoverished neighborhoods (Petelewicz 2016). Poverty combined with dysfunctions can also deprive children of home in a literal sense – it poses the threat of being taken into care by other people, for example, relatives, but also by limiting or withdrawing the rights of parents and placing the child in a childcare institution. Family problems encourage some teenagers to look for intimacy in early sexual relationships. Confirming the principle of homogamy, girls and women usually pair up with boys and men of low economic status, coming from the same or similar environment, which in the 1980s J.W. Wilson characterized it as a shrinking pool of marriageable [partners]. It happens that from these “street cohabitations” (the young have nowhere to meet, they live in their family homes), children of teenage mothers are born. These girls, abandoned by the partners or with them, remain in their current neighborhood, struggling with life problems accumulating in subsequent years (Wilson 1987: 68–76, 82, 95, 104, Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 61,70, Rossa 1999, cited in: Golczyńska-Grondas 2004: 71, Potoczna, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009, Bunio-Mroczek 2016). The thus-far description already indicates the potential of a vicious circle of poverty activating the mechanism of its intergenerational transmission. This mechanism determines the course of educational careers, during which the opportunity structures of biographical success are gradually closing. The lack of educational aspirations, interest, and support from parents who themselves finished their school careers early, are accompanied by a lack of wise, effective support from educational institutions and teachers, isolation and stigmatization of the poor children by their peers. “Poor” grades, constant failures, problems in relationships with adults and schoolmates lead to early school leaving. The reason for early school dropout is also the conviction that one has to take up a paid job to help their family or to have one’s own money (among others: Sennett, Cobb 1972, Fatyga et al. 2001, Zahorska 2012, 2014). A feature of biographies of permanently pauperized people is, therefore, the experience of early employment or early unemployment. In the professional dimension in such biographies, we also find the instability of employment, frequent changes of workplaces, periodic unemployment combined with work in the informal sector. The material and emotional situation is aggravated by inevitable random events – as there is a lack of resources necessary to deal with illness or death of close ones. A deep deprivation of the living conditions can also cause a (significant) shortening of one’s life (Tobiasz-Adamczyk 2000, Satterley 2012).

The case of Pola¹⁷ – opportunity structures and “limitations,” resources, and unused biographical opportunities

A “private” history – a resource or a biographical burden?

Pola was born in 1964 in a traditional rural family. She was the so-called “middle child,” the only girl among five siblings. Her two older brothers were born in 1961 and 1963, and two younger ones in 1968 and 1973. The description of the material conditions of her childhood indicates a low standard of living of the family, “maybe not the poorest out there in this village”:

In total, there were **thirteen of us at home, we only had one large kitchen**.¹⁸ My mother with father and five of us children and my mum’s sister with her husband and her daughter and two sons and also the grandmother. [...] When it comes to food, **one would happily eat anything, I even liked very much bread with water and sugar. The water from the well was fresh** [...], or even such bread fried only on fat and I liked it a lot too, it was just, then it was a paradise yes, I liked it so much like today, I don’t know, ham, or anything even better.¹⁹

Both the house where Pola’s family lived, and the land constituting the basis for supporting the family, belonged to the maternal grandmother: “the land was all the time my grandmother’s, **so we simply helped on the land and lived off this land**”. The maternal grandfather was killed during the Second World War, the paternal grandparents, also farmers, lived in the nearby area. Pola’s father – a socialist impoverished-worker has employed in a construction plant, the mother, after the birth of one of the next children gave up her job in gastronomy. The father’s work made it possible to buy the first bicycle in the village (which does not sound credible), as well as the first television set – the programs were watched together with the neighbors. The parents did not want to stay in the countryside – the father “paid an instalment for a flat in the city” and the family was waiting for the allocation of the premises.

¹⁷ The interview with Pola is analyzed due to the assumptions of structural analysis based on methodology elaborated by Fritz Schütze and his co-workers. The text was thoroughly discussed among a multidisciplinary team during international and Polish workshops led by Fritz Schütze within the framework of the INVITE project in early 2000 and reanalyzed for the purpose of the chapter.

¹⁸ All bolded phrases in quotations are emphasised by the authors.

¹⁹ In our other interviews with people affected by poverty, the consumption of bread with water and sugar, or bread fried on fat in childhood, is cited as evidence of the experience of poverty (e.g., Potoczna, Kruszyńska 2009).

In the narrator’s memories, the childhood time in many respects appears to be a good, somewhat idealized, stage of life. Despite the cramped living space:

all in all, we lived very happily. There were no bigger conflicts, as you could see or hear about other people. Some of them had posh houses, but domestic wars were fought quite often. Now I think so, that my family is unique compared to the others who lived there.

The image of Pola’s happy childhood is also constructed by referring to games and time spent with her peers:

Life was carefree. We went to bathe in the river, and also to the so-called meadows. [...] We often went out, we had such a big yard and often in the evening we stood with the guys by the fence just like the young, we talked, we laughed, we were fooling around.

Pola did not feel material deficiencies: "from my mother’s story it can be said that yes, we did not have much, so to speak, but as a child, I did not feel it at all, I never lacked anything".

In the narrative phase of the interview, the description of family relationships is overshadowed by the optimistic tale of the collective upbringing of eight children staying under one roof: "everyone raised us. The aunt was interested, the uncle was interested, the grandma was interested, well everyone was interested in us, in all the children." However, already in this part of the narration, there are statements which may indicate the tension in family relationships felt by the narrator, which may have been resulting from the crowding of 13 people in a small living space:

Such a situation once, it got stuck in my memory, because I came from school once and I say to my grandmother: "Grandma, what’s for dinner?" and she says: "Leave me alone, you have your ma," so she got upset because my mother worked, so many children here and each, well, mum at work, well, so all the children go to grandma, grandma this, grandma that, and grandma was also fed up sometimes.

"To this day" Pola remembers both this incident and her strong emotional response to her grandmother’s words which "somehow" hurt her. Grandmother, a "very good person, really" has been the most important person in the family and support, and perhaps even the narrator’s actual biographical carer. The narrator’s parents differed in how they treated children. The narrator says of her father that he loved and spoiled her very much, but he did not have any significant impact on her history. In the role of the "event creator," she casts her mother, whose character became the inspiration for creating the category of a destructive significant other (Golczyńska-Grondas 2008/9a). The rejection

which Pola felt from her mother's side triggered a child's trajectory of suffering (Golczyńska-Grondas 2016), which marked her further years of life:

Well, I was such an obedient daughter, I did what she wanted and I think that if she had not influenced my decisions so much, my life would have been a little different. [...] Mum is more/ she always said (xx) that she didn't like girls, but guys. It hurt me a lot because she said it so often, I thought that, and that's why I tried to do everything as she wanted... that she would be happy, that she would praise me, but I haven't lived to see it and I won't see it happening. [...] Otherwise, no one else has influenced my life too much... As I say, I wanted to, I probably wanted to please my mother in everything ((a very long pause)) and that's the reason for so many life mistakes.

Perhaps the idealization of childhood in the first part of the interview is associated with historical events and a critical turning point resulting from the dominance of the mother which Pola experienced at the threshold of adulthood:

As I mentioned, my childhood was happy, let's say, up to the age of eighteen, life at home was happy. [...] And later, just after graduating from trade school, in a way my happiness seemed to have ended.

A biographical breakthrough in the life of Pola happened during the Martial Law, and in parallel, when the family move from the village to the city was approaching. During this period, the 18-year-old Pola, a graduate of a trade school, was persuaded by her mother and concluded an early marriage characteristic of traditional rural culture with a man who was four years older, which triggered one of the main currents of her biographical trajectory.

One had entered such a maybe not very adult life, but as soon as things got rough, because it was somehow Martial Law soon... And people... in the countryside were really terrified ... so my mother too, she told me to marry so early, because "What will you do, you don't have work, how will you make a living?"... And so I married... a boy from our village... **Persuaded by my mother, I didn't love him, but I married him... I was young and stupid... At that time I didn't think about it yet, that it's for the whole life, a marriage...** Maybe he was not a bad man, but... I dreamed of something else. And so I got married shortly after graduating from this trade school...

The very negative attitude of Pola towards her husband is evidenced by the fact that this character disappears from the following parts of the narration, only at the end of the interview the narrator briefly talks about her marriage in response to the researcher's question:²⁰

²⁰ "I want to ask about your marriage, right? You said it was a boy from the same village, did you know him from your childhood, in such a way"?

I mean, I don’t remember, because as a girl I wasn’t really interested in him at all. I don’t remember him as a child. [...] When I remember him, he is already a guy, I don’t know, a fifteen-year-old... [...] I thought maybe that when there will be a child, it will somehow bond me with him, but actually, it was getting worse. Anyway, it was him I didn’t like. He was a man who you couldn’t count on. He was not a drunkard, he wasn’t violent, none of that stuff, but just, well... Well, even when it comes to such matters, err, I’ll call them bed issues... I did not enjoy it, even this was hard work for me and I just couldn’t and it seems that I was with him a long time, ten years...

The marriage ended with a final break-up – her husband’s moving out after 15 years of “shared” life and a formal divorce two years later. When asked about the profession and education of her husband, Pola answers: “...I don’t even know who he was... I was never interested in him (laughs) so that I don’t know.”

The analysis of the interview prompts the question – to what extent does Pola’s family of origin constitute her biographical resource, and to what extent limits her life opportunities. Certainly, the mother appears in the context of the narrator’s account as a biographical “gate-keeper” – closing access to the opportunity structure at a private life level.

Educational career – Pola’s unused potential

The elementary school reality quickly disappointed the seven-year-old Pola. The narrator’s dreams of starting a school, which she had imagined as a sign of independence, are replaced by trajectory experiences:

[...] I envied my two brothers that they were already going to school. **I wanted terribly to go to school**, by myself of course, because on the first day my mother walked me, and later, I walked alone, because if my brothers walked alone, I also wanted to be so adult ((laughs)) alone, independent, I remember this very well. Well, later, maybe **I didn’t love school that much** (laughs) ... **learning wasn’t going so well.**

The educational methods used in this village school were rigorous, there was physical punishment and labelling. Pola “was a bad student,” received unsatisfactory marks, repeated the fifth grade. It seems that the teachers have tried to help the failing student to catch up during extracurricular classes, but were unsuccessful in this field; probably at least some teachers were not motivated enough to run these classes.²¹ They also failed to recognize the girl’s

²¹ “To me, the maths teacher also seemed to be the worst she could be. Today, in retrospect, I can say that she was probably not the worst, but even when she made you stay after lessons when you did not get it, and she would say earlier, first she would say that you had to stay for an hour, then she would let you go after half an hour.”

abilities and guide the development of her interests. Undoubtedly, Pola was artistically gifted, she also showed some ability to learn foreign languages, but the disclosure of the latter met with a stereotyping and humiliating reaction of the subject teacher:

[...] to be honest, I was doing better in Russian than in Polish... I even remember, in primary school once, there was such a situation that I got a B on a test and the teacher told me that I had cheated. Well, it hurt me so much that she just told me that I had cheated as if it was impossible for me to get a B...

Repeating the class mobilized Pola to study more so that it was “hard as it was,” but “somehow [she] finished” this stage of education and being “talked into by a friend” began studying at an agricultural trade school. The choice of this institution was accidental and unsuccessful for many reasons²²:

I knew that sooner or later we would move out of the village, because my father paid an installment for a flat... in the city and, and we were just waiting for these flats. In fact, I was interested in something else, as I thought about sewing.

The education program duplicated the curriculum of the last grades of elementary school, the problems with maintaining discipline by the teachers came as a shock for the narrator. Finishing her education at the trade school – without any problems, this time, with “fairly good grades” and a driving licence for a tractor – Pola obtained the profession of a “vocational” farmer.

In the education process, Pola could not count on the support of her parents, who “in fact, did not put much pressure on learning, as they had only done six grades of elementary school in total, both the father and mother.” The acceptance of her choice of agricultural school on the part of her parents was dictated by material conditions:

In the countryside there were no such opportunities, of course, you had to commute somewhere, and parents told us all the time that they couldn’t afford it... here, this trade school was convenient for my parents because there was a bus, it was for free, and for a school elsewhere I would have to pay.

The narrator’s brothers also had learning problems. The youngest of them graduated from primary school, the remaining three failed to graduate from trade schools.²³ In the summary of the interview, Pola says:

²² Pola’s parents did not have their own farm, and the prospects of inheriting a larger area of land from grandparents seemed very doubtful in the narrator’s case.

²³ Which in the case of her siblings resulted in starting work quickly.

Now I would not go to this agricultural school, but to some kind of profession that... would interest me. Well, but as I say, in the countryside there were no such opportunities, of course, you had to commute somewhere, and parents told us all the time that they couldn’t afford it... **They did not try to educate us at all... They probably thought that if they could live without it, then we can. Well, they probably, this was their assumption...**

Pola’s education history clearly shows the mechanism of inheriting low status associated with the lack of education. This mechanism has been consolidated through the processes of social valuation and by the educational system which gives students from the upper classes badges of ability, and the students from the lower classes signs of inability. At school, students from the lower strata of the social structure such as Pola, ignored, disciplined, and labelled by teachers are primarily focused on survival, a quick end to the school career, and the start of “real life.” Therefore, the symbolic valuing practices of the self-fulfilling prophecy nature block the life chances of some, enabling the success of others and thus consolidate or even petrify the social structure (Sennett, Cobb 1972: 82–87, Zahorska 2014, cf., Golczyńska-Grondas 2014a: 152–155). The low level of the obtained education, the lack of support in educational choices, the abilities undiscovered by teachers create real limitations which a few years later condition the functioning of the individual on the labor market. It is the poor education that Pola considers as one of her life failures:

Today, for sure, I would like to educate myself in some specific direction, so that I would not have such difficulty with work, this is one thing, and so that I would do what I like. It’s definitely what I would like to change. Now I would not go to this agricultural school, but to some kind of profession that... would interest me.

As illustrated by Pola’s example, the institutional and educational opportunity structures – seemingly available to everyone – remain out of their reach for many children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bourdieu, cited in: Jacyno 1997).

From the PPR to the new Poland – adrift on the labor market

For the first three years after arriving in Łódź, which probably happened in 1984 or 1985, Pola did not work professionally. The young couple lived in a three-room flat in a block of flats with the narrator’s parents and brothers. It seems that in those years the trajectory evoked by an ill-considered marriage decision was developing, and the narrator could not find a solution to this situation:

For these three years, I worked at home, not that I was just lying around there. I cooked, I washed my husband's stuff, I took care of the house. I don't know, I wasn't thinking about a job. I don't know, I rebelled a little because, because maybe I was dissatisfied with this marriage, somehow. I don't know, and on the other hand, perhaps I was hoping that I would get pregnant. In fact, after three years, I became interested in just having this child. Even three years of marriage passed and we didn't have children, I even thought that maybe something was wrong with me or my husband.

Pola decided to get a job around 1988, in the last period of the socialist policy of full employment. Initially, she wanted to work in a hospital, but eventually, she got a job in a textile factory, learning about this possibility from a neighbor. In the first year of work, she performed simple auxiliary activities, then, without proper preparation, she began to operate textile machinery. When she soon became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, she decided to go on a two-year maternity leave. The moment of Pola's return to work in 1989 coincided with the beginning of the changes in the employment structure. The narrator was moved to another department because "in her department" the redundancies had begun. In this department, she also started at the lowest level, "and later with time [switched] to [...] more complicated machines [...], in total, [it] was not difficult work." In this plant, Pola worked 14 years. She was made redundant when Łódź was hit by the second wave of unemployment, rising since 1998 and triggered by a progressive restructuring process of the economy. In practice, this process meant an almost complete liquidation of the textile industry in Łódź. Like other Łódź textile workers, the narrator at first was unaware of the seriousness of her situation:

And then larger group redundancies began and finally they fired me, I always laughed and said to my friends **"Well, come on, they won't fire me, I'm the best employee" and suddenly the manager came and handed me the dismissal.** They fired me. In fact, it was sometimes better sometimes worse in this job at the time. **I even said it was good for me, that maybe I would get out of here and have a chance to find something better, something that would suit me better, but maybe I was unaware of the unemployment and that it would be hard.**

Thus, around 1999, Pola's professional career as an unskilled worker, stable for several years, collapsed and the narrator's biographical drift began which has lasted until the time of the interview. The next four years in Pola's "professional" life were: 1) a three-month unemployment benefit period; 2) a year of working in a worker's position based on sequentially concluded contracts of mandate in a newly created company interspersed with periods of registration and deregistration at the employment office; 3) a year of working for a foundation established for disabled children; 4) four months of working in a newly created

small factory in a worker’s position steaming jeans, and subsequent months in the same place as an ironer; 5) a year of unemployment during which the narrator participates in training courses and is intensively looking for a job.

During this period of the narrator’s life, the biographical trajectory reveals with all sharpness. It is associated with a social process structured “through a chain of related events which cannot be avoided without incurring high costs, continuous breakdowns, expectations, and a growing sense of loss of control over one’s life position.” In this process, the individual – going from the intentional phase to the passive phase – can only face the “external forces” whose actions he/she does not understand. (Riemann, Schütze 2012: 393 et seq).

Pola’s trajectory of suffering, based on the inability to maintain work continuity and the traumatizing experiences accompanying her subsequent activities are determined by the closing institutional opportunity structures, the illusory nature of some of the opening structures and the individuals’ actions implemented within them, including the ostensible activities of the employees of public employment services. Using the metaphor of the door as a symbol of access to the labor market, and thus to mainstream society, you can draw here the picture of the narrator who slips through successive pairs of doors avoiding with difficulty their wings slamming shut. The emergence of new companies announcing recruitment initially brings hope for stabilization in the labor market, but soon it turned out that these hopes were illusory and the narrator began to “pulsate” between successively undertaken work and the periods of unemployment:

Er, and they fired me, for some time, I don’t know, I think for three months I was on the dole then [...]. I found out that some work was supposed to be there, that some new company was going to do the same, but they were taking on people. So I went there [...], the manager [...] called [me] and there was a job, but then I already got a, err, a contract of, a contract of mandate, so, it varied at the beginning because I would get a contract even for two days..., or for a month, or for two weeks, and for two days, and I was just going back and forth, registering at the employment office and deregistering, and registering and deregistering, I kept going back and forth like that [...].

The reality of the next work done for a foundation with an unclear status did not match Pola’s expectations regarding the care for disabled children. Her job was actually the work of a face-to-face fundraiser asking for donations for the foundation, also outside Łódź:

I thought it would be looking after handicapped children... but there I found out later, it was about fundraising for these children. Well, but there was no other job, so I took this one [...] in the end, I gave it up myself, because... it was not a job for

me, and there was a big risk, I didn't like it. I thought that at least these funds would simply be collected, for example, in some, err, in prosperous companies, and this was just everywhere, you had to go everywhere, to people, to private homes.

During this work, the narrator experienced distrust and humiliation on the part of people who she asked for donations. She visited the same places several times, at the behest of her superior, which exposed her to accusations of extorting money, and additionally, the lack of trust was caused by the fact that the collection of money was carried out by a paid employee. She got bitten by a dog, people who performed the same task told the narrator that they had been thrown stones at by the inhabitants of one of the visited towns. Pola quit and took up work again in a small private company:

[...] I managed to get [a job], err, also, err, in the same buildings as I used to work in my first one. There, actually, a new company was established [...] they're doing [AGG/MP operating], to this day, err ... This is a laundry service with ironing, additionally dying jeans. [...] I even wanted to work in this ironing room, [...] but I landed in another department, because there was a need there, although later I was satisfied, all the more so [that] when there we had no work, they would take us to ironing. [...] And I worked there... I guess until April, from January to April, and then it started to be difficult with work, fewer and fewer orders were coming, and they started letting people off. **And at the beginning they said that it is a newly opened company, it would prosper so well, at the beginning it was really a lot of work, a lot,** that they even pressured us to do as much as possible, and then it got worse and worse, fewer orders, you would come to work and they told you to go home because there was nothing. [...] Of course, if I had paid for the [bus] ticket, I came, but nobody would pay me back, I didn't do any work, nobody wanted to pay for it. [...] Well, it also got worse and worse with work [...] later when they had a little more work, they either called us or if someone was at hand, they took her, and so on and so forth. Later [...] they didn't extend my contract, it was also a contract of mandate [...] and I would sit at home, I went there from time to time, they said that something would move, even the director promised us that it would move, that he would call. [...] A month had passed, silence. In the second month, it was not far away, I [...] dropped in on this plant and asked around, but I went a few times and left with nothing. Later they also took me on a contract of mandate ... for a month. But, err, to the ironing room, and there in the other department, when they needed, err [...] and there just when they needed, then they would take me [...] and that's how it went on. Well, but there wasn't so much work like at the beginning. [...] Some people were from the beginning and as soon as I went there, err, then later the same people were left to the end, err, and others were dismissed.

The narrator also resigned from this job. These years were still a time of "ruthless capitalism," the emergence of small companies, some of which failed,

and on the other hand – the market of the employer and the instrumentally treated employees:

And one, err, was like on-demand, it wasn’t that I just worked even those six hours, [...] six days a week, the Sunday off, but no, because there were four shifts, kind of... and it was going on and on, work went on and when there weren’t enough people, then just, one was supposed to have four shifts a week and should have two days off, as it used to be when I worked before, it was two days off a week, after night shifts, [...] one day was free, and after night shifts two days. [...] Now, I was working all the time, for example, I was finishing the night shift, and in the afternoon they would call me to come to work. It was just paranoia, I did nothing but work and I was tired and sleepy, and this went on for quite a while.

Pola also became a victim of abuse. In the steaming plant, workers used harmful toxic chemicals, therefore, masks with replaceable filters were necessary for such work, even if they probably did not fully secure them, anyway. This equipment after a long time and only as a result of the intervention of workers: well, “it was possible to deal with that somehow.” The wage level did not match the agreed remuneration:

I got my salary in this ironing room, there was a huge difference compared to what I had earned there. I got over a thousand zlotys there, and here I didn’t even get eight hundred. And the work I would say, it was not lighter at all. I think they wanted to, I don’t know, that one person did as much as two... at the beginning, and they paid less for it... So, when I saw my salary, I wasn’t too happy.

This was the last paid activity which Pola had undertaken by the time of the interview. The narrator became unemployed, just like other members of her family of origin. In 2004, only Pola’s youngest brother was in permanent employment, working in conditions which today we call precarious. The other brothers, having been dismissed from a liquidated enterprise, were unemployed. Two of them were on the dole and undertook occasional work, one was addicted to alcohol. Also, the cousins with whom Pola grew up in her grandmother’s house did not find a job in the countryside.

In the drift of an unemployed person described here, Pola used the assistance of public employment services. She made several attempts to obtain unemployment benefits, she also used training and career counselling services. The actions of the services’ employees partly deepened the narrator’s feeling of being objectified. Pola mentions here the unclear rules for calculating benefits, a certain discretion in considering contracts of mandate and contracts of employment, the negligence of employers who should provide the former employees with properly prepared documents certifying their earnings, the indifference and the lack of support from clerks. The experience of suffering is

illustrated in particular by one of the longer fragments of the interview regarding the application for unemployment benefits, colloquially called “kuroniołka,”²⁴ which we will allow ourselves to cite with some abbreviations:

I counted it up, [...] I was eligible for this kuroniołka, although I also had quite a hassle with this kuroniołka, because at the beginning, just when I left the foundation... I know for sure that I had submitted all the papers, and later they said that I was not given it because one document was missing, [...] I remembered very well that I went to the foundation especially for this document. And I was telling, in this foundation, Ms. Manager that, that I needed it, what I earned each month separately, [...] because I said earlier I worked on a contract of mandate and I know it is required. She said that no, that it's no longer so, that it had changed, that she wouldn't, and she didn't give it to me. Well, but later when I went to the employment office, they said that it was required and I remember it very precisely because I went for these ((speaking ironically)) earnings, once again to this foundation, and later it turned out that it was missing... And I did not qualify for it. I thought that I would normally get the money, so I came and they said no. I went straight to the manager, err, I presented her the case. [...] She tells me “Submit an application,” and I say well, but what application, for what? When I know for sure, as I say, I have worked for over a year and I should be eligible, so I don't understand why. “Maybe you should check it.” And she went, looked at those papers, and said that one document was missing. She tells me, “Bring this document and then we will consider the case” So, happy or not, I say I have to go, but nevertheless, I started to argue with her a bit, because I told her that I had specifically come to get this paper and that's why I remember that it should be there. Well, “but it's not” and that was the whole answer of the manager, so I went to this foundation, of course, earlier there she wrote it on the spot, and now she said that no, she doesn't have to. Because in general this whole office [was] (((a town in the south of Poland))), [...] and here it was only a branch, and she had to register me there and they will send it to me. [...] And that was just before Christmas, and I was penniless. And... I waited a week for these papers... the papers came, I took them to the employment office, the ladies at the employment office accepted the papers, she told me to write an application despite all that, that I was not granted ((the benefits)) because of such and such papers missing and wait a month for an answer... I said great, it's Christmas, and I'm without money... Well, I don't know ((sighs)) probably a week had passed again or two, I was summoned to the employment office, and I thought to myself, what's going

²⁴ The name of the benefit comes from the name of Jacek Kuroń, who was the Minister of Labor and Social Policy at that time. In the years 2002–2004, the amount of this benefit was around 500 PLN. 80% of the amount was paid to those whose work experience was below 5 years, those with up to 20 years' experience were paid 100%, over 20 years – 120% (<https://www.infor.pl/wskazniki/prawo-pracy-i-ubezpieczen-spolczych/zasilki-i-slaty/79,1134,Zasilek-dla-bezrobotnych.html>).

on? I was supposed to wait a month for the answer, probably something is missing again. I got nervous again, I went to this employment office again, err, but there I went to another room, upstairs, and there a lady explained to me what and how, that actually, to make things go faster, I don’t have to submit this application at all, all I have to do is deregister, today, for example, tomorrow I will register and they will give me the money. So I say, couldn’t the manager tell me that right away? Well, she could have just explained it. And she was only like “submit your application” and goodbye... Well, and so I deregistered one day, the next day I went to register again, and then they granted me the money, but of course I had to wait for almost one month to get this money, so I got it in January... And so. Well, and the thing that I took care of it all, I was granted that money one day in December already, so in January when I got it, I only got it for those days from the twenty-something to the thirtieth, only for those days I got something like two hundred zlotys ((crying)). This was also... I broke down... [AGG: It’s OK] ... It’s already gone, but when I talk about it... [a break in the interview during which the researcher provides emotional support to the crying narrator].

Narrations about similar humiliating situations experienced by informants when dealing with employment offices are also found in other interviews of the poor and the unemployed found in collections compiled during the research on poverty and social exclusion in Łódź. Pola experienced more “humane” contact with assistance institutions when participating in meetings for the unemployed organized by the Non-Material Assistance Center – a kind of prototype of the local activity center organized at one of the branches of the Municipal Social Assistance Center. However, here too, she did not see any chance that the classes and individual conversations conducted by psychologists [would] “actually bring any results.”

The poor and the unemployed use various strategies during the periods of poverty and unemployment. Małgorzata Potoczna points out that generally these strategies can be divided into two contrasting categories of at-benefit orientation²⁵ and at-employment orientation. Pola undoubtedly presents the latter option, actively seeking work. The analysis of her life history and similar biographies, however, indicates that the employment services of that time were not very effective (Kabaj 1998, 1999). One of the strategies for seeking work used by the unemployed was visiting the employment office. Pola had never received any job offers from this institution. Despite this, she “quite often” went there alone and read job offers posted to clients, partially copying the ads in the press. Some of these ads would turn out to be outdated, which in the case of people slipping into poverty meant not only further stressful experiences and unnecessary travel expenses, but also probably had a demotivating effect on their subsequent efforts:

²⁵ Also requiring significant activity on the part of people pursuing this life orientation.

And there, they do not take these ads down. [...] A friend told me that she had read the advertisement, went to the room, they gave her a referral, she went and the lady shouted at her: "Leave me alone, will you? I have already hired a worker a long time ago, and you keep on coming and coming here." Yes. And she got a referral from the employment office that same day. And that's how they work there in the employment office. They are no longer valid [...] and in the employment office, they explain again that when employers take someone on, they do not report that they have taken someone on, so they don't know. Well, I don't know, maybe some do not report, but there are certainly those who do report, but in the employment office, either they do not immediately take it down, or they don't get it out of the computer there, later they forget and it will remain so. I suppose, if this is the way, err, it just happens, then it must be so.

Pola was also looking for a job by reading newspaper ads, among them she found "many such ads in newspapers, interesting [for her]," and went "to many places." Most of the time, however, it turned out that these endeavours were taken in vain – for example, someone else had already been accepted for work, the potential employer did not indicate in the ad that he will only employ men, he informed the narrator that she did not have the qualifications or experience he expected for the job:

They just don't, no, they don't give you a chance, that with time, because it's obvious that everything which is done for a long time, it is simply done faster, but they do not give you a chance to familiarize yourself with it, but expect you to come and work at once and that's it. This is a drawback in all this because usually, employers want qualified ((workers)), those who do it not even quickly, but very quickly.

The narrator also left recorded messages on answering machines at workplaces. Employers did not respond to these cues or called to promise to call again, but never did.

Pola undertook actions to increase her chances on the labor market by participating in two training courses aimed at requalifying the unemployed. The first of these experiences proved unsuccessful. The pastry and bakery course was organized during layoffs in the catering industry and the liquidation of state-owned bakeries and confectionery factories. On the other hand, small business private owners were looking for qualified employees and were not interested in recruiting people without professional experience. The narrator participated in this course "terrified" – her emotions resulted from the awareness of the futility of participating in the classes. Participation in the second training course is a sign of the narrator's feeble attempts to break the trajectory. They are based on a biographical action plan – an independent decision, grounded in self-image

as a manually gifted person, to cover the cost of an expensive hairdressing course (the narrator did not receive funding from the employment office):

I went to this hairdressing course, [...] because the ad was just there, [...] a lady opened a new private hairdressing parlor and I went there, and I said that I just simply have manual skills, that I like to comb and cut hair, men's and women's, do hairstyles. And I went to her there, I talked to her, [...] she was a very nice lady. Well, but unfortunately, she didn't even like the way I washed hair ((laughs)), yes, that I didn't have the slightest idea about washing hair, in fact, at the hairdresser's... because I had never washed one. And this lady just said that, because I said that I haven't done any course, I am just self-taught, and she kind of said that if I finished the course, then I should come back, that maybe something... So I said, I will finish this course, I will go there, see, and maybe she will give me a chance. It would be nearby, too, I would not have to travel... close, if it worked out, it would be great [...]. So, I'm still hoping that maybe after this hairdressing course **I will be able to do something there...** Because, if you come across a person who will just give you a chance, well, maybe there are not many people like that.

In order to increase her chances on the labor market, Pola started learning English on her own initiative, being helped by her daughter in this activity. However, she did not see the possibility of obtaining further levels of education – her school experience meant that the existing opportunity structures for adults, such as evening and extramural education, she perceived as permanently shut:

Today, to go to school, maybe, they say that it is never too late, but, but I guess I have just never had such abilities to learn. I'm just very stressed. For example, when I attended this baking course, you know, **everything was great during lectures, I also did well at home, but when it came to the exam, I was so shaky, although you can say this exam was like a dream.** But, because I was so shaky, I forgot half, they gave us some hints, and somehow I passed. So, in practice, a person can learn many things, especially if one has a talent for this something, but there is also theory.

At this moment, the history of Pola stops – we do not know if she managed to implement this fragile, biographical action plan. Nevertheless, taking into account the conditions of the labor market and the demand for cosmetic and hairdressing services in Łódź in the second decade of the 21st century, the decision to take up hairdressing training could prove to be successful.

The everyday life of Pola *in the year 2004* was as follows: the narrator lives with her fifteen-year-old daughter – a middle school student, her youngest brother and mother in a flat which the family moved into during the Martial Law. The family is supported by Pola's mother's pension, or rather a survivors'

pension after the narrator's father who died in 1999, Pola's unemployment benefit and irregular earnings received by her brother. Additionally, the narrator receives alimony from the husband – in a rather symbolic amount of 350 zlotys. Despite low income, Pola does not decide to apply for material benefits in a social assistance center. She pays rent with her own money. The mother is still trying to influence the narrator's life, discouraging her, among other things, from participating in training courses ("You've attended one, she says, and it came to nothing and nothing will come out of this one either, so I say: Then, I will sit at home and I will sit and wait for manna from Heaven.") In this relationship, the narrator, assessing that a significant part of her life mistakes resulted from attempts to "please [her mother] in everything" is struggling for autonomy:

At the moment, I am, err, more rebellious and now I do not let her. What I have to say to her, what hurts me, I simply tell her what hurts me. But, she then, she, she takes it as an insult. Yes, I feel that she takes it as an insult if I do otherwise than she wants me to...

Evicting her ex-husband from the flat required effort. At the time of the interview, he maintains regular but not very intense contacts with his daughter, "who he is a little bit interested in at the moment" – he bought her a computer, finances holiday trips. Pola did not enter into another lasting relationship, for some time she was seeing a married man, "broke up" with him when he became too possessive. The narrator maintains relationships with her close relatives –her grandmother, who is still significant to her, her brothers and their families. She has no close friends, but she meets her casual friends. She has closer contacts with those not working professionally, with one of them they participate in meetings for the unemployed. In the description of everyday life evoked by the researcher's question, we can notice that the specific structure of time grounded in the life situation of the narrator. For three days a week, Pola spends a few hours studying on a course. In the days of her afternoon classes, the mornings are filled with shopping, cooking dinner, reading job offers in the newspaper, and attempts to contact the ads' authors on the phone. On Wednesdays, the narrator attends classes at the Non-Material Assistance Center, pops into the employment office on the way to check the job offers there. She is also learning English.

Conclusions

From the perspective of biographical researchers of poverty and social exclusion, Pola represents the generation of women – big city immigrants, for whom the basic factor pushing into poverty is a loss of job in the first years

of the transformation and limited chances of permanent legal employment in the following years. In Pola’s biography, we see mechanisms that pose a risk of inheriting poverty and a series of circumstances arising from her biographical conditions, closing access to post-transformation opportunity structures. However, at the same time, we cannot unequivocally say that the narrator is a complete “loser” – a passive victim of coercion and constraints resulting from the socio-historical processes. In her biography, in addition to hindering constraints, we also find resources and attributes which can potentially help to overcome the trajectory of suffering. The course of Pola’s biography and her current life situation is primarily determined by her childhood and adolescence experiences, including educational experiences. Already in the analysis of the situation of her family of origin, we find the ambiguity of the narrator’s biographical conditions. We observe a lack of economic capital probably resulting from grounded rural poverty. On the other hand, Pola accumulates significant resources of emotional capital, created regardless of the destructive influence of her mother in relations with her grandmother, father, cousins, and peers. These resources may also be the result of the socialization of the child in a rural community still retaining elements of tradition. One can refer to the issue of her educational career more unequivocally, as a result of which Pola is unable to take advantage of the institutional opportunity structures, seemingly available in the education system in a democratic society. A low level of education, a profession inadequate in relation to family plans, as well as the situation on the labor market in Łódź after 1989, significantly block the narrator’s professional opportunities. The diploma of the agricultural trade school with which Pola entered adult life, sentenced her to take up employment as an unskilled worker in a textile plant and proved completely useless in the years of transformation. One can speculate, if the narrator had stayed in the countryside, would this diploma have given her a chance of a prosperous life? At the time of the interview, Pola is experiencing a trajectory of suffering with its overlapping and mutually reinforcing layers – professional (unemployment, the threat of social exclusion) and private (single parenthood, living in the household with her mother – a destructive significant other). However, living and running the household together prevents her from losing a flat of a decent standard (Pola has not yet faced the need to move to an impoverished neighborhood due to housing debts) and further slipping into poverty. Paradoxically, the income of the destructive mother is a safeguard for all the close relatives. Here we see a pattern characteristic of the families of Łódź social assistance beneficiaries, where the basis for the maintenance of three generations (children, parents, grandparents) in the 1990s were the material resources of the oldest generation (Potoczna, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009). The balance of Pola’s marriage is definitely negative, but the narrator perceives

her motherhood, the resulting “fruit” of this relationship as a success. She tries to provide her daughter with good conditions, sees her abilities, helps in planning education. The daughter is also an important source of support for Pola. We see how much effort Pola makes herself to stay “afloat,” break the trajectory using all the possible institutional opportunity structures. The narrator seems aware of the illusory nature of some of these structures. At the same time, the structures whose use would allow her to change the course of her life remain – due to intrapsychic reasons and structural conditions – inaccessible. Finally, let us recall the opinions of symbolic elites cited in the introduction to this part of the book about the “inept, unable to adapt numpties,” “guilty themselves,” “ordinary citizens,” “civilizationally incompetent,” showing a “general lack of discipline and diligence” (Buchowski 2008, Sztompka 1996, 2000 cited in: Buchowski 2006). In the light of this analysis, the narrator seems to be trying to act rationally, creatively, flexibly, autonomously, responsibly to meet the challenges of the free capitalistic labor market, and yet, despite the enormous effort, she remains in a constant biographical drift. In 2004, Pola was still waiting for her chance.

Joanna Wygnańska

CHAPTER XIV

NARRATIVES ROOTED IN FAMILY MILIEU CASE STUDIES OF AGNIESZKA AND PAWEŁ FOCUSED ON THE FAMILY THREAD AS THE BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCE AND MAIN STORY-LINE

Introduction

The Polish film director Jan Jakub Kolski¹ in one of his interviews explains what strongly influenced his adult work is growing up in the countryside, where he lived between the ages of 11 and 15 on his maternal grandfather's farm. Kolski describes this important episode in his biography with the following words:

As a child from the city, I came to the village, from the fourth grade of primary school I lived with my grandfather in the countryside. Everything was new and enchanting to me. Grandfather was a saddler² He was visited by various people. I listened to their stories. This childhood education is the source of my secrets and interests.³

¹ Also a screenwriter, cameraman and prose writer. Born in Wrocław in 1956. He is the creator of mainly feature films (e.g., *Historia kina w Popielawach* [1998], *Daleko od okna* [2000], *Pornografia* [2003], *Jasminum* [2006], *Ułaskawienie* [2018]), as well as documentary series and documentary films (e.g., *Między rajem a ziemią* [2003], *Namibia* [2005]). He published several novels and collections of stories: *Jańcio Wodnik i inne opowiadania*, *Kulka z chleba*, *Egzamin z oddychania*, *Mikroświaty: opowiadania*, and *Jadzia i małoludki*. He has been a member of the European Film Academy since 2000.

² He made horse harnesses, saddles, and equestrian accessories. These products were sewn by hand from leather and then finished with metal upholstery. Saddlery currently belongs to the so-called vanishing professions. This is mainly due to the modernization processes taking place throughout the 20th century, which resulted in machines taking over the role of horses.

³ From: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/jan-jakub-kolski>. Text author: Ewa Nawój, April 2004; updated February 2019. Retrieved November 12 2019.

This experience made the village of Popielawy,⁴ which at that time was Kolski's house, also become a place where part of the story told by the director⁵ takes place. It is often an imaginary world, saturated with "magical realism" typical, among others, for the novel *One hundred years of loneliness* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Nevertheless, the threads raised by Kolski also refer to his biographical experiences related to everyday life with his grandfather

The artist who returns in his works to his own biography, in his latest film titled *Ulaskawienie* (2018) attempted to tell the story of his maternal grandparents from the perspective of a grandson. This extremely moving picture of their lives interwoven with the difficult experiences of the First and Second World Wars and the mourning after the death of their son, a soldier of the Home Army⁶ (the brother of the director's mother), who was shot in the autumn of 1946, is the quintessence of stories which, as a child, Kolski was not yet able to understand exactly. In this way, in his adult life, through the film frame, he attempted to face the history of his family, as well as to show its importance for his individual experience. The figure of the maternal grandfather played an important role in the artist's youth, not only as a carer, but also as a significant Other for the formation of his vision of the world. In this way, in a film plot based on a true story – the director allowed his grandparents to say goodbye to their deceased son (the director's uncle) differently from the way it really happened. As he says, in another interview:

Ulaskawienie shows the story of two elderly people who carry the coffin with the son's body throughout Poland. Let it remain a mystery what is fictional content. My grandparents did not go on such a journey. The grandfather welded his son in a coffin and covered it with concrete in the Łaznów⁷ cemetery. In my imagination, however, they set off on this journey. This journey on screen will be a kind of compensation for this terrible fate which my grandparents met.⁸

⁴ A village located in central Poland, in the Łódź Voivodeship.

⁵ For example, the film *Historia kina w Popielawach* (1998) takes place in the scenery of the director's rural, family landscapes, among "familiar" spaces and human types. The narrator in the film is a boy, Staszek Szewczyk, who has been raised so far in a big city, starts living in the countryside, where his grandparents come from. The plot of the picture intertwines with Kolski's memories of his family history and (equally personal) reflections on the phenomenon of cinema in the time of subordination to the art of so-called tenth muse, including profit dogma.

⁶ The Home Army (AK), the armed forces of the Polish Underground State in the years of World War II.

⁷ A village located in central Poland, not far from the director's home village – Popielawy.

⁸ At <https://lodz.naszemiasto.pl/film-ulaskawienie-jan-jakub-kolski-krecil-kolo-lodzi/ar/c13-4360783>. Author: Anna Gronczewska, December 2017. Retrieved November 12, 2019.

The above digression, evoking Kolski's creative inspirations and references, aims to indicate the importance of experiences rooted in the family history for the formation of a single biographical identity. In the introduction to this part of the book, we pointed out that the family thread, in many of those narrations gathered in the project: *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective*, was one of the main storylines around which the interlocutors built the story of their lives "oriented by the cognitive overall *Gestalt*" (Schütze 2008a: 175). Thus, many narrators reconstructed their individual biographical experiences as if in relation to the history of their families and by pointing to those people who have had a direct and significant impact on their beliefs and life choices. Thus, like the grandfather, they are, in the case of the director Jan Jakub Kolski, the significant Others who, as we indicated in the introduction, have a formative role in shaping the stories of the childhood and adolescence of our interlocutors. They are also present, often symbolically, in their adulthood. Besides, from the biographical perspective of "now," relations with these people were treated by the narrators as crucial for attributing meaning to their biographies. Most often, these people were grandparents, but also our interlocutors' parents, their husbands, wives, or partners. In this way, the story of the family was indicated by many of them as the most important or one of the most important threads of their biographies. Thus, I treat this thread in the analysis below as a biographical resource. As Kaja Kaźmierska writes in the introduction to this part of the book, it is such a dimension of the biographical experience of the narrators which they considered crucial for the development of their lives. What is more, I show it in the context of biographical processes and the related social processes (Schütze 1992a, 2008 a, b, 2014, Kaźmierska, Schütze 2013, Waniek 2019), in which the individual biographical fate of our narrators was entangled.

To conduct the research study set out in this chapter, I chose from among the 90 collected autobiographical interviews two narrations: Paweł,⁹ a manager (born 1976) and Agnieszka, a speech therapist (also born 1976). By studying these two cases, I try to explain the complexity of biographical and social processes from which the interlocutors' individual patterns of action and interpretations of social reality emerge (Breckner 2007: 115). Additionally, referring to the assumption that "what you say about your life story entails explanations of your own actions and self-assessments" (Gültekin, Inowlocki, Lutz 2012: 661), I focus on reconstructing the experiences of the narrators inscribed in a specific social framework (Schütze 2008a, b). On the other

⁹ In Chapter IX, Part 2 of the book, I refer to a fragment of Paweł's biography touching the sphere of his reflectiveness concerning his individual biographical experience of the time of transformation in Poland.

hand, I concentrate on the layer of their reflectivity, in which they present their developing biographical identity by recreating their biographical experiences. I treat the family thread which orders their biography as the frame connecting individual phases of their autobiographical accounts. In this perspective the specific research objective of the analysis undertaken is, on the one hand, a structural analysis of the autobiographical narratives of Paweł and Agnieszka, in order to show in the fullest possible way what role the family thread plays in building their life stories. Moreover, through the analysis of these biographies, I am trying to put my reflections into the discussion on the contemporary narrative on the importance of the family as a value in Poland, from the position of understanding the family as an important biographical resource in building stories about one's own life.

The choice of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases was not connected with the research decision to analyze only this part of the interview collection which presents the biographical experiences of people born in the decade of the 1970s. The study of these two autobiographical stories is rather a consequence of choosing (out of 90) the collected narrations. Those in which the family was treated by the narrators as an important thread organizing their biography both in the spontaneous narrative phase and in the additional questions phase. The specificity of biographical research is in fact generating from the collected material those categories which allow the researcher to reconstruct the biographical experience of the narrators entangled in a specific social framework. Moreover, the aim of my analysis was based on selecting the similar cases rather than contrasting ones in order to be able to trace how the main narrative line, which is the family thread, is built in them. The analysis of similar cases also gives an opportunity to show the discussed problem on many levels, to look at whether in both of the studied biographies it really has a very similar specificity, or maybe, despite the assumption of similarity of the discussed narratives, we are dealing with, from the analytical point of view, significant differences in the understanding of the importance of the family thread for building life stories by the narrators. In this way, both in Paweł and Agnieszka's biographies I encountered a special role attributed to their relationship with grandparents¹⁰ and parents. In addition, these biographies

¹⁰ In very many of the autobiographical stories we have gathered, the narrators described their relationship with grandparents, pointing to the special role of grandmothers and grandfathers during their childhood and adolescence. This is because grandparents often provided not only help in their upbringing, thereby relieving the often busy parents. They were also treated by our interlocutors as significant Others for the development of their biographical identity. As Kaja Kaźmierska writes in the introduction to this part of the book: "Much more important [in the narrations we have gathered; ed. J.W.] is a kind of relationship built then [with grandparents; ed.

carry a clear desire of the narrators to cultivate the importance of family ties also in the families they started. In Paweł's life history, as in the case of Jan Jakub Kolski, the important dimension of his biographical experience is the relationship with his maternal grandfather. In addition, it should be noted that the story about the grandfather and the narrator's relationship with his grandfather appears both in the preamble and in the coda closing the phase of Paweł's spontaneous narration and linking the following threads he presents. Importantly, if a preamble appears in the autobiographical story, it usually coincides with what the narrator says in the coda. What is more, when there is a preamble in the narration, the coda which appears at the end of the life history told is elaborate and is also often a split coda (Każmierska, Waniek 2020). We find this coda in Paweł's narration and this is an important analytical aspect undertaken in the study of this case. In the interview with Agnieszka, in turn, the figure of her maternal grandmother comes to the fore, who is depicted by the narrator not only as a grandmother, but also as a close friend. Agnieszka considers growing up at her grandparents' home as something which shaped her perception of intimate relationships and an ideal vision of the world in which she would like to function.

Additionally, Agnieszka and Paweł devote a lot of space in their narrations to give sense to their biographical experiences by reconstructing the fate of their parents, siblings, and their spouses. In the case of Agnieszka's biographical work (Schütze 2008a, b), the story of her sister Hanna¹¹ is important and their deep sisterly bond. What connects the selected cases is, therefore, the rooting of both autobiographical stories in the family *milieu* and the presentation of other threads (including professional life) through the prism of this area of experiences. Using the term "rooted in the family *milieu*," I am inspired by the concept of the autobiographical narrative vectors: "rooting in history" and 'rooting in *milieu*' (Piotrowski 2016), discussed, among others, in the introduction to the first part of this book. In this perspective, the "rooting" of Paweł and Agnieszka in the 'family *milieu*' manifests itself in the domination of experiences inscribed in the family context in their narrations. In other words, the family thread is the main dimension of biographical references in them, and the other experiences described are subordinate.

JW.], which in many cases has been formative and the figure of grandparents was part of the family landscape."

¹¹ The case of Hanna, a doctor born in the early 1980s, is discussed in detail in Chapter X, in Katarzyna Waniek's analysis. Jacek Burski refers to the narrator's professional experience in Chapter XI. A reconstruction of Hanna's experiences from the late 1980s showing a comparative perspective on the PPR line and the well-being of the Western world can be found in Chapter IX of my authorship.

Conceptual framework of further deliberations

The considerations presented here should be placed in a broader framework of analyses concerning the family in biographical research.¹² First of all, I would like to refer to the thoughts of Paul Thompson, derived from comparative studies conducted with Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame in the second half of the 1980s¹³ regarding intergenerational communication and the multi-faceted phenomenon of social mobility. At the same time, it should be noted that in his reflections on the effects of this Anglo-French comparative study on the core kin families, Thompson writes both in relation to the analytical perspective of oral history,¹⁴ as well as undertakes the task of conducting a study of biographical interviews within the biographical method with members of 100 families in England and France. It is the latter perspective of his analyses that is the subject of my reference. I am also aware that the study of family histories

¹² This text also requires a theoretical reference to the research field of sociology of the family. In Polish research the perspective of studying the frame of the concept of the family, processes taking place within the family, and also dilemmas and changes of modern Polish families, it can be indicated here, for example, Adamski (2002), Tyszka (2002), Slany (2002), Giza-Poleszczuk (2005), Szlendak (2010), Kotlarska-Michalska (2015), Boguszewski (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2015), Kwak (2005, 2015), Sikorska (2014, 2019), and the interdisciplinary scientific journal *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny* (Journal page: <https://press.amu.edu.pl/pl/katalog/czasopisma-naukowe/roczniki-socjologii-rodziny.html>).

¹³ I am talking about *Families and social mobility: a comparative study*, funded on the British side by the Economic and Social Research Council, and on the French side by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). “The initial focus was middle generation informants, aged 30–55 married with children. Interviews typically cover family background and occupation, as well as a full life story covering childhood, working life, marriage, and childrearing” (after <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/- Archive Website on which one can find the description and access to the research materials collected on the British side of the comparative study>). The result of these studies are two book publications. The first one, (Bertaux, Thompson 1993) published as part of the series *International Yearbook of oral history and life stories* and the second (Bertaux, Thompson 1997) constituting a collection of texts showing the multi-faceted aspect of social mobility. The publications present the issues of an intergenerational message in the context of a research quest for answers to the question about the content of family histories, about what knowledge parents pass on to their children and how this message influences the formation of the life stories and life paths of their children.

¹⁴ More about Thompson’s approach to oral history can be found in his book (Thompson 1978, 2000). To understand the differences and the mutual relationship between oral history and biographical method see the text by Jakub Gałęziowski (2019).

indicated here, including the cooperation of Thompson and Bertaux, is far from the interpretative perspective presented in my text. However, as part of outlining some broader background of completed research projects focused on analyzing family history and intergenerational communication in the context of biographical research, I decided that the comparative research study should also be mentioned. Reflecting on the impact of family experiences for shaping individual life paths, Thompson notes that:

Telling one's own life story requires not only recounting directly remembered experiences, but also drawing on information and stories transmitted across the generations. [...] Life stories are thus, in themselves, a form of transmission; but at the same time they often indicate in a broader sense what is passed down in families (Thompson 2005: 275, also Thompson 1993: 13).

In this view, the most important resource of life stories told was the transmission of family influences across the generations. "It shows how within that framework individuals can choose not only to accept but also to reject their transgenerational inheritance" (Thompson 2005: 277). In such an analytical approach, the family context shown in individual life stories was treated in relation to the interpretation of how narrators "fuse the personal with the familial" (Thompson 2005). It should be noted that the described study of intergenerational dependencies in terms of Thompson and Bertaux grew out of Bertaux's research intention to give the biographical analysis a macro-social dimension.¹⁵ Bertaux saw the possibility of including analyses of family histories in the perspective of macro-social interpretations and research based on these analyses of social processes such as social mobility and social change (Każmierska 2012b: 118).

The family thread, also in a different perspective from the biographical analysis of cases presented in my text, is present in the research conducted

¹⁵ As Kaja Kaźmierska (2012b: 116) notes, Bertaux is rather 'reluctant to identify with the interpretative perspective, sometimes calling it narrativism.' His analytical approach is dominated by the treatment of "biography as a means" (Helling 1960: 16), to gather biographical information to be used to answer sociological questions. The project undertaken with Thompson to collect family stories, however, differed from his other research initiatives related to collecting life stories among people belonging to the same *milieu* (the most significant in his achievements are the long-term studies of French bakers accomplished with Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame). He returned to the family context collecting, together with Catherine Delcroix (again) life stories (not family stories) among family members representing "the same social formation," which was to "lead to learning about general cultural and social patterns, the dynamics of change and social reproduction or historical transformations" (cited in Kaźmierska 2012b: 118).

by Gabriele Rosenthal. Her extensive study concerned the importance of intergenerational dialogue in the family for the formation of a “historical and family sequence of generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 686).¹⁶ On the one hand, the researcher was interested in how intergenerational processes are shaped in terms of intergenerational experiences. In her analysis, she also tried to show “how much the experiences of the generation of parents and grandparents can have on the condition of the next generations – especially when they are suppressed and when they are denied” (Rosenthal 2012: 690). Rosenthal notes that this generation of parents, called the “middle generation,” is embedded in a particularly important role in the context of intergenerational relations. It has a direct impact on the process of transmitting the family past and thus maintaining the dialogue between the generation of grandparents and the generation of grandchildren. In addition, the family narrations that the researcher got (people from 1960–1970) were marked by the experiences of World War I and II. In this way, the intergenerational message she analyzed was dominated by attempts made by the middle generation to face not only the individual difficult biographical experience, but also the difficult experience of the parents, entangled in “negotiating, reinterpreting, silencing, and externalizing” the past. Attempting to complement the reference to the research perspective proposed by Rosenthal,¹⁷ it is worth referring to the analysis of Katarzyna Waniek, who notes that:

The biographical research method, almost absent in recent years in American sociology, located on the outskirts of the main currents in both France and Great Britain, still holds a relatively high position in Germany. There is a thriving environment of sociologists-biographers focused primarily on the schools of Fritz Schütz and Gabriele Rosenthal (2019: 137).

However, I am not attempting to reconstruct the relationship between the two approaches in the history of biographical research. Briefly, it can only be pointed out that their assumptions are associated with the implication

¹⁶ The scholar conducted research with members of three-generation families in Germany, with people born in 1890-1970. It focuses mainly on the concept of a historical generation, recognizing that it is shaped “through family dialogue and a specific family sequence of generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 698). Starting from the definition of the real generation of Karl Mannheim (1992/1993), Rosenthal assumes that the historical generation develops through reliving the past and reinterpreting processes which “take place in interactions with others – and this also means with the members of older and younger generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 688).

¹⁷ A broader discussion of this approach to the biographical method one can find, for example, in her text (Rosenthal, 2005) in *Biographical research method*, Volume III.

of questions about the social function of biography, about social processes in which the analyzed life stories are involved (Schütze 2008a, b, 2014, Rosenthal 1993, 2012). However, in Schütz's approach: "what? and how? in the autobiographical narration are treated inseparably" (Waniek 2019: 144). This relation is in his considerations: "correlated with the key assumption about homology reported in the narration and events experienced in life" (Waniek 2019: 144). Rosenthal, on the other hand, is in favor of "separate treatment of what is told (*erzählte*) and what is lived (*gelebte*), and thus between the *life story* and *life history* (Waniek 2019: 144) respectively.

Another interesting perspective of research on the transmission of family history, based on the analysis of life stories, are Catherine Delcroix's many years¹⁸ of reflection on the uncertain life situation¹⁹ of immigrant families from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria) living in France. The methodology of her study is based on "recreating family stories reconstructed on the basis of several meetings with many members of the same family (with parents, with children)" (Delcroix 2012: 701). Thus, it is also a different research perspective from the approach presented in my analysis, assuming the interpretation of the narrator's individual biographical experience in reference to the "social frames of involvements of the narrator" and the significance of specific events in his life history for his developing biography (Schütze 2008a: 173). Delcroix focuses on considering the transmission of family memory by reconstructing ways of communication between generations and the role of parents in the process of socialization of their children. Research conclusions are also formulated by placing the collected narrations in relation to the changes in French socio-political reality. Delcroix explains that "The relevance of this methodology lies in the importance of the family as a 'micro-environment of intersubjective relations where [...] emotional, moral, and' semantic '(symbolic) relations dominate, that is to say, generate meaning' [following Bertaux 1997: 38; ed. J. W.]. The family members are all 'significant Others' to each other; and particularly important ones" (Delcroix 2019: 36–37). On the one hand, their ethnic heritage, the culture of origin plays an important role

¹⁸ Delcroix has been conducting her research since the 1990s. She is following various immigrant families over long periods as an ethnographic observer and biographical-narrative interviewer.

¹⁹ Delcroix defines uncertainty as "précarité," which relates to an uncertain life situation resulting mainly from insecure employment, may also, however, relate to other situations related to the individual's experience, for example, the need for migration. In Polish, the word functions semantically as a "precariat" and concerns an uncertain life situation resulting from the instability of employment. For several years, it has also been the subject of scientific interest in Poland (e.g., Sowa 2010, Mrozowicki, Karolak 2017).

(Delcroix 2000, 2012, 2019). On the other, preparing the young generation for the risk of encountering racism and life uncertainty. Therefore, after Delcroix, it can be pointed out that:

Additionally, collecting life stories from parents and children allows an in-depth examination of educational strategies and the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions. These life stories give us evidence of parents' educational practices and how they organize themselves to try to give their children resources, values, and principles. Reciprocally, it is to capture, in the children's discourses, what they retain from the education provided by parents and, more widely, from the family history as it is related (Delcroix 2019: 43).

The author collected and analyzed some of the research material together with the already mentioned Daniel Bertaux (see, e.g., Bertaux, Delcroix 2000). Recently, the researcher has attempted to recall and reconstruct the biographical portrait of families from Morocco living in one of the French settlements.

Summarizing this part of this chapter slowly, it is also worth recalling the considerations of Lena Inowlocki (2000) regarding the problem of constructing "normality" and forming "Doing" being Jewish in the families of displaced Jews in Germany. Focusing on case studies, the author interprets the social structures in which her interlocutors' experience was entangled, rather than recreates the collective family history. It is, therefore, an analytical perspective close to my considerations. Other, more modern biographical studies, in which the family theme plays an important role, include the analysis of transnational motherhood experience carried out by Sylwia Urbańska (2015), or the considerations of Paulina Bunio-Mroczek (2014, 2016) regarding the phenomenon of early parenthood. Importantly, in the latter of the indicated research projects, as the researcher points out (Bunio-Mroczek 2014: 28): "Interviews with teenage mothers and fathers were biographical, but not narrative." According to the classical division of Ingeborg Helling (1990), in this study biography was used as "biography as a means." In this analytical perspective, Bunio-Mroczek sought answers to "questions about the dimensions and mechanisms of social exclusion experienced by teenage parents from neglected environments" (Bunio-Mroczek 2014: 28). Therefore, this is not an example of a biographical analysis which falls within the framework of interpretative sociology, but the analyses made by the author raised the issues of what role the family of origin played in the biographies of the respondents and how they present their individual parenting experiences.

The family research mentioned above can be treated as an important background for the analyses undertaken in this chapter. On the one hand, they show a certain spectrum of analyses concerning the family narrative in biographical research. On the other hand, the above review of the literature

on the subject allows us to place the considerations conducted in this text in a broader analytical perspective. The presented research threads show how important the family is as an analytical category and how its significance in the life of individuals can be studied. Most of the above mentioned texts represent a different dimension of the approach to biographical analyses than the one organizing my considerations. However, they create the necessary contrast to the reflections undertaken in this text.

In my case studies, however, I, myself, base it on the assumptions of Fritz Schütze's biographical method. Therefore, I am attempting to reconstruct the story of a family in autobiographical narrative interviews both as a biographical resource and as the main line of spontaneous narration. It should be noted that these are, however, two different analytical orders. On one hand, the family thread is the main line of spontaneous narration. On the other, as a biographical resource, it is selected by narrators from a spontaneous narration. Thus, as I have already mentioned, the family theme understood as a biographical resource is an analytical category generated during the interpretation of the biographies of Paweł and Agnieszka. In this perspective, in the case studies below, I am also trying to reconstruct the ways in which the family thread emerges in their narrations, also referring to the basic communication patterns of representation of life and the world: narration, description and argumentation (Schütze 2008a). In addition, it is worth noting that in the assumptions of the Fritz Schütze's method 'the subject of the narrator's account becomes his own life history: it is he and not the researcher who decides what will be told and what is not; in what order, with what intensity and in what way. This decision of the informant is becoming an important analytical thread itself' (Waniek 2019: 137). Moreover, at this point it's important to mention that his chapter is also a workshop illustration of the structural analysis of the text in terms of Fritz Schütze's biographical method. This means that the main research problem addressed in this chapter, which is the importance of the family thread for the construction of stories about one's own life and the location of this way of telling about the family in the contemporary perspective, is presented in this chapter, both from the perspective of the structural analysis of the texts of Paweł and Agnieszka's biographies, and within the analytical procedure aiming at establishing typical links between specific biographical processes and the social phenomenon studied.

Paweł's case analysis

Paweł was born in 1976 in a small city in central-eastern Poland. He grew up in this place and also lives there as an adult. Due to the work of his father, who in the PPR times held a managerial position in a large nationwide

commercial network, his experience of childhood and adolescence was somewhat privileged. The narrator himself speaks of this issue in the interview, referring to the phenomenon of the economy of shortages and dysfunctions of the socialist system in Poland, which goes beyond his personal biographical experience. Because of the belief in his family (on the mother's side) that an accountant is always a respectable job, like his grandfather, mother, and older sister, Paweł is also professionally connected with what he calls "work in finance." Paweł's mother, apart from working in accounting, was also a teacher for many years. She taught mathematics and accounting at schools and courses. Until the time of the interview in 2016, being already retired, she was writing accounting textbooks. Paweł graduated from university and started his first job (in the accounting department at one of the car companies) while still being a student, just like his parents, which, as it turns out, is important in his biography. Since the beginning of the 2000s, he has been professionally associated with a large international corporation dealing with manufacturing and sales of household products. He works as a manager in the finance department. In connection with his professional work, the story of experience inscribed in the phenomenon of "transnational workers" resounds in his biography. Paweł spent 9 months in Russia in one of the branches of the company in which he works. Despite the fact that the employer allowed him to go with his family, this episode of his biographical experience is marked by trajectory markers. At the end of his studies, he got married and remains in that relationship (time of interview). His wife is a doctor by profession and works at a hospital. They have three children.

I would like to start reflecting on the theme of the family as the main narrative line of Paweł by looking at two *demonstration markers*: "the introduction or preamble of the autobiographical narration and the conclusion or coda of it" (Labov and Waletzky 1967, cited in Schütze 2008a: 175). In the introduction to the spontaneous narration and the coda that closes it, the narrator tries to show what people and events shaped him as he currently sees himself. Importantly, the preamble segment developed in arguments is not a common feature of autobiographical stories about one's own life. In this sense, Paweł's reflection in starting his story stands out from the other narrative interviews collected in our set. Also, it should be noted that despite the similarity of the content contained in the preamble and the coda, these two *demonstration markers* differ from each other in an analytical sense. In the preamble, the narrator who finds himself for the first time in an autobiographical interview situation tries to show the basic features of his biography and the most important lines of the events he reports. Sometimes, as in the case of Paweł, we encounter a preamble in which the interlocutor captures the basic features of his story in the form of superior predicates. In this way, through cognitive questions (Who am I? What shaped me?), Paweł is trying to understand the meaning of his biography. However,

moving on to understanding the concept of the coda, it should be noted that the narrator, closing his autobiographical story, looks at the overall entirety of his (told) life history. As Fritz Schütze writes (2008a: 178): “The narrator, looking at the overall *Gestalt* of his life history, asks himself the question: Can I go on with the dominant biographical process(es) that I am in right now or should I work for a decisive change?” The coda is, therefore, a segment in the narration, in which the interlocutor moves his story into the present tense, summing up his current life, and “this can also be combined with some argumentative assessments of the present life situation and with the course of the life history in general” (Schütze 2008a: 178). In addition, in Paweł’s narration, we are dealing with a broken coda, which, as I will show below, is a very important interpretative resource in the analysis of the whole of his biographical story.

Before I quote fragments of Paweł’s biography which are interesting analytically, I would like to explain why at the beginning of his case analysis I also focus on the coda in which “we can get a first glimpse on the overall *Gestalt* of the life history as experienced and seen” by the narrator (Schütze 2008a: 178). Such a research decision is dictated here by my desire to reconstruct the main plot visible in Paweł’s reflection on what experiences shaped his biographical identity (including his beliefs and vision of the world). In this way, in the main line of his spontaneous narration – stories about the family (both of this origin and the one he had started), its fragments about the person of his grandfather stand out clearly. This thread is extensive in both the preamble and the autobiographical coda of Paweł’s account. The narrator in both segments, looking at the overall entirety of his biography, tries to show himself and the listener the sense of his life. He reproduces insights regarding his biographical experiences, using them through these patterns of behavior and view of the world that his grandfather followed. I will now quote both passages from the interview with Paweł that are important for my analysis of this case:

Preamble segment in Paweł’s narration:

N: OK, I was really wondering what it would look like and what things I should remember and relate right here. And I really think that generally speaking the way my life looks now, well, [...] depends on how and where I was growing up, how I made friends with, err, in the past. [...] It had the biggest impact. [...] Obviously, with hindsight, well, I might have chosen different people, who/ I’d like to model myself on and who could be my guiding patterns. But. OK, what’s done can’t be undone. [...] So perhaps I’ll speak about the past which, to the biggest extent, which shaped me in my view, which shaped my character, which shaped me the way I am currently and what my life looks like now. [...]

[Here, the narrator mentions that he was born in a small city in central-eastern Poland and that as a child he liked to spend holidays in a town in northern

Poland where his mother's family came from. He talks about the time spent with family, children's games, and being carefree. Thus, in this part of his spontaneous narration, he falls into the coverage of his childhood. However, he interrupts them and in the next fragment of his narration he returns to the thread of reflecting on what shaped him as a person; – J.W.].²⁰ So with hindsight, I think it was at that time, err, that time when I was being somehow shaped in my early childhood and I started to see how I'd like it to look. [...] I really think that even when I speak to someone close or someone else I really say that my grandpa is my role model. Even in my primary school, we were assigned to write about, I remember, no, it was in my secondary school, I guess it was the beginning of secondary school. It was about giving examples of people, who we'd like to imitate, to act like them, *who is the role model for you?* I remember I wrote about my granddad.

I: Hmm.

N: And [...] I'll really discuss it at length because I think it was the time, which for several years, err/ showed me the way to live. So from that point of view, err, it was rather poor in the countryside. They weren't people who came from some higher classes, even for farmers. Notwithstanding, my granddad was incredibly [...] well-read. He enjoyed, just devoured books. And I remember even today how he told us poems about Stefek Burczymucha²¹, it was amazing and he was using special intonation. The only thing that/ I somehow remember it, he was smoking cigarettes. No, not so terribly, in the kids' presence, he would always go out of the home. However, he would sit somewhere in the granary and would smoke those cigarettes. And my grandma would tell him off. Anyway, he would typically sit with his grandchildren and would tell them stories about his times. He was writing an incredible diary. There are several dozens, I don't know for sure, a couple of thick several-hundred-page notebooks. One of his grandsons keeps them at his place at present. It was there where he was describing what his life looked like practically day after day. (.) So in fact, yes, my grandma was incredibly lively, she was insisting on keeping order and tidiness. She was ordering my granddad a bit about and he would tolerate it patiently and with his, well, I don't know his knowledge from books and understanding how the world functions, well, he was incredibly in that area where they lived, he was greatly respected. My grandma would even laugh that he must have been some general's son, as it would have been impossible to come from a peasant's home and be so obsessed about gaining knowledge. [...] Another thing/ an introduction why I think that that place shaped me. Rarely does one meet people from the country who achieved

²⁰ I made the decision not to provide the whole fragment of the introduction segment and to relate some of its parts in a form that informs the reader about their content due to their size. Assuming that in this way I still do not lose what is most important in Paweł's reflection.

²¹ Stefek Burczymucha is a character of a poem for children written by Polish author Maria Konopnicka. It's about a boy who liked to brag and show off his alleged courage. But, finally one day he was frightened by a little mouse.

quite a lot. In fact, he was born in a relatively poor family, but through gaining knowledge he wanted as an adult/ err, he graduated from secondary school and passed the final exams. But, after the war he started, I mean after the war/ during the war even he started dealing with financial matters, he was working as a head accountant, yes. And it passed down in the family. After him two daughters out of four, who have/ used to have/ have/ dealt with finances. They were working as accountants, including my mum. In a way, it also impacted me, so I consider myself a continuation of what he ... what he represented.

I: Hmm.

N: How to live, how to behave and what is important in life. [...] I still recall his words when he said: if you're an accountant, I don't know a financial advisor, err, an accountant rather than, regardless of the political system you'll always be useful. If you calculate it doesn't matter if it's communism or socialism or free-market economy, financial specialists are always in demand and you'll always enjoy a quiet life and opportunity to find your place in life. [...] Alright, that'd do as an introduction of sorts. [...] So, for me, let's say, it's some beginning, kind of.

Coda segment in Paweł's narration:

N: If only I had/ plenty of time, I believe it's before me, still. [...] I approach this issue cautiously because speaking about politics I have very clear, very strong convictions in terms of what is good in my view and what is bad. And I decidedly support one of the political parties. It is, it leads to some tension between me and particularly my in-laws, they are very religious let's say, and support one political side, which I can't stand, [...] I can't stand, [...] to put it differently, I can't stand that pressure and my attitude is most negative to it. And when it comes to some/ I try to avoid those issues or taking part in meetings when such issues are discussed, but of course, you can't avoid them altogether. Anyway, if I were to assess my, err [...] my life, I know that my in-laws don't like my attitude to political matters. And they particularly bear a grudge against me because my wife has a similar attitude to mine. She's religious, that's a fact, I'm a little less. Or I'll put it differently, I'm a believer, but, but I'm far from what the Catholic Church in Poland, the way it acts now, and that it is the right way. Or let's say God, God or the power of creation had imagined what it would look like. Therefore, there are tensions between us, I know they don't like it too much. However, my personality hasn't been luckily shaped by them, it's not from recent years, but mainly from what I had taken from my grandparents and my parents. Leaving it aside, my grandma from my mum's side was also a very religious person. But, she also had common sense and separated faith from the way the Church should act and look from its political tendencies. Besides, the time when they were living, cause my grandpa died in 1997 and my grandma in 2001, so it's been a while/ and the divisions back then weren't so deep as they are now, at least they weren't so/ perhaps the divisions

were into post-communists and freedom-oriented ones. But still, even then she knew what some people from this freedom-oriented side, which they strongly supported. And even in that camp, she had her favorite candidates, grandma and grandpa had their favorite candidates against the whole group, so to say. Or they couldn't stand some of them, who are close to the top right now, or on the top. So looking at time I was really shaped probably by my teenage years. All those holidays I spent with them and their attitude and understanding. [...] If I could say two things more, which, which in spite of my forty years, which I have, which will probably remain till the end of my life. One of the stories, I didn't witness it, I don't even know if my mum witnessed it, I only know it from somebody's story. My grandpa was incredibly honest, I mean he never wanted to harm anybody, or that they could face consequences of his dishonesty, or that he would want to act dishonestly. I know from other people's accounts that he was to take a sack of rye, I don't know, some grains to the market, I don't know. Anyway, he went there, took it and sold it. When he came back home my grandma asks him how much he got for it, how much he sold it for. And he said some amount. Anyway, my grandma got to know later on that the prices on the market were somewhat higher that day, I don't know, a little higher, you know. Anyway, she says, how come everybody sold at this price and you came back, you sold it for less. And he was like that producing it cost him so and so and it would be unfair to earn too much on it. I know it from some account.

I: Hmm.

N: Another thing I remember I was going with my grandpa, my grandma would leave us home, and we would go on holiday to feed geese in the pasture in the surroundings. And on the other hand, with my sister, with my sister we went to the cinema at school, at home, and somewhere her friends showed a dried dragonfly, it was violet I guess. I don't know where they got it from, how they caught it. Anyway, I really liked it, because it was in vivid colors, nice, they were shining. And when I went with my granddad to feed geese in the pasture I wanted to hunt such a dragonfly to dry it and keep it like those buddies did. Anyway, my granddad saw it and was like: *what are you doing?* And I'm like/ you know I said I wanted to catch it and have it. And I remember even today his words: *but why do you want to do it? It's a living creature who wants to live and not only delight your eyes.* I was shocked that he says that even such creatures want to live and why you want to take its life away to be delighted. So it was a very, very deep [...] awareness of [...] life and [...] to act decently. And I think that these things really shaped me. Go ahead ask me, what I haven't said and I should have, or what I should expand on.

Looking at the quoted passages, one can see a certain double narration about Paweł's grandfather and their mutual relationship. On the one hand, Paweł is trying to "recreate" the person of his grandfather in his autobiographical relationship, thus pointing to the importance of these memories for building a story about his own life. On the other, by pointing to the person of the

grandfather and through him in his narration, Paweł is facing his own biography. In other words, he accounts for himself biographically, interpreting his experiences and life decisions regarding the pattern of behavior he considers to be right. In this way, at the same time in the preamble, referring to the essay he wrote about his grandfather in secondary school, as well as in the coda in which he returns to the story about his grandfather, he recalls his “very deep awareness of life and how to act decently.”

In the preamble, moreover, Paweł points out the relationship between his biographical experiences located in the past and his perception of himself from the perspective of the biographical “now.” As Fritz Schütze observes:

In autobiographical narrative interviews, the relatively rare cases of elaborate preambles would normally be a sign of extended rethinking and reassessment work as it could have been accomplished in reflective mental reaction to a severe life crisis and, connected to it, through intensive communication with a significant other about it or with a professional in a biographical counselling situation or even in the context of a psychotherapeutic setting and treatment relationship (Schütze 2008a: 176–177).

In Paweł’s case, both in the preamble and in the coda, one can see the biographical work which the narrator performs “consciously and critically referring to life experiences and events” (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116). Importantly, the biographical work is self-interactive, but also involves working with others (e.g., family members, therapists, counsellors), yet it does not exclude the role of significant Others in the process (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116, Strauss 2012a: 518). In other words, a person who performs biographical work undertakes “the effort to interpret one’s own biographical experiences in relation to one’s identity, self-perception, behaviors, activities undertaken or not” (Każmierska 2008: 29, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116). Fritz Schütze (2008a: 160) states that: “Biographical work is basically an inner activity of the mind and emotional psyche, and this inner activity is essentially constituted by a conversation with significant Others and oneself.” In this approach, biographical work allows the person to perceive one’s life as a separate whole (*Gestalt*) and is “a kind of special reflection on the entire history of life, the conditions of this history in which the central issue is to address the question of embedding and influence, the participation and importance of the individual in the course of biographical processes and mutual relations between them and the identity of the social actor” (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 118).

Paweł, through his references to his grandfather’s figure and his relationship with his grandfather, undertakes this “special reflection” regarding the history of his (whole) life. Thus, he is struggling with important epistemological questions about who he is and whether the pattern represented by his grandfather is

present in his personal conduct. In the words: “So perhaps I’ll speak about the past which, to the biggest extent, which shaped me in my view, which shaped my character, which shaped me the way I am currently and what my life looks like now” – thus outlines the sphere of his experience that allows him to justify: “the way his life looks now.” This kind of reference appears again in the coda, where Paweł states that: “So looking at time I was really shaped probably by my teenage years. [...]” Then recalling the thread of his grandfather’s, he adds: “If I could say two things more, which, which in spite of my forty years, which I have, which will probably remain till the end of my life,” closes this part of his narration with two stories from the past in which he sees an important component of experiences which, as he says, “shaped him.” It is apparent from the preamble that his grandfather influenced his biographical decisions by showing him: “How to live, how to behave, and what is important in life.” In addition, it is due to his grandfather’s beliefs about a certain “timelessness” of performing the accounting profession that his professional path is associated with work in finances, as mentioned in the cited preamble segment. For Paweł, granddad is also an example of an honest man who treated other people and beings with respect. Therefore, he is a significant Other who influenced Paweł’s perception of his life and identity in relation to the values represented by his grandfather: dignity, honesty, and sensitivity towards others.

Marzena Farnicka, writing about everyday life in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, notes that a grandparent as a significant Other can have a strong impact on the development of a grandchild’s personality and identity. Often, his role focuses not only on the care and transmission of family traditions, but can also relate to the indication of best practices and to explain the importance of following specific moral and ethical principles.²² Grandparents can also play the role of “support points,” that is, those who show their grandchildren with their attitude what is permanent in life, how to deal with others, what is worth striving for (Appelt 2007: 91). In addition, research on the role of grandparents in the development of grandchildren shows that:

Grandparents feel that they exist in their grandchildren, they see the continuity of their family, first of all through the transmitted genes, but also through the possibility of passing on their life achievements, both in the material aspect, but also through their own values and memories. Thanks to this, the oldest and youngest ones develop a sense of continuity. Grandparents play an important family integrating role (*kinkeeper role*) – thanks to them, the family meets more often, shares more family stories and customs, has a stronger sense of family ties and a stronger sense of commitment to support each other when needed (Appelt 2007: 92).

²² At <http://encyklopediadziecinstwa.pl/>. M. Farnicka *Dziadek w codzienności dziecka*. Retrieved November 12, 2019.

In the case of Paweł's life history above, the quoted passage about "the sense of grandparents' existing in their grandchildren" can be slightly reformulated and it can be stated that Paweł "has a sense of his grandfather's presence in him." Thanks to his self-reflective references, he reassures himself whether he is behaving properly, whether he is like his grandfather. This is clearly seen in the quoted coda segment, where Paweł again checks himself against his grandfather's ideal pattern. It is a broken coda, which means that the "ordinary" coda sequence associated with the summary of the general form of the biography is divided by extensive theoretical and argumentative commentary (Każmierska, Waniek 2019: 70). A broken coda is also an important interpretative resource. Its presence in Paweł's autobiographical story indicates that he is under the pressure of argumentation and evaluation of specific experiences for his life course. As Fritz Schütze writes, in special cases we find in the coda segment: "argumentative commentaries of balancing the pros and cons of one's life and biographical work in general, and therefore they deal with the global storyline and the overall biographical shape of the life history of the narrator" (Schütze 2008a: 180). In this segment of the coda of Paweł's spontaneous narration, it can be seen that the narrator is looking for answers to the questions: Am I a good person, am I a good Catholic, are my political views correct, or am I acting in a dignified way? On the one hand, there is a tension between the clash woven into the contemporary perspective between the narrator's (political and religious) beliefs and the tradition and views represented by his in-laws. On the other hand, the interlocutor struggles with the awareness of growing up in the period of socialism in Poland and with the involvement of his biographical experiences and the experiences of his parents in this system. This time in Paweł's biography is presented in opposition to the figure of his grandfather, who is characterized by honesty and opposition to injustice and social inequality, which Paweł attributes to the socialist system.

The narrator also addresses the grandfather's person in the coda by referring to two stories related to the pattern of behavior represented by the granddad, which he considers important for the formation of his own biographical identity and which he is facing in assessing his current life. Fritz Schütze (2008a: 179) states that:

The coda element of extempore narrative storytelling consists of two parts: (a) One part is dealing with the closing up of the content of the autobiographical story, that is, with bringing the flux of recalled lifetime and its experiences to an end. And this activity encloses intensive biographical work of characterizing the general features of the overall biographical *Gestalt*. (b) Another part (mostly a sequentially second part) is dealing with the activity of refocusing the communicative attention from the time of the life story contents, that is, the autobiographical experiences, to the time of the actually "here and now" ongoing communication and situation of the interview setting (Schütze 2008a: 179).

A particularly important analytical issue is that the last fragment of the coda quoted is an exact reference to the content with which Paweł begins his autobiographical story. Thus, through theoretical and argumentative comments, he tries to assess his life history, giving it meaning through the opening and closing story of the relationship with his grandfather. Additionally, we can try to justify the narrator's construction of these segments of his biography by referring to the concept of "biographical view." Fritz Schütze, considering the cognitive figures of narration (e.g., *The global storyline*), writes that:

If there is a conscious image of it or even a self-theoretical reflection on it, it should be called *biographical view*. Biographical views quite often are the result of sober and intensive biographical work taking into account the authentic experiences of the biography incumbent, and then they have the power to help the biography incumbent to work realistically on her or his biographical problems. But, biographical views could also be constructed in contrast to the authentic experiences in order to fade out or to mystify the difficulties and problems of biographical experiences or even of the overall biographical ordering or the biographical process structures involved in it (Schütze 2008a: 181).

In this view, it can be stated that Paweł, basing his main line of spontaneous narration on the family theme, undertakes his own conscious reflection on the shape of the history of his own life. Interestingly, in Paweł's entire narration, whose main theme is the family, he devotes relatively little space to stories about his father and the relationship with his father. We only learn that he is already a pensioner and that he comes from the southeastern part of Poland and that he graduated from economics, and his professional career was primarily associated with trade, where for a long time he held a managerial position in a network of nationwide stores. However, we cannot find in Paweł's narration references to their shared biographical experiences or relationship. Now let us look at one of the few passages in which the narrator talks about his father:

During the socialism era, it was really, I mean it was [X Company – the name of the company in which Paweł's father worked], a countrywide cooperative. I also think that leaving aside some of my dad's opinions, I mean in human terms, which I don't quite approve or I wouldn't like to follow them. In terms of knowledge of things, duties, I think that my dad was very good at what he was doing. And among other things, the fact that this cooperative survived all those years of change because many of them have collapsed, in bigger cities or somewhere, they surely still exist. However, in smaller towns, the free-market economy caused that these types of enterprises couldn't, didn't manage to compete on the market. And my dad at some point, while he was beginning his career he wasn't at the top of the structure, but after many years he held one of the two or even the top position in the cooperative in our town in its last years. So I guess that to some degree it

was thanks to his approach and his organizing skills, so he was able to, managed to ensure that those stores were succeeding on the market.

In the quoted passage, Paweł says directly that he doesn't share his father's views. The narrator's statement: "I don't quite approve or I wouldn't like to follow them" may indicate that the interlocutor puts the figure of the father in a way counter to the pattern of honesty and sensitivity attributed by him to the figure of the grandfather. At the same time, he emphasizes that his father coped with his work (during the socialism era and in the first years of transformation) thanks to the beliefs and skills he possessed. Paweł states here: "In terms of knowledge of things, duties, I think that my dad was very good at what he was doing." Adding at the end of his account: "So I guess that to some degree it was thanks to his approach and his organizing skills." In another fragment of his biography mentioned previously, which I discussed in Chapter IX in this book, Paweł refers to the operation of the socialist system, reflecting on it from the position of empowerment that he experienced thanks to his father's professional work. The narrator recalls:

So I can remember such things that that system harmed people by forcing them to look for solutions in ways, which didn't look as they should or weren't honest/didn't have anything to do with an... anything to do with an honest attitude to life. So you know [...] there are such moments which make me wonder whether the man acts wrongly or well when they act like that. It wouldn't change the situation if I hadn't taken those opportunities, which were presented thanks to my dad's place of work, my situation wouldn't have improved, the situation of other people wouldn't have improved either. It was the economy of eternal shortages and if it wasn't me then somebody else would have used it.

I cited this passage to show that Paweł was again reflecting on the activities of the socialist system in Poland and the topic of work done at that time by his father, weaving the thread of references to an "honest attitude to life" represented by his grandfather's figure. Paweł also says that the system in which his father found himself hurt people and was based on injustice. Here you can see an analogy to two stories about the grandfather quoted by Paweł in the last fragment of the coda. For the narrator, the grandfather embodies, as I have already mentioned, completely different features, expressed not only in the pattern of honest life, but also in sensitivity to the harm of others and fair behavior.

Thus, referring to the notion of the "biographical view" mentioned above after Fritz Schütze and the assumption that "it could also be constructed in contrast to the authentic experiences in order to fade out or to mystify the difficulties and problems of biographical experiences," it can be stated that Paweł, although he doesn't say much about his father's biography, nevertheless

juxtaposes his experiences with his own picture of the world, developed on the basis of his relationship with the grandfather. This is only one of the possible research interpretations of this autobiographical story. In this way, it can be concluded that by using his own biography through his grandfather's thread, Paweł may obscure the difficulties he experiences in the relationship with his own father. However, this is an analytical thread difficult to develop in further considerations, due to, as I have already mentioned, Paweł's scarce references to his father, both in his spontaneous narrative phase and in the additional questions phase. That is why I see him only as one of the possible interpretative frameworks of Paweł's case.

The grandfather as the most important significant Other also appears in Paweł's story about his adolescence, related to the time of the first democratic presidential election in Poland in 1990. A teenager at that time, Paweł supports one of the independent candidates,²³ which from a biographical perspective of "now" he is ashamed of in his autobiographical story. Let us look at this fragment of Paweł's narration:

Anyway/ it means it was probably the eighth grade, it seems to me it was the seventh, the eighth was the breakthrough of 1989. And I remember the thing I've been a little ashamed of ever since and which also shaped me politically. However, it had a negative impact, including the elections of 1989. I can't quite remember if at home our parents engaged us in it or explained it in any way. It was more about my experience, let's say a political attitude related to grandparents/ grandfather was a member of Piłsudski's legions.²⁴ He had two little torsos of Piłsudski and had a very negative attitude to the authorities which took over after WWII. But, he didn't rebel, somehow he wasn't an individual who'd fight. Besides he had hardly any chance 'cause he wasn't working in a manufacturing plant, he wasn't a laborer. And even if he was I don't know if he'd take such actions. My parents/ parents didn't even speak out clearly about it. I can't remember whether they openly told me that what surrounded us was bad, or if it could be any better. We weren't travelling the world, we had no such

²³ This is about the figure of Stanisław Tymiński (Stan Tymiński), a Polish businessman doing business in Canada and South America. In 1990 he ran in the presidential election in Poland as an independent candidate, unknown on the political scene, having no backing crediting his candidacy. He returned to Poland again before the presidential elections in 2005, in which he ran as a candidate of Ogólnopolska Komisja Obywatelska (OKO) – a political group of a centred character, established in 2005 as a result of the transformation of the Ogólnopolski Komitet Obywatelski established in November 2003. After the 2005 elections, the activity of the coalition faded.

²⁴ Polish Legions in World War I. The I Brigade of the Polish Legions under Józef Piłsudski, formed in mid-December 1915'.

opportunities. I remember my trip to East Germany also in the 1970s, and I was shocked then. [...] In Frankfurt upon Oder, we crossed the border, I guess we had left the car on the Polish side and crossed the bridge on foot. Yes, it was that for sure, I remember even that the German guard said: *Pawel, Pawel* and sternly pointed his finger at me. So I remember also, a memory flash from Frankfurt, which surprised me a lot, that behind the window in some huge shop were cars, Wartburg and Trabant. We were laughing out at those cars as such, but for me, it was a surprise that it was possible that cars were standing there available for buyers. Boy, you know, not to mention that it wasn't even possible to get a passport to travel freely, but only to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, I was completely shocked, probably I went to some, Paris or Rome or Bonn. But, but, even in East Germany, it was an enormous change compared to Poland where everything was rationed and available only on coupons. [...] Therefore I guess that deep inside I supposed it wasn't quite as it should be. But, we didn't have any examples or any major discussions besides the fact that my grandpa didn't support it. and I remember those holiday trips where he tried and listened to Radio Free Europe and those interferences and all. For a child, it didn't mean much. ***Probably if I were five, seven years older I would learn more and perhaps my parents, I don't know, with my sister would discuss those issues more.*** Therefore I can't remember the elections of '89 too well. OK. I remember, but I don't know now if it's that poster with a sheriff, poster with a sheriff or from a reproduction which are somewhere now. Anyway, I remember presidential elections, the first ones, won, actually not won, when Jaruzelski was appointed president as a continuation. Nevertheless, I remember those first elections and it was the first moment of my political involvement. Of course, I couldn't vote then yet, but I was conscious of what I was doing and that it was worth doing it. But, it was also a moment of my, moment of incredible shame on the other hand, cause I remember that on the meeting of scouts, it was a shame, a real shame that at the meeting of scouts [...] we were wondering where to gain money for our trip, some subsidy for it. And I came up with this stupid idea when I had seen those, those TV programs, as one of the candidates/ because it's shameful I won't mention who it was, he boasted what a good scout he was. And [...] I said if he says he was such a good scout and he has possessed substantial wealth we should engage in his support. And because of/ and that teacher of mine should have said that 'listen, you're talking rubbish and that way isn't good', they followed my advice and said 'alright, let's take some fliers and we'll support him'. [...] And it's regardless of the fact that we didn't benefit financially from that action at all. Thank God that candidate didn't win, didn't become president then. But, I've remembered ever since that as a teenager, I don't know I was fourteen, fifteen let's say, I had/ I was making decisions emotionally. [...] But, it was an enormous internal shame for me. [...] My parents know it 'cause somehow/ they didn't oppose it, it's strange, but they weren't opposed to it. They didn't say, listen, no way. So it was a moment of shame.

First of all, it should be noted that in the quoted passage we encounter a background construction. This phenomenon is related to the narrator's introduction to the main narrative line the events, descriptions, and explanations (argumentative commentaries) which did not appear in the chronological order of the story. Thus, through their introduction, the narrator performs self-correction and refers to the omitted events and experiences trying to show his autobiographical story more reliably and consistently (Schütze 2014; Kaźmierska, Waniek 2019; also see Chapter I in this book). In the case of the quoted fragment of Paweł's narration, the first and last sentence belonging to the background construction is in italics. Here you can see that the narrator, introducing the background construction, goes back in his story to return to it exactly at the moment when he suspended the main storyline. Paweł refers here to his growing up and the turn of 1989/1990. In a broader socio-historical context, he places his story during the first democratic presidential election in Poland. The narrator focuses here on a shameful event for him – showing support for one of the candidates.

Going back to the experiences of his childhood, Paweł includes in the story a comment about the lack of shaping of his worldview of that time by significant Others. He recalls again the figure of his grandfather, who, according to his narration, at that time did not break the passivity of Paweł's parents in this matter and did not make his grandson realize that his choice was not right. Additionally, the narrator also introduces here a contrast comparison of the PPR and the GDR – mentioning the time when he visited the GDR as a child. In this way, he tries to show that he was trying to understand the significant differences between these two socialist realities. He also mentions the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, which he listened to as a child, but which he could not yet fully understand. He ends the quoted threads with the statement: “Probably if I were five, seven years older I would learn more and perhaps my parents, I don't know, with my sister would discuss those issue more” – thus trying to authenticate his political immaturity and unconsciousness, and to emphasize that his parents did not familiarize him with this knowledge.

What is more, this passage concerns an important moment in Paweł's biography which the narrator struggles with in the biographical perspective of “now” when talking about his life. Thus, he legitimizes his actions by referring to his grandfather and parents as significant Others who did not protest at the time against his bad decision, did not show him that he was wrong.

To sum up the topic of the importance of the relationship with the grandfather for the formation of Paweł's biographical identity and for building a story about his life, I would like to refer to the concept of *dramatis personae* (Schütze 2008a: 182). They are *event carriers*, that is, social units, also those from outside the human world (e.g., illness, home), who: “are introduced into

the autobiographical narration rendering by a narrative statement of what they did in terms of higher predicates or by descriptive characterizations often connected with personal evaluations; sometimes an additional characterizing story is told depicting personal (or individual) features of the respective event carrier” (Schütze 2008a: 182). In this approach, significant Others are the most interesting “of the story carrier and biographical incumbent,” because they influence the course of his biographical work by being “central helpers, mirror images, and counsellors” (Schütze 2008a: 182). In this understanding, we can include Paweł’s grandfather to the *dramatis personae*. As the main significant Other in his biography, he becomes a mirror image for the formation of Paweł’s views, his identity and building the story about his life. He is also an important adviser in the narrator’s choices and a model for his behavior, carrying within him a timeless vision of an honest and dignified life. Through references to his grandfather’s figure, Paweł performs biographical work which allows him to perceive his life and identity as a separate whole (*Gestalt*) (Schütze 2008a, b). At the same time, in the preamble, in the coda, and during the spontaneous narration, Paweł recalls the grandfather’s thread, assigning him the role of the person who shaped him as he perceives himself today and how he would like to see himself in the future.

Another important person and also another significant Other in Paweł’s narration is his mother, who accompanies him in subsequent stages of his life story. The narrator also links the biographical experience of his mother and father with the justification of his choices made in early adulthood. His parents finished their studies, which, as he notes, was not the norm at that time. “So both of them graduated from university. And generally speaking, it was some time in the late 1960s so there weren’t too many people like that. That’s why they were welcome everywhere they went and job opportunities were abundant to them” – says Paweł. The parents, as he adds a few lines later, also made sure that he and his older sister not only have a higher education, but also a certain profession (this is a strategy typical for many parents of our narrators – this is what Julia’s parents discussed; for example, see Chapter IX of this book). According to Paweł, it was thanks to his parents, mainly thanks to his mother, and also thanks to his grandfather that he managed to complete his studies and work in the profession.

In his story, the narrator refers to his mother first by mentioning trips to grandparents (her parents) for holidays and their family meetings. He notes that his best childhood memories are related to his mother’s family. The relationship of Paweł and his mother, as an important resource for him, appears in his narration mainly during the reconstruction of difficult biographical experiences. This is evidenced by a fragment from the initial pages of his biography, where the narrator mentions a hard time for him in elementary school:

My place of living was relatively near the school because the town isn't large, as I've said it's 20, 30,000 people. The school was about a kilometer away from my home so I used to walk. However, my mum was walking me to school practically all the time. And I also remember that I wasn't affected by the school, I wasn't emotionally attached. I didn't used to go to kindergarten, but only attended preschool. And that school of mine wasn't for me [...] the place too friendly as I perceived it. And I remember that always/ sometimes it was also that my mum would wait for me during the breaks when she had nothing to do she took either a book or something and somewhere on the bench near the school or somewhere there was waiting and during the breaks I would go out to my mum so, err, so I can recall such things.

Paweł's mother, who at that time was working at the school which the narrator attended, is from the present (time of interview) perspective considered by him as a person who helped him survive the early years of learning. Let us notice here that in the case of Agnieszka discussed below, her grandmother plays a similar role. It is the closeness and support of significant Others (biographical carers) that allow Paweł and Agnieszka to control difficult experiences and to normalize these situations from the past in some way. Additionally, Paweł only in the further part of the narration, when talking about the teenage period, introduces the thread of peer bonds he had experienced. They become a new social framework, next to references to family ties, for the reconstruction of his experiences.

Another moment when his mother supported him is an episode from his adult life. He also introduces the topic of relations with his wife and refers to the issue of biographical costs which he had to incur due to his extended stay in Russia, where he was sent to work by his company. It was an extremely difficult biographical experience for him, which he describes as follows:

Here, since I joined the company there were some little advances, moving between departments and so on and so forth. But, this big, significant/ big, significant change in terms of business or professional development was this offer to relocate to Russia. And I decided to take the offer. 'Cause I didn't know/ I was getting a bit bored here with what I was doing. It wasn't clearly defined what you could achieve here/ what I could achieve, so we decided to give it a shot. [...] And we decided to move there with my wife. [...] My mother visited us, she was here when we were here, she stayed twice the longest time allowed, for three months. She was helping us, but generally speaking, I consider that stay as a failure. Besides the fact that I found out how different people are and what pressure they could use to get what they want. Right, if I hadn't gone there I would've regretted till now because I would've thought to myself *boy, I wonder how it would have worked out*. With the benefit of hindsight, I regret a little because of my wife, how hard it was for my wife. For me it was exhausting. And I probably got older, I stayed there for a relatively short time, some nine months. But, even as little as three months of staying there

I knew that I didn't want to stay there any longer, I had to escape from there. We had a huge problem with our daughter as well, the eldest one, who was about to attend the first grade. [...] We managed to arrange it and she attended the first grade, but still, it posed a huge problem for her as she was learning that language in kindergarten. [...] It was particularly painful to her at the start 'cause when [...] she was under enormous stress when she didn't understand what they said to her, what she was expected to do, right. And once/ oh, and my mum went, of course, and similarly to the time when I attended primary school when during the breaks when the gate was closed or something, my grandma was standing behind the fence and was waiting so that when Ola goes she could see that grandma is around, that there's somebody close near her. [...]

This experience bears the hallmarks of the trajectory of suffering understood as a process of biographical experience which, although resulting from a growing disorder, is internally ordered in its course (Riemann, Schütze 1991, 2012, Schütze 2012, Waniek 2016). This process is discussed in more detail in Chapters IX and X, among others, which is why I will not describe it analytically again. I will proceed to discuss the fragment of Paweł's story quoted above. The narrator's indication of the biographical costs associated with living in Russia, for him, as well as his wife and daughter, shows Paweł's biographical work and self-reflection regarding this difficult time. In addition, in this story, he combines the perspective of his experiences from elementary school and the experiences of his daughter, which is linked by the figure of his mother. She appears as a significant Other at the time of Paweł's childhood, related to his difficulties in elementary school, as well as during his adulthood, which includes the difficult experience of working and living in Russia. Paweł's mother also plays an important role in the experience of his daughter, who, leaving to Russia with her parents and attending one of the schools there, is struggling to adapt to a new place which is foreign to her. However, thanks to the support and physical presence of her grandmother – like her father in the first years of his learning – she is not alone. The grandmother accompanies her in her daily duties and supports her in the moments of loneliness. The narrator's reflection on this subject strengthens his conviction about the importance of the mother in his biographical development (indicated by an earlier narration about the support he received from his mother). Also, he also shows that without her presence, the experience of this trip would have been much more difficult for his daughter and could have disturbed the formation of a positive image of her biographical identity. In the next part of the interview, Paweł closes this difficult episode for him and his loved ones, telling:

So after only three months of staying in [name of a city in Russia], I knew that this is not the place where I could stay for a long time. That my attitude to life

and my understanding of another man, rather than attempts to put pressure on him to gain what one expects, that this is not the place where I could be able to work that way. That's right, even my boss said at that time when we talked, she said: *you'd better not introduce democracy here*. So, it isn't OK any more. It isn't/ to put it differently, they're used to working differently, that's right. They're ordered and they go. Poles are different. We need a little rebellion and freedom, at least it seems to be the case. After those three months, I knew I didn't want it. [...] I said to myself that enough is enough and I can't take it anymore, I would physically do myself in. And I decided to break the agreement, I give up, do whatever you want, I'm coming back. And then I received a helping hand from a director here in Poland. He said: *stay a little longer, and I'll bring you back to Poland*. And there was really such a, such a possibility that a person or people from here were going abroad so I was able to come back after a nine-month stay and we managed to conclude the deal [...] So we returned in May 2010.

The quoted passage clearly shows that in the course of developing trajectory, Paweł's "organization of everyday life" and his "orientation towards herself," in case he would not control them, could collapse (Schütze 2012: 429). In the words: "I said to myself that enough is enough and I can't take it anymore, I would physically do myself in. And I decided to break the agreement, I give up, do whatever you want, I'm coming back" – Paweł from the biographical perspective of "now" describes the moment when, if he was to stay in Russia for longer without being aware of returning to Poland in a short time, he could experience a "breakdown of self-orientation" and then fall into the trajectory. Importantly, in an unquoted earlier passage of this part of his story about the stay in Russia, he also draws attention to the difficulties of his wife. In order to accompany him along with the children during his official delegation, she had to adapt her professional plans to this situation. Paweł, recreating their stay in Russia in his biography, repeatedly emphasizes that for his wife it was, in a way, a more difficult experience than for him. He also adds that if they did not come back in time, perhaps he would lose what he considers the most valuable, that is, their relationship and family. Explaining the situation his wife was in at the time, he says:

She started working shortly after her graduation, took an internship, started work in our home town. She completed her specialization because they have to take that specialization exam so she was returning from [name of a city in Russia]. She was studying there in [name of a city in Russia]. My mum was helping, that's why she also arrived there to help to take care of the children so that she could hit the books. And then she left for Poland with two kids, to take the exam, from there.

In order to introduce a comparative perspective, one can refer to Katarzyna Waniek's considerations regarding the biographical analysis of the experience

of Polish immigrants who left for Germany between 1989 and 1999. She focuses on, among others, Marek's case. The narrator went to Germany with his wife, who, like Paweł's wife, modified her career plans – suspended her career for some time, also in the medical profession. Unlike Paweł – Marek, however, does not take into account the perspective of his wife, and what is more, he deceives her with the promise of a temporary departure, thus hiding from her the desire to stay in Germany for longer. Katarzyna Waniek defines this form of covering one's biographical choices and entangling the other person in the biographical costs as "the conning practice," writing that Marek "who emigrates willingly" in his narration "describes how he 'conned' his wife and coerced her into settling in Germany. It's likely that for the fear of his wife's strong resistance Marek gave a false and dishonest picture of their stay abroad" (Waniek 2012: 162). Such a situation is, therefore, a counter-example illustrating a different perspective from the one presented in Paweł's biography. In the case of Marek, who deceives his wife with the promise of returning to Poland soon, and also does not try to understand the difficulties she faces, his marriage fails. Therefore, this is the biographical cost which, in the case of the trip to Russia reported in his biography, Paweł is most afraid of. Being aware of the difficulties of this experience for his wife, Paweł also reflects on her feelings and in relation to them justifies his decision to return to Poland quickly.

In other fragments of the interview, Paweł also turns to the presentation of his wife's experiences inscribed in their joint and individual biographical choices. It is significant that they met in elementary school and they had been a couple since the second grade of secondary school. The wife is, therefore, his first girlfriend and the first love. She is also, next to his grandfather and mother, another significant Other – a person in relation to whom Paweł constructs himself in his biography.

Analyzing Paweł's autobiographical narrative in a problematic sense allows the capturing of a story contrasting with a contemporary discussion about the individualization and self-realization of an individual. In addition, through the above structural analysis of the text of the interview with Paweł, one can also see how the narrator builds the main line of his narrative and thus how the family thread organizes his biographical experience. In the *demonstration markers*: segments of the preamble and coda (Labov and Waletzky 1967, cited in: Schütze 2008a: 175) the interlocutor faces the search for the roots of his biographical identity. He does this additionally by referring to his grandfather's person in a detailed way. In this way, he tries to show a certain timelessness of the pattern represented by his grandfather and emphasize following him in his biography. This "timelessness" of this pattern presented in Paweł's story is related to the biographical work which the narrator performs giving sense to his biography by referring to his grandfather's figure. The relationship with the

grandfather thus becomes the main frame for organizing his life history. Other significant Others are also Paweł's mother and his wife.²⁵

It can also be said that reconstructing who Paweł is would not have been possible without interpreting the importance of the family thread in his biography. The narrator, seeking an answer to the question: "what shaped him?" does not reveal other dimensions of his biographical experience in the story of his own life. He is rooted in the family *milieu*. His family is a biographical resource here, which allows Paweł both to develop his autobiographical story and also plays an important role in his work on the trajectory.

Agnieszka's case

Agnieszka was born in 1976 in a large city in central Poland, where she grew up and has been living with her family until now (interview time, 2016). An important aspect in her biography is the time of childhood and adolescence spent in what she describes as a "multi-generational home," in which she lived with her maternal grandparents, parents, and younger sister Hanna. Interestingly, from the accounts of her sister Hanna we learn that the family at that time did not live at home, but in the grandparents' three-room flat. In her entire narration, Agnieszka uses the terms "home" or "multi-generational home," describing the places where she lived and currently lives. In this way, she turns rather to the symbolic understanding of the word "home." By associating a "home" not with a particular place, but rather with a place where the family can stay together, where one can cultivate intergenerational bonds.

Agnieszka's parents are doctors by profession and both are still professionally active. Her father works in a hospital and her mother works in a private clinic. Her younger sister Hanna followed in her parents' footsteps, graduated from medical studies and works in a hospital (an analysis of her biography can be found in Chapters X and XI). For Agnieszka, her younger sister's graduation from medical studies and work as a doctor is an important reference point for giving sense to her own biographical choices.

Thus, remaining in the field of biographical decisions of the narrator, it should be pointed out that initially after graduating from secondary school she studied law. However, it was a short episode in her life and, as she comments, not a fully conscious or good choice. After quitting law studies, she decided to try her hand at psychology. This field was a place where she found herself very quickly and in Agnieszka's narration this stage of her life is connected

²⁵ When talking about his life, Paweł also talks about his sister, who is older than him and with whom the narrator "maintains good relations." However, he does not devote as much space to his sister's story as his stories about grandfather, mother, and wife.

with many good memories. After graduating and defending her master's thesis, she started her first job in the administration department in one of the largest medical institutions. Then, for many years, she worked in private companies as a medical representative. However, in her opinion, this job was not interesting and stable²⁶ enough for her to just continue working. Thus, after rethinking her situation and, additionally, consulting her choice options with her mother, sister, and husband, following mainly the mother's suggestions, she decided to do postgraduate studies in speech therapy. At the time of the interview, she is working as a speech therapist in one of the private clinics.

She met her husband, who is an engineer, during her studies. In 2004 they got married. They have two children. Their biggest common family passion is mountain hiking, which Agnieszka talks about in the spontaneous narrative phase. They also bought a piece of land near one of the Polish mountain ranges and in the future plan to build a house there, where they will be able to come not only with children, but also with the narrator's parents and sister. At the end of this introduction to Agnieszka's biography, it is also important to recall the narrator's idea of an additional paid job, which she was implementing at the time of the interview. Together with her friend and mother-in-law (the topic of her good relationship with her parents-in-law is also important for Agnieszka) they were planning a business in the field of education.

Before starting the analysis of Agnieszka's narrative fragments, it is worth noting that in the pool of interviews we collected, this is the only case in which we have the stories of the lives of two sisters (Agnieszka and Hanna) and thus people so closely related. I have conducted both interviews, which is related to my own short research reflection. I first interviewed Hanna, and it was thanks to Hanna that I also managed to reach Agnieszka. Despite the research fears that Agnieszka might be prepared for the interview situation by having talked to her sister, which could affect the spontaneity of telling the story desired in the autobiographical narrative interview, I soon realized that those were unnecessary.

²⁶ Here Agnieszka refers to the specifics of the profession of medical representatives. She says that when they do not work for large pharmaceutical corporations then they work for smaller private companies which find it harder to stay on the market. This situation is associated with job insecurity, and the way out is either to work in a corporation or to go self-employed. Employing such people is more profitable for small companies due to the elimination of many employee costs. However, Agnieszka considered becoming a self-employed medical representative as an experience too marked by uncertainty markers. In the interview, she is much more enthusiastic about the idea of her own business related to the production of educational toys. Here, as she comments, she could do this work in her spare time apart from being a speech therapist. She does not explain in the interview why she did not work for a large pharmaceutical corporation instead of working for small private companies.

Additionally, although in many places the sisters referred to similar threads in their narrations, they are very different, however – both in the layer of experience (which is obvious in a certain way) and in the sense of building a story about their own lives. Thus, this unplanned attempt to gather biographical experiences of people so closely related has proved to be a valuable research experience. From the point of view of my considerations, I can thus point out that just as Agnieszka's narration is rooted in the family *milieu* (e.g., in the story of her relationship with her sister), whereas the main narrative line of Hanna is the theme of work and other areas of life experiences are subordinate. The moment when both biographies meet the most is the story of both sisters about their maternal grandmother. And it is from this common thread that I will start analyzing the interview with Agnieszka.

To reconstruct the narrator's account of her relationship with her grandmother, as in the case of Paweł, I would like to look at the beginning of her spontaneous narrative:

I was born in '76, in April to be exact. [...] Turning to these nice memories, because I have very, very nice associations with my childhood. Although my parents were always busy, they always had a lot to do, they nevertheless tried to create such a warm, family-friendly home, where a lot would be happening and a lot was happening. Although my maternal grandparents played a very important role in my childhood, because as it happened, at the beginning we lived with them and my sister was born, but I will tell you about it in a moment. And, and there my life went on with my grandmother and my grandfather. And these were/ are still very, great memories. In any case, grandma rose to the challenge and was such a rock of the family. And, and, and took care of our upbringing very much. Because it is probably this memory that is firmly grounded in me, that if anything happened or the day was not so great, I could always count on my grandmother and stay at home. And we would spend this time together. Also, there was always a four-legged creature in the house, there was a dog or a cat. Anyway, a lot of different things were happening. We also spent wonderful holidays, Christmas holidays together, Christmas Eve. But, there are also grandparents from my father's side who were a little bit further away. And these are mainly family gatherings, mainly some festive ones. It also stays in memory, it's all there. However, this upbringing because my grandmother was with us all the time. I spent the first five years of my life with my grandmother in one house. And, and, and it was the grandparents who were my carers. Well, without diminishing the role of my parents of course.

Agnieszka, in contrast to Paweł, begins her narration with a story about her childhood, without preceding it with an argumentative commentary. Thus, in the early phase of Agnieszka's narration, there is no sphere of searching for the sources of formation of her own biographical identity and giving sense to her biographical experience, which can be seen in Paweł's narration. What is the

common point in both analyzed cases is the turning of both narrators to point out the significant Others for the development of their life stories. Paweł refers here to his maternal grandfather and Agnieszka to her maternal grandmother.

Considering that the very choice of the narrator as to how and in what order she will tell her experiences should be an important part of the analysis (Waniek 2019: 137), I will look at the quoted passage. What emerges here are three aspects of the narrator's biographical experience and the main line of her narration. First, remembering her childhood, Agnieszka points to the important presence in her life of her grandparents, mainly her grandmother, to whom she returns in subsequent stages of her biographical account. Secondly, she introduces here the perspective of her parents and sister, who, like her grandmother, also become another important framework for her biographical references. Thirdly, there is the experience of growing up in a multi-generational home, which the narrator also talks about further on. Additionally, she mentions her paternal grandparents – she also returns to this thread in the interview coda. The “catalogue of characters” outlined in the first lines of the story – the significant Others in Agnieszka's biography, in the next lines of the story is supplemented with the characters of her husband and children. In the first lines, therefore, she presents the threads important for the formation of her life history, which form the main line for the subsequent phases of her account. The most important people in the history of Agnieszka's life are her grandmother, mother, and sister. One can get the impression that without them her biography would be incomplete.

Turning to the story about the significant Others in Agnieszka's biography, I will refer to the fragment of the narration about the period of her childhood, into which the narrator weaves the story of the birth of her sister Hanna. On the other hand, she shows how important her grandmother was to her at that time.

'81, OK. Hmm, the birth of Hanna was also a great experience, I remember that when I saw her for the first time in the hospital. Everyone was crying because of the tear gas on Dabrowski Square. Generally, all the hospital staff cried and it wasn't good. The windows were open, although it was December, it was terrible. And Hanna, when she saw me, opened her eyes/ I got a camel from my parents. I also remember, it was such a wow experience, where they managed to get it from, I have no idea, but it was the greatest treasure. And this little Hanna looked at me and then I thought: *I think I have a sister*, a really great event. And, and of course, later, little Hanna also started crying. Dad quickly took me home. And then the common life began and, and times began to change a little bit. And I was already at school then, hmm (wonders) at school? Was I at school? Actually, yes. These were my beginnings of school. I have no great memories of primary school. I know I was so/ stressed with everything. And that's what I'm still like, unfortunately. Maybe some kind of school trauma, I don't know what to call it.

Now I think I am growing out of it a little bit, luckily. But, again, primary school was not so easy nor wonderful for me. And, and maybe it's not the time to make some bigger confessions here, but I know that, yes, there were many such things and a lot of emotional oppression, my feelings and these nerves, and my grandmother would just help me out saying: *Agnieszka, don't worry*. And I used to go to my grandmother's to read together, then there was absolute peace. We would open a book and without any stress, we read the book with my grandmother, I mean I was supposed to read. My grandmother, with divine tranquillity, listened to everything I did with this reading. But, I remember this and I know that I used to go there with joy. And it was so pleasant.

The account of the birth of the sister outlined in the first lines of the quoted passage, despite being located in a broader, difficult socio-historical context of the imposition of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981,²⁷ is remembered by the narrator as a joyful time in her childhood experience. In the following lines, however, she abandons her enthusiasm and points to the difficult experience of the first years of primary school education. Here, the figure of the grandmother comes to the fore, devoting time to Agnieszka who is having learning difficulties, and giving her support in this difficult experience. Agnieszka mentions her problems with reading and how under her grandmother's care, without feeling nervous or stressed she would catch up. She says: "[...] a lot of emotional oppression, my feelings and these nerves, and my grandmother would just help me out saying: *Agnieszka, don't worry*. And I used to go to my grandmother's to read together, then there was absolute peace. We would open a book and without any stress, we read the book with my grandmother, I mean I was supposed to read. My grandmother, with divine tranquillity, listened to everything I did with this reading. But, I remember this and I know that I used to go there with joy. And it was so pleasant." The grandma is, therefore, Agnieszka's first biographical carer. She is with her in difficult times and, most importantly, at a time when Agnieszka's parents devote a large part of their daily lives to the development of their professional careers.

In addition, the above fragment should be referred to the entire autobiographical account of the narrator, who as a child of doctors despite having problems at school tries to follow the pattern of her parents. In secondary school, Agnieszka attended a class of a biological and chemical profile. It was only during the questions phase when I asked her to explain why she actually

²⁷ Martial Law was imposed on 13 December 1981 throughout Poland. General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced it in his morning radio and television speech. The communist regime hit the NSZZ "Solidarność" and the opposition gathered around the union, trying to save the system. It was suspended on 31 December 1982 and abolished on 22 July 1983. Hanna was born in the second half of December 1981.

started studying law, which she briefly mentions in the main narration before she enters the path of a longer story about studying psychology – she explains to me this important thread. She says that when she was in elementary school and then in secondary school, her parents, and mainly her mother, expected that just like them, she would finish a “good” field of study and be sure of finding a job. In the quoted passage, Agnieszka says: “I know I was so/ stressed with everything. And that’s what I’m still like, unfortunately. Maybe some kind of school trauma, I don’t know what to call it.” This “school trauma” accompanies her for a long time and, as we will see in the fragment of the coda closing her spontaneous narration, analyzed in the next part of the text, only the biographical experience of her sister Hanna, who meets the expectations of her mother and becomes a doctor, seems to relieve Agnieszka of the feeling of not meeting these expectations. I will return to the topic of the role of Hanna’s biographical choices and Hanna’s character in building a positive image of her biographical identity. To complement the grandmother’s image in Agnieszka’s biographical experience, I quote below a fragment of her biography from her secondary school times:

Anyway, I went through elementary school and then there was secondary school. (...) In fact, a very nice secondary school, and also a nice time. Some trips have already begun, to camps, sailing camp, trips to the mountains. And here this environment that slowly began to draw me in. We were already getting on well with Hanna, even though she was/ I mean there was some age difference, practically six years. But, but, I know that we always got along. [...] This period of growing up in my case probably wasn’t terribly turbulent. I didn’t have a terrible rebellion, I think my parents can’t complain. Well, but, the period of secondary school and actually my starting of secondary school was also associated with unpleasant events. Well, what I’m getting at, it was the time when grandma passed away. Grandma got sick, it lasted a short time. Grandma was at home. I knew something was wrong, my mother was constantly crying. I couldn’t explain it to myself. Because on the one hand, I saw that my grandmother was recovering, that she had had surgery. That all this was getting better, but she was losing strength and, at some point, I realized that it was not good, that something was ending. That some part of our family is leaving and that for me this, I don’t want to say the most important one, because my parents and all that, but yes/ because with my grandmother it was something more than just such relations granddaughter-grandmother. It was some kind of friendship, something, it’s hard to describe in words. We understood each other. We/ she knew perfectly well what I feel, what I think, how it’s all going. And, she really did a great job when it comes to my entry into life. And, and I think it would all look different if it wasn’t for her help in those, such, my struggles with those earliest/ err [...] my adolescence. Well, she was extremely important and, and later I terribly missed her. And it was something that was really difficult to come to terms with. And I know that I had dreams about my grandmother, that, that I don’t really know until now, maybe it’s

just my imagination, but I have the feeling that if I make an important decision in my life or something, I think about her and somewhere I hear her telling me *to do this, it's good, you can just do it*. So I think that, well, my grandmother, my childhood is her.

Referring to the last phrase of the quoted passage: “So I think that, well, my grandmother, my childhood is her” you can see how important a biographical thread it is for Agnieszka to remember her relationship with her grandmother. In Weronika’s case I analyzed in Chapter IX, as well as in the case studies of Julia, Inga, and Hanna in Chapter X and Kaja Kaźmierska’s considerations regarding Róża in the introduction to this part of the book – among all the narrators, we find similar references to their relationship with grandmothers (although Weronika treats her aunt Ida as her grandmother). The memories of grandmothers are also close to the perspective of the relationship between grandfather and grandson, described by Paweł in his biography. What distinguishes Agnieszka’s narration in this way is the reduction of her childhood experience mainly to the topic of the relations with her grandmother. The narrator also mentions her sister and parents, she talks a bit about her maternal grandfather, but it is the grandmother who fills this time the most. Thus, Agnieszka’s words “my childhood is her” reflect exactly what she recalls about her experiences at that time.

Agnieszka’s other significant Other and biographical mentor is her mother. However, this type of bond developed between them only in the adult life of the narrator. This does not mean, of course, that she did not previously have contact with her mother or lived in conflict with her, it is rather associated with the fact that the two women became closer at the time when Agnieszka started her own family. As she says in the interview, even though her relationship with her mother was close before, it was only the moment of marriage and then motherhood that allowed her to understand better how difficult her mother’s task in life was to reconcile such hard work with looking after the family. It was then that Agnieszka appreciated that thanks to her mother’s efforts, after the death of her grandmother and grandfather, such important family ties had not disappeared. She also recalls this time from the biographical perspective of “now” as very difficult for her whole family, but especially for her mother.

It is often the case that when people are very much together, at some point something ends and the other person [passes away – J.W.] [...] I don’t know how this happens. But, that’s what happened in our family. Grandpa indeed lived about a year longer and passed away. I didn’t have grandparents from this side anymore and my mother was left without her parents, which for a person who works and professionally everything is going well with her family, this can be explained. But, if someone has such a relationship as we had, which my mother had with her parents, well, that’s for sure it must be scary and I understand it more now.

Because then you lived your life, so young, growing up. But, now I understand it, better and better and I realize this that it was very difficult, that it was impossible to take a break from work, break in such coping, you just had to carry on with this life and go on. But, it was difficult, for sure, also a lot here, I have respect for them, for my mum's perseverance in all this, because she didn't lose her head. But, but, it was difficult and it lasted for a long time before she got over this, yes. Well, such deep memories.

For Agnieszka, this fragment of her biographical experience is important in understanding that the deceased grandmother disappeared not only from her life. In this way, the narrator undertook the reconstruction of this difficult experience also in relation to her mother's experiences. In the entirety of Agnieszka's life history it is clear that from the moment when she refers to her grandmother's death, a lot of space in her story is taken by references to her mother's person. This moment of connection of the grandmother's and mother's in her biography is summarized in this fragment:

Well, that's the way it is, grandma is grandma. I say I feel, I feel this grandma. She is in me. And that's it. But, Grandma Waleria was awesome and really, it was friendship, it was something so wonderful. What is interesting and what I discovered is that my mother has always been my mother. But, the mother is such a person about whom one could go on for a long time, a lot and all the time.

In addition, thanks to the advice and support of her mother, Agnieszka decided to change jobs and take up postgraduate speech therapy studies. This presence of Agnieszka's mother in crucial moments in the narrator's biography is shown in the fragment in which she refers to the time when she became pregnant. For her, it was a time related to the uncertainty in maintaining a permanent job as a medical representative, when she was considering leaving the company and looking for a new source of income. The narrator mentions this period as:

But, but, that's exactly the crossroads, this completely different dimension of life, that is, the appearance of Ania in the world. I know that when I found out I was pregnant/ I totally panicked. Well, it was a joy and it was great/ I say: mom, will everything be OK? I called my mother. All in all, I could have conveyed it to her in a nicer way, but I remember I was treating an infection at that time. And because this [first – J.W.] test came out negative, so I did not limit myself to treatment and, and later I realized that I had done it too early. And all this, I call my mother, crying on the phone, I say: mom, she says: listen, I have patients here, what is [it – J. W.]. I say: mom, I'm pregnant, I don't know what to do. It's a disaster, generally speaking. She says: wait, take it easy, these are not such important medicines, don't worry, it will be OK, so/ And again such peace because when my mother says something, it's OK.

It can, therefore, be concluded that Agnieszka, by recalling positive stories about her family relations, escapes in some way from a longer narration about difficult issues. In the passage quoted above, she normalizes this situation very quickly by first referring to a conversation with her mother and then with her husband (which she does not elaborate on, but only states that she talked with him and that, like her mother, he convinced her that everything would be alright). Agnieszka's story undoubtedly shows that the family as a biographical resource allows the narrator to give sense to her experiences, while the reflections on the difficult moments of her life are presented mainly in relation to the opinion of significant Others who supported her behavior or made her aware that she should not worry, much less often from the perspective of her self-reflection. This is a certain attempt to interpret Agnieszka's experience, which in my opinion, devotes only small fragments of her biography to discussing themes subordinate to the main line of her narration. I am not saying that Agnieszka does not take up a biographical work or cannot be reflective. However, many people are involved in her life story, including those who act as biographical carers, and thus understanding her experiences without placing them in this "collective" context is not possible.

Before I refer again to the thread of Agnieszka's biographical carers – this time, to her sister Hanna, I will focus on one more important aspect of her story. For the narrator, the most important reference frame in her adult life is her own family – the husband and children. She talks a lot about their shared mountain passion and about plans to build a house among mountain peaks. She also mentions that it was her parents who 'infected' her with the mountain passion, showed her how great it is to spend time hiking in the mountains. This thread also appears in the story of her sister Hanna, who, talking about her time of growing up recalls a trip to the mountains with her dad and Agnieszka as one of the important elements of her biographical experience. Hanna talks about this episode as follows:

N: The winter break trip was just as much of a highlight that both my sister and I still recall it. We often recount this story and the town we went to had this amazing name, Z. We spent around 2 weeks in Z. with our father, in winter. He came up with a variety of fantastic games, for instance when we came across a frozen puddle he told us how to lift it. And he actually lifted the puddle using a tiny branch so we were both amazed by how ingenious he was. He came up with agility tasks, as when, for example, we walked/ went for long walks, we had to hold a stick right in front of us that was of relevant weight, I had a smaller one, my sister had a bigger stick and my father held the biggest one and that's how we hiked in the area. Then we had/ we dined in a diner where you were faced basically with only thick smoke upon opening the door. They would place wobbling pork knuckles in front of us, with fluttering hair on it. My sister and I were disgusted by it so my father would

usually have three pork-knuckles. We would be served some pancakes. Anyway, it was really nice. There were no restrictions, no one bossed us around. It was really nice and to make things even better, our father read “Paddington Bear,” “The Adventures of Paddington Bear” to us. And we would be eating this powdered milk, a dry one, powdered milk with sugar, as he was reading. I can’t imagine anyone eating this, it is revolting, and it is horribly sweet if you add sugar to it. [...] My father was, however, displeased at times because when he wanted to grab a bite we would not let him do it as he would have to stop reading. So this trip actually stayed in my and Agnieszka’s, my sister’s, mind.

Although Agnieszka, in her autobiographical narration, does not take up the topic of the sisters’ trip, however, she talks about their dad, who occupies an important place in her biography. She mentions him referring to his difficult profession, which for many years was associated with long hours spent in the hospital. She also speaks about the very good relationship he has with his grandchildren – her children, how much time they spend together and what a great grandfather he is. She also talks about the fact that she enjoys spending time with her dad, especially now that now being retired, he does not have to spend so much time working in the hospital. Moreover, what Agnieszka is still trying to do is maintain in a way the close contact between her family and her parents, so that her children would be close to their grandparents just as she once was. She also emphasizes the good contact she and her children have with her husband’s parents.

Referring to Agnieszka’s childhood experiences, outlined in the introduction to her story, it should be noted that what significantly marked her perception of family ties is the aspect of growing up in a multi-generational home. In one fragment of the narration, she recalls the time when she, with her husband and children, lived for three years in her parents’ house (while renovating their own house during this period). In this way, she combines two time perspectives – growing up in her grandparents’ flat (together with the parents and Hanna) and her adult experience of living with her children and husband at her parents’ home. At the same time, she points to the disappearing tradition of such homes and families functioning in such a way. In this view, on the one hand, she is trying to show some important, qualitative change associated with moving away from the tradition of three-generation families living together in one house in modern times, related, among others, to the progressing processes of individualization of societies, modernization, and the phenomenon of individuals postponing the decision to start a family. According to Agnieszka, multi-generational houses are now a much less frequently encountered element of the social landscape. On the other hand, the narrator states that in her family the everyday understanding of family relations and bonds understood in this way are still nurtured. Let us look at how she says it herself:

And besides, it seems to me that it was because we lived together. What we have created a multi-generational house, which don't exist anymore and they are wonderful. This is a fantastic experience for me and for the children. And I lived in a generational home and I know how much it gave me. I talked about it a lot because it gave me a lot, these are the memories. And we had a generational home. [...] This is really fantastic. We grow up together, we learn each other. And those were wonderful years. I, that's why I have a house here, not at the other end of Łódź. I had a choice to buy a larger house with more expansion options. In general, larger to start with, for a similar price, but in [name of the part of the city where the narrator's parents live]. And I say: Wojtek [narrator's husband – J.W.], how will that be? I will have to get into the car to get to my parents. And here, we are so close that recently we were bringing a table upstairs to the kids' room. And my father tells us not to bother unscrewing the legs, and just carry it. I say no problem. We just took the table and carried it. We had to unscrew the legs to bring it upstairs to us, because actually, the stairs are too narrow, that did not work out. But, this is great, we are close, we are together and it continues to shape us and I hope this remains.

To understand Agnieszka's rooting in the family *milieu* better, I would like to refer here to two fragments of the narrative coda, which, as in the case of the interview with Paweł, in some way connect with the threads raised by the narrator in the preamble. In this part of my discussion, I will also address the role of the story about Hanna in Agnieszka's biography. The selected fragments of the coda are quoted below. Because of their length, I will start by referring to the first one.

The first fragment of the coda segment in Agnieszka's narration:

Yes, that's how it looks professionally. And [...] and this is such development in all this. And my immediate and distant family is included in all this. I know that the person who always said it on the phone and told me/ my paternal grandfather was calling me, grandpa Witek. He said, you know, because *you are my first granddaughter and I believe in you very much*. And I would say *that's cool*. Well, this year grandpa Witek is no longer with us. Just before Christmas, and since then, well. And I thought, wow, I didn't even get the chance to get to know this man so well. And, and, and it has always been rather casual, how are you, how are things. There were no such strong bonds. But, but, I know that these thoughts, these memories are here now. And I say what life they had, these grandparents of mine. Because there were completely different times. And they raised three children. And they have lots of grandchildren. [...] Well, but, it is difficult to talk about your experiences, especially because they are so fresh. I regret that even these last moments when it was already known, that grandpa is not feeling well. I was also aware of what this will lead to. I put off meetings. We will have time. [...] And, and my dad was with him all this time. Although we all knew that it

would be like that, I did not catch the moment that it is already happening and I did not manage to. And, and I really regret it somewhere in me, that it looks that way. Well, that's it, that's it. Oh, but I'm sure these grandparents also had an influence on who we were. That they would visit, there were meetings at my [maternal – J.W.] grandmother Zofia's, they came round. [...] That's what these memories are like. You reminded me of those memories here. I wonder what else is extremely important to talk about. Maybe ... [here the narrator talks about her children that she appreciates that she has them and about the fact that she did not expect to become a speech therapist, then the fragment cited below appears].²⁸

In the final part of her spontaneous narration, Agnieszka touches on the topic of paternal grandparents, about whom she did not speak much in her biography, emphasizing each time the important place they occupy in her biographical experience. Referring to the assumption that “Dealing with coda and pre-coda phenomena is dealing with the overall order of biographical rendering and the overall order of biography” (Schütze, Wildhagen 2012), it can be concluded that Agnieszka settles here in a way from a sense of unfulfillment in the relationship with the deceased grandfather Witek. This is a thread she is struggling with in the biographical perspective “now” and which is not yet worked on in her biography. Here, too, the narrator's self-reflection can be felt, because in this part of the coda she refers to her relationship with her grandfather, by thinking about what she could change, do better while the grandfather was still alive. That is why this thread appears when she closes her biography and therefore devotes so much space to it. Let's now look at the rest of the coda segment.

The second fragment of the coda segment in Agnieszka's narration:

And I have the impression that my life/ I am very happy with it at the moment. Although for a long time I had such a feeling, I cannot meet, no, no, I am not sorry, I cannot meet certain expectations of the environment, the family. That I was never in my life jealous of my sister, absolutely, no. I even thank God that she managed to finish this medical studies. That she is a great doctor because I know she is great. [...] I felt this when she got into this medical studies and later she was good at it. And the specialization and now, it's a weight off my mind. I say wow, she managed, one of us did it, it's great. Well, now I'm working in a clinic too. And this job suits me because it is, I'm coming back to this again, maybe I'm repeating myself. It's not cool to repeat yourself, but I really feel that I'm finding

²⁸ I made the decision not to quote the whole fragments of the coda segment and to report some of their parts informing the reader about their content due to their size. Assuming that in this way I still do not lose what is most important in Agnieszka's reflection.

myself professionally. I wish Hanna that she, I think that she wants it and I would really want Hanna to experience what I had, to have a child and start a family. And it would be great and fantastic. Well, and I would like to be able to get these professional matters together. But, I promised myself one thing. Whatever I do, I must have time for my kids. And, and already, and this speech therapy also gives me these possibilities. [Here, the narrator returns to the idea for her own business, saying that next to speech therapy this is her “current topic.” And then this segment of her narration saying] And so the story goes on. I don’t know, you can say a lot of things about everyone. And I was supposed to talk till twelve, it’s almost twelve, thirty. I think I exaggerated.

In this passage, it is clear that it is very important for Agnieszka to consider the perspective of others and to put her adult, biographical choices into the experience of being a wife and mother. Summing up her life, the narrator says: “But, I promised myself one thing. Whatever I do, I must have time for my kids. And, and already, and this speech therapy also gives me these possibilities.” In this way, remembering her own experiences of being a child of busy parents, she tries to make her children’s experiences different. Although the narrator does not tell in her biography why she did not decide on a well-paid job in a medical corporation (at the time when she was a medical representative), from her whole story, and above all from the content of the coda, it can be concluded that such a job would require her to be available and committed. As a result, she would not have too much time for her children, which, as she emphasizes, is an important aspect in her current life.

In the last part of her life history, Agnieszka also returns to her sister. Earlier, she emphasized their strong sisterly relationship, as well as similarities and differences in their perception of the world. Therefore, we are dealing with a contrast set introduced by Agnieszka in her biography (Schütze 2008a). It is an important cognitive figure serving primarily to indicate those biographical features which Agnieszka does not have, and which in her opinion are necessary for being a good doctor and thus meeting her parents’ expectations (mainly the mother’s). Secondly, through the contrast set with Hanna, Agnieszka also shows the important features of her biographical identity and her vision of the world, and thus reflects on her own life. She says among others:

We are different, Hanna is different, I am different. If I have a problem, I have to talk about it, I can’t contain it because it is killing me. However, Hanna is probably such a person that you need to reach her a little bit. And she says everything is OK, but somewhere I think she is just as sensitive and, and that also needs to be taken into account. But, all in all, it’s great that of the two of us, she became a doctor. She has absolutely better features to be this doctor. To be able to do all this, have it under control and be a good doctor. Because I think she’s a great one.

Agnieszka's indication of her sister's medical studies and becoming a doctor present in the coda fragment cited above, requires a few more explanations. As I have already mentioned, as a daughter of doctors Agnieszka attended a class with a biology-chemistry profile in secondary school. Although she did not want to follow in the footsteps of her parents and become a doctor, despite mainly her mother's expectations, feeling that she was "unsuitable" for this profession, her mother decided that in this case studying law was the alternative. Agnieszka points out that she followed her mother's command at that time, though against her will. Therefore, after trying to study law for a year and the difficulties she experienced in normalizing this situation of her biographical experience, she decided to change the field of studies. In this perspective, the beginning of the last fragment of the coda: "Although for a long time I had such a feeling, I cannot meet, no, no, I am not sorry, I cannot meet certain expectations of the environment, the family," we can assume that it refers exactly to this situation in which she could not become a doctor or a lawyer. On the other hand, Hanna's success, that one of them is a doctor ("one of us did it, it's great") seems to take away from Agnieszka some burden of the responsibility for "not meeting the expectations of the family."

Thus, the "admiration" of Hanna's life can be of dual nature here. On the one hand, it probably results from the closeness of the sisters' relationships, from the strength of their bonds. On the other, it may also be that Agnieszka, knowing how much effort it cost her to face the fact that she would never be a "great doctor," tries to support the sister in her choice so that she would not doubt herself. Hanna is not just a sister to Agnieszka, just like the mother and grandmother, as I have already mentioned, she belongs to the narrator's triad of biographical carers. It is she that Agnieszka shares her ideas with, consults important decisions and gives meaning to her biography in reference to their relationship.

In Agnieszka's autobiographical story we can, therefore, see how the narrator's biographical carers change. First, the maternal grandmother – she looked after Agnieszka as a child, she was her friend and confidant of secrets. Then Agnieszka's mother, who advises her in difficult moments, whose presence becomes crucial for Agnieszka at the time of her first pregnancy and currently when she is raising her two children. Thirdly, Agnieszka's sister – Hanna. They are very close, Agnieszka often emphasizes this in an interview. In her eyes, Hanna is more organized, less susceptible to emotional imbalance, persistent, and consistent in achieving goals, self-oriented – which Agnieszka often misses on her path. Hanna is also an important "mirror" in which Agnieszka sees the sense of who she is. In the case of Agnieszka, her rooting in the family *milieu* is, similarly to Paweł, related to embedding her biographical experience in the frame of a narration about the family. In analyzing her life story, an attempt to reconstruct her experiences in a different frame would also be a very difficult analytical task.

Conclusions

As Kaja Kaźmierska mentions in the introduction to this part of the book, the sphere of biographical experiences embedded in the family context was, next to the sphere of work, one of the main threads to which our interlocutors referred. Such a situation, as further commented by Kaźmierska, is probably not unusual considering that both these orders of life of individuals organize their experience of everyday life. However, a certain non-obviousness and research thread, which in the face of the phenomena of an individualizing society (e.g., Jacyno 2007) and changes of the family and the family life (e.g., Szlendak 2010, Sikorska 2019) we did not anticipate was the issue of the importance of the family to which I refer in this chapter.

The contemporary perspective of research on the family shows that the family is more and more often becoming a temporary contract, based on the pursuit of the self-fulfilment of the family members rather than a permanent union of a community character (Marody 2015: 144). The second important issue is also the retreat from the nuclear family towards other forms of family life (Marody 2015: 144). It should also be noted that in the contemporary perspective of research of the sociology of the family, it is the changes in family life that are becoming the subject of interest for many researchers. However, it is not only about the transformations in the very functioning of contemporary families, but also about drawing attention to contemporary family life practices and transformations in this regard (e.g., Sikorka 2019).

In the perspective of contemporary times, the family is increasingly rarely a certain integrity in its traditional understanding, and less frequently from sustaining its existence, individuals “cease to develop a sense of their lives” (Marody 2015: 145). Moreover, in the discussion on an individualized society, work, including the individual’s work on himself or herself understood as self-fulfilment, is regarded as a sphere to which individuals devote most of their lives. Thus, the family, in this arrangement of meanings, is often treated as a kind of obligation which in some way takes away the individual’s time for this self-fulfilment. It should also be stressed that for family research itself, the natural aspect is the concept of change, inscribed in the broader social-historical mechanisms of change in the structures of social reality. The diagnosis of the impasse of the family is therefore inscribed in the discussion on the crisis of the family, in contrast to the normative model of family life. This makes the discourse on the crisis of the family refer to the negative effects of contemporary social changes, which lead precisely to the crisis or the decline of the family as an important aspect in the course of the life of individuals (e.g., Slany 2002, Szlendak 2010, Ostrouch-Kamińska 2011, Chambers 2012).

In addition, because of the transformations of family life inscribed in the optics of contemporary times, the researchers of the scientific subdiscipline of sociology of the family are reflecting on its meaning. This is due not only to the ongoing discussion on the crisis of the family, but above all to a certain implicit need to supplement it with important trends such as the sociology of the couple or the sociology of intimacy, as well as the need to speak about the sociology of family life rather than the sociology of the family, due to a certain difficulty in matching the definition of the family with the subject of analysis in nowadays perspective (Sikorska 2019: 57).

Therefore, due to the contemporary discussion about the crisis of the family as a value, the interviews selected for analysis in this chapter and many other interviews collected in this project show a completely different perspective. It is related to the narrators' perception of family ties as a permanent element of the landscape of their biographical experiences. Our interlocutors, reconstructing the social change which took place in Poland, indicate, among others, situations as the uncertainty on the labor market, financial uncertainty, and the disappearance of some old reference communities (e.g., the yard community). However, despite these uncertain threads in their biographical experiences of the post-transformational reality, in most of the narrations collected in our project – the family – is situated on the side of something permanent. Regardless of whether we are talking about formal or informal relationships, having children or merely expressing the desire to have them in the future, starting a family with someone is an important thread for our narrators to which they refer.

Moreover, it should also be noted that the family understood as a biographical resource is above all a resource that is available. This is a particularly important aspect when we talk about the Polish reality, where society is devoid of medium-order structures, that is, in many situations it is difficult to talk about the phenomenon of institutionalized biographical carers in Polish social reality. Thus, the family as a close and accessible resource allows, on the one hand, the elimination of the socially created state of uncertainty, inscribed in the functioning of the individual in contemporary times. On the other hand, as Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 57) notes, living in a family, regardless of its crisis, is still “the experience of most individuals.” Therefore, in the perspective of the biographical research described in this book, it seems appropriate and important to discuss in the context of discussion about today the family life of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases.

Moreover, narrations such as Paweł and Agnieszka's – as I emphasized in the introduction – stand out from our collection. They are rooted in the family *milieu*, and the story of the family plays the role of a biographical resource. This means that by referring to the family thread ordering their biographies, Paweł and Agnieszka give sense to their biographical experiences. In the analyzed

stories, the biographical identity of the narrators is not formed on the basis of the professional world, peer relationships or relationships with people with whom they share common passions (who are not members of their families). Here, the family context is the point of all the biographical references. Writing about the family as a value in society, Wojciech Świątkiewicz states that:

The family is often treated in the social consciousness as a kind of extended personality, a perspective in which a person perceives the sense of one's own life, aspirations, and life goals. Through the eyes of the family, the individual looks at the surrounding world, one's place in this world, learns to name and classify, to recognize the world as friendly or hostile in one's own or another way (Świątkiewicz 1999: 120).

This quote can be referred to the significance of intergenerational relations in the narrations of Paweł and Agnieszka. On the one hand, they are a dimension of their search for their biographical identity (which is shaped by references to the grandfather in the case of Paweł and the grandmother in the case of Agnieszka). They are also a determinant of what they strive for in their lives, a certain pattern inscribed in the tradition of multi-generational families. They both place their biographical experience within this perspective. For Agnieszka, this thread is also problematized in a wider, macro-social perspective. She notes that multi-generational homes like the one she grew up in are gone. She also emphasizes that she tries to be as close as possible to her parents, nurture their frequent contact with their grandchildren, and care about spending time together with the family. She presents this issue as appropriate for her biographical experience, while not seeing it in the social landscape which surrounds her.

Finally, answering the formal questions about the sense of the researcher taking biographical case studies, while remaining in the perspective of the biographical method in the view of Fritz Schütze. I believe that such a research approach primarily involves the ability to reproduce more precisely those threads which are associated with broader social processes, and which are often overlooked during the analyses of extensive empirical material. In addition, focusing on individual cases gives us the opportunity to trace the common features of the autobiographical accounts we have collected. Therefore, before I chose to discuss in this chapter – the biographies of Paweł and Agnieszka – I looked at how the analytically important topic of the family was presented in the remaining interviews gathered in our project. In this way, I considered the narrations of Paweł and Agnieszka to be unique (against the background of other autobiographical stories contained in the collection).

The biographical analysis that I present in this chapter does not escape the perspective of certain generalizations. I have already mentioned that the family

theme appeared as an important frame of reference in many of the narrations gathered in the project. Very often, our narrators also devoted a lot of space in their biographies to the story of grandparents who supported the process of their upbringing and socialization. Thus, by weaving the experience of Paweł and Agnieszka and our other narrators into the perspective of the present, it can be seen that the role of grandparents is still a very important aspect in the analysis of the topic of the family undertaken by social and pedagogical sciences. Małgorzata Sikorska, analyzing the modern family and parenting practices on the basis of in-depth dyadic interviews with pairs of parents and in-depth individual interviews carried out with single parents, indicates that both in their individual experience and in their reconstruction of the children's experience, by far the most important significant Others indicated by the interviewees were the grandparents (Sikorska 2019: 110).

Thus, the analysis of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases conducted in this chapter also touches on issues important from a contemporary perspective. Namely, those related to the role of significant Others in the process of forming the identity of the individual and the role of family and intergenerational ties for the experience of individuals, inscribed in social processes relevant for the present time, such as individualization, modernization, and retraditionalization. In this view, the cases I have analyzed show the biographical experience of people whose life choices (including professional ones) do not belong to the sphere of individual decisions and self-fulfilment, but are rather inscribed in the perspective of their family relationships, which both Paweł and Agnieszka treat as the most important frame for their experiences. Additionally, these case studies can also be used to introduce the reader to this aspect of the biographical experience of the time of transformation in Poland, in which social change is a theme subordinated to the topic of a family story. It is the family theme which is the frame organizing the analyzed biographies. My aim in the considerations was, therefore, to indicate what constitutes the sense of the biographies analyzed and to reconstruct the sphere of references important for the general conclusions contained in this book, which for our narrators was, along with the topic of work – the family theme.

Jacek Burski, Joanna Wygnańska

CHAPTER XV

A BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE YARD AS A SYMBOLIC BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCE

Introduction

This chapter deals with the reconstruction of the biographical significance of the yard experience, in relation to which our interviewees interpreted the social change in Poland. What is important, this thread, present in their narrations, is treated by us as a symbolic biographical resource which was used by narrators to make their own biographies meaningful. In other words, they perceived it as an important factor for the formation of their biographical identity linking the subsequent phases of their autobiographical story.

For us, the biographical experience of the yard is a central analytical concept illustrating the sociocultural changes into which the experiences of the narrators' adolescence (growing-up) and adulthood are inscribed. Thus, we are interested in their reflections on the topic of the yard both in their personal experience and in the comparative perspective applied to their autobiographical stories. In this way, it becomes possible to juxtapose different phases of the biographical experience of our narrators, ordered according to three time frames: in relation to the Polish People's Republic (PPR) period, the transformation time, and the post-transformation reality.

Additionally, the yard experience is expressed and presented by our interlocutors in the phase of a spontaneous narration regarding their life history. Biographical accounts of the yard appeared when describing the time of childhood as a formative experience, having a big impact on who our narrators have become. However, in subsequent phases of the conversation with the researcher – if the topic of the yard appeared – it was treated by the narrators as a passage enabling the comparison of ways of raising children or the conditions of growing up in relation to the two time perspectives: the childhood of our interlocutors and the present day.

Therefore, this is not a biographical thread induced by the researcher in the additional questions phase, but rather it emerges directly from the

narration of the interlocutors. Fritz Schütze (2008a: 173) notes that: “The communicative scheme of extempore narration is the most elementary means to focus on, to present, and to understand the flow of events making up the smaller and greater change of one’s (everyday and biographical) life, and these changes are very deeply connected with – sometimes more and sometimes less decisive – historical changes of one’s social surroundings.” He also points out that there are also two other basic communication schemes inscribed in a spontaneous narration and used by individuals to reconstruct and interpret their biographical experiences: description and argumentation. The first one “is built into the unfolding of the scheme of narration in order to deal with (i.e., to focus and to clarify) social frames of involvements of the narrator and other *dramatis personae* within biographically and socially pivotal events.” The other communication scheme – argumentation – relates to explaining the course of events in the individual’s biographical experience, seeking explanations for biographical decisions and choices made (Schütze 2008a: 173).

The biographical experience of the yard, which is the main subject of our research, is thus an important interpretative framework for the experiences of our interlocutors. Both in the sense of showing the socio-historical contexts which their biographical experience is linked with, as well as in relation to the development of their biographical identity. Additionally, our aim of this text is to show how our interlocutors, using the biographical experience of the yard (in the spontaneous narrative phase), interpret and reconstruct the changes taking place in Poland in relation to the three time frames indicated above (the PPR period, the transformation time, and the post-transformation reality). In this way, we try to see to what extent the use of the yard thread allows our interlocutors “to reach authenticity of the expression of life historical experiences and thus to start and to realize biographical work” (Schütze 2008a: 173).

We also assumed that the starting point for our reflections should be the reference to the role played by the yard community experience in the socialization processes of an individual. The undertaking of such a research thread resulted from the research intention to refer to biographical processes ordering individual phases of the biographies of the narrators. It also allowed us to attempt to reconstruct the social processes in which these biographies were/are entangled (Każmierska, Schütze 2013). Within the biographical narrations collected in our project, the story of the yard was very often included by our narrators in their childhood experience and in the phase of their biography in which they are parents themselves. Starting from this observation, we also treat the analytical concept of the yard as a *contrast set* (Schütze 2008a) showing the differences in the way of experiencing the yard community, both at different stages of life and among different generations.

We would like to set our reflections in a scientific-cultural frame and indicate approaches which treat the yard as a permanent element of collective and individual memory, both in the spatial and symbolic dimension. Referring first to the scientific perspective, it is worth mentioning that as it was said before we understand the biographical experience of the yard as one of the spaces of the socialization process of an individual. Relating to the concept of upbringing activities and their types presented by Aleksander Kamiński,¹ it can be seen that the undertaken topic of the importance of the yard community experience in the biographies of our interlocutors falls into the “team education” category marked by the collective experience. The author indicates here the mutual influence of peers or members of social groups on each other, escaping institutional control and going beyond the space of parental upbringing actions (Kamiński 1976: 11). In this view, one can attribute the yard community as belonging to the sphere of unintentional socialization² rather than intentional upbringing (educational institutions and the family).

The subject of the biographical experience of yard which is of our interest thus falls within the conceptual area of socialization and upbringing, which are primarily the concern of pedagogy and sociology.³ In the first case, we should point to family pedagogy and educational pedagogy as those subdisciplines of

¹ Kamiński lists three types of upbringing: the first, based on the direct individual relationship of the pupil and the educator. The second is “team education” as indicated in the text. The third one concerns the environmental educational process, and the researcher connects it to the essence of social pedagogy.

² In his considerations regarding the sociology of education, Jan Szczepański (1970) also mentions the unintentional influences in the sense of their impact on the process of socialization of an individual. This means all the unintentional social activities forming an individual. Such unintentional influences of the environment can also be described as “spontaneous socialization.” The yard community can thus be considered as the space of impact of socialization understood in this way.

³ Additionally, a study of family life, its changes and processuality in the Polish context (including the upbringing category) can also be found in contemporary anthropology. It is worth recalling, among others, a publication of Agata Staniszc (2013). The author described in it the lives of 100 Polish families, trying to show similarities and differences between them. Its objective was also to capture the everyday life experience of these families and growing up in them, which seems close to our research approach. Thus, the research study presented in the book aimed at a certain reconstruction or deconstruction of the available theoretical models regarding research on family and kinship through reflecting on the diversity of Polish families and their ways of dealing with everyday life. The author did not do a biographical analysis of cases, but her attempt to record the experience of everyday life of Polish families seems to us worth recalling in order to indicate other sociological studies of the family from the position of examining the individuals that create it and their experiences.

pedagogical sciences in which the topic of the aforementioned unintentional socialization associated with our experience of peer and neighborly yard community is explored. Additionally, we would like to point out that the analytical perspective presented in this text is also part of the sociology of education,⁴ family sociology,⁵ and childhood sociology. Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska (2015: 10) after Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Robert van Krieken (2009: 188) notes that current research on children and childhood includes three trends in the sociology of childhood:

- (1) the structural approach, also referred to as the generational approach, concerns childhood and adulthood as segments of macro-structure, constituted by the inequality between them; (2) the historical and social constructivist approaches analyze discourses about and actions toward children; (3) the ethnographic approach focuses on interactions and communication in different groups of children.

Childhood is understood here as a socially and individually constructed experience. The analyses attempted in this chapter fall within the above-mentioned comparative perspective affecting the experience of childhood and adulthood. However, due to the biographical approach we present, our reflections combine the interpretation of macro-structural changes forming the biographical experience of childhood and adolescence of our narrators with contemporary optics of their children's experiences through the reconstruction of social processes and the associated biographical processes. Thus, by studying

⁴ Looking at the history of Polish sociology of education, one should mention, among others, the classic works of Florian Znaniecki (*Sociology of Education* 1928, 1930) and Józef Chalasiński (*Family and School and Wider Social Groups*, 1929). The post-Second World War texts worth mentioning are: *An Outline of Sociology of Education* (1974) by Stanisław Kowalski and *Typical Educational Environments of Contemporary Poland* (1976) by Włodzimierz Winclawski.

⁵ Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 40), notes that: “researchers of family life point to the transition from the structural-functional paradigm and modernist family theory (Bernardes 1997) to a paradigm that can be collectively described as a *postmodern model* (Szlendak 2010) or *new studies on the family*.” The author refers here to a change in family research practices that, from an approach analyzing what a family is or what *being a family* is, are now focusing more on the perspective of *doing family*. In this perspective, it is important for researchers to get to know the family in relation to practices (e.g., parenting), a sense of belonging, emotions of individuals, as well as the assumption that “the family (or in fact its members) has an impact on reality, on social processes” (Szlendak 2010: 50). The family is therefore understood here as a process, and researchers focus on “analyzing interactions within the family” and “analyzing everyday life” of family life (Szlendak 2010: 51).

the biographical experience of the yard, we try to show this sphere of childhood and adolescence experience of our interlocutors, which becomes an illustration, a reflection of many important socio-cultural changes taking place in Poland. The thread of the biographical experience of the yard in the interviewees' narrations is therefore related to issues such as socialization, the importance of peer relationships, a sense of community, and the relationship between freedom and control.

Additionally, in our reflections we also reach for the concept of *communitas* (Turner 2005, 2010) considering the yard as a community based on building bonds (peer and neighborly) despite the external barriers and social distances through which individuals can experience socialization. We also refer to the concept of liminality (Turner 2005, 2010, van Gennep 2006), which we link with the process of growing up and entering adulthood of the narrators. In this way, our analytical approach also falls within the perspective of analyses touching on the problem of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004, 2007). At the same time, the narrations we discuss concern people born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, whose adolescence and adulthood process was embedded in a completely different frame of socio-historical changes than the analyses of "*emerging adulthood*" characteristic of experiences of contemporary post-industrial societies.⁶

Thus, in our considerations, the yard is of metaphorical character capturing a peculiar space of freedom deprived of (full) control of parents, teachers, or adults in general. A space where peer groups play a key role. They constitute – as Mirosława Marody (Marody 2015: 179) says after Florian Znaniecki:

the main environment for shaping those competences that form the foundations for harmonious social coexistence and effective interaction with others. It is in peer groups that an individual shapes one's self-esteem, learns how to negotiate, resolve conflicts, loyalty, and maybe even above all that one should take into account the views of others. It is also in peer groups that an individual has the opportunity to acquire this knowledge, which s/he is not able to get from adults, regarding, for example, sexual practices, informal institutional rules, socially incorrect forms of behavior, et cetera.

And indeed, for the narrators whose life histories we briefly discuss below, this is the role of the yard. A significant change – which they regret – is taking place in the generation of their children, when the yard understood in such a way

⁶ This thread was described in an interesting way by Anna Lipska and Wanda Zagórska (2011), in their text comparing the development stage extending between adolescence and early adulthood in relation to the concepts of 'emerging adulthood' and the liminal phase.

ceases to exist, peer meetings are mainly mediated by social media, and games and activities take place “online.”

While pointing to publications, research, and cultural activities describing the yard in a spatial, symbolic, and material sense, we would like, among others, to recall the considerations of Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska (2019) regarding the study of play space. The researcher, making a comparative analysis of modern and old forms and places of play, states: “Thinking about childhood, we often look at it through the filter of our own memories, recalling nostalgic images of yards with carpet hangers in the background, hopscotch drawn with chalk on the asphalt and other not necessarily childish places of implementing the wildest play scenarios.” In opposition to such evoked memories, on the one hand, she places the modern “safe” yards, educational, creative toys, and activities designed to provide children with creative entertainment. On the other, she indicates current games of children seeking alternative solutions, stimulating the imagination, occasionally similar to the yard community experience, going beyond the limits of the modern times (associated with strong control processes and the phenomenon of “design” thinking about childhood). We also refer to the threads cited by the author in this text, showing the importance of the biographical resource of the yard experience for shaping a comparative perspective in the biographical experience of our narrators. In this way, we also try to reconstruct their interpretation of the contemporary experience of childhood and adolescence by placing their reflections in the frame of the experiences related to the presence and absence of the yard community.

Another publication that is also worth paying attention to is the book *Dzicy z naszej ulicy* (2005) (“Savages from our Street”) by Barbara Fatyga in which the author attempts to explore the youth culture in Poland. The theoretical and research perspective forming the frame of her analysis is mainly derived from cultural anthropology. Despite many meticulous references to sociological optics, the researcher remains, however, in the field of anthropological considerations, and thus this publication primarily addresses the problem of the anthropology of youth culture. However, what constitutes an important part of this book are the cultural experiences of the leaders and active members of youth organizations. In this part of the analyses, the author recalls the experience of the yard community and peer bonds which are close to our research reflections. In the cases described by Fatyga, however, they play a significantly different role than in the biographical experiences reconstructed by us. The author points to yard games which connected the future activists of youth organizations organizing protests, the first rebellious behaviors of the future leaders of such activities. The yard is not, therefore, one of the key topics of this study and the biographical experience of the yard as a symbolic biographical resource is not analyzed. However, due to the author’s case study

touching upon the experience of adolescence, which is of interest to us, it is also worth paying attention to the anthropological perspective of the research on the cultural experiences of young people proposed by the author.

Another contemporary academic study showing the memory of a yard in Poland is, inter alia, the publication *Cmentarz, park, podwórko. Poznańskie przestrzenie pamięci* (2018) (“Cemetery, park, yard. Poznań spaces of memory”) by Małgorzata Fabiszak and Anna W. Brzezińska. The book is the result of several years of research conducted by the authors within the NCN OPUS research grant. The scholars touch upon the problems of memory and forgetfulness in urban space, making it a laboratory for conducting an ethnographic study of places (in the symbolic, historical, collective, and individual sense).

The memory of the Polish yard is also the subject of many cultural and commemorative initiatives. An important example is the photo exhibition *Memory of your yard* prepared in Hrubieszów by the Digital Archive of Local Tradition and exhibited in the City Library (2019). In *Tygodnik Zamojski* there was a note that:

The exhibition captures in photographs and memories moments spent in Hrubieszów yards; moments of carefree fun, swimming in Huczwa, relaxing in numerous home gardens, long queues for ice cream or playing kiczka! Whether it is Wygon, Pogórze, Ludna Street or Kilińskiego Street, the memories are dominated by the theme of children’s free play outside from morning to evening and the atmosphere of a city full of greenery, where time was spent in a wide circle of family or neighbors, often singing, playing, talking.

The project coordinator, Katarzyna Suchecka in one of the interviews given about the exhibition comments: “Almost everyone has a yard where they grew up. We were curious about how children, young people would spend their time then.”⁷

Another initiative worth mentioning is the “Łódź yard – tradition and modernity”⁸ a project implemented in 2019 by the Museum of the City of Łódź. In addition to themed walks, outdoor cinema, workshops, and meetings in the space of Łódź yards, the event was accompanied by a permanent exhibition entitled “At a common yard – a melting pot of cultures and religions in Łódź” presented in the basement of Izrael Poznański’s Palace. The idea of the project was to show the yards of Łódź as a space of material and symbolic heritage of Łódź, combining memories of the older Łódź residents with a modern

⁷ After: <http://www.tygodnikzamojski.pl/arttykul/95875/hrubieszow-bdquopamiec-twojego-podworkardquo-czyli.html>. Retrieved November 17, 2019.

⁸ The project was co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund.

perspective in which many of the presented places had been forgotten. The yards of Łódź were treated as places marked by a rich past, full of traces of the history of many generations next to each other. One of the effects of the implemented project is the plan to create a repository of memories of the inhabitants of Łódź, which will be connected with the memory of the old life in the Łódź yard, at the meeting point of cultures and tenement houses.

Finally, the reporting activity of Filip Springer could also be referred to, who by photographing yards, tries to apply a filter of past memories onto these frames. At the same time, the author is interested in the current vision of Polish yards and their – still important – role of creating a community of neighborly experiences. Springer comments: “It took me some time to understand what was there in yards that was attracting me. It was not about the space, although it was photographically attractive in its neglect and severity. With meticulous inquisitiveness, however, I sought places on the backstage of the city, which build a community.”⁹

However, with regard to the conclusions contained in the chapter, it should be emphasized that the subject of our research approach is not an institutional outlook, dealing with the impact (potential or real) of a family or school on the formation of an individual. The subject of our reflections is rather the individual perspective, and more precisely the biographical experience of adolescence, which can only be considered to be part of a broader upbringing mechanism to some extent. As we have already mentioned, the yard is interesting for us as a significant symbolic and material space embedded in the experience of the socialization process of individuals and the development of their biographical identity.

In addition, the methodological approach organizing our analyses is founded on the methodological and analytical perspective of Fritz Schütze, which gives us a chance to go beyond the narrow disciplinary framework. Therefore, in this chapter following the methods of reconstruction and interpretation and the theme of the yard in the biographies of our narrators, we attempt to present individual biographical experiences in relation to the collective mechanisms of impact of social change. In other words, the biographical analysis makes it possible to trace these threads and phenomena in relation to pre-transformation and post-transformation social reality.

Justification of the analytical perspective

What convinced us to engage in the biographical story of the yard in a more detailed way is primarily the emic character of the indicated category. On the one hand, it involves the spontaneous introduction of this thread into the

⁹ After: <https://radio.lublin.pl/news/pamiec-twojego-podwórka-fotografiektore-przypominaja-hrubieszow-sprzed-lat>. Retrieved November 18, 2019.

narration by the interlocutors -- on the other, it is associated with the meaning we assign to it in the analysis of the interviews. The yard connects the world of childhood and adolescence in the biographical memory of the narrators, establishing a reference point in the process of ordering their biography. At the same time, it is captured in the perspective of their biographical "now," allowing us to follow the clues which constitute the image of social change perceived by the interlocutors (in the context of, *inter alia*, changes in the upbringing patterns, ways of spending free time by children and young people or the impact of technology on these social practices).

In this chapter, however, we would like to focus on understanding the yard not only in the aforementioned areas, but also as an important biographical resource of our narrators. In this way, we will try to indicate, on the one hand, how the memory of the yard is reconstructed by our interlocutors in their biographies and what semantic resources are assigned to this analytical category in relation to the transformation process in Poland. On the other hand, we are interested in reconstructing how our interlocutors perceive the changes taking place in their social and cultural environment. At the same time, aiming at creating more general categories related to the social change described in the perspective of the whole book, the topic of the yard is analyzed as a biographical resource in this chapter, also used by the interlocutors to assign meaning to certain processes and phenomena, which go beyond the narrators' experience of everyday life.

It should be stressed that this chapter is somewhat different from other parts of the book based on case studies. In this chapter, we focus on reflections of three chosen narrations. We do not undertake an analysis of the entire life story of the narrators, but follow the trail of one of the threads, which allows us to make a comparison between the selected cases. This line is the recurring theme of the yard. Thus, limiting, in a sense, the scope of analytical activities, we try to reconstruct the mechanisms of social change, which is the subject of the book. In other words, in this perspective, the yard is a kind of metaphor for the social change taking place and – at the same time – one of the keys to understanding the world in which our interlocutors functioned and are still functioning.

The selection of cases which we discuss in this chapter is connected to our attempt to reconstruct the biographical resource of the yard experience in order to show the importance of this resource to make their biographies meaningful. In the pool of 90 autobiographical and narrative interviews we collected in the project, we often came across the story of the yard, in a communal sense, as a formative factor for the biographical identity of our narrators, or in relation to socio-cultural changes associated with the transformational and post-transformation reality. However, we decided to choose such autobiographical

stories in which the biographical resource of the yard experience is in our opinion one of the key elements connecting the whole biographical experience of the narrators. We also tried to ensure that the interviews selected for analysis show different dimensions of the interlocutors making their own biographies meaningful by recalling the yard experience. In this way, from among the many narrations gathered in the research project in which the symbolic biographical resource of our interest appeared, we selected three cases to be considered here. Therefore, applying these two criteria: the year of birth of our interlocutors and the search for those biographies in which the theme of the yard was key to building their narration, we decided to take a closer look at three autobiographical stories: Marian (1962), Adam (1972) and Izabela (1979). The last of the biographies, although date-wise still falls in the 1970s category, was classified by us as a life history bearing many features characteristic of the narrations of people born in the 1980s. Among other things, one of the distinguishing traits for this category is the lack of direct references to the PPR period, with focus on experiencing transformation, typical of these narrations (in the case of Izabela especially in the context of the consumption of mass culture of that period, for example, by watching the first satellite television channels). An equally important feature of the narrations collected among the interlocutors born in the indicated decade is the experience of educational and professional career, as in the interview with Izabela, concentrated in terms of cognitive structures on the belief that it is necessary to build capital based on good education. Characteristic for the interviewed people from the 1980s is also the lack of children. However, this does not prevent them from making comparisons relating to changes in parenting styles (how children were raised during the childhood of the narrators, and how it is done now).

Let us move on here to the presentation of short biographical portraits of each of the interviewees and the key analytical conclusions, with particular regard to the theme of the yard.

Marian's case

Marian was born in 1962 in one of the cities of the Silesian agglomeration. His father was an engineer. Together with his parents and sister, Marian lived in a block of flats in the vicinity of tenement houses. The narrator spent his childhood in the town of origin, occasionally leaving during the holiday season to a village near Kraków where the mother's family lived. Later, he began studying at the technical university in Kraków. Then, remaining in this city, he undertook various studies to finally graduate in Forestry. The very period of studying, in his case, lasted almost 10 years, and shortly afterwards (and after the start of his first job) he was drafted into the army. Having done his

military service, Marian became involved in the organization of one of the first centers of alternative education in Silesia. After a few years, he left this place and went to work at the Education Office. During his studies, he also met his wife. Currently, he is also the father of an adult daughter. The marriage itself broke up, however, and the narrator is in a steady relationship with his new partner.

In his story, Marian devotes a lot of space to recall the period of childhood and youth. In these fragments of his biography, the important threads are primarily the experiences related to building relationships with peers. The narrator also shows his struggles with education (transition from being an extremely talented student to a student with problems) and in an interesting way describes his fascination with popular culture, especially music, which had an impact on the formation of his biographical identity. In the second part of his main narration, he also focuses on reconstructing his work experience. More broadly, he talks about his role in running one of the centers of alternative education. Interestingly, private issues play a secondary role in this narration, which is most evident in the part of the interview based on asking additional questions by the researcher, when the narrator has problems remembering his daughter's age.

Marian presents a nostalgic attitude to his childhood. In his story, one can notice that state institutions played an important role in shaping the biographical experience of the narrator. Although Marian does not use the term "welfare state" when referring to his biographical experience within the PPR timeframe, he points to the features of this period relating to such characteristics:

N: I suppose we didn't have any problems then, those ones which could affect, err, people in that system. Or, in other words, we lived somewhat more or less like, like the majority, maybe a little above the average of that, that system. Well, I mean safely, safely. There was enough for everything – holidays, EHF, that is Employee Holiday Fund, (speaks faster) to the seaside, a camp or camps, well, to live not to die (laughs). It is from this perspective that it is now judged that it was a paradise, really. Yes, yes, it seems strange, not that it was communism, but the child does not live in politics, right? The child lives in a completely different world and perceives it differently. For a child, freedom is not important, what counts is "Jacek and Agatka," which will be broadcast at twenty past seven.

I: (laughs)

N: Or "Reksio,"¹⁰ later more modern times came.

¹⁰ Marian is referring here to popular cartoons for children broadcast on television. "Jacek and Agatka" was one of the first so-called, good night, or evening programs for children. The time of issue of "Jacek and Agatka" (1962–1973) overlapped with Marian's childhood. "Reksio" was an animated series produced from 1967 until 1990. Both titles (among dozens of other productions) were broadcast as part of the children's evening

The quote above is worth comparing with the next one, in which the narrator emphasizes the issue of safety, characteristic of his childhood in the PPR:

N: I lived in those days, absolutely safely. What/ which is what I probably couldn't give to my children. What is very difficult for many parents now – such a sense of security, total security. Absolute peace, absolute security.

At this point we would like to return to the topic of the perception of social distance. In this context, childhood was very important for Marian. In his story, it is in these references that we find the image of a neighborly society in which the economic, cultural, and social differences did not lead to the breakdown of bonds within this community. Therefore, they were not of a dysfunctional character. On the contrary, they were a natural and indisputable feature of the local community in which our narrator grew up. In one fragment Marian recalls:

N: Well, I had/ for me this, this, this smoking was a bit exotic, and for them, it was an everyday reality, because they were from those a bit neglected environments. I remember such such, maybe not pathological, but such impoverished environments. For me, it was so [...] exotic, right? Smoking such/ such a different world a little bit. Then I would come back to my sort of orderly, safe, well-off world, and, and, and here, they are a bit different, so Silesian, real – someone is working somewhere, someone is not working, someone is drinking, big families, right? Erm, but I really liked it, their life like that, right? [...] Erm, but then there were no such differences, neither, neither I nor them. Only now am I evaluating it like that. No, no, no, we didn't notice these differences, right? We did not notice that they exist.

The quote above also includes an important theme of the peer community, which becomes an introduction to the description of the yard from the perspective of a young boy. Importantly, the yard category is introduced by Marian in a spontaneous way (it is not triggered, for example, by the researcher's questions) and is an important element of the main story in the interview. Again, we can observe the way the narrator highlights the social differences between his family and the families of his friends:

N: [...] because it is also important, the environment in which I grew up, in the yard, and back then people lived in the yard, not like these days, when you don't live in the yard. So you lived in the yard, a fantastic yard, a dream. (speaks more slowly) So first, there was a new block.

program on TVP channel 1 (broadcasting time varied, but the program always appeared before the main news bulletin around 7 p.m.) from the 1950s until 2013 when it was decided to transfer (with a short broadcasting period on TVP Kultura in 2013–2014) to the TVP ABC platform addressed directly to children and young people.

I: Mm

N: Where I lived, old tenement houses were bordering the area, so there were the old tenement houses, and those ones from those flats were poorer. I mean it seemed so to us, in those one-hundred-and-twenty-meter flats, right?

I: (laughs)

N: Poverty, and we in these super modern fifty-meter cages, right? But, they also saw it that way. They also preferred our cage flats than in their humongous, neglected ones, because these are old tenement houses. Although at that time they were not so badly neglected, erm, tenement houses.

It is worth noting here that while peer groups were just “existing” at the time and, paraphrasing the words of Berger and Luckmann: “we had to deal with friends whom fate gave us” (1983), they are now rather “intentional” in the sense that it is the parents who sooner decide “who with,” “what for,” but also “where” their child will develop their social competences. Here, it is clearly seen that the yard is a place beyond social class where individuals from various environments¹¹ come together (especially children and teenagers, although as shown by the example of Marian not only).

However, the importance of the yard community is manifested in Marian’s interview not only in the context of the reconstruction of his experience from his youth. The narrator emphasizes that the bonds built at that time lasted until the period of studies and even longer. Two aspects related to the interlocutor’s functioning within his peer group played a specific role here. First of all, the time spent among friends extended beyond the joint stay at school, which Marian refers to in the passage cited above. Secondly, the holiday trips mentioned by the narrator also deepened the bonds. As a result, Marian’s biographical experience was dominated by a strong sense of community and security. In this context, it was the yard that played an extremely important role in shaping this experience. Marian comments on this period of his biographical experience as follows:

N: I gained a lot from trips with young/ with my older friends. We could then go to the seaside or to other places as a group. I was probably twelve years old when I went alone with this group of my older eighteen-, nineteen-year-olds. We went somewhere for two weeks, right? Of course, all forbidden stories would happen there.

¹¹ Similar traces of overcoming social barriers can be found in the literature referring also to the pre-war period. We can mention here many examples from memoir literature and diaries, for example, two: memoirs of Hanna Świda-Ziemia (2018) or books for young people by Kornel Makuszyński. This, in turn, would validate the thesis about the yard as a place of breaking social barriers appearing in various historical contexts (also those characterized by a much sharper social distance than the PPR).

I: (laughs)

N: We were returning green (laughs), from there, most often from the seaside, well stoned, knackered, but we came back. My parents were happy that we came back and they knew of course what was going on there because they were not stupid, were they? So, but, but it's ok, isn't it? Apparently, it has to be this way, no? Such an initiation. We have never talked about this topic, because of course, "how was it?" "cool, we went swimming in the sea, eating, and it was great, right?" Nothing more was said than that.

I: (laughs)

N: So as not to give them a headache. And so we could just go, safely.

Again, one can see how important the question of security and control was to the interlocutor, or rather the lack of the latter on the part of the parents. Marian refers to a kind of "social contract" concluded between him and his parents, which is contained in a short question "how was it" on a vacation trip with friends and an equally short answer. There is also a story of parallel life in the peer group, which the narrator also mentions at other times in the interview. Marian's experience is therefore marked by a double feature. On the one hand, being a talented student, he realizes institutional patterns of expectations on the part of the school and parents. Thus operating within the Turnerian structure created by educational institutions and the family, but at the same time entering the *communitas* of the yard, where as a member of a peer community he experiences the freedom of action resulting from the trust which his parents had placed in him. Here, it is worth recalling the account of the functioning of the "club," founded by the narrator with colleagues. The narrator relates this stage of his biography:

N: We had a basement and our club was in the basement. Well, that's exactly how it was. Erm, I mean in our block in the drying room. There was such a drying room, they had it there for some time, but the neighbors kicked us out because we were so loud.

N: However, the basement from a friend in this tenement house was ideally suited. There were basements there, God, like apartments. Ceilings, bricks, we made a club there, gee! We spent all the summers there, completely stinky. The summer would just pass by being in the club and and and zero suntan, just gray, green,

I: (laughs)

N: Stinking with cigarettes, cheap wine, we would go out from there. There were/ we would spend our lives, err, playing cards, various nice games for, for, for small money, because there was no big money. Although then it was big, right? Losing a pack of cigarettes meant something. There we indulged in those negative sides – dance parties, fan-fantasy. Just our world, right? Well, you entered there you

could see. [...] This now, I don't think these people have it anymore. Well, from time to time the police would come, but once they came, it was no joke, when they came in two, it got crowded there, right?

The above-quoted fragment of the narration shows that also in everyday life Marian and his colleagues were looking for "their place" – a space free from parental supervision. Interestingly, the phrase "our club was in the basement" is a word-for-word quote from one of the best-known Polish songs *Autobiografia* by Perfect. The song itself was released in 1982, but the text is a symbolic description of the experiences of the 1950s and 1960's generations.¹² Although Marian does not speak directly about this song, he makes it clear to the researcher that he notices the quote. He does this by making sure in the next sentence: "Well, but that's exactly how it was," thus authenticating his account. In a broader perspective, we can emphasize that this is another fragment in which music (and popular culture in general) – directly and indirectly – creates the background for Marian's biographical fate. Strong peer relationships built during adolescence survived despite the passing of time or the narrator's relocation during his studies:

N: Then there was time [...] What was going on then? Secondary school, well secondary school, it was really such an important period in my life. The other one was very important too, but this/ this was also important. [...] Anyway, it is important because even, for example, my friends from elementary school call me not so long ago, because there is a sad situation because a friend died

I: I see.

N: Something, he got sick, from elementary school, and they call me: "Marian"/ they found me on the internet, "Krzysiu is dead, right?" Well then obviously, we go to the funeral, let's see who else will come, right?" After all, all these years, this half a century has passed, there was no contact, and, and you go to this funeral just to a friend, right? Of course, we're always with all our friends who were in elementary school, secondary school, and so on, on first name terms, there is no such thing that I'm a big cheese here and they drink vodka somewhere, right? Jasio is Jasio and Jasio is always Jasio for me and I am for Jasio Marian, right? For us, it is a common experience and I see no reason for it to be different at all.

The recalled anecdote confirms the phenomenon of the extraordinary durability of peer relationships in Marian's biographical experience. Thus, one can see in the discussed biography how the yard makes an important biographical resource for shaping the biographical identity of the narrator.

¹² The authors (born in the 1980s and not feeling the generational meaning of the quote) thank Katarzyna Waniek for the remark about the significance of this fragment.

Fritz Schütze (2008a: 163) emphasizes that “There is a very deep relationship between the identity development of an individual and her or his narrative renderings of life historical experiences.” This means that by recalling his own past, the narrator, referring in his autobiographical story to “certain phases and episodes of life or in narrating the life history as a whole, the narrating individual conveys a basic order and identity structure to her or his life that is lived and experienced up to now” [...] (Schütze 2008a: 163). Additionally, in the narrative presentation of one’s own life, telling particular fragments of a biographical experience: “reminds the informant of the argumental potential regarding the fundamentals of her or his life. The quite steadily occurring summarizing and evaluation sub-segments of the narrative units, which are piling up during the course of storytelling, are feeding into the recollection of the basic elements and tendencies of the argumentative potential for relating to one’s own biographical identity during the life course” (Schütze 2014: 243).

From this perspective, we can see that in the case of Marian’s autobiographical story we are dealing with an account of a person who was shaped primarily by the constellation of events in which he found himself during adolescence and school times. What made a significant impact on this layer of his biographical experience was the frame of reference, which the narrator reaches for from the biographical perspective of “now” (the interview recording time). On the one hand, it is created by the narrator’s relationship with his parents, based on a kind of relation between a sense of control and freedom. On the other, its important element is the space of the yard, understood here as a place of hanging out, spending time, and experiencing everyday life. Secondly, the yard is understood in a symbolic sense as a community of experiences which Marian recalls in relation to his individual experiences, as well as in the sense of the experiences of the group in which he grew up. Such arrangement of past references is most fully expressed in the fragment of Marian’s already mentioned narration regarding his emphasis on the durability of yard bonds. Therefore, this line of argumentation proves that the narrator gives these episodes from his biographical experience an important role in the process of shaping his identity. In other words, how Marian perceives himself today and how he reconstructs his biographical identity is strongly marked by the experiences he underwent while growing up. That is why he devotes so much space in his narration to return to the subject of the yard, showing it in relation to many experiences encompassed in its frame.

Summing up the importance of the theme of the yard in Marian’s narration, it should be emphasized that it performs two basic functions. First, it allows the narrator to give a specific dimension to the memories of his childhood and, more broadly, to the social system in which he grew up. Marian, referring to the experiences woven into the biographical experience of the yard, first of all,

emphasizes the issue of security, which is understood here in terms of economic security (social trust) and in the sense of trust on the parents-children line. On the other hand, in the narration of the interlocutor, the yard is a community similar to the idea of Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* (1988). Based on direct contact, not very hierarchical, to some extent beyond what was happening around (here it is worth noting Marian's comment, which emphasizes not paying attention to politics). Following this, we can see that the yard is a liminal space, which by "exclusion from the world" facilitates the transition from childhood to adulthood, a space giving the opportunity to practice the rites of passage (van Gennep 2006, Turner 2005, 2010). Young people, being on the threshold of adulthood, train within its space in responsibility, become independent, build relationships with others, enter into conflicts, and solve them. As Turner shows: "Important liminal situations are an opportunity for society to manifest self-awareness, and actually to ensure that its members, in the interval between attribution to specific positions, can achieve, despite all limitations, an approximate global view of the place of man in space and his attitude to other visible and invisible entities" (Turner 2005: 202). Seemingly trivial, frivolous experiences often associated only with playing and having fun, sometimes laziness, not being serious, and in a kind of "equating with others" are, however, of great importance for entering adulthood and returning to the structure. They become a kind of training of social competences used in later stages of life. Moreover, the yard community resembles Turner's *communitas* suspending the operation of the social structure and combining "low status, holiness, homogeneity, and brotherhood. [...] *communitas* is a basic bond proper to people" (Turner 2010: 220). When describing the next cases, we will see it more clearly, but also here we can risk an assumption that the yard *communitas* characteristic of the pre-computer and pre-internet era gave a greater chance to develop and practice values such as egalitarianism or community spirit in real social life. In the era of the growing importance of networks and virtual contacts, the heritage of the yard experience is thus becoming a less available commodity.

In the case of Marian, we can observe a repeating pattern based on the search for this type of community in subsequent social worlds. In a broader biographical plan, devoting a large part of his account to the reconstruction of the yard experience can, therefore, be understood as the introduction of a certain ideal of a community based on mutual deep emotional commitment, help and support in difficult situations, which the narrator later tried to recreate. Both during his studies when he was involved in the opposition¹³

¹³ Marian took part in students' strikes in the 1980s, although he did not play any significant role in them. However, it is worth noting the reason for his disappointment with the strike – Marian was displeased with the situation in which it turned out that

or the hippy subculture, as well as afterwards, when he implemented anti-pedagogical ideas by working towards the organization of alternative education centers, Marian recreated the experience of that yard community in which being together came to the fore.

Adam's case

Adam's case was selected for analysis although the theme of the yard is not one of the key topics of the interlocutor's biography. It is focused around two basic issues: work in a psychiatric hospital and family life – especially raising children. In relation to the second sphere, there are references to the yard community, which in our opinion plays the role of a biographical resource in Adam's narration. Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of this thread, we will briefly characterize the biography of our interlocutor.

Adam was born in 1974 in a small village in central Poland. He comes from a large family (he has six brothers). He lives near his native village and has good contact with his family home. He works as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital. He is married and has two children. Adam builds his autobiographical narration based on the history of going through the subsequent important moments of life, starting from education (attending secondary school), through military service to employment in the hospital. It is worth adding that one of the so-called turning points is the change of relations with the employer (i.e., the psychiatric hospital in which Adam works) from a full-time job to the so-called contract, that is, a civil law agreement, financially more favorable for the employer (does not have to pay health and pension benefits) and to a certain extent, for the employee (the net pay received is higher due to the lack of premium).¹⁴ In the narration, subsequent transitions function as a source of serious tensions, thereby building trajectory potentials (Waniek 2016, Burski 2019), which Adam controls with greater or lesser difficulty in the course of his biography. It seems that one could risk making the assumption that in Adam's biographical experience one can see the impoverished ethos, which is a good summary of the slogan "one must survive."

some people (leaders of the movement) get better food than the rest. In his eyes, it was a form of betrayal of the community which all (theoretically) were part of. Looking from the perspective of the entire biography of Marian and how he emphasized some of its elements (the importance of non-hierarchical communities), we treat this story as evidence of the key importance of the *communitas* experience for understanding his narrative.

¹⁴ More about this mechanism of marketization of healthcare in Chapter XI by Jacek Burski.

Undertaking work in a psychiatric hospital – a key decision shaping the main biographical experience of the interlocutor, is connected with a situation in which Adam is on the edge of a biographical trajectory. Having done his military service, he faces a difficult career path. Here, one of his friends comes to the aid and claims that in the area where Adam lives, one of the few certain jobs is the psychiatric hospital, in which it is easy to get to the position of a nurse. The narrator decides to make this move and works there until today, although there were some difficult situations at the beginning. Twice in a fairly short period of time, the interlocutor was beaten by patients (in the second case Adam won the case in a civil court case against the perpetrator). Those situations were so traumatic that the narrator considered quitting his job. Ultimately, he did not make such a decision, and after a few years achieved a good professional position (e.g., he switched to the aforementioned so-called contract, which significantly increased his earnings). However, this is not just a story of success.

An important element of Adam's narration is the description of changes which are associated with the systemic transformation. The biographical experience of that time is told through the eyes of a member of a large family. In such an autobiographical story, the narrator reconstructs, among others, the mechanisms of a certain circulation of material goods within his family, recalling the story of how he and his brothers shared clothes, toys, et cetera. In this frame, the narrator also describes the differences between the village and the city in the sphere of consumption. However, when introducing stories into the narration, for example, about building relationships with peers, the indicated diversity is no longer perceived by the narrator as significant, and it can even be said that it does not play any role in Adam's relations with peers.

From the perspective of the issues raised in this chapter, it should be emphasized that this is another interview in which the narrator reconstructs the image of the yard community. However, before we proceed to its analysis, we would like to focus on the topic related to the yard and its role in the interview with Adam. What we mean is the comparative perspective, which Adam introduces in his narration, and whose key function is the reference to the contemporary context, to the lives of the narrator's children who are growing up in a similar or the same geographical space, but within rules which are completely different from those experienced in the past by the narrator. Despite the unobvious relationship which connects the theme of the yard directly with the theme of the interlocutor's children, it should be noted that in Adam's narration, when describing both fragments of his biographical experience he uses a mechanism common to both of these stories to reconstruct the social change that he observes and which he is part of. In Adam's narration, one can see the use of a *contrast set*, which is an important cognitive figure used for describing the social framework in which

individual biographical experience is intertwined (Schütze 2008a: 183). Therefore, the contrast set introduced by Adam, showing his biographical experience of childhood and adolescence (including the yard community) and the experience of his children growing up allows the narrator to trace not only the social framework forming these experiences, but also gives him the opportunity to interpret the occurring socio-cultural changes. Also, the contrast set functioning in Adam's narration, understood as a "collection of social categorization" (Schütze 2008a: 183) allows him to combine many phases of his biographical experience and, as we will show later, to conduct biographical work, which in the case of Adam (due to trajectory markers present in his biography) is particularly important.

We will begin our analysis of Adam's case with a quote describing the narrator's struggle with the need to explain the rationing of goods during the PPR, which is the result of severe market shortages. The consequence of this rationing was that the so-called cards for the purchase of designated goods, primarily for food, but also other consumer products. The symbol of those times, in this case – cards for cigarettes, are found in modern times by Adam's daughter, in an old suitcase hidden in the attic in the narrator's house:

N: This was in the '70s, the beginning of the '80s. I remember cards as if it were today.

I: Mm

N: For food. Even now, even in the attic, erm, we were looking for something there and there was some suitcase of my late grandparents, and we found the cards. My child, ten years old at the moment, "dad, what is this?" I say: "Well kiddo, this is a food card."

I: (laughs)

N: No, I mean, for food. "But tell me! It is written cigarettes here," right? Well, she is aware that, she does, even more so 'cause I smoked before, I have not smoked for a year, she knew that my father would go to the store, bought cigarettes and had no card, he had money, right? And, and would buy. Okay, so I started there/ slowly, I explained it slowly, and okay.

Like Marian, Adam also refers to economic issues, although in his case it is not about guaranteeing security, but rather about ensuring a certain standard of living or in other words protecting his children from the difficult conditions of growing up which the narrator experienced in the past. We learn from other parts of the interview that, especially during the transformation, Adam's family had to face poverty and deprivation. This was partly related to the number of children, which resulted in not being able to send the sons to university. Adam also shares his reflection on what his children have access to and what level

of consumption he and his wife can provide them with, comparing it to the conditions prevailing during his youth:

N: The kids also don't feel that, for example, I will go somewhere and that I won't, because I don't have, erm, I have to teach them that not everything, but there is no such thing. Although, maybe one also (sighs) compensates for it. For sure, even certainly, we even talked with my wife, I say, even to the kids, right? I say – you have whatever you want. Holidays, you go wherever you like or that. During the week: we go to the swimming pool, we even go to Uniejów, a whim, we get in the car, we go. I say, at your age, I say, I didn't have such things, because I say, I would come back from school, drop my school bag, I would go to the field to collect potatoes or beetroots, right?

I: Mm

N: Yes, in the case of autumn now, well, right? I say wow, what attractions you have. I somehow did not, one had to treat himself to some attractions, I say, erm. Attractions. The attraction was simply that one rested and went on holiday for two weeks, if one earned for it a year in advance, right. Then one could go for two weeks: whether to the mountains, or to the seaside, or to Masuria, or, or/ but I say, it was such a condition at home that you would earn for it yourself, somewhere, well, then you will go, otherwise there was no other option, because the parents could not afford/ parents could not afford to treat me to a trip. Well, because the costs, this was associated with costs. But I say, there is no, no such thing.

An interesting thread in the context of the above interview may also be the question of what Adam considers “you have what you want,” which is a slogan expressing the achievement of the desired status. One may wonder if this is a trace of class distinction, or perhaps upward mobility, which Adam, as one of the farmer's six sons, ultimately experiences. Its last dimension is a significant increase in earnings resulting from the change in the form of employment. Even if we remember that this is not a situation of obtaining a higher education degree or vertical promotion (ultimately, it is difficult to compare his and his parents class position), then focusing on the possibility of satisfying the needs of children (as well as providing them with extra classes, which we will demonstrate in the next quote) can be considered one of the characteristics of the middle class. Here, Adam's narration captures the changes in the economic, social, and cultural sense. They are expressed through the compensation of deficiencies which the narrator had been facing (related to growing up in the PPR, in a large and poor family) to his children. The comparative perspective introduced into the autobiographical story allows us, on the one hand, to interpret his experience of growing up and his children's through the prism of his aspirations to achieve a stable material situation. On the other, in a much broader dimension, this comparison shows the social and cultural conditions

in which Adam's biographical experience is intertwined. Both in the sense of the reconstruction of the time of his growing up and the story of the conditions in which his children are growing up. In this way, in the biography, the narrator recreates the social processes associated also with the post-transformational reality. A confirmation of this interpretation is a quote about the issue of control over children and the changes within, which the narrator points out:

N: And even kids in the countryside, if they are there, I know they are safe, because there are grandparents there, this is a fenced farm, there is no way that they can get out onto the main street, but there is also – I have to see them, I have to know where they are.

I: Mm

N: There was no such thing. There was no such thing when I was, I mean. Parents were just/ it was just so free and easy, as we used to say

I: Mm

N: And I think/ And the second thing is even these meetings / I go to the countryside now, I pass through these so-called strategic points, as we called them – there is nobody. I don't know where it has all gone. But, as for me, it is the same at home – if it is forbidden to go outside, the weather is what it is or I do not want to go out then my daughter asks: "Dad, can I turn on the computer?"

I: Mm

N: And it is on this principle. I say, we didn't have computers.

I: (laughs)

N: There were no laptops, no tablets, no mobile phones, but people could just get together, so I say, the whole village was there. And it was from 5 to 18 years practically. Well, in secondary school we met many times, right? Actually to secondary school, it was already/ from my circles just a few people, a handful were coming. Also, probably because of the circumstances, because one was brought up, one grew up in a rural environment, it was also, not everyone went to this.

I: Mm

N: Most were going to vocational schools, popular at that time. Later this was replaced by these vocational technical schools, although it is reportedly coming back. These vocational schools are reportedly coming back. Erm, and, but I say no, there was no division.

I: Mm

N: We were one group, one such one, and at the moment I think there are already divisions (pause 2s). You can't see, you just can't see those, these youngsters, you can't see those kids like that. Somehow also everyone in their own backyard. I say,

most of them also just don't want to, either sitting in the, and through Facebook or, or messenger. Why should they go out, why should they go outside and ride a bicycle when they could just sit quietly in front of the computer, right?

In the longer fragment of the interview quoted above, the narrator shows the differences between his generation and the generation of his children. Through a comparative perspective, he reconstructs the previously mentioned social and cultural conditions of his biographical experience of growing up and then of being a parent, relating this to the experiences of his children. He starts with the most important change – increased control means security, but also provides peace in an emotional sense. In this context, it is more about Adam than his children. At the same time, perhaps without even seeing similar motives in other parents, the interlocutor notes the differences in the village itself, which, in his opinion, looks deserted when it comes to the presence of children and young people. He looks for an explanation of this situation, attributed to the perspective of modernity, in the emergence of new technologies which change the way peers contact one another, replacing direct meetings with technologically mediated conversations and games. He stresses that in his and his peers' case, being together and communicating face-to-face was a key value. At this point, we can refer to the conclusions of Mirosława Marody and claim after the researcher that:

We are dealing today with such changes in the family and patterns of bringing up children which lead to a decrease in the child's contact with the immediate social environment. This is due to both the increase of working women, the reduction in the number of children in the family and the parents' aspirations, especially in the middle and upper classes, to protect children from the undesired contact. An additional factor strengthening this tendency is the development of new technologies, which, according to many researchers, are conducive to the social isolation of the child. All this results in limiting the child's access to situations which allow them to practice, in the natural, social environment, such skills which facilitate networking and effective cooperation within wider social groups (Marody 2015: 174–175).

We would like to round up the comparative thread between the experiences of Adam's growing up and the growing up of his children by referring to a quote in which the narrator talks about the role of social media in modern times (an important element of criticism he directs against modern times) and raises the topic of the multitude of extra-curricular activities which his daughter is currently attending. We can also investigate the role of the peer group, but in a different function than it was in his case. In this view, it is rather characterized by the potential impact on the child of the narrator who could influence him to agree to set up an online account or a profile:

N: I do not know what will happen next, although I can say, she does not have a Facebook account set up yet, she has no other similar ones, whatever you call them. Erm, she doesn't ask for it. She does not have it yet, she's not at this stage, I suppose, to be interested in this Facebook, these messengers and so on.

I: Mm

N: Maybe there is no such interest in school yet. I suppose that if a girlfriend had it, or a male friend or something, it would be: "I want it, dad, set it up." There is no such thing. And, and during the school term, it is more or less from half an hour to an hour, but it is two or three times a week, there is no way for more, for, for, because there are lessons, there are additional classes, well, there are also many lessons, well. You also have to sit down, and you just have to work on your lessons.

I: Well, and these extra classes, what is it?

N: I mean, she attends additional English and-and-and once a week the Youth Club/ a Culture Center operates here in W., there is an art and music section, it depends, what is offered, for an hour, and English additionally, once a week.

Summing up the analysis of Adam's case, one analytically significant issue should be noted. The biographical experience of growing up and the dual perspective imposed by Adam on that time in his biography through references to his children's experiences is related to the narrator's undertaking of biographical work. The experience of poverty in childhood, and then difficulties in getting a job and finding oneself in the chosen occupation in the following stages of his biographical adulthood impressed Adam's biography with trajectory markers. Therefore, we assume that through the comparative perspective introduced by the narrator, he tries to reconstruct his difficult experiences in a positive way. In this way, by reflecting on his childhood and the experience of being a father, he shows the potentials and mechanisms of development of his biographical identity. What is important in biographical work is "the insight that one's own identity is something unique with its own overall *Gestalt*, which matters and is essentially valuable and worthwhile to develop" (Schütze 2008a: 160). Moreover, "biographical work consists of narrative recollection; reflection of symbolic, 'deeper' meanings revealing self historical *Gestalts* of life" (Schütze 2008a: 160).

Being aware of our analytical assumptions made in this chapter, and thus not undertaking the analysis of the entire life histories of our narrators, we try to point to some important analytical figures for the organization of their autobiographical stories, whose impact resonates in the quoted fragments of their biographies. That is why in the case of Adam, we consider it extremely important to show a broader context for the comparative perspective he introduces, which we read in relation to the entirety of his autobiographical story. It can, therefore, be concluded that by placing his own biographical experiences in

the optics of his children's experiences, Adam attempts a reconciliation with his own biography. He entwines it not only with the socio-historical context of the times which this biographical experience belongs to, but also works through the difficulty of his past biographical experiences by a reflective assessment of his and his children's possibilities. In this way, the narrator discovers threads important for the formation of his current beliefs and attitudes and verifies his positive experience of being a father.

What is also important, as in the other histories recalled in the text, the biographical experience of the yard appears in Adam's spontaneous narration. It is woven into the communication scheme of description and thus, through the story about the experience of the yard constructed in such a way, the narrator focuses on explaining the social framework in which his biography is entangled. Thanks to this, in Adam's autobiographical account we can see a broader macro-structural perspective of the social changes which have taken place in Poland. Additionally, this narration, through the contrast set introduced by the narrator and the description of his biographical experience of the yard, allowed us to interpret the importance of the yard story for the formation of his current biographical identity.

Compared to Marian, in the interview with Adam the role of the yard is, however, much more limited and plays, as we have said, a contextual role in the thread of comparing the narrator's situation with his children's. The dominant value in Adam's account is a sense of community and being together, which Adam juxtaposes with the much more isolated and controlled childhood of his children. In this way, similarly to Marian's case, we can see the functioning of the idea of *communitas* (Turner 2005, 2010), but this thread is much more limited than in Marian's narration. However, we can notice some similarities between the Silesian neighborhood and a village from central Poland. In both cases, the emerging peer group is of a collective nature. It brings people together despite the presence of various social distinctions. As in the case of Marian, one can see the effort which the interlocutor makes to convince the researcher about the lack of divisions among families living next to each other, which he had experienced in his youth. Nevertheless, in the case of Adam's account, the introduced contrast set, which converges his biographical experience of childhood, growing up and being a father, plays a much more significant role, also in relation to the theme of the yard community.

Another issue worth considering is the influence of class lifestyles (Gdula, Sadura 2012) and social upward mobility, which impact Adam in this context. It would not be great mobility in the structural sense, but clear in the context of consumption. Moreover, it would also be a sign of social change in consumption related to the education of his children, which should be treated as one of the derivatives of the transformation. In this case, it would be the privatization

of healthcare¹⁵, thanks to which Adam can significantly increase his income without vertical promotion understood here as a promotion to a higher position in the hospital in which he works. Finally, it is also worth adding that in his narration Adam is rooted in *milieu* (Piotrowski 2016). This means that by reporting subsequent stages of his life he places these experiences into the perspective of the local community in which he grew up and in which he is still functioning. In other words, the local context is, as we could see in the cited fragments of Adam's autobiographical account, an important reference point organizing his biographical experience of everyday life in the village and then in a small town in central Poland.

Izabela's case

Izabela was born in 1979 in a small town in northeast Poland. The narrator's father was in the military, which had an impact on the interlocutor's biographical experience, although it should be emphasized that in this analysis we do not focus on the thread of her father's involvement in the activities of the PPR system. The layer of Izabela's narration which is important for our considerations is rather the issue of her growing up in the space of military estates. In her childhood, the narrator (together with her parents and younger sister) changed her place of residence several times due to the specificity of her father's profession. Living in a military unit, even though it meant staying in a kind of closed space, consisting of families of similar status and inhabited by soldiers, in Izabela's story is mainly related in connection with everyday life entwined with the experience of the community. The theme of the yard functioning within this community is an important resource of sense in the biographical memory of the interlocutor. Importantly, due to frequent moving house, Izabela's parents did not have their own flat or house for a long time, which is why the grandparents played a significant role in the narrator's biographical experience. For a long time, their home was an anchor place for Izabela's family, being also a permanent point in her biographical story. To outline the narrator's biographical portrait, it is important to add that she is currently living in one of the cities in northern Poland. Professionally, she is performing academic and artistic work.

Concerning the issues which are of our interest in this chapter, the parts of the interview of key importance seem to be those in which Izabela relates the time of her childhood spent in one of the small towns on the Polish coast. Referring to this place, she evokes the yard community in her narration. This account is similar to Adam's, who spoke about the space of the entire village

¹⁵ See Chapter XI by Jacek Burski.

as an area where he and his peers would spend time and have fun. Izabela also does not focus on merely reconstructing her biographical experience of growing up in a military settlement, but describes and shows more broadly her functioning in a small town.

Before proceeding to the description of specific fragments of Izabela's autobiographical account with reference to her experience of the yard, we would like to point out several features and threads of the interview important for setting the narrator's life episodes in a broader perspective. An important role in this narration is played by references to mass culture – mostly, the stories of the first contact with satellite TV and music channels in the early 1990s. These fragments of the interview show the functioning of globalization mechanisms, understood by us as the emergence and access to the content dominant in popular culture at that time. In this context, we observe the similarity between the experiences of Izabela and Marian, for whom Western music (especially rock music) played an important role in the process of socialization and when bonding with peers. In a sense, it has also become one of the important resources for the formation of the interlocutor's identity. In the case of Izabela, it is rather the sheer fascination with the possibility of following a new content that plays a significant role, which the narrator comments on in her biography. Moreover, as in Marian's case, an important point in Izabela's narration is also the issue of consumption and the appearance of goods in her biographical experience, to which she previously had no direct access. The narrator relates this time of her biography as follows:

N: Although I remember, for example, since we are talking about the transformation of that period, the first cable TV when cable TV appeared. Or when the Kukuruku wafers appeared, I remember. And I remember how a Kukuruku wafer was a great, erm, always such a special day when you bought it. There were also such stickers inside, which were collected in a special, special notebook. I remember the first Barbie doll that was given to us by my aunt's boyfriend, who used to go abroad. I remember tracksuits from the GDR, well, let's say some of the first manifestations. But, it was nothing compared to the first time we got connected to cable TV.

I: Mm

N: And German programs appeared. Jesus, how we would/ it was terribly funny when you now, that is, terribly strange when looked at in retrospect. But, it was so that we would sit with the whole family and stare blankly at the TV screen. They spoke German, but it didn't bother us, because what was happening on this screen was amazing. I mean, I don't know, some colorful game shows, some unbelievable prizes for us, some trips abroad, I don't know. Until now, I remember what some of the game shows were called. Then, of course, we got bored after some time. But, this first craze was amazing. And of course, I remember MTV, these were

the times of MTV when, when everybody was watching. But, it was still the good MTV, it was British, classic, which at that time on cable TV, erm, could be watched on cable TV.

The reconstruction of the consumer experience of the transformation made by Izabela brings associations connected with the concept of generation, though not in the classical sociological sense. However, we can use less sharp generational references (characteristic of other social sciences, for example, anthropology or media sciences), focusing, *inter alia*, on the consumption of cultural texts. Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak in one of her texts refers to Don Tapscott's reflection on the generational impact of a particular medium:

That's why the new media researcher Don Tapscott distinguishes generations according to the main medium they use. In America, for the first post-war generation (baby boomers) which includes people born in 1946–1964, the invention forming their perception of the world was television. Generation X (born in 1965–1976 in the USA, in the case of Poland it would be 1970–1980) is of multimedia character, but it does not give primacy to any of the media. In turn, generation Y (born in 1977–1997, in Poland – after 1980) is, in other words, the generation of networks, who works, has fun, and loves on the Internet (Nowicka 2012).

Bearing in mind the limitations associated with applying concepts and definitions from other social contexts, it may be interesting to use the logic of the most important medium as proposed in the quotation. In the context of the interview with Izabela and in a certain opposition to Nowicka-Franczak's proposal, television would be a characteristic medium for people growing up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially at the time when commercial channels appeared, whether as part of the so-called satellite TV, digital TV, or later cable TV.

The quoted passage shows that the biographical experience of that time reconstructed by Izabela is full of symbolic references. At this point, we would like to refer to the concept of biographical vectors already mentioned in the first chapter (Piotrowski 2016: 240), understood as “local interpretative attitudes used for presenting episodes or stages of experience.” Applying this concept to the analysis of biographical experiences of World War II has resulted, *inter alia*, in the elaboration of analytical categories of “rooting in history” and “rooting in *milieu*.” The first one means presenting and interpreting one's own experiences in relation to “social and historical macro-processes” – the latter one, as we have shown in the example of the interview with Adam, refers to relating one's biography on a “microscale of the direct living environment” (Piotrowski 2016: 240–241). Using the category of “rooting,” we would like to propose

the concept of “rooting in popular culture” characteristic of the interview with Izabela, but whose traces also appear in other narrations collected in the corpus (including Marian’s presented in this chapter). It is understood by us as referring in the biographical narration to the phenomena of popular culture and making one’s biographical experience meaningful through such references. In the case of Izabela’s biography, we are specifically talking about rooting in consumer culture understood as the incorporation of external (in this case foreign) patterns or the creation of new consumption models which were previously unavailable. These patterns are related by the narrator as designates of change, and we treat their creation as one of the characteristics of the transformation process we are putting under scrutiny.

The broad introduction above, which goes beyond merely the reconstruction of the yard category in Izabela’s narration, also serves to indicate how she relates her biographical experience of the time of transformation. Due to the specificity of the analysis undertaken in this chapter, we are not trying to reconstruct the entire history of Izabela’s life. Rather, we remain at the level of her biographical experience of childhood and adolescence and notice that from the biographical perspective of ‘now’ her autobiographical account of that time is built around references to popular culture and based on reporting new consumption patterns. As for the theme of the yard community, in the case of Izabela’s narration, it emerges in her account of growing up in the aforementioned small coastal town. The narrator describes this time of her biographical experience embedded in the perspective of the turn of the 1980s and 1990s as follows:

N: U. (seaside town) it was an amazing place. That is cursed by adults, adored by children. Why was it at that time/ now it is probably a very developed tourist town, I think that it is quite alive in the summer. Erm, however, at that time it was really somewhere between nowhere and goodbye. There was a military unit, sea on one side. On the other side there was a lake. And we lived on a narrow isthmus surrounded by forests. And in addition, small private businesses connected to holidaymakers’ accommodations. And there was nothing more there. But, it was an amazing paradise. We really had, erm, to the sea from our blocks, there were dunes across the street, behind the dunes was the beach.

I: Wow (smiling)

N: We lived like that.

In a later part of the interview, the narrator develops a description of the “paradise” in which she again discusses the issue of the felt and experienced everyday life, in the sense of peer contacts and between military families living side by side. Izabela’s narration is filled with a deep sense of neighborly

community (again we can see the trace of *communitas* here), or at least such a feeling resonates in Izabela's biographical memories of that period.

N: But really a very, very nice place for childhood. We all/ also lived in a place consisting of eight blocks, each block had one staircase, one floor, four flats in one building, so thirty-two families. And this was like, almost everyone was military. And it was such a closed enclave. And the whole life went on inside in the yard between the blocks. I remember such, erm, [...] such pictures that the doors to really all the houses are open. The kids running between everyone, all the flats, and every neighbor, every neighbor is an aunt, an uncle. It doesn't matter who is having dinner now. I don't know, you're playing at someone's, they're eating dinner, they will give you dinner. It really was amazing. Our, I remember in the summer, our fathers always played volleyball in the middle, in the middle of the yard. And mommies at that time would take out stools, and on these stools – coffee. And they watched their husbands and sons playing volleyball. Erm, it is quite gendered, but it was like that. The division of roles was clear, and we were just running around on our own.

In the quote above, it is also worth noting the reconstruction of the parents' community – similar to the one found in the first interview with Marian. Despite the idyllic image, the narration also reveals the mundanity of everyday life in “paradise.” This time you can see similarities to Adam's story, who efficiently combined the description of the rural yard with the reconstruction of living conditions and educational patterns. In the case of Izabela, it turns out that the isolation dictated by her father's professional career detached the family from their grandparents, mentioned elsewhere in the interview as an important support for the narrator's parents at a time when her father was on duty closer to their home. This, in turn, was associated with an increase in Izabela's responsibilities and her sisters. In addition, for the interlocutor, the lack of the physical presence of the grandparents on a daily basis resulted in the necessity of developing some independence. The parents, who were busy working at that time, could not always devote time to Izabela and control, among other things, the number of duties imposed on her. The narrator comments on this experience in the following fragment of her autobiographical story:

N: So I was this proverbial child with a key around her neck, that's a fact. No, erm/ actually, from the beginning of elementary school which I attended in the nearby town and you had to take a bus, actually only the first time my mother took me at the beginning, showed me the way. And then you had to manage, but I also do not see, not that I complain, nothing like that, no. On the contrary, I was very proud that I would go to school by myself. Anyway, I think there was no other solution since my mother and father worked in the morning. Also, my mother often left earlier than we did to school, so you had to close the house yourself, go alone,

come back and do the shopping for dinner on the way, because it was always so, it was so normal actually. Then after returning drop the backpack

I: (laughs)

N: in the hallway and out to the yard. And always, and always I was such a very absent-minded child who [...] lost everything. And these keys, either I did not close the door to the house, or I lost gloves, or umbrellas, PE outfits, or the shoe bag. There was always something.

I: (laughs)

N: I left my backpack on the bus a few times. And, I don't know, but I really have very good memories of that.

The above quote allows us – as in the case of the fragments of interviews with Marian and Adam cited above – to capture the account of the freedom associated with the childhood of our narrators. The experience of being a “child with a key around the neck” which Izabela mentions also appeared in many other narrations collected in our project. This is an important thread which differentiates our interlocutors' past experiences and their accounts of the present times. It could be assumed at this point that in the post-transformational reality, the perception of this phenomenon, common for our interlocutors' adolescence, is positive, and is now associated more with the categories of a lack of security and proper care on the part of parents rather than a certain social norm.

Later in her account, Izabela, like Marian, tries to recreate a certain community ideal, which she remembers from her childhood. The narrator refers here to the phenomenon of being “a child from the blocks”:

N: I mentioned that I had moved house, but I wanted to say that I am I suppose, deep down, I am a child from the blocks, I have to state it. Although, I have not always lived in such typical blocks of flats, but, but most of the time I think a lot, I feel good in such big human clusters. And I could never have a house in the countryside, or even live separately in the city without a neighbor on the other side of the wall. Now I know it and I also value a lot large human groups which are socially mixed. I like it when there is a big variety, when it's not uniform, that's for sure.

For Izabela, the phenomenon of community which she had experienced while growing up turned out to be formative for her biographical experiences in the perspective of the present. In this fragment of the narrator's biography, therefore, one can see a pattern of argumentation, which next to the already mentioned schemes: the description and narrative scheme is, as we have already mentioned, one of the “elementary communicative schemes of

representing life and world” (Schütze 2008a: 173). The argumentation scheme “searches for explicates and discusses the reasons for decisions between alternative projects of action one was planning or one is presently planning for the management of future developments” (Schütze 2008a: 173). One can, therefore, point out after Fritz Schütze (2008a: 173) that

autobiographical narration is interspersed with subdominant activities of the scheme of argumentation in order to answer questions such as: why certain life historical events would have happened at all and why they would be that important in terms of biographical unfolding, why social frames were established and why they exerted certain social forces on the flow of events and on biographical process structures and what should be considerations and reasons for future biographical developments.

In the quoted fragment of the interview with Izabela, her reference to the topic of being a “child from the blocks” and the phenomenon of living in the neighborly community is also accompanied by a reference to the “alternative projects” of her current (time of interview) everyday life. The narrator emphasizes that the biographical experience of living close to her neighbors means that she could not function in her biographical present in a different reality. In addition, the term “child from the blocks” recalled by Izabela is also an important feature of her biographical identity and a certain link between her experience of the transformational and post-transformational reality.

The last thread, which we consider important for the analysis of the interview with Izabela and related to the study of the category of the yard, relates to discussing the patterns of raising children in a comparative perspective between the biographical experience of being a child and the biographical experience of being a parent. Insofar as Adam relied on his own experiences of being a father when commenting on these issues and comparing the conditions in which his children function with the ones he had been growing up in, the childless Izabela makes such comparison by recalling the perspective of the biographical experiences of her loved ones. To illustrate the topic in question, we would like to quote the following fragment of the narrator’s biography:

N: Just one more reflection, because I don’t have children, but I’ve recently talked to someone who has, with my girlfriend, how it is possible just like that, I just wondered that we, our generation, mostly all children with the house keys on our necks and just allowed to run free, which does not mean that we were from some pathological families, just then there was such a model. That they bring up, that our generation now brings up so, it seems to me a less independent generation of children, who are given much, much more attention. Which is great on the one hand, because we, for example, in my earliest childhood, I told you my father was not there. He was flying around somewhere. However, and it seems to me

that in those houses that I knew, the father was somewhere on the side, but now all the children, now there is more participation of fathers in raising children, which is great generally speaking, I believe. But, on the other hand, when you look out the window, kids don't really see a single child in the yard outdoors. Apart from the small children who are all the time accompanied by moms, yes. So I was wondering how much the model has changed. Because I was wondering, I don't know, we mentioned the proverbial carpet hangers. A friend of mine who is from my year said that he would never let his child go to the carpet beater. I say: why? You yourself would also hang around on the carpet hanger. Because he will break a bone. I say: Well, I'm not sure, back then, everyone would sit on the carpet hanger.

I: And nobody broke anything.

N: They did break, they did, but let's not exaggerate. There was always someone who'd fall down somewhere and break an arm, but I don't know, I don't know. Of course, this is probably a complex problem and so on. As I say, I don't have children, so I don't know certain things. But, when I see that indeed our generation, such very independent kids, suddenly brings up such a limitedly independent generation.

I: Yes, it's such a transition /

N: Yes, and it is a change within one generation, this is such, I don't know. When I recall this very early childhood, for example in this U. (name of a seaside town), where you never really sat at home. I know that this is all so, that these are obvious things, that there was no Internet, et cetera and so on, but nevertheless. I don't really know, in my neighborhood of blocks, now in P. (name of the city in the north of Poland), there are very few children who play in the yard. Except the really youngest ones, under the supervision, under the supervision of parents. But, there aren't such older ones there, about 10 years old or more, really. Then, of course, there is this middle school group that hangs out in the staircases or around the shop area. But, this is a different story. And these children as if in this age in-between are not there, disappeared somewhere, I suppose.

In this elaborate quote, one can see a few threads that we would like to draw attention to. First of all, the key characteristic of Izabela's childhood – just like in the cases discussed earlier – was spending time outside the home, being in a peer group and beyond direct parental control. At present, the narrator notices and confirms by pointing to her friends' biographical experience that from a certain stage of their growing up children are spending most of their time at home. The justification for such patterns reconstructed here is primarily the issue of security. However, in the interview with Adam analyzed earlier, we could see that these could also be issues related to planning time after school and organizing extra-curricular activities for the children. Secondly, Izabela sees another dimension of the change related to the greater participation

of the fathers in raising children. On the one hand, the narrator refers to her own childhood experiences in which her father's role in upbringing was marginalized due to his professional career. On the other, she also raises the topic of independence, attributing her generation with greater resourcefulness and autonomy.

Summing up, in Izabela's narration the thread of the yard community is the contextual theme in her entire biography. It also plays an important exemplifying role – it allows the narrator to outline the perspective of social change, which in her account is not related to economic or political issues. However, it is of great importance because of the consequences for social life. Izabela's reflection in the interview does not go that far. In her narration, nonetheless, one can find several issues important for our analysis, such as first, the story of freedom and control in the biographical experience of growing up. Secondly, the experience of the neighborhood community, which has also influenced the current biographical choices of the narrator. Thirdly, an important thread is also the issue of comparisons between the experience of Izabela's adolescence and the present times. An additional element organizing the experience of transformation in Izabela's autobiographical story is her reconstruction of the atmosphere of that time by showing some new, emerging material goods and the phenomena related to consumer culture.

Conclusions

The considerations undertaken in this text, on the one hand, refer to a fairly obvious sphere of the social change related to the ongoing process of modernization, affecting the experience of everyday life. Being aware of this certain obviousness of the presented problems, we wanted to reconstruct the ways of problematizing the broader social change (transformation) and refer to those threads that play an important role in the process of making these experiences meaningful throughout the course of one's life, based on the biographical experiences of our narrators. Moreover, the biographical experience of the yard appeared in the interviews in the spontaneous narrative phase and thus functioned within three communication schemes: narration, description and argumentation (Schütze 2008a). This means, as we tried to show in the analysis above, that by referring to the story of the yard, our narrators, on the one hand, presented the social framework of their biographical experience, reproducing the course of social and historical events (Schütze 2008a: 173). While on the other, the biographical experience of the yard in childhood and adolescence constituted an important part of their autobiographical accounts and influenced their adult choices. In this perspective, it has become an important biographical resource, recalled from the perspective of their biographical "now."

In the introduction to our analyses, we also emphasized that the biographical experience of the yard, to which our narrators assigned the meaning of a symbolic biographical resource, plays the role of a metaphor. It captures this space of biographical experiences of interlocutors, which combines both the experience of community, peer relationships, being beyond adults' reach, and the experience of growing up. This is also an important theme illustrating the change in the socio-spatial landscape. Based on the analyzed narrations and our own observations, we can conclude that in both urban and rural space, yards are often no longer a permanent element. Additionally, our interlocutors point to the problem of the disappearance of this common space in relation to the changes of the feeling of community, which is the foundation of the biographical experience of the yard.

In our reflections, we have presented three examples of the description of the biographical resource we are interested in, focusing on the different dimensions of the biographical experience of the yard and the impact of this experience on the entire biography of our narrators. In other words, we referred to the biographical theme of the yard community experience, its reconstruction performed by the narrators in their autobiographical stories and its significance for the development of their biographies. We also looked at the function which the references to the biographical resource of the yard experience played in those biographies. In the case of Marian's narration, the yard was one of the main analytical categories important for the interpretation of his entire biography. The theme of the yard community appears in Marian's main narration and is one of the dominant frames around which the interlocutor builds a picture of his childhood and adolescence. The yard community in his case is primarily an extension of the neighborly community created by the residents of the tenement houses and the block in which Marian's family lived. An interesting thread here is the issues of the interdependence of security and control. Marian reconstructs the first theme through references to the social and economic system of the PPR, in which social inequalities were small. In this way, the social distance which the interlocutor noticed and recalled in the narration was not dysfunctional. Therefore, it was possible for families of different socioeconomic profiles to function together in one space (Marian's family was privileged in this context, which could, of course, affect the way the interlocutor presented this situation). In turn, the issue of control was reconstructed by Marian by pointing to its lack or by referring to his relationship with peers, which was focused on avoiding it. Importantly, such behavioral models were, in his opinion, possible because of the approach towards security issues, which parents demonstrated in those times.

Additionally, Marian's yard community is of an ideal type and is a model for him in the search for subsequent groups which the interlocutor belonged to, and which he refers to while reconstructing his biography. Starting from

secondary school, through his involvement in the student opposition, the hippie subculture to the creation of one of the centers operating within the framework of alternative education, the narrator has always sought poorly structured, informal (or at least based on informal contacts) communities, anti-systemic in a way. Even the army, to which he was sent for a few months at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, was a place where he actively fought with the hierarchy and orders. The experience of the yard *communitas* was, therefore, a role model for Marian, which he tried to recreate to a lesser (oppositional activity) or greater (running an educational center) extent. As we know, *communitas* (sometimes referred to as an anti-structure) in itself has a structure-forming potential. However, in the moments of too strict rules, clear hierarchies, closing or limiting common spaces, Marian simply left subsequent environments (as it was the case in the described student strike situation).

In Adam's case, the yard community is much less essential in view of the entire interview. The central frame of his main biographical narration is his struggles with professional work and curbing the trajectory potentials associated with entering the world of a psychiatric hospital. However, the theme of the yard is activated in important passages regarding the comparisons between Adam's adolescence and the conditions in which his children are growing up. When we compare Adam's considerations with the narration of Izabela, we will find some similarities related to the functioning of the yard theme as a reference frame for comparisons, which we have treated as one of the dimensions of reflection on social change, which is important for this book. In other words, in the analyzed narrations, transformation is contextualized through the changes in the yard community, understood here primarily as a bond with the peer group. The interlocutors no longer see this among their children (Adam) or in their surroundings (Izabela).

Additionally, the analysis of Izabela's autobiographical story is also of important research value. Considering her narration, we have selected a new biographical vector – “rooting in popular culture,” which, next to “rooting in history” and “rooting in *milieu*” (Piotrowski 2016) proposed by the research team of the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź in the early 1990s,¹⁶ we consider significant for the analyses of autobiographical accounts. In our opinion, “rooting in popular culture” is characteristic of those interviews in which the narrators make the different stages of their life history meaningful by referring to culture – here we mean the symbolic culture, popular culture, and consumer culture. In the pool of the 90 interviews collected in our

¹⁶ These vectors were indicated based on the analysis of the research material collected in the research project on the war biographies of Poles. See more in the introduction to Part II of this book written by Joanna Wygnańska.

project, in some cases, we have noticed the use of the thread of participation in culture. This served the purpose, *inter alia*, of the argumentation of our narrators' biographical identity-forming process. Referring to the classic concepts of "rooting" cited above, the rooting in culture would be indirect – it would be somewhat between rooting in macro processes (important historical events) and the microcosm of the local *milieu*. In our opinion, linking the transformation period with the participation in and consumption of the contemporary then elements of mass culture (starting from television, films through food products, clothes, etc.) is not without significance. Perhaps this is a phenomenon entwined with the mass adaptation to capitalist forms of consumption coming from the West, which virtually the entire Polish society at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s took part in.

Therefore, we can summarize that in the analyzed narrations, the disappearance of the yard, as a community built on the basis of direct, physical contact, from the field of perception of our interlocutors would be the dimension of change. In their reconstructions, the life of the yard was less controlled than modern children's activities. An important value cited in narrations was the small social distance which the narrators attributed to the yard community. Of course, it was not homogeneous, and economic or cultural differences were still visible to the interlocutors. However, they did not have a destructive effect on the bonds between adults and children, and above all on the peer bonds recalled in the analyzed narrations. However, it is worth remembering that at least in Marian's case, the fact that the narrator himself came from a family with a higher social status than the rest of his peers could have played an important role, which, however, did not ultimately result in the development of a sense of social inequality between the narrator and his friends.

Since, as we have said, a certain type of community is disappearing, it seems reasonable to ask what appears in its place? If we were to provide an answer based on the cited narrations, it seems that what appears instead is conscious and intentional parental practice shaping the activity of children in the so-called free time. This can be interpreted as one of the consequences of changing the cultural pattern of raising a child, who, relating to neoliberal rhetoric, should be equipped with the right resources from an early age to manage whether within educational institutions or later on as adults on the labor market. At this point, it is worth referring to the considerations of Philippe Ariès (2010), who notes that childhood as an experience is constantly subject to the processes of construction and reconstruction, it is dependent on the wider social, cultural, economic, and technological changes. He, therefore, understands childhood as a semantically changing process, the meaning of which depends on the cultural and historical context. In the modern optics, the child becomes for the parents a central reference point, a project and an investment. Granting

children with the so-called better start in life is therefore associated with the aforementioned multitude of extra-curricular activities and the provision of the most comprehensive education of one's offspring. The modern times are also characterized by a departure from the community of the world of children and adults, due to the deepening processes of parents' professional development on the one hand, and the most complex offer of education for children on the other. Additionally, children's play areas are nowadays often lonely islands, fenced off from the outside world. The yard in the sense of a community of adults and children, recalled in the narrations of our interlocutors, which is an open and vibrant space, disappears in favor of a space which is safe, but strongly dependent on adult control.

In a broader context, we can also observe how the public institutions characteristic of the PPR get transformed after 1989 (state-funded holiday camps or active scout movements, which had pre-war roots, but after 1945 was also an ideological support for the system)¹⁷ and now coexist with the offer of the free market. In the latter case, the aforementioned phenomenon of the multitude of additional classes offered to children and young people today plays a significant role.

The marketization mechanisms are clearly seen in the juxtaposition of Marian and Adam's narrations. The first one recalls, as something natural, his engagement while growing up through, among others, annual summer camps or scout activities, which at that time were assigned to the role of state institutions. This sphere is also currently dependent on the individual activities of parents, organizing and paying for the activities of their children. This is what mostly Adam talks about: "For sure, even certainly, we even talked with my wife, I say, even to the kids, right? I say – you have whatever you want. Holidays, you go wherever you like or that." Adam refers here to the situation of parents participating in the organization of their children's free time and making this process dependent on economic and social capital.

The dimension of social change we have shown is also related to the contemporary phenomenon of the culture of individualism and individual society. Małgorzata Jacyno (2007: 12) notes that:

The decisive meaning for the formation of the modern order was "conjuring up" by the authorities a new object which became the subject of its influence and control. Changing people by institutions or by other people is time consuming, difficult, and

¹⁷ The year 1989 is also an important moment in the history of Polish Scouting. The thus-far monopoly of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association is broken after the creation of the second nationwide scouting organization of the Scouting Association of the Republic. Currently, there are four nationwide and over a dozen local scout organizations.

expensive. The modern power transfers the related costs and time onto individuals who perceive themselves as objects of possible influence. The new discipline of *psyche-ology* allows an individual to rationalize the efforts *to create oneself*.

In this perspective, individuals are focused on “self-management” and “self-struggle” (Jacyno 2007: 13), and the modern power “has begun to *produce* opportunities, chances, perspectives, and outlooks for a good life” (Jacyno 2007: 40). This way, a feature of an individualized society is experiencing the world as a structure of possibilities and perceiving one’s life in terms of a project, and “the belief in the possibility and necessity of creating oneself is a constitutive experience of the culture of individualism” (Jacyno 2007: 52). Therefore, the above-mentioned treatment of a child as an investment, as a central reference point is the result of neoliberal rhetoric, which forces an individual into the compulsion of constant, individual work on self-development, in an educational and professional sense (e.g., Czyżewski 2009, Waniek 2016, Waniek 2019 and Chapter IX in this book, Wygnańska 2019 and Chapter VIII in this book). The effect of this individualism is a clear disappearance of the peer bonds recalled by our narrators, being also part of the disappearing space of the yard, in favor of the time spent on extracurricular activities or in front of a computer screen. On the other hand, the experience of individualism can also generate biographical costs associated with, for example, difficulties encountered in the “self-management” process. The purpose of our reflection is not, however, a broader analysis of the problem of an individualized society. At the end of our analysis, we only wish to note that, to some extent, the dimension of change related to modernization, the change in the logic of power and the social landscape, as problematized by our narrators, is also part of the discussion on the culture of individualism.

It should be added as well what role this text could play regarding existing states of knowledge? In the introduction we have listed different approaches focusing on the topic of socialization, upbringing, anthropology of youth, and ethnographic studies devoted to the yard itself. We would like to underline that the results of our analysis place this article in a different perspective. The yard here is not explored as a unique and autonomous topic. We are not interested in reconstruction of every aspect of yard memories that could be found in collected interviews. While using this topic in analytical procedures, we are trying to show how it influences the biographical experience of individuals. In that regard, we are focused on broadening the knowledge of building a narrative about social change – related to transformation, as in the case of Adam and Isabella, and sometimes beyond, as in Marian’s interview.

This chapter, devoted to showing the biographical resource of the yard and the changes related to this thread, is also intended to bring the reader

closer to this dimension of social change, which is not necessarily its central frame. The importance of this topic, however, lies in the sense it has for understanding the biographical processes which translate into the experience of individuals. In the three narrations analyzed above, the yard plays a different role as a reference frame: from being one of the key resources for the formation of a biographical identity as in the case of Marian, the argumentation of her biographical decisions as in the case of Izabela, to the context function for the main topics of biography, as we could see in the case of Adam's story. However, in all three analyzed autobiographical accounts, by using the indicated thread intentionally or not, the interlocutors reconstruct the broader background of their biographical experience of the transformation time in Poland.

Kaja Kaźmierska

CHAPTER XVI

(RE)CREATING BONDS IN THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – A CONTRASTIVE COMPARISON OF TWO LIFE STRATEGIES

Introductory remarks

As Anselm Strauss observes, every reflection on life is a symbolic ordering of events. The meaning of life experiences depends on the interpretations we give our past activities. If the interpretations used are reliable, if we trust our “terminology,” then the various events and motives which we followed in the biography become one common meaning and allow us to perceive life as a whole. “It is as if you were talking about your life epoch by epoch assigning meaning to each of them through the final product. The subjective sense of continuity is expressed not so much in the description of the amount and degree of the changes in the behavior but, in a grid of terms by which otherwise mutually exclusive events can be combined with each other” (Strauss 1959: 146).

I begin this chapter by citing Strauss’s perspective regarding the process of shaping identity supported by constant biographical work on one’s own life. As the quote indicates, this is a universal phenomenon, independent of place and time, and at the same time strongly embedded in the cultural context. Striving to organize one’s own biography in a symbolic sense so that, at least from the perspective of the individual, it creates a fairly coherent whole is both a psychological and a social need. It is difficult to decide today to what extent the culturally shaped patterns of reflection about the world (e.g., expressed in historicity through combining the past, present, and future in both individual and collective dimensions) are an expression of cultural coercion and to what extent they express the biographical pressures, grounded in a sense of the need for continuity and personal integrity. Regardless of the sources (this is not crucial here), it should be noted that in the narratives collected in this project (as well as in many other studies), their authors struggle to a greater or lesser degree with the task of a coherent look at their biography.

In this chapter, I will try to analyze this issue considering the process of building social bonds and embedding biographical experiences in a specific *milieu*. I refer here to the distinction made between enrooting a biography in the *milieu* and in history, where the first means “placing one’s own biographical and interbiographic processes (e.g., family) in the context of the local micro-environment” (Czyżewski 2016: 74).

While in relation to that project, it primarily concerned a more universal or a more local biographical perspective triggering the process of interpretation of biographical experiences,¹ in the case of the collected narratives, we can pose the question about the role, strength, and significance of the *milieu* in the biographies of individuals, recognizing that it has become a space for building social bonds and relations. In other words, we can ask if and how social ties are important to the narrators. This question is posed within the framework of the modern diagnosis of an individualized society, experiencing a crisis of bonds, their fragility, especially concerning interpersonal relations. The impermanence of relationships, including marriages, is more and more often seen as a social problem – the experience of loneliness. It can be contrasted with the creation of virtual communities or with focusing attention and action on global problems (e.g., the most modern ecological protests organized by young people). Such references will not be considered here, however, because they are missing in the collected material. The narrators, when talking about their lives, most often referred to the bonds embedded in their biographical experience relating to the interpersonal dimension and possibly the *milieu*, and not to the global or virtual dimension.

My intention is not to present a collective characteristic of the otherwise rich material, but to juxtapose, based on the analysis of two contrasting cases, two different ways of building relations with the *milieu*. It can be attributed, although somewhat schematically, to two types of society: modern (or rather semi-traditional) and postmodern – characteristic for the contemporary post-transformation modernization processes. I will try to show this in relation to two cases – Róża representing the decade of the 1970s and Marta of the 1980s.

The case of Róża

Róża – As I often say, you can take advantage of someone’s advice, someone’s skills and vice versa. This, too, gave me a lot, because if one was so closed, I say, otherwise, it is harder on one’s own.

¹ Since it concerned specific experiences, as related to the time of war, they had to be associated with the need to face the Other, for example, to create specific stereotypes or prejudices in the perspective of these two frameworks of interpreting the biography.

Róža's narration has already been the subject of my interest in Chapter II, where the main focus was on analyzing her situation on the labor market in the context of transformational changes. Thus, I will recall only the most important elements of her biography. Róža was born in 1975 in a small rural commune (about 6,000 inhabitants) in eastern Poland. The values which build and structure her biography are: first of all, work and activities undertaken in connection with it, included in the life of the local community within which Róža operates every day. Secondly, the family, a three-generation family home (her mother, she and her husband, four children, including the eldest daughter together with her husband and son – Róža's grandson). Thirdly, faith – Róža strongly emphasizes her religiousness at various times during the interview.

The narrator was an only child, partly raised by her grandmother due to the professional activity of both parents. Her father was a farmer and her mother worked at a post office. Róža's grandmother was, to her, a very important significant Other.² After her death in 1991 (Róža was 16 at the time), family ties were limited to the mother-father relationship. In this context, the narrator mentions her dreams of having a large family in the future. Meanwhile, she tried to compensate for the lack of siblings by relationships with many peers so that she would never feel lonely. Therefore, to some extent, paradoxically (or only contrary to the accepted stereotypes), the experience of being an only child and life in a literally nuclear family did not lead to self-concentration, quite the opposite, it strengthened Róža's desire to build relationships and social bonds.

My problem in my school years was that I was an only child. I had always, always envied my neighbors, friends, classmates, that they had brothers or sisters. They had somebody to come back to, unfortunately, I was all by myself, alone. But, I wasn't a typical only child, who was just an egoist. I was simply always inviting lots of friends, I was incredibly open. And my home was always vibrant, although they weren't my brothers or sisters, but my acquaintances, my friends.

This motive of building bonds and creating an environment – a *milieu* becomes one of the most important narrative threads. Both in its main part and in answering questions, Róža emphasizes her commitment. First, to relationships in a peer group – she was a very active member of school and church youth organizations (in this way she was quickly recognized as a very dynamic person, she was also a good student), then to family relationships (Róža has four children), and finally fulfilling professional roles in adulthood. It should also be noted that all these dimensions function parallel in the narrator's

² The relationship connecting them (along with reference to the quotes from the narrative) was described in the introduction to this part of the book. See: *Biographical resources: family and social networks*.

life and are both synchronous and diachronic. Synchronous because in her biography focusing on building relations is a kind of “independent variable” which constantly formats the narrator’s experience, and is not associated with planning the biography or its subordination to institutional expectation patterns. It can even be said that Róża “breaks” the latter, for example, by getting pregnant early and giving birth to a child right after graduating from secondary school. Therefore, in Róża’s biography, there is no pattern so common nowadays – postponing the decision of parenthood, when the couple works on life and professional stability before the birth of their first child. This is especially true for women who want to strengthen their position on the labor market. Of course, it can be seen that the first pregnancy is completely unplanned and escapes this rationalization, but then the next year another child is born and two more are born every four years. Thus (taking into account the professional activity of Róża) her motherhood develops in parallel with professional work and education (the narrator finishes librarian studies, extramural bachelor, and then master’s studies). The diachronic dimension is related to Róża’s opening to all new relations along with the dynamics of her biographical experience: concerning work³ and educational and social activities. New relations open up new possibilities. For example, when going to Warsaw to study, she builds a network of relationships which gets activated when the opportunity structures for their use arise. Let us look at the following passages:

And I obtained that bachelor’s degree, oh God, so I need to take up graduate studies, a bachelor’s degree is of little use. So that’s how I continued studying in Warsaw, extramural studies of course, for three years and I obtained a master’s degree. And there, in Warsaw, you know, directors, who didn’t have an education, had to obtain it, such incredible possibilities and connections. I was actually with people from all around Poland, from the seaside, with experienced librarians and simply directors of culture clubs. So these connections have been paying off up to now, ‘cause if we want to do something, be it at the seaside or whether we are going for an excursion, for example, to Wrocław or Gdańsk, I make one telephone call and some director of a culture club, and he welcomes us there, so it really pays off.

I mean all, all the contacts are thriving, they are, and they are useful for me at work. I mean you can often use somebody’s advice, someone’s skills and it works both ways. So this, this helped me a lot, ‘cause if I were uncommunicative, I mean, then it’d be different, it’d be harder all by oneself. And thanks to my work here when contacts are helpful, various ideas, whether we organize any kind of trips then those contacts with friends are useful to me. And especially from those studies, I mean from all over Poland, I mean, err, when I started my work during

³ This thread has been thoroughly explored in Chapter II.

the first year I immediately brought a band from Norway. And everybody was oh God! In Z. (a small town in southeast Poland) there's a band from Norway, she had only opened the culture club a month before and there's a band from Norway. But, I had a friend who was on tour in Poland. I didn't understand a thing at all, but they came, they translated into Polish, the performance was fantastic. I mean thanks to the fact that I'm so open it provides more opportunities.

The first fragment comes from the main part of the narration, the second one is the answer to the researcher's question (and is not quoted in its entirety, due to lack of space): "Well, I will come back to this work, but as it is at the end of the story, I still wanted to ask you, you were just talking about this church-related activity, and about this scouting, and about the fact that in elementary school, that there was a lot of it and then in secondary school. I wanted to ask, and generally such peer bonds from that time, I understand that a little bit yes, surely it was different than it is now? They were probably a little stronger, I suppose much more time outside the home was spent with the children, right, right, this probably translates?"

The intention of the interviewer was to elicit reflection on comparing childhood and youth with the present day. This question fits well into the content of Róža's narrative, but it is also the result of seminar discussions of the project team and parallel analysis of other interviews, with the process of collecting next interviews.⁴ It is interesting that Róža, taking up this thread in the first sentences of her answer, quickly proceeds to describe relations and contacts, here is the beginning of her answer:

Exactly, exactly, I travelled a lot, a lot, well, what I can be grateful for to my parents is that they allowed me to go on all the excursions. It wasn't that/ sometimes only children in the family were, you know, they were wrapped in cotton wool. But, I wasn't, none of my acquaintances, peers, wherever I went, none of them even supposed I could be an only child. Generally, I always made a lot of buzz. I always had interesting ideas, was open to challenges. [...] And this is what I'm grateful for to my parents, for all those camps or trips, I was always eager to go. Even when I was at school, in secondary school or somewhere it was possible to sign up then my mum told me I needn't even ask, because for this money had to be found, money had to be found. And I benefited a lot from this, there were simply whether two-day [trips], or some religious camps, they let me go on any trip. *I'm still in touch with many people from those teenage years.*⁵

At this point, Róža abandons the thread pointed out by the researcher and first talks about keeping in touch with old peers in the present, followed by the fragment

⁴ See Chapter XV on the yard experience, included in this part of the book.

⁵ Italicized by K.K. to emphasize the wording used.

quoted above. There are many such examples throughout the story. Together they create a wide spectrum of contacts, relations and more or less close bonds, from which Róża builds a network of connections resembling a bit bricolage (this can always be useful), but also because of their autotelicity – building relations for Róża seems to be a value in itself, as a contrast to the loneliness resulting from their lack. Thus, the narrator interprets many experiences through the prism of bonds and trust, and only *ex-post* perceives them as biographically “useful.”⁶ It should be added that the source of this trust lies in the family as a biographical resource. This can be seen, for example, in the quoted passage, when parents allow their daughter to travel unhindered (“mum told me I needn’t even ask because for this money had to be found”), develop peer relationships. Other fragments of the narrative show that the first, early pregnancy in a small local community, a very religious one, was not associated with ostracism or rejection. Róża’s life situation was seen as a challenge to be responded to.⁷

Let us look at one more fragment:

Well, but two years passed by, my colleague returned from extended maternity leave, so, so again I was, I was laid off. [...] So what to do, and there was a scouts rally at school.

And I also started talking about scouting, cause I was left after that library when my colleague came back from extended maternity leave, so I was simply, to put it colloquially, left with nothing. So I think scouting/ I was coming back from my studies and one time two teenagers were saying that they were coming back from a rally, I say, *what rally?* From a rally of scouts, I say, how come, how come you went there. Cause it’s a nationwide rally. *And what scouting group do you belong to?* So they explained to me that they belonged to some European scouting association.

⁶ The association with *The Savage Mind* by Lévi-Strauss comes to mind and the description of the process of building knowledge about the world when the author writes that the Amazon Indians’ extraordinary knowledge of the surrounding species of plants and animals results mainly from the desire to categorize reality and only later to recognize their usefulness. The same is true for Róża, for whom the goal is to build bonds for their own sake, without instrumentalizing them. This does not undermine the issue of their usefulness for Róża, which is expressed in her readiness to activate the potential of the relationships created.

⁷ Róża’s attitude can also be compared with the nationwide research on distrust and trust. The authors of the CBOS Report from 2018 write “The declarations collected since 2002 invariably indicate that Poles are rather distrustful in social life. Only slightly more than a fifth of the respondents (22%) assume that most people can be trusted, and more than three-quarters (76%) adhere to the principle of maintaining extreme caution and suspicion in relations with others” (Cybulska, Pankowski 2018: 1).

I took down the number and called their boss and brought that scouting to Z. (a small town in southeast Poland). It was the headmaster of my school, where I wasn't working at the time yet, but I put forward such an initiative that I'd like to do something like that. And the headmaster, well, supported the idea. He said that there had been attempts to establish a unit of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association there, the teachers wanted to reactivate it, but they failed somehow. And he says that if I have enough energy and persistence then I could go ahead and set it up. So one meeting, another meeting with parents, with representatives of that scouting association. The whole school took part in them, it was very kind of the headmaster, 'cause he allowed for two free lessons. All came to the assembly hall, they presented their program and the candidates immediately signed up, whoever wanted to belong to the scouts. [...] And the headmaster kind of wanted to find out and, err, asked me if I had a job. I say: *no, unfortunately, I don't*. And it turned out that a colleague who was working in the school library took a one-year sick leave. So the headmaster said he had a job for me there at the school, in the library. It's amazing, I say, I need a job right at that moment. In the library at school with kids, brilliant.

This quote illustrates well the synchronicity and diachronic nature of the narrator's experiences in relation to building relations. The starting point for Róża is a permanent fascination and willingness to act and build structures that will have a bond-forming nature. The narrator does not take up this activity to "show-off" in her community, but to create another *milieu* for building relations. At the same time, this impulse is superimposed on the moment of termination of work as a substitute. The story of introducing scouts takes place in diachronic order because Róża inserts a series of events into a fortunate ending of her acquiring another job as a replacement. Interestingly, in the removed fragment of the story marked with: [...] there is a background construction explaining the circumstances of meeting the scouts on the train – Róża is travelling to Warsaw to finish her bachelor's and then master's studies. Appreciating the importance of education, "Studies are needed nowadays," the narrator highlights acting more in favor of *milieu* than education as such.

In Róża's story, we also find other types of actions for the local *milieu*.

Oh, one more thing, I belong to an association which deals with food distribution, we joined the Food Bank. And we brought six and a half tons of food for, err, the poorest people in our district. And they just for half a year were delivering food to us and we were distributing it. It is the social security that should have the know-how, but they are too lazy to do it, so my colleague from the association and I, we divided that food and distributed it to the needy. What's more, last year we distributed a hundred tons of apples and pears among the local people.

This is one of the many examples of this type of activity which Róża talks about. She takes part in the *Szlachetna Paczka* charity action, undertakes ad

hoc actions for the benefit of specific people (e.g., renovating the place where a mother with children could move to in order to avoid confrontation with her husband who was to leave prison where he had been serving time for domestic violence), or activities described above. Interestingly, in the quoted passage Róža makes it clear that not all institutions in her environment operate effectively. We might wonder whether in the long run substituting their competences by bottom-up activities of community members including Róža is constructive for this community. Probably not, but this is not the subject of the issues raised here. I rather aim at showing the potential of Róža's activity, which is revealed in her relationship building and empathic response to the problems of her community.

The case of Marta

Marta – I remember standing in the window of my room that overlooked the street and this street was so, nothing happened there, sometimes a lone dog ran across. And I thought, God, only three more years and I will leave this place and that only two more years and I will leave this place.

Let us move on to the presentation of the second case. Obviously, more space should be devoted to it (as I mentioned, the narrative of Róža was already presented in Chapter II). Marta was born in 1984, so almost a decade after Róža, she lived in a ten times larger city of about 60,000 residents in central-southern Poland. Her biography is radically different from Róža's. The difficulty in the process of analysis and comparison is related to a methodological issue. While in the case of Róža, we are dealing with a narrative interview clearly divided into a code-based narration undisturbed by the intervention of the researcher and then a phase of questions, in the case of Marta, the interview, despite the initial assumptions, is an unstructured interview. What is more, the mode of its conduct and the interventions of the researcher (interrupting with questions) result in a small number of narrative fragments. On the other hand, it is very interesting and extensive material collected during two meetings (58 pages, 48 lines per page) and the choice of this particular case was determined by the maximum contrast.

At first, Marta lived in the countryside with her mother and two sisters at her grandparents' (her mother's parents), her father was finishing his studies extending them in time, and the mother took care of the children and also graduated from extramural studies. Then the family moved to a town, where the parents live to this day in an old tenement house belonging to the paternal grandparents. Marta recalls very poor housing conditions, no bathroom, small space. The conditions improve when other tenants move out and the family gains additional space, and the father builds a bathroom. The story of housing inconveniences and complexities in spatial management take up a lot of space

in the interview. This experience is contrasted with the picture of the life of her schoolmates who lived in blocks of flats, which Marta was very jealous of.

Marta's biography encompasses several main threads: family relationships, including the need to face her father's alcoholism (this story is very enigmatic, we know that he did not resort to physical, but rather psychological violence, and that he did not "[hang] out outside the bar") and the parents' struggle with transformational changes (unable to work in the engineering profession in line with their education, they engage in petty trade); relations with the peer group which changes along with the process of growing up and making life choices; leaving to study in a big city and focusing the biography around the experience of otherness and incompatibility with the metropolitan environment and precarity on the labor market (temporary contracts, low income on the border of poverty); last but not least, an important thread is the deep experience of the trajectory of suffering associated with her own illness, first anorexia, then depression, and then with therapeutically treated alcoholism – this is quite a lot for a person in her early 30s. As I pointed out, the individual threads form a more or less orderly whole, but from the narrative interrupted by the researcher's questions, it is difficult to select the author's *Gestalt*.

In the following part, I want to focus on the threads which are similar yet contrasting with Róza's narrative. While in Róza's case the story of the peer group forms a fairly coherent picture of relations based on Róza's desire to establish as many relations as possible to compensate for the loneliness of being an only child, in Marta's case, it is the older sisters who are the significant Others, introducing her into the world of social relationships and what is important in her biography – into the world of music. In her childhood and early youth, Marta listens to music which her peers do not yet listen to:

N: Anyway, the pirate ones were cool, because they were so damn cheap, I mean damn, I could just afford them, I never got much pocket money, err, and I used to go buy these Queen cassettes and I remember being offended by a lady who asked what interests me, maybe Faselki?⁸ And I just (laughs). Faselki?! You know.

I: But, how did you come up with Queen?

N: I probably got it from my older sister. Then I got Nirvana from my older sister Zuza, who would listen to Nirvana probably a year earlier than I did, I didn't use to like Nirvana much, but then I started listening.

Throughout the story, the changes in life cycle phases, environments, or interpretations of reality are marked by a change in her musical tastes. Therefore, one can refer to the category of *rooting in culture* presented in the previous

⁸ The name of a popular children's vocal and dance ensemble.

chapter, which in this case is manifested by the translation of the interpretation of biographical experiences by musical preferences, which will be visible in the fragments of the narration below.

More or less at this point in the story, Marta recalls memories of her involvement (also following her sister's footsteps) in a religious movement in the last years of elementary school. In this way she describes the process of *entering* and *leaving* the religious movement:

Err, and, err, well, I was at that time participating in the Oasis,⁹ err, actually, my sister started going there, who I copied, err, she was going to Oasis in/ her group, they met at the clergy house and they sang, probably rather girls sang, I think it was a rather female company. Although no, not only, guys were there too, it was probably quite an important element that it was a co-educational environment, err. This group was somehow connected with the choir, my sister sang in the choir, the choir was like that, that there are some girls and a boy with a guitar and during mass they sing religious songs with the guitar. [...] And I also decided/ah, and besides, apart from, from such social meetings that were attractive, because it was some kind of out-of-school environment, well, there were holiday trips, I mean trips to religious camps that were such 15-day trips that were super cheap. And yes, to tell you the truth, I think this is the main reason, I mean, these were the main I guess, in any case, my parents never sent me to summer camps and to the religious camps they did, so I think it was a financial reason here, I mean, if you have one child in college and two daughters, it's difficult, err, to go on vacation together or send children to summer camps, so, err, so they sent us, so we would go to these religious camps, with their permission. Besides, it's the church, well, so you know, nothing bad will happen. And so my sister went to these religious camps, she always came back delighted from these religious camps, in love with the music animator, the music animator, because on the religious camps there are such scout-like groups, consisting of some people and each group has its own animator, that is, it used to be like that, so an older person, let's say, from secondary school or college, err, who, well, does some stuff out there with these kids and there is also a music animator who is for all the children, and there is daily singing of various religious songs, you learn the songs and sing them. And this music animator was usually a guy, and you understand that such a guy with a guitar who sings beautifully and has a guitar and is the object of sighs of the whole, err, the whole group, during the whole stay. Well, so my sister always came back delighted with the music animator, with some new friends from the whole diocese, because children from the whole diocese went to the camps, which was pretty cool, because thanks to that you could have a friend from a town 60 kilometers away, where you can go by train, it's not very difficult. Well, well, anyway, I also wanted

⁹ A common name of the religious Light-Life Movement that is one of the movements of renewal in the Catholic Church, according to the Second Vatican Council teachings.

to go to those religious camps and started/ I was three or four times on those camps, no, probably three, err, in elementary school, I think I was in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade of primary school. In the camps they told us to wear, the girls had to wear long skirts, err, [...] I am trying to remember, okay, it's not important, some details in fact, okay, err. Well, there was a camp, err, as far as I'm concerned, I don't really remember those, I don't think there were such meetings in my parish for children of my age, I think there was a strong group at my sister's age and I was but too young to join this group, as you know, a 12-year-old to join 16-year-olds, err, but I would go to those religious summer camps, err, and on those summer camps, at the beginning, I was very religious indeed, I sang those songs and I experienced various spiritual exaltations, because these camps were always organized in different villages in the diocese, err, and every day there was, like, trips, I mean this group, let's say, a 6-person group, with its animator, went somewhere into the field, to consider the Mysteries of the Rosary, because since the camp lasted 15 days, it was for a reason, because 15 days is the same number as the Mysteries of the Rosary. There were five days, I don't remember anymore, anyway, each day one Mystery of the Rosary was being considered in these fields. And I remember that in July these fields were always very beautiful and such, let's say that it was such contact with, I don't know whether with nature or with God, err, I think/ well, because we're talking about God, then it was certainly with God and, uh. [...] Yes, I remember that I was somehow elevated very much, err, on those, on those, during those outings, err, in groups. Every day at the camp there was also a mass, it was not so cool, err, certainly on the third camp which I went to, at these masses I would secretly read books there. I remember reading Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye" at the time, but that was my last religious camp, I was already critical to, err, maybe not to church, but I was critical to exaltation, that they make us wear long skirts, err, and to the fact that they order us to do a variety of other things, I don't know like go to sleep at whatever/ well, I don't know what, in any case, I liked it less. Oh, I was critical of the mass and would read books, and in general, I was bored with it. And in this way I prematurely ended my career in the Oasis, I never became an animator, err, only after the eighth grade, yes. But, but I had a lot of friends from the Oasis who were all, who were all listening to Nirvana.

In the foreground here Marta is following in her sister's footsteps and perceiving this experience through the prism of social relations – peer bonds and, unlike Róza, instrumental ones. Marta participated in the Oasis because it gave her the opportunity for low-cost holidays. So here you can also see the difference – Róza received a message from her parents – *for this money always had to be found*; Marta – *a religious camp is cheap enough for us to pay*.¹⁰ Religious

¹⁰ It should be noted that while Róza describes the attitude of her parents (especially her mother's) Marta (re)constructs their motivations, choosing an appropriate argumentation, for example, without taking into account the possible religious motivations of her parents.

issues play a secondary role here and the attractiveness of the religious camp is associated with the possibility of a holiday trip and some form of romantic spirituality not rooted in religious experience (at least not as assumed by the Light-Life Movement – by the way, Marta never once uses this term). On the other hand, it must be admitted that the narrator efficiently reproduces the structure of this movement, the idea of summer camps and further formation. The fascination with Nirvana presents here the contrast and actual distance to the world of the Light-Life Movement and suggests living *in-between* or even *beyond* the reality constructed by this religious movement. What remains of that period are a few friends, also during the studies. These relationships are purely social, that is, “friends from the Oasis,” which can be treated as a synonym of “friends from holidays,” and are not associated with identification with a particular environment or worldview, and in principle, they are built on the worldview contrast: “Well, and actually it happened that, err, that we are still in touch, I mean, this friend of my older sister is in Warsaw and works here. *Of course, she’s been an unbeliever for ages* and in fact, is a lesbian. We just know each other from the Oasis and we know that we are, we have a similar sense of humor and so on and so forth.” The key to maintaining relationships with friends from the Oasis is paradoxically rejecting the proposed paradigm. Marta first distances herself from religion, to define herself as an atheist later – she touches on this thread while talking about her recent therapy and Alcoholics Anonymous group meetings. In this context, the term “friends from the Oasis” can be considered a synonym of an exotic memory, which, despite having taken place, is only legitimate as it becomes a sort of empty semantic category. So this resource of experiences will not be a biographical resource for Marta in subsequent stages of her life. In the interview it is recalled as a kind of activity undertaken in the mode of imitating her older sister, which mode is continued in subsequent stages of the biography:

I: And you said that somehow your attitude towards, to, err, just to commitment, to religiousness changed, that after the eighth grade you already read books during mass, in the Oasis. What happened in-between? How did that happen?

N: You know, I also think it was a matter of my sister’s influence, I mean my sister who was in secondary school. Ah, I mean, err, she was in such a group of people reading De LaVey, err, Lovecraft.

I: Wait, De LaVey is the one from the “Satanic Bible”?

N: Yes, yes. Alistair Crowley, they read Lovecraft and they played role-playing games, such, not online yet, but such, you know, they played Vampire, Call of Cthulhu, and something else, and that was such, I mean, they were not so sad, serious metalheads, only some, some were actually a little grunge, listened to some [...] Kult, listened to Kazik, err, and went to the cemetery after dark, went

to the tops of high-rise blocs, I mean, you know, on open roofs, and I went there I stuck with them. This gang consisted partly of people from A's class and partly of some people from these games, from these RPGs, err, and, and probably it was just that the company, more gravitating towards Satanism, I mean Satanism, you know, secondary school Satanism, yes, err, and reading Lovecraft, somehow made me less interested in the Oasis. I abandoned the Oasis, I don't know exactly how it happened, maybe just the group I went to, to another parish, somehow fell apart, I have no idea, you know, somehow I don't remember a dramatic breakup. I remember that I just didn't go to another Oasis holiday camp any more.

Therefore, Marta is not experiencing a crisis of faith or belief. As a teenager, she changes her perspectives and environments in Riesmann's mode of an other-directed personality and the framework for building relations is the environment of her older sister. Adopting her perspective, Marta begins to shape not only her musical tastes or fascinations (worldviews), but it also becomes part of the biographical action plan for her future – which is an almost compulsive desire to escape from the small-town reality.

Well, all in all, I remember when I was in secondary school, it was always like that, firstly, first of all, I dreamed about this moment when I would go to university, because when I finished first grade, then my sister left, my other sister, my sister-friend, she actually left for studies to X and a year after the other sister, my friends left/ I mean everyone, maybe not everyone, because of course I had friends among classmates, but you know, the older friends, they were the better/ better friends. So I was just sitting and thinking when, when will these two years be over, and I will leave for college too, but all in all, and probably then I started to be more friendly with my classmates, because otherwise, I didn't give a shit a bit, to be honest, probably, I suppose so. Err, and, and in class, I also started, err, to belong to some kind of group or something, that I imagined as a gang, something like that, you know, it was a group of 9 people.

In secondary school, we are dealing with a tension between the yearning for adulthood and the desire to break free from the local *milieu* and quite, so to speak, entry into a peer group. Seemingly, Marta is not a loner, she is liked, as a good student she lets others copy her notes, she is a member of a group of friends, but the basic biographical perspective for the future is leaving and severing relations.

Gee, how was it with, you know what, I suppose that about going to college, I was already thinking about it from the beginning of secondary school because I had these older friends and a sister and everything. I remember standing in the window of my room that overlooked the street and this street was so, nothing happened there, sometimes a lone dog ran across. And I thought, God, only three more years and I will leave this place and that only two more years and I will leave

this place. And besides that, I don't remember that I would somehow, you know, deliberately and rationally shape my, you know, I was 16, and sure, and I remember that I was unhappily in love throughout secondary school, so I was more focused, you know, on a male friend sitting in the first row, who I liked, rather than on, who was also in this group of friends, than you know, where I will go to college. Well, somehow you know, probably this decision I made in the fourth grade, at the end of the third grade, and actually, it was the decision what [to study] and which subjects to choose for the final exams.

In Marta's account, it is not the changes in values and worldview that play a key role, not the peer relations as such, not learning, which she had no problem with – she was the winner of a Science Olympiad, which gave her open access to prestigious studies – not a biographical plan of studying in a particular field, but leaving to a big city, getting out of the locality. In the passage above, the picture of an empty street and stagnation is engraved in the narrator's memory, rather than the dynamics of her experiences at that time, peer relations, or the process of making educational decisions.

Finally, the longed-for moment of departure came. In the field of biographical analyses devoted to the experience of emigration to another country, there is often an observable regularity of the transition from a biographical action plan – the intention to emigrate – to entering the experience of the trajectory of suffering, when the ideas about the country and people do not prove to be true, the myth of a better life gets destroyed, and cultural and linguistic differences become a real problem (Riemann, Schütze 1991). A very similar pattern can be found in Marta's story. Although she does not leave the country, but only leaves a small town and moves to a big city to study, the way the story is told shows the experience of the trajectory very clearly.

I had imagined that, you know, that a big city is extraordinary, great, there are concerts, cultural life in general and there are simply different awesome things which are not in present in the Town.¹¹ You know, I had never imagined that I had to learn to get around this city, which is completely different, in which, you know, everything is completely different. So you know, I didn't even think in such categories about this Town that I have people there who can help me somehow, only in orienting myself in the city, just that, well, I just thought it is nice there because I heard that it's cool. And the City is something like, everyone is working there, running around, somehow it's not so cool there, not student-friendly, not at all. But, you know, I just came to study, without having done any research on what is really there, on which faculties, nor with any insight into what is there

¹¹ In the quote, the name of the place where Marta lived was anonymized under the name Town, while the name of the big city in which she took up studies is anonymized as the City.

at the University, right, what is there. In fact, it was probably only after a year that I began to understand what the difference between a faculty, an institute and a department is and which is superior to which, which is subject to which because I didn't get it before. And it was damn hard because I went to do studies where I was supposed to arrange the timetable myself, so I should have been familiar with these things, but I wasn't.

In this passage, Marta draws attention to her social unpreparedness to live in a big city. It is expressed in the absence of adequate cultural capital. It turns out that the ideas of living in a big city must be supported by specific skills, for example, navigating around in a topographic, social, and environmental dimension. It also turns out that Marta does not have these skills, and she additionally chose the city in which she had less support from a group of friends who were studying in a different academic center. Interestingly, during the interview, before the topic of leaving for studies is mentioned, Marta recalls an episode lasting for some time, which she comments from today's perspective:

At the end of elementary school, my folks signed me up for music classes, meaning some private thing at a music school, because they just wanted me to learn to play an instrument and I want to talk about it, because it's, from today's perspective it seems to me like, you know. Two engineers enroll their daughter in playing and instrument lessons, so that she becomes so cultured and, so, that she plays an instrument, right? And I think they also thought that the music classes would be some kind of casual playing, so I learned to play this one, so I went there for three years and learned to play the classical guitar, and then I finished and stopped playing because it wasn't my thing at all. Well, that's an *off-topic* anecdote, I just remembered, because you know, there are some funny expectations connected with that.

Recalling this episode, *off-topic* according to the narrator, is in fact not outside the reflection path taken during the interview. Let us repeat that making in-depth analysis is difficult here due to the low narrative quality of the material. It is therefore difficult to place this fragment in the context of the whole narrative because narration as such does not exist in this interview. Nevertheless, it is symptomatic that Marta recalls this memory, which even surprises her a bit. It can be presumed that narrative constraints are starting to work here, and the return to this experience plays the role of the background construction when Marta tries to talk about the inadequacy of her biographical resources for the dream/challenge she has posed to herself – living in a big city, lack of bond, and lack of *milieu*.

Marta develops a growing belief of her lack of cultural capital or the appropriate habitus, which fully unfolds when she starts her studies. In other words, it is not enough to be a winner of the Olympiad, have the skills and

ability to learn in order to function effectively in the university world, especially since Marta chose inter-faculty studies.

I don't think these studies were a good decision because I just felt very alienated, you know, I didn't have any group, I had the feeling that I had to ask, to ask, maybe even to be enrolled, to be signed up for a group. That it is so, that there is a group that comes to these classes, I come and say "good morning, could I join here, I am from the inter-faculty studies" and I sit in a corner and actually it is not, somehow, err, I could have fit into this group, right, but I think I didn't have that drive, and all the time and I had the feeling that I was, that I would not be accepted, whether it was my obsession, right, but this, this along with those studies that have such a construction that you are an outsider, somehow didn't click, didn't click. Yes.

The described lack of social competences, contrasting with high educational competences (Marta had been studying a lot while preparing for the Olympiad) was strengthened by the illness experience:

So I just sat and studied like crazy and would eat nothing. And I think this idea of not eating came from my older sister, who also had such an episode, and from one chick from our group, who also had, probably she was anorexic, I don't know. Anyway, anyway, then when I won this Olympiad at the end of fourth grade and I already knew that I would go to university, I mean, you know, I reached for some things I had been exhausting myself for, to achieve them, but you know when I left, and, and, and, you know, damn no, I got confused. Anyway, I came to the City just so overworked, starved, completely without, you know, some sensible plans what I will do here. And it was terrible, actually, I actually started to have some depression. I mean, I cried every day, so I suppose I was just simply depressed. I came in October, or at the end of September, and I was fucking cold, because if you don't eat it, it's cold, so I was already wearing winter boots since this September. Mmm. I spent entire days at the university, I was not really, I didn't really know how to spend time in the city, because somehow [...] I mean [...] how to say it. Err, for example, I was going to, I was going to university, taking a thermos which some chicks were sniggering at, right, cause in the City you buy coffee in a paper cup and do not bring it yourself, you do not bring a thermos. Well, and I had little money, I was convinced that it is just fun to save money and I came with just one sandwich or a whole thermos and a whole thermos of coffee. And also, I actually think that I didn't really go to any dinners, anyway, I would sit at the university all day, you know so cold and haggard. Well, and I found myself a psychiatrist here, or a psychologist and a psychiatrist. Generally, it ended so, that after the first semester, that in the second semester I stopped going to classes, I finally got some sick leave, I took a dean's leave for a year, for the second, I don't know how it was that for a year.

Marta falls into a spiral of experiences characteristic of the trajectory of suffering. Anorexia and depression acquired earlier (again the figure of the older

sister is substantial here) are deepened as a result of “emigration” experiences, a sense of loneliness, being an outsider due to the lack of integration with a group which she does not formally belong to and a different lifestyle personified by the contrast between “thermos of coffee” and “coffee in a paper cup.”¹² Added to this is the experience of economic deprivation which runs through the entire interview when Marta talks about her times of studying and first jobs. This time is dominated by the necessity of a very modest life due to the lack of money. Marta receives little financial support from her parents, who, recognizing their duty of supporting their daughters, also have fairly limited financial resources. The jobs she undertakes are precarious, they are the so-called junk contracts, substitutions, often low-paid as part of internships. The above fragment shows that Marta is trying to control the experience of trajectory, she undertakes therapy that will prove effective. The narrator changes her direction, returns to university and successfully graduates. The trajectory experience, however, does not disappear, this time it appears in the form of a progressive addiction to alcohol. The ascetic lifestyle previously developed is conducive to drinking. Marta can deny herself everything and spend money on alcohol.

But in any case, anyway, because, because I just came to college with depression, anorexia, and in the meantime, I started to drink hard, and this, this, this is what I thought, that I just would not survive, I would not live too long. That I would live maybe to 24, and if I do live till then, I will definitely end up badly, and therefore I thought that boosting any consumer needs in myself is simply pointless because I will never earn for them anyway, because after all, because I suck, I won't have any job, especially after such studies, what kind of job can I have anyway? So, so I just thought that it is of value to spend as little money as possible, and not to, for example, dress nicely, or just drink warm coffee from Starbucks. Starbucks was not there at the time, but something similar, you know, I was aiming at developing methods for the cheapest way to survive a day in the city. And I guess I stopped carrying the thermos, but in general I drank such teas, coffees from a vending machine for 1,50 PLN, and I would eat chocolate bars because they were cheap too. And yes, well [...] I had quite limited needs. I mean, you know, the fact that I had limited needs, I limited my needs. It was because I was drinking hard and alcohol is just expensive, so if I think this is such a pretty junkie pattern, right? Junkies also don't eat much, they don't dress well, because they must have cash for alcohol. Since I didn't get much money from my parents, it was like that.

I: But, that had changed, right?

¹² As a side note, one can see here the dynamics of changes in behavioral patterns. Currently, drinking from a thermos or thermal cups is considered a most desirable act of pro-ecological behavior. Today Marta's behavior and her minimalism would be perceived in a completely different way.

N: Yes, that changed only at the end of my studies. I mean, I just started going to this therapy to this association, which somehow helped me a lot. I mean, it was probably also like that, that I was tired of belittling myself and just had to this way or that way, right? And maybe it was that I just wanted to take advantage of it. I mean, here it was like that, that no one took me there, only I decided myself that how fucking long can I go on like that. And this, and I went to this psychotherapy for about the second half, the other half of my studies. [...] Well, it was also probably like that, because I thought about those friends in college that I had the feeling that I had different problems, right? That I just have some hardcore problems, and here people are drinking coffee from paper cups. What do I have in common with them?

Once again Marta takes up the struggle with trajectory, she arrives at the decision to undertake therapy, which she recalls in detail in the interview. These fragments are narrative, it is clear that this is the set of experiences which the narrator has worked through best. The reflection on her own life is combined with the observation of various forms of therapy and other addictions. Marta slowly gets back on the rails, “gets used to” city life and at the same time builds a distance to it. This process of transformation and familiarization is symbolically included in the once again cited image of drinking coffee as part of a specific lifestyle: from a thermos, coffee bought in a vending machine, a paper cup. Marta finally gets to the point of tasting. Her new partner introduces her to this unknown world.

And, and I remember that at that time I learned that, I mean, sometimes we would eat out somewhere in a pub, or, or we went to a cafe and then I learned to distinguish all these different coffees and all the different espressos, lattes and all the other varieties. Because before, this sphere of reality was as if it did not exist for me at all. OK, anyway, back to the time when I stopped having a job at K., that’s when I really felt poverty. Maybe it is because I stopped being like that, you know, a junkie-hermit, and stopped thinking that it is best to feed yourself for 1 PLN a day and it turned out that it is actually cool sometimes to be able to drink a latte in a pub.

It can be said that Marta travels a long way, which consists of a project of escaping from a provincial town, the difficulty of adapting to the urban lifestyle formatted by the feeling of being an outsider, low cultural capital (despite high intellectual potential), and above all the experience of suffering related to diseases: anorexia, depression, and alcoholism. Needless to say, all these dysfunctions must have a deeper source. It probably lies in family relationships – this can be guessed, but the transcription of the interview forces us to stop at this point in order not to enter into speculating or psychologizing. The result of this difficult path is the rediscovery of biographical resources deposited in the provincial town.

Well, the Town, the Town is probably already, it really is how you are saying, that after leaving it, maybe there is something to it, I mean that I have already left this Town and already, you know. [...] I don't know, I'm already, I think I have felt valuable enough and metropolitan that I stopped being afraid of identifying with a provincial town. Because, yes, because before it was probably a shame. I suppose so, that when I started keeping a blog I didn't even write which town I came from. In the end, I wrote that I have lived in the City for some years. Then I added that I come from a post-industrial town, because it seemed to me such an interesting biographical feature, however. And only after that, I wrote this town by its name and it was already, maybe I had been writing this blog for four years when I did it. Earlier, this Town did not seem important to me at all, and probably also, and probably also, somehow, you know, it's symptomatic that I, with these people from the City did not at all keep in touch. I mean, there wasn't any diaspora in the City, right? I mean, mm, somehow I enjoyed it, that my friend who I met in college is from the City that my friend's friends studying law are from the City, you know, I felt so metropolitan,¹³ right. That I'm not hanging out with *immigrants, but only with the natives*, and you know, and I also think that just when, after all those years, I have already learned this City, and you know, I have already learned, in the first years I learned how to use public transport and the fact that you cross the street differently than in the Town, that in the City you dress differently than in the Town and that dressing anyhow is not well seen here, unlike in the Town where it is ok. You can dress anyhow. And that, and finally when I learned what's the difference between espresso and espresso [...] Jesus, I'm trying to remember the name, espresso macchiato, there is something like that, right? Well, so when I learned what's the difference between espresso and espresso macchiato and that you can drink this espresso, and I became so metropolitan, I felt that now I can go back to this Town without such, you know, mm, without fear of getting stuck there. Because when I got back there to work on this street market¹⁴ I was not afraid of it any longer. Actually, I thought that even if I was, even if it lasted a long time, that I would work on this market, it is actually quite interesting. Such an interesting street market. Oh, and look how it compares with the fact that I'm afraid of being stuck in unemployment, well, as if it's probably like this, that I'm far away from that, I'm not afraid, you know. But, I am afraid that it will happen to me again, with that here, unemployment, the precariat, and work for 1,000 PLN per month.

The presented fragment contains a series of arguments through which Marta tries to give new meaning to her biography, especially concerning the relationship with the place which she identifies as a world of childhood and adolescence, from which she wanted to break free. She thus experiences telling the story, associated with a symbolic return, as an act of *repatriotization*.

¹³ Marta uses an adjective derived from the name of the City.

¹⁴ Marta helped her parents in trade for some time.

This concept was coined in the process of analyzing narrative materials in the EuroIdentities project and referred to emigration experiences related to travelling to other European countries and then returning to one's home country. The repatriotization phenomenon in research in the aforementioned project was associated with the process of escaping (feelings of oppression caused by personal conflicts with one's social *milieus*, but also a generalized feeling of dissatisfaction because of life conditions and culture of the country of origin), tend to undergo, in an intensive biographical identity work, a significant transformation which we propose to call, to put it generally, a reconciliation with one's place of origin. On the microsocial level of one's collective affiliations, this usually means an improvement or re-establishing of family bonds which were spoiled or broken. On the level of one's orientation towards larger social collectivities, such a reconciliation may occur as a process of a (*re*)*discovery* of one's own place of origin, its society and culture, as a valuable frame of reference and identification regardless of many of the country's limitations and shortcomings which were previously speaking of escape. In cases, when such coming to terms with one's own heritage refers to the level of nation-state and national culture, we could call it (*re*)*patriotization*, having in mind its non-conflicting modality which does not imply differential we-feelings based on ideologies and meaning contexts of nationalist character (Każmierska, Piotrowski, Waniek 2011: 152).

Of course, in Marta's case, we are not dealing with a return to the mother country, but to the Town, from which she escaped in a symbolic but planned way, treating this activity as a form of emigration. In the quoted fragment, she even uses such a categorization, dividing the City's inhabitants into immigrants and natives. As we found out from the previously quoted passages, Marta escapes from her hometown driven by the myth of life in a big city and the compulsion to imitate her older sisters. It is also an escape from an emotionally difficult family home. In fact, it is not known what constitutes the main frame of reference here (it is difficult to find any clues in the text), that is, to what extent Marta constructs the experience of the small-town mentality in order to be able to get out of it, to what extent this image is created under the influence of her personal experience, and how much under the influence of the sister and the environment of older friends who go to college leaving a high school girl looking out the window. Nevertheless, in the passage cited below, Marta, by introducing a comparative perspective, from a distance begins to perceive the advantages of the place where she comes from and positions herself without complexes both in the context of life in the City and a symbolic return to the Town. It becomes no longer a starting point, an escape from, but a form of an alternative world to the life in a big city, where Marta wants to settle for good. The arduous working out of her otherness, the acceptance of the metropolitan

lifestyle, shown in the quote, allow her to appreciate the once rejected provincial world and recognize it as equally important, in some sense alternative to everyday life, with which Marta intends to be part of. Once again, one can recall the metaphor of structure and *communitas* (Turner) already presented in other chapters. Living in the city equals entering a role and looking for a job, adopting a specific status symbolized by the ability to distinguish between types of coffee. *Communitas* is a world in which, being recognizable you can be yourself, you do not have to pretend, to follow conventions. In another passage, Marta points out that she took up working with her parents in the market with the awareness of the time frame and distance from the situation when she was looking for a permanent job in the City. It was a kind of moratorium before returning to the City, but now on her own terms, that is, finding a non-precarious job (both due to employment conditions and remuneration). Acting for the benefit of the local community is expressed by her involvement in various cultural initiatives, history exploration, and restoring memory, among others about the pre-war Jewish community of the Town.

For me, you know the thing which so so, in this Jewish topic, I mean, it was about excluding otherness and not just about excluding Jews. This is some kind of emblematic exclusion of otherness. [...] Sure, probably also deriving from, I mean, the very interest in not excluding otherness, probably also resulting from the fact that I am quite a freak myself and someone could exclude me, because of alcoholism, because of earlier anorexia, or because of being from a provincial town, or you know, I kind of have a lot of weak points. On the other hand, Jews also made me. [...] You know, I suppose that it's like this, I saw these Jews are, mm, some part of the city's history. It may even be that this interest in Jews is also somewhat related to interest in urban space or the city. That this space is somehow shaped, that culture shapes it.

Marta's return happens within the framework of reconciliation with the place and the appreciation of its cultural, historical, and social potential. It also has a therapeutic effect. The experience of otherness is worked through as a positive value.

Róża and Marta's contrastive comparison

The two cases presented above can be used for comparing two different strategies for building relationships with the *milieu*. Let us start, however, with the basic similarity of the biography of Róża and Marta. Despite such fundamental differences, they both experience a biographical metamorphosis. In the case of Róża, as I already wrote in Chapter II, "What is more interesting, the metamorphosis mode becomes in a way a constant pattern of her action. We

can even describe it as a metamorphosis potential which, in a way, eliminates the trajectory potential. It is undertaken in the fashion of happening events that she meets on her way, not in the mode of expectations and biographical plans. Such an attitude is possible because her main biographical resource is a trust relationship.” In Marta’s case, the metamorphosis refers to some unexpected change in her attitude towards the local community as the result of working through difficult trajectory experiences, the source of which was in the experience of family life, thus in the local *milieu*. The dramaturgy of suffering itself happened primarily during the period of studying and entering the metropolitan social tissue. In the two interviews discussed, the main difference is in how they are rooted in the *milieu*, building references to the value system and building bonds, including family relationships.

Regarding Róža, we are dealing with a narrative strongly rooted in the *milieu*, based (as I also wrote in Chapter II) on the relationship of trust (William 2017) and the biographical and social need to build bonds. Yet, this rule applies both to relations with the local and beyond-local environment. Róža has the skills to build *milieu* and relationships in every context (e.g., groups of students of extramural studies from different parts of Poland). Additionally, Róža is oriented towards values that should be described as traditional. A strong rooting in religious life seems authentic and “natural” in Róža’s case. Religiousness is one of the important features of the whole *milieu*, not just Róža’s family. It can be said, again recalling the typology of David Riesman, that Róža is inner-directed and at the same time does really well in modern society. She is open to new challenges and willingly uses new opportunity structures – without losing sight of the basic normative framework of her activities and a clearly defined *her-place* in the world, which is the local community. Róža, therefore, does not rebel against it, on the contrary, she always perceives her *milieu* as a basic reference point.

This Warsaw, for example, when I was coming back after the weekend of studies, I was so tired, simply tired of all that traffic. Every man/ I live in the country and I’m used to living a quiet life. While there everybody is chasing something, everybody is in a hurry. Of course a rush, you get up in the morning, car traffic, in the evening after classes, after 8 pm, I was staying in D. (part of Warsaw), so it was quite far. So it took us an hour/ there at nuns’ place, of course, to keep costs low/ we would get about by bus with schoolmates. [...] I was terrified by endless traffic and people always in a rush. I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t like to work in a big city, absolutely not, I would never like to live in a big city, definitely not. I’m glad I’ve been there, I can compare now, my perspective has broadened, but I wouldn’t like to live in a big city. Surely, there are some people who like it. They were born there, perhaps they haven’t lived anywhere else. But, when you are from the country and plucked from the countryside to the city center then, then definitely not.

Róża, therefore, rejects an alternative – urban lifestyle. She does so without complexes, with the awareness of gaining a comparative perspective. It can be said that she combines a traditional model of life with a (post)modern use of contemporary opportunity structures. She also emerges unscathed from transformational experiences. Despite the long-term precariousness of her situation, in the end, she always has a job, regardless of the high level of unemployment in the region. Her education does not necessarily work to her advantage on the local job market threatened by unemployment. What determines her undoubted success is the determination combined with a sense of strong rooting in the *milieu* and the ability to build social bonds sustaining this *milieu*.

In turn, Marta's situation is completely different. Starting from family status – Marta is not an only child and she is introduced to the world of relations by her sisters. Moreover, her biography was affected by family problems related primarily to her father's alcoholism. This is also indicated by the elements of her sisters' biographies cited here and there. For example, one of the sisters Marta talks about most often experienced anorexia and depression, changed her studies three times, then returned to her family home and helps her parents working on the street market. Marta's starting point is not rooting in the *milieu*, but looking for *uprooting* opportunities. Marta is not inclined to build relationships wherever she is. On the contrary – she feels alienated and for a long time rather looks for experiences which would allow her to maintain the identity of the outsider. In Marta's case, one can refer to the concept of emerging adulthood by Jeffrey Arnett. One of the features of this life cycle phase, which the author considers to be characteristic of modern societies (the phase between adolescence and adulthood) is the experience of loneliness. Referring to the experience of American society, Arnett writes: "Young Americans aged 19–29 spend more of their leisure time alone than any person except the elderly and spend more time in productive activities (school and work) alone than any other group under 40" (Arnett 2000: 474). Regarding the two cases in question, the contrast is striking. Marta talks about the fostered relationships as if "through the fog," especially when she talks about her efforts to root in the social tissue of a big city. Róża everywhere sees an opportunity to build relationships and open potential for creating a *milieu* within the dimension of her local community, peer group or, for example, students of extramural studies.

Marta's strategy is biographically very costly – the price is the experience of anorexia, depression, and addiction to alcohol (let us remind you that Marta is only in her early 30s at the time of the interview). The situation of precarity common to both, in contrast to Róża, is associated with the experience of isolation, breaking bonds and alienation. Marta emphasizes many times that giving up social life associated with, for example, visiting a café or restaurant

was associated with her difficult material situation, bordering on poverty, very poorly paid work, or lack of it. The thing which in the case of Róża intensifies the search for others, makes Marta closed for such experiences.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to characterize the process of giving meaning to biographical experiences through building bonds and social relations rooted in the *milieu*. Of course, it must first be stated that in every biography there is a certain form of relationality and bonds – after all, every human (whether they want it or not) is a social being. Secondly, the two contrasting cases described here do not entitle us to make generalizations nor show an exhaustive spectrum of possibilities. One can start with the question to what extent these two cases are particular, for example, embedded in the social transformation processes, and to what extent universal, that is, showing various possible biographical scenarios related to living in the provincial towns and attempting to position oneself in relation to the metropolitan world. Putting it a bit differently, one can ask if transformation experiences were necessary to give these two biographies their particular shape, or whether they would take on the processual structure described in brief here, regardless of the circumstances. Of course, the point is not to make zero-one decisions here, after all, each biography is conditioned by a specific and unique constellation of events and experiences.

Therefore, what can one “read” from the biographies presented? The paradox associated with the stereotypical perception of the dynamics of transformation and modernization processes comes to the fore. It can be said that in both narrations we are dealing with rooting in the *milieu*. Róża and Marta come to this in completely different ways and one of the elements, apart from their biographical differences, family complications, et cetera is the generational difference. Marta represents people born in the 1980s, and the features of this group have been exhaustively characterized in Chapter X. Here, it is only appropriate to be inclined towards this characteristic.

The narrators are, therefore, in a different life cycle phase, which is formatted by different values. One can clearly see the difference in the process of giving meanings to similar biographical events, which, however, are experienced differently. An example is the participation in a religious community during early adolescence present in both biographies. Nevertheless, if you look at the role they can play in their *milieu*, and above all the way they include them in their biographies, it can be concluded that in both cases the balance is positive. In this sense, the processes described here are universal – they may happen in other transformational and modernizational contexts. Of course, both biographies are placed and formatted by a specific time and place. However,

it can be argued that building contrast between traditional and (post)modern values does not have to be a condition for building the present and a modernized society – including the relations within/with the *milieu* (Joas 2016). The cases presented here show a certain paradox. It is based on the fact that Marta, who is very oriented on her individuality, has difficulty including it here within her biography, although she possesses objective attributes – she is very talented, has an individual view of the world, and open horizons. In turn, Róża, focused on the community, is in fact developing her biography in an original and highly individualized way. Marta definitely represents the modern model of biography and looks for modern patterns of actions – the return to *milieu* may seem in this context as counter-productive, but it turns out that it is an element which makes her life more meaningful. Individuality and maturity can be positively verified by including biographical experiences within the framework of the local *milieu* while developing a distance from the world of aspiration and origin. In Róża's case, it is difficult to make such distinctions here, the synchronous and diachronic dimension of building bonds forms a fairly harmonious *Gestalt*. This is also visible in the dynamics of biographical work. Marta has to laboriously “put together” her experiences into any coherently understood whole, at the cost of experiencing the trajectory of suffering associated with various aspects of her biography. While in the case of Róża, the biographical work consists of regular “correction” of the chosen course – the coherence of experience and the constructed image of *milieu* surrounding Róża suspends problematizing the world. Focusing on bonds and relationships enables one's individual development. In the case of Marta, it seems to be the opposite – focusing on herself and the need to work out her own biography leads to her rediscovering the place. It is not about assessing these strategies, but about comparing and showing their biographical, but also social consequences.

Kaja Kaźmierska, Katarzyna Waniek

CONCLUSIONS

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATION AS A SOCIAL CHANGE STRETCHED IN TIME AND SPACE

Sociologists have erred in locating social problems in objective conditions. Instead, social problems have their being in a process of collective definition. This process determines whether a social problem will arise, whether they become legitimated, how they are shaped in discussion, how they come to be addressed in official policy, and how they are reconstituted in putting planned action into effect. Sociological theory and study must respect this process.

Herbert Blumer

The abolition of the old order and the transition to another form of social organization was one of the most important subjects of interest for the Chicago school sociologists. Emphasizing its processual character, they pointed out that almost always this evolutionary transition, extended in time, is associated with the creation of areas of chaos and anomy. For some people (whether individuals or specific “we”-communities), these new initially disordered social frameworks are favorable opportunity structures that, thanks to their specific biographical resources, can be used, but not always successfully. For others, a situation in which certain symbolic resources and normative systems lose their orienting power, and the new economic and social order does not allow the continuation of important biographical paths can lead to a more or less significant and protracted sense of sense loss and deepening confusion. This is usually accompanied by a sense of a weakening of social ties, a kind of collapse of the world of everyday reality, and a dramatic deterioration in the ability to plan your own biography.

In many chapters of this book we have repeatedly mentioned that – to recall the words of Marek Czyżewski – many sociologists studying transformation processes in Poland were rather engaged in the “legitimizing service” of social reality instead of subjecting it to critical reflection (Czyżewski 2013). Tomasz Warczok and Tomasz Zarycki (2014: 146–147), first and foremost pointing

to the works of Sztompka, Marody, or Domański, criticized how, “under the guise of neutral analysis[,] they imposed classifications and explanations that magically transform inequalities into natural differences and, consequently, how they are unspeakably socially justified. Justifications may be ‘functional system requirements’ or teleologically perceived ‘progress’ (or ‘modernization’).” In a similar tone, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk much later comments: “as sociologists we did not want to be only passive observers of the 1989 transformation. We thought that our obvious duty is not only to describe modernization, but to actively support it [thus] we have lost the ability of real analysis” (Giza-Poleszczuk 2018), that is, taking into account the multi-threading and multi-dimensionality of social processes, as well as the perspectives of experiences and interpretations of experiencing individuals. The effect of abandoning such an analysis was the belief spread in the public and often scientific discourse about the alleged guilt of certain social groups or social entities for the failure of the transformation process.

In 2006 Michał Buchowski summarized:

For the troubles brought about by Poland’s economic reform, various groups are accused: crooked politicians, corrupted bureaucrats, selfish entrepreneurs, and international agencies, including the EU. However, in the elite dominant discourses in mass media and scholarly analyses it is the “subaltern’s’ nature” that blames workers, agricultural workers, and the impoverished for their own degraded circumstances, and for society’s difficulties which generally “trumps this critique” (Kideckel 2001: 98). Real workers and the impoverished have disappeared from public discourses. Many stories talk about unemployment, the black market, and economic problems that, while addressing macro-level issues, miss the grass-roots perspective. Underprivileged groups are depicted during situations of conflict like strikes or road blockades. In the absence of ethnographic descriptions rooted in everyday practices and confronted with details of social life studies, ideological and essentialized images are concocted. Media images emphasize new kinds of employment and material culture. Advertisements portray middle class professionals and high-tech products that have little relation to “ordinary people” (Buchowski 2006: 467).

The collection of autobiographical interviews collected as part of the *Experience of the Process of Transformation in Poland* project gave the opportunity to capture this forgotten or neglected bottom-up voice, or, as Buchowski writes: “grass-root perspective.” Since the publication of the cited text, many of these groups have already been reminded: industrial plant workers (including fibrillating machines), the poor, the unemployed, or the precarious young (see, e.g., Mikołajewska, Wawrzyniak 2016, Gospodarczyk, Leyk 2012, Madejska 2019, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2014, Mrozowicki 2011, Czarzasty, Mrozowicki 2020,

Leyk, Wawrzyniak 2020). However, we believe that the material collected by us fills a gap, showing the biographical process of the working-through of the systemic transformation also among those who somewhat escaped the attention of researchers, being, according to certain sampling assumptions, neither the beneficiaries nor the losers of this great change.

It is worth noting that over time public discourse has undergone significant transformations and – as Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak shows:

For several years, reverse internal social orientalization¹⁵ has been more and more clearly present in both conservative and leftist discourse, in light of which the contempt of neoliberal elites against the morally winning and demanding dignity of the folk class should be settled (Nowicka-Franczak 2017: 409).

To put it simply, it can be said that both these discourses undermine the possibility of building a dialogical, based on solidarity, bond of a “we-you” relationship (e.g., one that was hardly worked out since the ‘70s between workers and intellectuals, whose “power” led to the overthrow of the old social order in 1989). They are based primarily on pushing the vision of a society in which “we” are threatened by some “them,” to which – like Marek Czyżewski, Andrzej Piotrowski, and Sergiusz Kowalski showed in *Ritual Chaos* (1997) –

we refer descriptively as a world existing abroad mutual obligations, essentially strange, at best indifferent, and in the extreme case – hostile and threatening, similar to natural elements or mechanical devices. In such an extreme case, it is said of “them” that they behave in a way more or less explainable by external circumstances, but it is difficult to attribute “their” behavior to the value of action understood in terms of meaning. The more “they” are experienced by “us” as a strange and hostile world, the more space is left for justifications to define “them” in terms of objectification” (Czyżewski et al. 1997: 37).

¹⁵ This is a certain option of orientalization emphasizing intercultural differences leading to the identification and isolation of “strangers” or “worse” within a specific “we”-community. We should add, that Andrzej Piotrowski, looking at the split of Polish society as a result of transformational processes resulting in radical economic changes, pointed to a clear division of the emerging knowledge class after 1989 with those segments of Polish society that wanted to remain faithful to the “oppressive and defensive structure of national or regional identity based on fear and a sense of danger from strangers” (Piotrowski 2005: 338–339). He adds that “[...] it is not only about cultural and national strangers, dissidents or newcomers from outside who overcame and subordinate us as their periphery through their civilization advantages, but also about the gap between sections of the native society which perceive themselves as separate, losing common foundations at the level of meaning systems, separate cultural worlds” (Piotrowski 2005: 339).

Interestingly, in the collected autobiographies this sort of categorization of the world and positioning ourselves towards others do not exist. The fact is that during the questions phase of the interview, we did not ask our interlocutors about their ideologies, political sympathies, or grass-rooted theories about the system transformation of which they became subjects and often objects. It is also a fact that these issues rarely appeared in the spontaneous narrative phase, and therefore did not constitute the framework for organizing the biographical account. In this respect we can conclude that narrators have not been feeling a part of history as it has not been a bottom-up transformation project, but a top-down design. We will return to this issue in the following pages.

The systematically gathered life histories (bottom-up voices) were intended to diversify the sample as much as possible and the only ordering factor was (in accordance with the assumptions adopted at the project planning stage) the belonging of the informants to three different cohorts. Thus, the collected autobiographical accounts allowed, first of all, the showing of the life history of people whose experience was in both public discourse and sociological analyses “annulled,” their attitudes assessed as “backward” and “inoperative” and their fate as “losers.” On the other hand, they gave the opportunity to analyze the lives of representatives of (allegedly key to the capitalist social formation) the “middle class.” The stories of people placed by sociologists in this stratum, however, revealed the significant diversity and the multilayered nature of their biographical experiences in connection with social processes, which did not always, and simply, make them “winners” of the systemic transformation. It was probably because, as it was explained in the *Methodological note*, that we have searched for the interviewees in the periphery, and not in the centers understood here literally as the main centers of dynamic processes of social transformation seen in the framework of development and progress. The vast majority of our interlocutors showed their resourcefulness resulting more often from the skilful use of biographical resources and in their own way defined opportunity structures, in many cases distancing themselves from the described neoliberal rhetoric. At the same time, we can point to a certain paradox. The collected data, whose authors were born in the next three decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, show that the greatest trajectory potential associated with the way of social anchoring in modern times (we omit here individual biographical experiences, for example, diseases) in terms of institutionalized criteria of the life course: education and family manifests itself in autobiographical accounts of people born in the 1980s. Two interpretations collide here: the first one indicates that while people who experienced a large part of their life in the Polish People’s Republic (PPR) may have difficulty adjusting to the new social, economic, and partly political order, while the younger generation (i.e., those born in the 1980s) without the ballast of the old system, without the bite of the

homo sovieticus syndrome could softly enter a new and obvious reality. The second interpretation falls within the broad diagnosis of modernity and emphasizes that we live in a risk society that entails uncertainty, and a difficult experience of individualism. It seems that the second diagnosis is more likely. Perhaps in a specific set of socio-biographical conditions in individual experiences, does the coherence of educational, institutional, and media messages depicting the model of a man who is “an entrepreneur of oneself” (see Czyżewski, 2013: 19, Stachowiak 2013: 141–161) become so obvious that – in the absence of alternative references – it is accepted unconditionally? What is the significance of the fact that, in the context of the analyses undertaken in many chapters in this book, which show the mutual interplay of social transformation with the processes of chaos and suffering of narrators, the most “vibrating” narratives appeared among those who were born in the ‘80s and, consequently, their biography is placed in specific phases of the process of social, economic, historical, and cultural changes? We should ask a question here: are the experiences of people born in other decades different and why? What are their interpretive resources, material hierarchies, or orientation systems? Do family situations and values taken from home allow for critical reflection on the experienced social reality – at least by juxtaposing and comparing different world concepts, life patterns, and basic progressive rules? We have tried at least partly to answer these questions in individual chapters of this book, showing various aspects of the narrators’ experience and different constellations of social processes.

When designing the study and choosing the birth decades as the basic criterion for the sample selection we also wanted to face the question of whether one can speak about the generational experience of transformation. According to Karl Mannheim, “the generational site” embraces all the people born in a certain period of time in a given place, but the social site itself though distributing chances and resources rather creates opportunity structures, which may be used by a generation. Only then are they interpreted as a common feature and only then does it help to create a generational actuality in which experiences of a generation are connected by interpretation. “We shall therefore speak of a generation as an actuality only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by their *being* exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization” (1952: 303). The sense of Mannheim’s concept of generation, appreciated as the most complete and sociologically grounded (Pilcher 1994), stresses that the *Generationszusammenhang* is created as the result of specific bonds. So an objective criterion of a social location of a generation related to being exposed to shared collective phenomena, is not enough. “The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide do not, in

themselves, involve similarity of location. What does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data et cetera, and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly 'stratified' consciousness" (1952: 169).

Given the conditions described, which create the social construction of the generation, the meticulous analysis of the gathered materials again points to a certain paradox: although it should seem that transformation is/was a generational experience of those who became its subjects, or often objects, it turns out to be such an experience to a lesser extent. The life histories of people born in the 1980s should also be taken into account here as well. Of course, if we consider the "objective" criteria related to the change of the political system and economic order, this is a generational experience, especially if it is taken in a comparative perspective before and after. On the other hand, the collected narratives show that it was only in the 1980s that the effects of transformation processes fully gain the formation power of biography. We can refer here to the narrative analyses of three young women presented in Chapter X. These three life histories, show a certain and yet not that rare modality of the dynamics of experience based on the maximum use of biographical potential of an individual by the neoliberal labor market in its Polish version. This becomes possible due to the strong alluring embedded mechanisms that obscure (or expose it only to economic logic) other areas of the individual's life, as well as thanks to the commonly promoted and accepted, by virtue of taken-for-granted, necessity for empowerment. This, the case of Róża born in the '70s, shows that the narrator does not follow this logic and frames her biography by reference to very traditional values yet she finds herself in a new reality as a successful individual.

In most cases, the biographical accounts of people from the 1980s clearly unveil a sort of seduction mechanism based on the myth of education as a biographically planned path of a better life. This is also based on the myth of a self-steering market economy that is to ensure the satisfaction of needs, social advancement, and access to goods. If we follow its logic, we will put forth individual development, as well as take full responsibility for our own actions in terms of success or failure. That is, we agree to the social distribution of roles between *winner*s and *loser*s. In this context, we can again observe certain paradoxes.

First, the experience of ideological seduction is repeated in the next generation. Of course, it concerns a different reality, but in some sense the strategies for rationalizing the world described in Chapter VII (analyzing the PPR) are reproduced. Of course, we are not talking about the ideological alignment of both systems, but about paying attention to how they can be worked out at a biography level. Again, paradoxically, it can be said that in the

PPR period it was “easier” to build a critical attitude towards the system after the ideological seduction phase. We are currently dealing with the new type of naïveté. Our interviewee, born in the 1980s, would like to experience getting chances. When choosing a project of action based on education they expect their future will be as reality is now. Yet, long term patterns of interpretations of actions could not be directly transferred from the previous system. This is due to two factors: the specificity of the current system in which it is assumed to be difficult to define fairly stable biographical stabilization patterns and a rhetoric based on the illusion of aspirations, seemingly guaranteeing specific biographical developments. At the same time, the current education myth was also supported by the rhetoric of the PPR system, in which, paradoxically, this biographical career (in the case of parents of narrators, or imagining their unfulfilled aspirations) worked out. Education was a way of social advancement, although its measure did not have to be high material status, rather stable work and social prestige. Of course, in retrospect and comparing the two systems, this positive picture may appear to be deceptive. Many of our narrators came to this conclusion by comparing the lives and work of their educated parents with their present day situation. In the vast majority of cases, this comparison, made from the perspective of adulthood, and thus looking at the then life of parents through the eyes of an adult who is in a similar biography point, triggered a reflection on the past and the present. Thus, the universal balancing of one’s own biography in relation to the life cycle shown in the context of social and family relations, in the case of the respondents, was mediated by the processes of systemic transformation. Let us repeat again: narrators most often did not talk about them directly by placing their or their family biographies in the constellation of historical processes. Rather, they talked about themselves, their parents, and life experiences for which the social reality was the background.

Summing up our considerations, we want to return once again to the analytical categories frequently cited in the chapters of the book, but developed in previous studies devoted to the experience of war (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996). It is worth emphasizing here that the discussed project *Biographical Experience of Transformation* is to some extent a continuation of the studies of the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź, where research was organized and conducted based on autobiographical narrative interviews focused on biographical experiences of World War II and the socialist statehood in Poland and East Germany.¹⁶ Thus

¹⁶ We have in mind two projects: *Biography and National Identity* based on life stories of Poles who experienced WWII. The research was conducted in the early ‘90s in the department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź (Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996 and Dobierała, Waniek ed. 2016) and the project *The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in*

it inscribed in chronologically defined logic of just researched phenomena, which enables to treat the already conducted projects as a source and a point of reference in empirical, analytical, and theoretical reflection. According to our research experience we could once more observe that events which are typically defined as the breakthrough moments or the turning points determining the framework for periods of history do not necessarily appear in autobiographical narrations.¹⁷ The same happened in this research: the breakthrough of 1989 and possibly other events contributing to the transformation such as the presidential elections in 1990, or the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Poland in 1993, the access to NATO and the EU, or the denomination of the zloty did not play a substantial part in our interviewees' biographical experiences. To the contrary, the events identified as symbolically significant and alluded to in the public discourse did not necessarily determine any meaningful framework for interpreting biographical experiences. Thus what was the most used category from the previous research was this describing biographies as rooted in *milieu*. Looking at the collection of narrations from the three projects, we can say that only in the narratives about the experience of war did individuals talk about great historical events. In the typology of life events, war is defined as an event of low probability, but if it occurs, it is experienced by the majority (Hoerning 1990: 131). So the war was the basic frame of reference for life stories. Nevertheless our analysis showed that even in this case, there were few narratives rooted in history, that is, presenting biographical experiences from the perspective of great historical processes. In the case of the narratives focused on PPR times, the rooting of one's own biography in the perspective of history was not so much about the events of those times, but about the references to the war. Moreover, showing one's own biography in the context of the family fate of parents and grandparents and their patriotic involvement in the fight during the war time, most often happened in the case of narrators, who wanted to legitimize their biography in this way. These were people who criticized the socialist system at the time of the narrative interview, but who had

Memory and Biographical Experiences of People Born between 1945–1955. A sociological comparison based on the biographical comparison by the Polish-German Scientific Foundation (PNFN 2012-03) implemented in 2012–2015 by the Department of Sociology of Culture of the University of Łódź and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg, funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science. As a result of these projects, the Department of Sociology of Culture disposes of more than 200 narratives with people born in the following decades of the 20th century, beginning with the oldest narrator born in 1909 and the youngest in 1988.

¹⁷ A very similar phenomena was observed by Antonina Kłoskowska during her research on the biographies of young Poles of the democratic breakthrough (Kłoskowska 2012: 322–355).

been seduced by it at some point and then changed their perspective and took, sometimes quite active, action against it. In the case of narratives collected now, rootedness in history is extremely rare, as a recessive thread in the context of justifying parents' biographies and their entanglements in the socialist system, although these issues are usually faded out of awareness.

The vast majority of the informants, irrespective of education or social status, narrated the sequence of events in their life from the perspective of their own social environment. This could be understood broadly: from family relationships and the family in general as a biographical resource, but also the only reference frame, work, or the local community. One, therefore, searches in vain for a framework of civil society according to its classic definitions in the gathered data. It should be emphasized that we did not ask about it, that is, during the questioning phase we did not bring up topics that did not result from the spontaneous narrative we just collected. Can one draw far-reaching conclusions from here? Certainly not, it can be assumed that our interlocutors have political views, in one way or another they create a society that we could define as civic. The thing is that the stories about their lives before the task do not reach this frame of reference. So what constitutes the "essence" of biographical recapitulations of – let us recall – the so-called ordinary people? Again, one should refer to one of the analytical categories defined as biographical vectors developed in the project on war experiences – resourcefulness.

It shows links to the biographical action scheme and institutional pattern (coping as the opposite of helplessness, that is one of the constitutive features of trajectory experience). However, the story about biographical experience in terms of resourcefulness may concern attempts to control destructive effects of trajectory [...] (secondary adaptations in the sense of Erving Goffman). All in all, if the concepts of process structures refer to experience as a psychosocial reality that is reached through the analysis of the narrative, while the notions of biographical vectors refer to ways of reporting experiences interpreted as experiences of a certain kind (Piotrowski 2016: 48–49).

Here, some terminological difficulty must be clarified. At present, as we have emphasized many times here, the concept of resourcefulness can be associated with the repertoire of neoliberal language imposing on the individual the task/obligation of coping with life. It should be stressed, however, that the analysis of many autobiographical accounts about biographical experiences rooted in various historical moments of our society shows a specific, culturally developed strategy, which can be called by capacity to adopt and cope on the level of getting by. These developed resourcefulness strategies are quite common in our narratives and, somehow "ahead" of trajectory experience, are specific "preventive" strategies. Their bases are usually quite traditionally

reference points. The way of bringing order in life goes through family and social networking – building of social ties. But, at the same time, in the case of the youngest group of narrators setting a new family seems to be no longer a pattern for stabilization. Whereas in the case of a person born in the 1960s and 1970s, establishing one's own family was connected with the desire to stabilize one's own biography, especially responsibility for children. Of course it should be analyzed more as cultural than systemic change. Yet, at the same time, as we showed on the basis of narrative analysis, family and family ties remain as one of the constitutive biographical components of people's life. This contradiction may cause certain problems on the level of coping with one's biography – the pattern of individualization is contrasted here with the traditional pattern of family relationships. Moreover in the narratives we could also see deinstitutionalizations of biographies of young people who rely on family – they were often brought up by grandparents and in adult life could observe that institutionalization processes are rather faced than having real social meaning.

Analyzing the interviews from this project, as well as recalling the analysis of previously collected narratives, we can only confirm that resourcefulness is one of the basic culturally developed strategies in our society. It should be treated primarily as a way of dealing with difficulties experienced on an individual and collective level. At the same time, we can also look at resourcefulness somewhat critically: working out ways of dealing with social reality can lead to normalizing strategies. This was the case in many of the narratives of the communist era when social abnormality was accustomed to the world in which we had to live. Similarly, nowadays, neoliberal rhetoric raises the idea that effective management of one's biography is the basic *modus operandi* of a successful life. The cases we have described exemplify this way of thinking and this type of resourcefulness. At the same time, we also have shown how people, in this case not seduced but incapacitated by this rhetoric, simply have managed to cope with the transformative reality. Of course they had to deal with their own life experiences and social opportunity structures (or the lack of them). But, we can metaphorically say that their resourcefulness was the answer to the discourse of winners and losers, and the idea was not to be labelled a loser. Here we can put forward a hypothesis, which would require further in-depth analysis, that our society has been quite smoothly subjected to the new economic order, which has often taken the form of an economic regime calling for surrendering to the invisible hand of the market and taking for granted the high costs of transformation. Perhaps focusing on coping with everyday life through resourcefulness and avoiding the label of the loser was one of the reasons why people did not take to the streets even in the most difficult moments of the transformation, when the unemployment rate reached 20% or more.

The collected narratives delivered very rich and diverse material. In the book we could present just some analytical perspectives and we have a deep feeling of insatiability. When constructing the logic of our presentation we decided to focus on chosen problems and present it mainly through the case studies. Of course such strategy has advantages and disadvantages. Beginning from the last ones, we have to admit that although the discussed problems are generated from the material, they are at the same time *our* way of social reality interpretation.

In his *Scope of Anthology* (1967) Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the Indian who during his visit in New York was not interested at all in the usually impressive image of the metropolitan space, but

All his intellectual curiosity for the dwarfs, giants, and bearded ladies who were exhibited in Times Square in that time, for automats and for the brass balls decorating staircase banisters [...] All these things challenged his culture, and it was the culture alone which he was seeking to recognize in certain aspects of ours (1967: 44).

We have the impression that our approach to the collected materials is similar to that of the Indian – our attention was caught by specific problems and social processes. It can always be said that this is not the only analytical view, that there are no synthesizing generalizations and summaries in our considerations. Adopting this critical point of view, we are also convinced that the strategy we adopted for presenting the effects of work in the project gave the opportunity to capture, at least some part of the bottom-up perspective, an ordinary person. This allowed us to show some aspects of social processes from the level of biographical experience and their interpretation, not so easy to grasp with other research techniques. Thus, we are convinced that we have at least partly managed to fill the gap in existing analyses of the transformation process. Showing individual cases is always a kind of laboratory of connections between what is one-eyed and social; and stimulates what is necessary in the work of a sociologist – sociological imagination.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that materials collected using the autobiographical narrative interview method as part of the *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland* project showed multidimensionality and multilevelness of individual experiences of systemic transformation in Poland. They deny the common schematic and stereotyping distinctions, which entails the discrediting of those who – in the conditions of “governing through freedom” – have not become enterprising enough to face the necessity of “taking life into their own hands.” And as Ulrich Bröckling says: “Forcing people to develop their own individuality also means that ultimately they are to blame for their failures” (Bröckling 2016: 5).

Last but not least, we can ask the question; what is the role of sociologists in the (dramatic) processes of change, social conflict, or tensions?

One solution would be a look at experiences of people through the prism of Fritz Schütze's idea of a liaison work concept inspired by the legacy of Everett Hughes – one of the classics of the Chicago School (Hughes 1972: 303 and on). It involves the transition of differences in language-conditioned cultural codas (understood as the resources of interpretation that enable the defining and giving of meaning to the world of life) with simultaneous explanation of various points of view of interaction partners or different realities (cf., Czyżewski 2005: 348). Marek Czyżewski distinguished three types of intermediary work in public discourse (2005: 356–385; 2006: 130–132): hegemonic, symmetrical, and asymmetrical. As it seems in the transition between the socialist social formation and the neo-liberal model of capitalism, the symbolic elites took up its hegemonic variant, that is, one that did not take into account other points of view (“of non-subjective” mass) and either simply ignored them or – defining them as unwise, wrong, distorted, or immersed in the mental legacy of communism – granted themselves the right to lecture and rebuke a “rebellious ward,” reluctant to “do up modernizing backwardness” in reference to Europe (cf., Piotrowski 2005: 338).

As a result, as Sergiusz Kowalski wrote in 1997, the process of decomposition of the former communist order was spreading: “it was the work of the elite in which the masses had little to say, and even less to do” (1997: 295). And yet, it would be possible to introduce a modality that would take into consideration the other party's perspective on equal terms and take into account its hierarchy of validity (symmetrical variant) and even one that (in a special situation of suffering) would be based on the patient listening to the voice of an “ordinary citizen” (asymmetrical variant). At this point, once again, it is worth asking a question about the alleged guilt: are “ordinary citizens” or intellectual and political elites really to blame or should we (also) look for the answer somewhere else?

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APPENDIX

Transcription Notation

Transcription notation system applied in the project was adopted from Gail Jefferson. The transcription symbols as used in the transcriptions of the autobiographical narrative interviews are to show the informant's talk as it was originally spoken and take paraverbal and nonverbal language phenomenon into consideration. All symbols derive from those developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson, Heritage 1984: ix-xvi).

...	The shortest healable pause, less than 1 second.
(2), (3)	Timed pauses, two and three seconds respectively.
.hh	Speaker's audible in-breath.
hh.	Spehker's audible out-breath.
It was/ it was my choice	Slashes mark a cut off of prior word or utterance; several times repeated words or utterances, corrections of prior word or utterance.
()	Unclear speech or noise to which no approximation is made; utterance produced, but its sense could not be discerned.
(word)	Material within brackets represents the transcriber's guess at an unclear part of the tape; word(s) unclear, but "retrieved" as far as possible by the transcriber.
((laughing))	Transcriber's comments on various speech sounds or other details of conversational scene, or characteristic of talk.
((((ironically)))	Transcriber's judgements and interpretations.
<u>Word</u>	Underlining marks show an emphasis on the word or utterance.
CAPITALS	Capital letters indicate speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.

Italics	Italics indicate words used in the foreign (German) language, or polonized versions of German words.
[opening the door]	Transcriber's comments on things which are not connected with characteristics of talk.
It was not my fault [] What do	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech denote the space of overlapping talk.

Additional symbols and remarks:

I: Interviewer

N: Narrator

List of narrators

NAME AND THE YEAR OF BIRTH	PROFESSION	EDUCATION	PLACE OF RESIDENCE*
Marian (1962)	Educational supervisor	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Ada (1963)	Medical staff in a Mental Hospital	Vocational school	Small town
Anna (1964)	The Cash manager of a Large Construction Store	Secondary education	Major city
Tadek (1963)	Electrician	Vocational school	Village
Arek (1969)	Security guard	Vocational school	Major city
Czesia (1964)	Practical vocational training teacher	Higher education	Major city
Emil (1968)	The Friar	Higher education	Major city
Teresa (1964)	Confectionery owner	Vocational school	Major city
Leszek (1963)	Taxi driver	Higher education	Major city
Barbara (1960)	Cleaning lady	Vocational school	Village
Janina (1961)	Worker in a Factory of Household Appliances	Vocational school	Mid-sized town
Maja (1969)	Worker in a Cold Store (of food products)	Primary education	Village
Kornelia (1968)	Accountant	Higher education	Major city
Czesław (1963)	Public Administration employee	Higher education	Major city
Maria (1964)	Hairdresser	Vocational school	Mid-sized town
Kazimierz (1960)	Renovation Company worker	Vocational school	Major city
Antoni (1962)	Mechanic	Vocational school	Small town
Albert (1965)	Technical worker in the theater	Vocational school	Major city
Cecylia (1969)	Chorister in the theater	Higher education	Major city
Gabriela (1967)	Seamstress	Secondary education	Major city

Jadzia (1963)	Store employee	Secondary education	Mid-sized town
Roman (1961)	Car mechanic	Vocational school	Small town
Jarek (1968)	Entrepreneur	Higher education	Major city
Ernest (1967)	Driver	Secondary education	Small town
Bogna (1966)	Dressmaker	Vocational school	Small town
Kalina (1964)	Kindergarten teacher	Vocational school	Mid-sized town
Blanka (1966)	Saleswoman at the grocery store	Secondary education	Village
Tymek (1968)	Carpenter	Vocational school	Mid-sized town
Zygmunt (1960)	Visual artist	Higher education	Major city
Mietek (1962)	Physical worker in rural commune	Vocational school	Village
Jeremiasz (1979)	The Friar and Psychologist (works with difficult youth)	Higher education	Village
Daria (1973)	Manager	Higher education	Major city
Grzegorz (1972)	Warehouseman	Higher education	Major city
Janusz (1972)	Baker	Vocational school	Major city
Zuzanna (1970)	Accountant	Higher education	Major city
Wojtek (1978)	Manager	Higher education	Major city
Beata (1977)	Artist	Higher education	Major city
Halina (1972)	House cleaner	Higher education	Major city
Elżbieta (1977)	Employee of the Television Network	Higher education	Major city
Róża (1975)	Community Center director	Higher education	Small town
Agnieszka (1976)	Speech therapist	Higher education	Major city
Aleksandra (1970)	Family assistance	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Paulina (1978)	Academic teacher	Higher education	Major city
Paweł (1976)	Manager	Higher education	Major city

Bartek (1976)	Music teacher and guitarist	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Tomasz (1969)	Academic researcher	Higher education	Major city (living abroad in Ireland)
Sławek (1971)	Unemployed person	Vocational school	Village
Bogumił (1978)	Bookmaker	Higher education	Major city
Piotr (1975)	Engineer	Higher education	Major city
Adam (1979)	Nurse in a Mental Hospital	Nursing school	Small town
Robert (1972)	High-skilled manager	Higher education	Major city
Izabela (1979)	Academic teacher	Higher education	Major city
Łukasz (1979)	Filmmaker (creator of animated films)	Higher education	Major city (living both in Poland and United States)
Father Kamil (1978)	Parish priest	Higher education	Village
Szymon (1973)	Academic teacher and photographer	Higher education	Major city
Przemek (1979)	Public Administration employee and member of Municipal Council	Higher education	Small town
Filip (1974)	Computer game store owner	Higher education	Major city
Konrad (1978)	Entrepreneur	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Marcin (1974)	Horticultural company owner	Higher education	Major city
Dagna (1978)	Bank employee	Higher education	Major city
Hanna (1981)	Medical doctor	Higher education	Major city
Jan (1986)	Policeman	Higher education	Major city
Julia (1984)	Skills coach and academic researcher	Higher education	Major city
Michał (1982)	Owner of a business in creative industries	Higher education	Major city

Inga (1984)	Visual artist	Higher education	Major city (living both in Poland and the Netherlands)
Magda (1982)	Beautician and owner of her own Beauty Salon	Higher education (cosmetology specialization)	Small town
Radek (1985)	Advertising Agency employee	Higher education	Major city
Karol (1982)	Musician in a Theater Orchestra and Music School teacher	Higher education	Major city
Marta (1984)	Public relations specialist	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Dobrochna (1988)	Medical doctor	Higher education	Major city
Jaśmina (1987)	Sales agent	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Franka (1986)	Social worker	Higher education	Major city
Lucjan (1985)	Web designer	Higher education	Major city
Weronika (1983)	Academic researcher (in time of the interview PhD candidate)	Higher education	Major city (living abroad in Italy)
Mariusz (1984)	Carwash worker	Vocational school	Major city
Artur (1986)	Academic researcher and school teacher (in time of the interview PhD candidate)	Higher education	Major city
Alicja (1983)	Confectionery owner	Higher education	Major city
Jakub (1981)	IT specialist (working in IT Management field)	Higher education	Major city (living abroad in France)
Ewa (1987)	Cultural Institution employee	Higher education	Major city
Andrzej (1980)	Store manager	Secondary education	Mid-sized town
Laura (1984)	School teacher	Higher education	Major city

Mateusz (1980)	Programer	Higher education	Major city
Norbert (1985)	English teacher	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Monika (1988)	Owner of private business	Higher education	Major city
Miłosz (1987)	Theater actor	Higher education	Major city
Kacper (1983)	Translator	Higher education	Mid-sized town
Nina (1986)	Florist owner	Vocational school	Small town
Dominik (1984)	Personal trainer	Higher education	Major city
Wiktoria (1988)	Bank employee	Higher education	Major city
Sylwia (1982)	Cashier	Secondary education	Major city

* Regarding possible doubts and questions, we decided to use the following criteria to categorize the place of living of our informants: major city – from 200,000 citizens, mid-sized town – from 20,000 to 200,000 citizens, small town – under 20,000 citizens. Assignment to the village category was founded on the formal administrative status of a particular settlement.

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INDEX

- argumentation: 30, 42, 45, 75, 109, 326, 394, 402, 485, 493, 524, 538, 553, 554, 556, 559, 562, 573
- argumentative commentary: 44, 281, 326, 343, 394, 419, 493, 498, 506
- background construction: 44, 242, 327, 360, 367, 407, 416, 498, 569, 577
- biographical action plan(s)/ scheme(s): 42, 43, 72, 73, 97, 100, 239, 250, 255, 289, 291, 295, 304, 337, 338, 340, 345, 358, 360, 361, 365, 366, 376, 398, 407, 470, 471, 575, 576, 597
- biographical carer(s): 157, 308, 459, 500, 508, 512, 517, 519
- biographical memory: 24, 104, 172, 177, 182, 188, 255, 263, 270, 531, 548, 642
- biographical resource(s): 11, 30, 72, 288, 289, 359, 365, 425, 427, 431, 432, 437, 441, 461, 475, 477, 478, 485, 504, 512, 519, 523, 528, 531, 532, 537, 540, 556, 557, 561, 568, 574, 580, 584, 589, 592, 597
- biographical work: 34, 39, 103, 109, 138, 148, 231, 234, 235, 255, 278, 303, 311, 322, 342–345, 370, 399, 400, 415, 422, 423, 426, 440, 441, 479, 491, 493, 494, 499, 501, 503, 512, 524, 542, 546, 563, 587, 609
- bottom-up: 16, 22, 28, 33, 34, 88, 104, 350, 570, 590, 592, 599
- coda: 42, 70, 338, 340–343, 368, 411, 412, 414, 415, 435, 479, 486, 487, 489, 491–495, 499, 503, 507, 509, 514–517
- cohort: 6, 36, 37, 39, 40, 117, 119, 148, 239–294, 297, 299, 300, 389, 421, 623
- collective memory: 104, 106, 107, 124, 141, 151, 222, 613, 643
- communism/t (s): 15, 17, 26, 40, 91, 99, 104, 106, 107, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 130–135, 136–138, 150–154, 156, 159, 161, 163, 164, 181, 194, 196, 199, 201, 205, 211, 224, 229–300, 232, 233, 236–240, 241, 243–246, 248–250, 252, 259, 260, 262, 267, 284, 292, 305, 401, 410, 415, 417, 489, 490, 508, 533, 598, 600–603, 614, 625, 627
- communitas: 238, 239, 311, 527, 536, 539, 540, 547, 552, 558, 583, 626
- contrast set: 302, 311, 353, 355, 359, 372, 415, 420, 516, 524, 541, 542, 547
- contrastive comparison: 7, 47, 317, 386, 436, 441, 563, 583
- cultural resilience: 72, 74
- discourse: 9, 18, 19, 25, 26, 33, 34, 39, 45, 47, 50–53, 55, 56, 73–74, 77, 104, 106–108, 111, 123, 124, 134, 141, 160, 162, 167, 168, 189, 195, 196, 211, 232, 235, 239, 242, 252, 256, 280, 284, 287, 290–292, 295–298, 323, 324, 334, 342–444, 387–388, 397, 417–420, 443, 444, 484, 518, 526, 590–592, 596, 598, 600, 610, 630, 632, 640
- dramatis personae*: 247, 325, 498, 499, 524
- economy: 17, 25–27, 44, 50, 55–56, 144, 167, 168, 172, 174–176, 180, 182, 185, 196, 259, 260, 264, 266–268, 289, 298, 301, 324–326, 340, 341, 349–352, 387, 388, 390, 408, 418, 420–422, 443, 447, 449, 451, 464, 486, 489, 494, 495, 594, 603, 605, 615, 616
- education: 17, 21, 30, 36–40, 43, 55, 58, 60–62, 64, 76, 90, 91, 151–153, 156, 158–162, 205, 121, 214, 218,

- 219, 225, 226, 230, 237, 238, 242, 245, 248, 259, 268, 272–273, 275, 278–280, 289, 293–295, 300, 301, 310, 332, 333, 335, 344–346, 363, 365–367, 370, 375, 382, 386, 389, 392–394, 397–399, 401–404, 406, 407, 411, 414, 416, 420–422, 425, 427, 437, 447–453, 461–463, 471, 473, 474, 475, 484, 499, 505, 508, 525, 526, 532, 533, 540, 543, 547, 558, 560, 566, 569, 571, 585, 592, 594, 595, 597, 601, 602, 604, 629, 635, 639
- emic: 5, 16, 18, 28, 47–49, 51, 56, 63, 76, 282, 425, 426, 530, 614
- emigration: 17, 106, 113, 183, 253, 256, 268, 270, 273, 277, 278, 318, 363, 364, 397, 576, 579, 582
- etic: 5, 16, 27, 47–49, 51, 56, 63, 76, 77, 281, 282, 285, 425, 426, 432, 614
- fading out phenomena/of awareness: 44, 85, 123, 311
- generation(s): 10, 13, 14, 23, 29, 37, 41, 85, 86, 106–110, 112, 119, 147, 148, 150, 161, 168, 169, 231–233, 237, 240, 265, 292, 298, 386, 396, 403, 413, 414, 435–440, 445, 472, 473, 480–484, 513, 524, 527, 530, 537, 545, 550, 554–556, 565, 592–594, 603, 612, 618, 621, 622, 628
- hierarchy(ies): 20, 37, 74, 204, 223, 231, 281, 286, 303, 306, 312, 317, 323, 331, 397, 558, 593, 600
- homo sovieticus*: 161, 224, 285, 297, 447, 593, 618, 628, 630
- identity work: 423, 439, 528
- innovators: 5, 112, 143, 146, 147, 149, 150, 163, 164, 642
- institutional action pattern: 364
- life course(s): 30, 42, 45, 64, 75, 89, 104, 107, 116, 117, 125, 230, 233, 237, 239–241, 254, 298, 300, 332, 338, 445, 493, 538, 592, 642, 643
- life cycle: 28, 35, 36, 50, 168, 172, 177, 293, 300, 311, 571, 585–586, 595
- life history(eis): 6, 9, 18, 23, 31, 35, 43, 44, 51, 57, 61, 63, 64, 68, 75, 76, 80–82, 99, 106, 107, 112, 146, 147, 225, 229, 230, 239, 240, 251–255, 257, 258, 261, 265, 267, 270, 276, 278–280, 282, 286, 294, 299, 301, 306, 314, 317, 323, 324, 342–344, 348, 353, 375, 386, 391, 394, 405, 411, 421, 423, 443, 456, 469, 483, 485, 487, 493, 494, 504, 507, 511, 518, 523, 527, 538, 546, 558, 552, 592, 594, 631
- life story(ries): 9, 15, 30, 31, 39, 40, 45, 51, 57, 63, 67, 70, 72, 74–77, 81, 82, 99, 103, 105, 111, 112, 223, 225, 250–252, 255, 258, 265, 287, 303, 304, 306, 345, 346, 360, 414, 427, 439, 477, 478, 480, 481, 483, 484, 493, 499, 507, 512, 517, 531, 595, 596, 603, 607, 612, 622, 628
- local community: 15, 57, 60, 61, 64, 68, 70–75, 245, 328, 400, 441, 452, 534, 548, 565, 568, 583–585, 597
- man on the street: 34, 35, 37, 56
- marginality / marginal man: 239, 241, 314, 626, 641
- Martial Law: 16, 91, 106, 117, 128, 136, 138, 175, 244, 375, 376, 460, 471, 508
- metamorphosis: 42, 43, 72, 73, 255, 370, 583, 584
- metamorphosis potential: 74, 584
- middle class: 20, 38, 53, 96, 179, 289, 295, 330, 332, 420, 543, 545, 590, 592, 605
- migration: 59, 113, 183, 204, 205, 251, 253, 255–258, 261, 269, 270, 273, 276, 278–280, 302, 391, 436, 445, 449, 483, 576, 602, 604, 607, 613, 631
- milieu*: 15, 31, 45, 51, 61, 68, 72, 83, 113, 121, 195, 199, 223, 224, 248, 283, 285, 289, 291, 441, 475, 479, 481, 504, 506, 514, 517, 519, 548, 550, 558, 559, 564, 565, 569, 575, 577, 582–587, 596, 621

- modernization: 19, 26, 27, 49, 53, 55, 74, 75, 95, 133, 145, 149, 150, 161, 183, 189, 195, 196, 198, 200, 202, 205, 208, 211, 217, 232, 233, 289, 294, 298, 300, 305, 347, 348, 354, 382, 386, 390, 421, 449, 475, 513, 521, 556, 561, 564, 586, 590, 613, 627, 630, 641
- narrative constrains: 45, 427, 577
- neoliberal: 14, 22, 25, 52, 53, 55, 62, 64, 69, 74–76, 77, 107, 111, 157, 160, 267, 268, 273, 282, 296, 298, 299, 301, 303, 306–308, 317, 329, 340, 342, 346–348, 401, 417, 420, 421, 443, 559, 561, 591, 592, 594, 597, 604, 608, 629
- opportunity structures: 11, 18, 30, 45, 46, 51, 59, 62, 63, 72, 75, 76, 112, 146–148, 157–160, 162–167, 169, 233, 281–283, 285–296, 298, 348, 350, 354, 355, 383, 387, 390, 397, 404, 406, 419, 421, 422, 425, 441, 443, 445, 452, 456–458, 463, 465, 471, 473, 474, 566, 584, 585, 589, 592, 593, 598
- ordinary man/people: 19, 28, 33, 34, 37, 103, 110, 117, 141, 198, 590, 597
- peer group: 293, 302, 326, 346, 527, 535, 536, 547, 555, 558, 565, 571, 575, 585
- periphery/peripheral/peripherality: 27, 38, 57, 96, 182, 195, 200, 210, 211, 224, 225, 227, 269, 347, 591, 592
- post-communist: 17, 26, 107, 161, 224, 259, 490, 602, 615, 625, 627
- post-socialism/t: 282, 289, 397, 608, 619
- poverty: 10, 22, 23, 30, 52, 55, 113, 125, 143, 144, 151, 198, 212, 213, 256, 266, 279, 283, 284, 294, 328, 372, 393, 443–451, 456–458, 469, 472, 473, 535, 542, 546, 571, 580, 586, 613, 628, 642
- PPR: 16, 17, 26, 28, 103–113, 143–147, 150, 153, 154, 157, 160, 161, 167, 172, 178, 179, 182, 183, 187, 192, 193, 203, 204, 229, 263, 265, 296, 305, 308, 351, 354, 355, 376, 414, 416, 428, 463, 479, 485, 498, 523, 524, 532–535, 542, 543, 548, 557, 560, 592, 594, 595, 596
- preamble: 278, 324, 325, 479, 486, 487, 491, 492, 499, 503, 514
- precarious/precariousness: 23, 24, 57, 62, 64, 65, 279, 295, 299, 300, 308, 313, 314, 336, 338, 344, 345, 347, 355, 390, 467, 579, 583, 585, 590, 619, 620, 629
- resilience: 72–74, 288, 332, 606, 608, 611, 618, 630
- resourcefulness: 72–74, 84, 88, 101, 185, 332, 347, 404, 556, 592, 597, 598
- rooted/ rootedness in history: 15, 121, 223, 597
- rooted/ rootedness in *milieu*: 15, 31, 72, 121, 223, 441, 475, 477, 479, 504, 506, 519, 548, 584, 586, 596, 597
- rooting in culture: 559, 571
- significant Others: 43, 57, 152, 153, 230, 239, 247–250, 262, 274, 304, 325, 422, 432, 433, 459, 473, 476–478, 491, 49
- social exclusion: 22, 52, 284, 443–446, 450, 456, 469, 472, 473, 484, 641, 642
- social reformers: 112, 146–148, 160, 164–169, 296
- social world: 39, 43, 45, 48, 102, 109, 146, 148, 158, 230, 236, 283, 285, 288–291, 295–299, 301, 302, 308, 312, 318, 324, 330, 335, 344–346, 353, 359, 381, 382, 422, 359, 606, 622, 626
- socialism (real/state): 92, 105, 107, 109, 110, 135, 139, 142, 143, 152, 153, 160, 181, 186, 194–199, 202, 209, 224, 225, 229, 231, 233, 235, 246, 259–261, 272, 284, 294, 300, 395, 397, 498, 493–495, 611, 613, 629
- socialist system: 21, 104, 117, 123, 146, 163, 203, 224, 232, 260, 267, 270, 451, 486, 493, 495, 596, 597

- socialization: 16, 36, 119, 145, 185, 245, 247, 254, 262, 278, 279, 300, 304, 306, 359, 473, 483, 521, 524–527, 530, 549, 561, 602
- Solidarity (movement): 16, 53, 91, 106, 107, 117, 123, 128, 132, 133, 135–138, 144, 156, 159, 164, 223, 239, 244, 248, 249
- theoretical commentary: 341, 359, 380
- trajectory (of suffering/experience/process): 43, 44, 64–66, 69, 83, 124, 131, 213, 226, 231, 253, 255, 259, 270, 272, 273, 277–279, 289, 291, 298, 303, 304, 319, 321–324, 331, 337, 338, 340, 343–347, 355, 358, 389, 445, 456, 460, 461, 463, 465, 470, 473, 474, 489, 501, 502, 504, 541, 542, 546, 571, 576, 578–580, 584, 587, 597, 612, 622
- trajectory potential: 43, 66, 67, 69, 72, 73, 272, 289, 295, 299, 303, 304, 319, 321, 324, 331, 355, 379, 540, 558, 584, 592
- top-down: 16, 238, 349, 363, 381, 592
- unemployed: 38, 59, 60, 129, 162, 224, 336, 446, 448–455, 467, 469, 470, 472, 590, 637
- unemployment: 17, 21, 40, 56, 57, 62, 65, 73, 113, 121, 127–129, 134, 167, 252, 256, 261, 262, 266, 269, 270, 284, 321, 351, 354, 357, 368, 374, 411, 447–450, 455–457, 464, 465, 467–469, 472, 473, 581, 585, 590, 598
- unskilled worker(s): 61, 66, 204, 205, 393, 406, 464, 473
- winners and/or losers, winners-losers: 18, 22, 47–51, 53–57, 63, 75–77, 82, 97, 118, 284, 297, 389, 414, 415, 443, 592, 594, 598, 614
- yard: 30, 293, 365, 440, 441, 448, 459, 519, 523–532, 534–542, 544, 547–549, 551–562, 567

Łódź University Press
90-131 Łódź, 8 Lindleya St.
www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl
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