

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 Róža's narrative. While in Róža's case the story of the peer group forms a fairly coherent picture of relations based on Róža'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 Fasolki⁸? And I just (laughs). Fasolki?! 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.

Róza 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 Róza and Marta. Despite such fundamental differences, they both experience a biographical metamorphosis. In the case of Róza, 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 cafe 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.