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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, Ziolkowski 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* (Aarelaid-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.