

Joanna Wygnańska

CHAPTER XIV

NARRATIVES ROOTED IN FAMILY MILIEU CASE STUDIES OF AGNIESZKA AND PAWEŁ FOCUSED ON THE FAMILY THREAD AS THE BIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCE AND MAIN STORY-LINE

Introduction

The Polish film director Jan Jakub Kolski¹ in one of his interviews explains what strongly influenced his adult work is growing up in the countryside, where he lived between the ages of 11 and 15 on his maternal grandfather's farm. Kolski describes this important episode in his biography with the following words:

As a child from the city, I came to the village, from the fourth grade of primary school I lived with my grandfather in the countryside. Everything was new and enchanting to me. Grandfather was a saddler² He was visited by various people. I listened to their stories. This childhood education is the source of my secrets and interests.³

¹ Also a screenwriter, cameraman and prose writer. Born in Wrocław in 1956. He is the creator of mainly feature films (e.g., *Historia kina w Popielawach* [1998], *Daleko od okna* [2000], *Pornografia* [2003], *Jasminum* [2006], *Ułaskawienie* [2018]), as well as documentary series and documentary films (e.g., *Między rajem a ziemią* [2003], *Namibia* [2005]). He published several novels and collections of stories: *Jańcio Wodnik i inne opowiadania*, *Kulka z chleba*, *Egzamin z oddychania*, *Mikroświaty: opowiadania*, and *Jadzia i małoludki*. He has been a member of the European Film Academy since 2000.

² He made horse harnesses, saddles, and equestrian accessories. These products were sewn by hand from leather and then finished with metal upholstery. Saddlery currently belongs to the so-called vanishing professions. This is mainly due to the modernization processes taking place throughout the 20th century, which resulted in machines taking over the role of horses.

³ From: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/jan-jakub-kolski>. Text author: Ewa Nawój, April 2004; updated February 2019. Retrieved November 12 2019.

This experience made the village of Popielawy,⁴ which at that time was Kolski's house, also become a place where part of the story told by the director⁵ takes place. It is often an imaginary world, saturated with "magical realism" typical, among others, for the novel *One hundred years of loneliness* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Nevertheless, the threads raised by Kolski also refer to his biographical experiences related to everyday life with his grandfather

The artist who returns in his works to his own biography, in his latest film titled *Ulaskawienie* (2018) attempted to tell the story of his maternal grandparents from the perspective of a grandson. This extremely moving picture of their lives interwoven with the difficult experiences of the First and Second World Wars and the mourning after the death of their son, a soldier of the Home Army⁶ (the brother of the director's mother), who was shot in the autumn of 1946, is the quintessence of stories which, as a child, Kolski was not yet able to understand exactly. In this way, in his adult life, through the film frame, he attempted to face the history of his family, as well as to show its importance for his individual experience. The figure of the maternal grandfather played an important role in the artist's youth, not only as a carer, but also as a significant Other for the formation of his vision of the world. In this way, in a film plot based on a true story – the director allowed his grandparents to say goodbye to their deceased son (the director's uncle) differently from the way it really happened. As he says, in another interview:

Ulaskawienie shows the story of two elderly people who carry the coffin with the son's body throughout Poland. Let it remain a mystery what is fictional content. My grandparents did not go on such a journey. The grandfather welded his son in a coffin and covered it with concrete in the Łaznów⁷ cemetery. In my imagination, however, they set off on this journey. This journey on screen will be a kind of compensation for this terrible fate which my grandparents met.⁸

⁴ A village located in central Poland, in the Łódź Voivodeship.

⁵ For example, the film *Historia kina w Popielawach* (1998) takes place in the scenery of the director's rural, family landscapes, among "familiar" spaces and human types. The narrator in the film is a boy, Staszek Szewczyk, who has been raised so far in a big city, starts living in the countryside, where his grandparents come from. The plot of the picture intertwines with Kolski's memories of his family history and (equally personal) reflections on the phenomenon of cinema in the time of subordination to the art of so-called tenth muse, including profit dogma.

⁶ The Home Army (AK), the armed forces of the Polish Underground State in the years of World War II.

⁷ A village located in central Poland, not far from the director's home village – Popielawy.

⁸ At <https://lodz.naszemiasto.pl/film-ulaskawienie-jan-jakub-kolski-krecil-kolo-lodzi/ar/c13-4360783>. Author: Anna Gronczewska, December 2017. Retrieved November 12, 2019.

The above digression, evoking Kolski's creative inspirations and references, aims to indicate the importance of experiences rooted in the family history for the formation of a single biographical identity. In the introduction to this part of the book, we pointed out that the family thread, in many of those narrations gathered in the project: *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland. A Sociological Comparative Analysis Based on Biographical Perspective*, was one of the main storylines around which the interlocutors built the story of their lives "oriented by the cognitive overall *Gestalt*" (Schütze 2008a: 175). Thus, many narrators reconstructed their individual biographical experiences as if in relation to the history of their families and by pointing to those people who have had a direct and significant impact on their beliefs and life choices. Thus, like the grandfather, they are, in the case of the director Jan Jakub Kolski, the significant Others who, as we indicated in the introduction, have a formative role in shaping the stories of the childhood and adolescence of our interlocutors. They are also present, often symbolically, in their adulthood. Besides, from the biographical perspective of "now," relations with these people were treated by the narrators as crucial for attributing meaning to their biographies. Most often, these people were grandparents, but also our interlocutors' parents, their husbands, wives, or partners. In this way, the story of the family was indicated by many of them as the most important or one of the most important threads of their biographies. Thus, I treat this thread in the analysis below as a biographical resource. As Kaja Kaźmierska writes in the introduction to this part of the book, it is such a dimension of the biographical experience of the narrators which they considered crucial for the development of their lives. What is more, I show it in the context of biographical processes and the related social processes (Schütze 1992a, 2008 a, b, 2014, Kaźmierska, Schütze 2013, Waniek 2019), in which the individual biographical fate of our narrators was entangled.

To conduct the research study set out in this chapter, I chose from among the 90 collected autobiographical interviews two narrations: Paweł,⁹ a manager (born 1976) and Agnieszka, a speech therapist (also born 1976). By studying these two cases, I try to explain the complexity of biographical and social processes from which the interlocutors' individual patterns of action and interpretations of social reality emerge (Breckner 2007: 115). Additionally, referring to the assumption that "what you say about your life story entails explanations of your own actions and self-assessments" (Gültekin, Inowlocki, Lutz 2012: 661), I focus on reconstructing the experiences of the narrators inscribed in a specific social framework (Schütze 2008a, b). On the other

⁹ In Chapter IX, Part 2 of the book, I refer to a fragment of Paweł's biography touching the sphere of his reflectiveness concerning his individual biographical experience of the time of transformation in Poland.

hand, I concentrate on the layer of their reflectivity, in which they present their developing biographical identity by recreating their biographical experiences. I treat the family thread which orders their biography as the frame connecting individual phases of their autobiographical accounts. In this perspective the specific research objective of the analysis undertaken is, on the one hand, a structural analysis of the autobiographical narratives of Paweł and Agnieszka, in order to show in the fullest possible way what role the family thread plays in building their life stories. Moreover, through the analysis of these biographies, I am trying to put my reflections into the discussion on the contemporary narrative on the importance of the family as a value in Poland, from the position of understanding the family as an important biographical resource in building stories about one's own life.

The choice of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases was not connected with the research decision to analyze only this part of the interview collection which presents the biographical experiences of people born in the decade of the 1970s. The study of these two autobiographical stories is rather a consequence of choosing (out of 90) the collected narrations. Those in which the family was treated by the narrators as an important thread organizing their biography both in the spontaneous narrative phase and in the additional questions phase. The specificity of biographical research is in fact generating from the collected material those categories which allow the researcher to reconstruct the biographical experience of the narrators entangled in a specific social framework. Moreover, the aim of my analysis was based on selecting the similar cases rather than contrasting ones in order to be able to trace how the main narrative line, which is the family thread, is built in them. The analysis of similar cases also gives an opportunity to show the discussed problem on many levels, to look at whether in both of the studied biographies it really has a very similar specificity, or maybe, despite the assumption of similarity of the discussed narratives, we are dealing with, from the analytical point of view, significant differences in the understanding of the importance of the family thread for building life stories by the narrators. In this way, both in Paweł and Agnieszka's biographies I encountered a special role attributed to their relationship with grandparents¹⁰ and parents. In addition, these biographies

¹⁰ In very many of the autobiographical stories we have gathered, the narrators described their relationship with grandparents, pointing to the special role of grandmothers and grandfathers during their childhood and adolescence. This is because grandparents often provided not only help in their upbringing, thereby relieving the often busy parents. They were also treated by our interlocutors as significant Others for the development of their biographical identity. As Kaja Kaźmierska writes in the introduction to this part of the book: "Much more important [in the narrations we have gathered; ed. J.W.] is a kind of relationship built then [with grandparents; ed.

carry a clear desire of the narrators to cultivate the importance of family ties also in the families they started. In Paweł's life history, as in the case of Jan Jakub Kolski, the important dimension of his biographical experience is the relationship with his maternal grandfather. In addition, it should be noted that the story about the grandfather and the narrator's relationship with his grandfather appears both in the preamble and in the coda closing the phase of Paweł's spontaneous narration and linking the following threads he presents. Importantly, if a preamble appears in the autobiographical story, it usually coincides with what the narrator says in the coda. What is more, when there is a preamble in the narration, the coda which appears at the end of the life history told is elaborate and is also often a split coda (Każmierska, Waniek 2020). We find this coda in Paweł's narration and this is an important analytical aspect undertaken in the study of this case. In the interview with Agnieszka, in turn, the figure of her maternal grandmother comes to the fore, who is depicted by the narrator not only as a grandmother, but also as a close friend. Agnieszka considers growing up at her grandparents' home as something which shaped her perception of intimate relationships and an ideal vision of the world in which she would like to function.

Additionally, Agnieszka and Paweł devote a lot of space in their narrations to give sense to their biographical experiences by reconstructing the fate of their parents, siblings, and their spouses. In the case of Agnieszka's biographical work (Schütze 2008a, b), the story of her sister Hanna¹¹ is important and their deep sisterly bond. What connects the selected cases is, therefore, the rooting of both autobiographical stories in the family *milieu* and the presentation of other threads (including professional life) through the prism of this area of experiences. Using the term "rooted in the family *milieu*," I am inspired by the concept of the autobiographical narrative vectors: "rooting in history" and 'rooting in *milieu*' (Piotrowski 2016), discussed, among others, in the introduction to the first part of this book. In this perspective, the "rooting" of Paweł and Agnieszka in the 'family *milieu*' manifests itself in the domination of experiences inscribed in the family context in their narrations. In other words, the family thread is the main dimension of biographical references in them, and the other experiences described are subordinate.

JW.], which in many cases has been formative and the figure of grandparents was part of the family landscape."

¹¹ The case of Hanna, a doctor born in the early 1980s, is discussed in detail in Chapter X, in Katarzyna Waniek's analysis. Jacek Burski refers to the narrator's professional experience in Chapter XI. A reconstruction of Hanna's experiences from the late 1980s showing a comparative perspective on the PPR line and the well-being of the Western world can be found in Chapter IX of my authorship.

Conceptual framework of further deliberations

The considerations presented here should be placed in a broader framework of analyses concerning the family in biographical research.¹² First of all, I would like to refer to the thoughts of Paul Thompson, derived from comparative studies conducted with Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame in the second half of the 1980s¹³ regarding intergenerational communication and the multi-faceted phenomenon of social mobility. At the same time, it should be noted that in his reflections on the effects of this Anglo-French comparative study on the core kin families, Thompson writes both in relation to the analytical perspective of oral history,¹⁴ as well as undertakes the task of conducting a study of biographical interviews within the biographical method with members of 100 families in England and France. It is the latter perspective of his analyses that is the subject of my reference. I am also aware that the study of family histories

¹² This text also requires a theoretical reference to the research field of sociology of the family. In Polish research the perspective of studying the frame of the concept of the family, processes taking place within the family, and also dilemmas and changes of modern Polish families, it can be indicated here, for example, Adamski (2002), Tyszka (2002), Slany (2002), Giza-Poleszczuk (2005), Szlendak (2010), Kotlarska-Michalska (2015), Boguszewski (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2015), Kwak (2005, 2015), Sikorska (2014, 2019), and the interdisciplinary scientific journal *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny* (Journal page: <https://press.amu.edu.pl/pl/katalog/czasopisma-naukowe/roczniki-socjologii-rodziny.html>).

¹³ I am talking about *Families and social mobility: a comparative study*, funded on the British side by the Economic and Social Research Council, and on the French side by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). “The initial focus was middle generation informants, aged 30–55 married with children. Interviews typically cover family background and occupation, as well as a full life story covering childhood, working life, marriage, and childrearing” (after <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/- Archive Website on which one can find the description and access to the research materials collected on the British side of the comparative study>). The result of these studies are two book publications. The first one, (Bertaux, Thompson 1993) published as part of the series *International Yearbook of oral history and life stories* and the second (Bertaux, Thompson 1997) constituting a collection of texts showing the multi-faceted aspect of social mobility. The publications present the issues of an intergenerational message in the context of a research quest for answers to the question about the content of family histories, about what knowledge parents pass on to their children and how this message influences the formation of the life stories and life paths of their children.

¹⁴ More about Thompson’s approach to oral history can be found in his book (Thompson 1978, 2000). To understand the differences and the mutual relationship between oral history and biographical method see the text by Jakub Gałęziowski (2019).

indicated here, including the cooperation of Thompson and Bertaux, is far from the interpretative perspective presented in my text. However, as part of outlining some broader background of completed research projects focused on analyzing family history and intergenerational communication in the context of biographical research, I decided that the comparative research study should also be mentioned. Reflecting on the impact of family experiences for shaping individual life paths, Thompson notes that:

Telling one's own life story requires not only recounting directly remembered experiences, but also drawing on information and stories transmitted across the generations. [...] Life stories are thus, in themselves, a form of transmission; but at the same time they often indicate in a broader sense what is passed down in families (Thompson 2005: 275, also Thompson 1993: 13).

In this view, the most important resource of life stories told was the transmission of family influences across the generations. "It shows how within that framework individuals can choose not only to accept but also to reject their transgenerational inheritance" (Thompson 2005: 277). In such an analytical approach, the family context shown in individual life stories was treated in relation to the interpretation of how narrators "fuse the personal with the familial" (Thompson 2005). It should be noted that the described study of intergenerational dependencies in terms of Thompson and Bertaux grew out of Bertaux's research intention to give the biographical analysis a macro-social dimension.¹⁵ Bertaux saw the possibility of including analyses of family histories in the perspective of macro-social interpretations and research based on these analyses of social processes such as social mobility and social change (Każmierska 2012b: 118).

The family thread, also in a different perspective from the biographical analysis of cases presented in my text, is present in the research conducted

¹⁵ As Kaja Kaźmierska (2012b: 116) notes, Bertaux is rather 'reluctant to identify with the interpretative perspective, sometimes calling it narrativism.' His analytical approach is dominated by the treatment of "biography as a means" (Helling 1960: 16), to gather biographical information to be used to answer sociological questions. The project undertaken with Thompson to collect family stories, however, differed from his other research initiatives related to collecting life stories among people belonging to the same *milieu* (the most significant in his achievements are the long-term studies of French bakers accomplished with Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame). He returned to the family context collecting, together with Catherine Delcroix (again) life stories (not family stories) among family members representing "the same social formation," which was to "lead to learning about general cultural and social patterns, the dynamics of change and social reproduction or historical transformations" (cited in Kaźmierska 2012b: 118).

by Gabriele Rosenthal. Her extensive study concerned the importance of intergenerational dialogue in the family for the formation of a “historical and family sequence of generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 686).¹⁶ On the one hand, the researcher was interested in how intergenerational processes are shaped in terms of intergenerational experiences. In her analysis, she also tried to show “how much the experiences of the generation of parents and grandparents can have on the condition of the next generations – especially when they are suppressed and when they are denied” (Rosenthal 2012: 690). Rosenthal notes that this generation of parents, called the “middle generation,” is embedded in a particularly important role in the context of intergenerational relations. It has a direct impact on the process of transmitting the family past and thus maintaining the dialogue between the generation of grandparents and the generation of grandchildren. In addition, the family narrations that the researcher got (people from 1960–1970) were marked by the experiences of World War I and II. In this way, the intergenerational message she analyzed was dominated by attempts made by the middle generation to face not only the individual difficult biographical experience, but also the difficult experience of the parents, entangled in “negotiating, reinterpreting, silencing, and externalizing” the past. Attempting to complement the reference to the research perspective proposed by Rosenthal,¹⁷ it is worth referring to the analysis of Katarzyna Waniek, who notes that:

The biographical research method, almost absent in recent years in American sociology, located on the outskirts of the main currents in both France and Great Britain, still holds a relatively high position in Germany. There is a thriving environment of sociologists-biographers focused primarily on the schools of Fritz Schütz and Gabriele Rosenthal (2019: 137).

However, I am not attempting to reconstruct the relationship between the two approaches in the history of biographical research. Briefly, it can only be pointed out that their assumptions are associated with the implication

¹⁶ The scholar conducted research with members of three-generation families in Germany, with people born in 1890–1970. It focuses mainly on the concept of a historical generation, recognizing that it is shaped “through family dialogue and a specific family sequence of generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 698). Starting from the definition of the real generation of Karl Mannheim (1992/1993), Rosenthal assumes that the historical generation develops through reliving the past and reinterpreting processes which “take place in interactions with others – and this also means with the members of older and younger generations” (Rosenthal 2012: 688).

¹⁷ A broader discussion of this approach to the biographical method one can find, for example, in her text (Rosenthal, 2005) in *Biographical research method*, Volume III.

of questions about the social function of biography, about social processes in which the analyzed life stories are involved (Schütze 2008a, b, 2014, Rosenthal 1993, 2012). However, in Schütz's approach: "what? and how? in the autobiographical narration are treated inseparably" (Waniek 2019: 144). This relation is in his considerations: "correlated with the key assumption about homology reported in the narration and events experienced in life" (Waniek 2019: 144). Rosenthal, on the other hand, is in favor of "separate treatment of what is told (*erzählte*) and what is lived (*gelebte*), and thus between the *life story* and *life history* (Waniek 2019: 144) respectively.

Another interesting perspective of research on the transmission of family history, based on the analysis of life stories, are Catherine Delcroix's many years¹⁸ of reflection on the uncertain life situation¹⁹ of immigrant families from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria) living in France. The methodology of her study is based on "recreating family stories reconstructed on the basis of several meetings with many members of the same family (with parents, with children)" (Delcroix 2012: 701). Thus, it is also a different research perspective from the approach presented in my analysis, assuming the interpretation of the narrator's individual biographical experience in reference to the "social frames of involvements of the narrator" and the significance of specific events in his life history for his developing biography (Schütze 2008a: 173). Delcroix focuses on considering the transmission of family memory by reconstructing ways of communication between generations and the role of parents in the process of socialization of their children. Research conclusions are also formulated by placing the collected narrations in relation to the changes in French socio-political reality. Delcroix explains that "The relevance of this methodology lies in the importance of the family as a 'micro-environment of intersubjective relations where [...] emotional, moral, and' semantic '(symbolic) relations dominate, that is to say, generate meaning' [following Bertaux 1997: 38; ed. J. W.]. The family members are all 'significant Others' to each other; and particularly important ones" (Delcroix 2019: 36–37). On the one hand, their ethnic heritage, the culture of origin plays an important role

¹⁸ Delcroix has been conducting her research since the 1990s. She is following various immigrant families over long periods as an ethnographic observer and biographical-narrative interviewer.

¹⁹ Delcroix defines uncertainty as "précarité," which relates to an uncertain life situation resulting mainly from insecure employment, may also, however, relate to other situations related to the individual's experience, for example, the need for migration. In Polish, the word functions semantically as a "precariat" and concerns an uncertain life situation resulting from the instability of employment. For several years, it has also been the subject of scientific interest in Poland (e.g., Sowa 2010, Mrozowicki, Karolak 2017).

(Delcroix 2000, 2012, 2019). On the other, preparing the young generation for the risk of encountering racism and life uncertainty. Therefore, after Delcroix, it can be pointed out that:

Additionally, collecting life stories from parents and children allows an in-depth examination of educational strategies and the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions. These life stories give us evidence of parents' educational practices and how they organize themselves to try to give their children resources, values, and principles. Reciprocally, it is to capture, in the children's discourses, what they retain from the education provided by parents and, more widely, from the family history as it is related (Delcroix 2019: 43).

The author collected and analyzed some of the research material together with the already mentioned Daniel Bertaux (see, e.g., Bertaux, Delcroix 2000). Recently, the researcher has attempted to recall and reconstruct the biographical portrait of families from Morocco living in one of the French settlements.

Summarizing this part of this chapter slowly, it is also worth recalling the considerations of Lena Inowlocki (2000) regarding the problem of constructing "normality" and forming "Doing" being Jewish in the families of displaced Jews in Germany. Focusing on case studies, the author interprets the social structures in which her interlocutors' experience was entangled, rather than recreates the collective family history. It is, therefore, an analytical perspective close to my considerations. Other, more modern biographical studies, in which the family theme plays an important role, include the analysis of transnational motherhood experience carried out by Sylwia Urbańska (2015), or the considerations of Paulina Bunio-Mroczek (2014, 2016) regarding the phenomenon of early parenthood. Importantly, in the latter of the indicated research projects, as the researcher points out (Bunio-Mroczek 2014: 28): "Interviews with teenage mothers and fathers were biographical, but not narrative." According to the classical division of Ingeborg Helling (1990), in this study biography was used as "biography as a means." In this analytical perspective, Bunio-Mroczek sought answers to "questions about the dimensions and mechanisms of social exclusion experienced by teenage parents from neglected environments" (Bunio-Mroczek 2014: 28). Therefore, this is not an example of a biographical analysis which falls within the framework of interpretative sociology, but the analyses made by the author raised the issues of what role the family of origin played in the biographies of the respondents and how they present their individual parenting experiences.

The family research mentioned above can be treated as an important background for the analyses undertaken in this chapter. On the one hand, they show a certain spectrum of analyses concerning the family narrative in biographical research. On the other hand, the above review of the literature

on the subject allows us to place the considerations conducted in this text in a broader analytical perspective. The presented research threads show how important the family is as an analytical category and how its significance in the life of individuals can be studied. Most of the above mentioned texts represent a different dimension of the approach to biographical analyses than the one organizing my considerations. However, they create the necessary contrast to the reflections undertaken in this text.

In my case studies, however, I, myself, base it on the assumptions of Fritz Schütze's biographical method. Therefore, I am attempting to reconstruct the story of a family in autobiographical narrative interviews both as a biographical resource and as the main line of spontaneous narration. It should be noted that these are, however, two different analytical orders. On one hand, the family thread is the main line of spontaneous narration. On the other, as a biographical resource, it is selected by narrators from a spontaneous narration. Thus, as I have already mentioned, the family theme understood as a biographical resource is an analytical category generated during the interpretation of the biographies of Paweł and Agnieszka. In this perspective, in the case studies below, I am also trying to reconstruct the ways in which the family thread emerges in their narrations, also referring to the basic communication patterns of representation of life and the world: narration, description and argumentation (Schütze 2008a). In addition, it is worth noting that in the assumptions of the Fritz Schütze's method 'the subject of the narrator's account becomes his own life history: it is he and not the researcher who decides what will be told and what is not; in what order, with what intensity and in what way. This decision of the informant is becoming an important analytical thread itself' (Waniek 2019: 137). Moreover, at this point it's important to mention that his chapter is also a workshop illustration of the structural analysis of the text in terms of Fritz Schütze's biographical method. This means that the main research problem addressed in this chapter, which is the importance of the family thread for the construction of stories about one's own life and the location of this way of telling about the family in the contemporary perspective, is presented in this chapter, both from the perspective of the structural analysis of the texts of Paweł and Agnieszka's biographies, and within the analytical procedure aiming at establishing typical links between specific biographical processes and the social phenomenon studied.

Paweł's case analysis

Paweł was born in 1976 in a small city in central-eastern Poland. He grew up in this place and also lives there as an adult. Due to the work of his father, who in the PPR times held a managerial position in a large nationwide

commercial network, his experience of childhood and adolescence was somewhat privileged. The narrator himself speaks of this issue in the interview, referring to the phenomenon of the economy of shortages and dysfunctions of the socialist system in Poland, which goes beyond his personal biographical experience. Because of the belief in his family (on the mother's side) that an accountant is always a respectable job, like his grandfather, mother, and older sister, Paweł is also professionally connected with what he calls "work in finance." Paweł's mother, apart from working in accounting, was also a teacher for many years. She taught mathematics and accounting at schools and courses. Until the time of the interview in 2016, being already retired, she was writing accounting textbooks. Paweł graduated from university and started his first job (in the accounting department at one of the car companies) while still being a student, just like his parents, which, as it turns out, is important in his biography. Since the beginning of the 2000s, he has been professionally associated with a large international corporation dealing with manufacturing and sales of household products. He works as a manager in the finance department. In connection with his professional work, the story of experience inscribed in the phenomenon of "transnational workers" resounds in his biography. Paweł spent 9 months in Russia in one of the branches of the company in which he works. Despite the fact that the employer allowed him to go with his family, this episode of his biographical experience is marked by trajectory markers. At the end of his studies, he got married and remains in that relationship (time of interview). His wife is a doctor by profession and works at a hospital. They have three children.

I would like to start reflecting on the theme of the family as the main narrative line of Paweł by looking at two *demonstration markers*: "the introduction or preamble of the autobiographical narration and the conclusion or coda of it" (Labov and Waletzky 1967, cited in Schütze 2008a: 175). In the introduction to the spontaneous narration and the coda that closes it, the narrator tries to show what people and events shaped him as he currently sees himself. Importantly, the preamble segment developed in arguments is not a common feature of autobiographical stories about one's own life. In this sense, Paweł's reflection in starting his story stands out from the other narrative interviews collected in our set. Also, it should be noted that despite the similarity of the content contained in the preamble and the coda, these two *demonstration markers* differ from each other in an analytical sense. In the preamble, the narrator who finds himself for the first time in an autobiographical interview situation tries to show the basic features of his biography and the most important lines of the events he reports. Sometimes, as in the case of Paweł, we encounter a preamble in which the interlocutor captures the basic features of his story in the form of superior predicates. In this way, through cognitive questions (Who am I? What shaped me?), Paweł is trying to understand the meaning of his biography. However,

moving on to understanding the concept of the coda, it should be noted that the narrator, closing his autobiographical story, looks at the overall entirety of his (told) life history. As Fritz Schütze writes (2008a: 178): “The narrator, looking at the overall *Gestalt* of his life history, asks himself the question: Can I go on with the dominant biographical process(es) that I am in right now or should I work for a decisive change?” The coda is, therefore, a segment in the narration, in which the interlocutor moves his story into the present tense, summing up his current life, and “this can also be combined with some argumentative assessments of the present life situation and with the course of the life history in general” (Schütze 2008a: 178). In addition, in Paweł’s narration, we are dealing with a broken coda, which, as I will show below, is a very important interpretative resource in the analysis of the whole of his biographical story.

Before I quote fragments of Paweł’s biography which are interesting analytically, I would like to explain why at the beginning of his case analysis I also focus on the coda in which “we can get a first glimpse on the overall *Gestalt* of the life history as experienced and seen” by the narrator (Schütze 2008a: 178). Such a research decision is dictated here by my desire to reconstruct the main plot visible in Paweł’s reflection on what experiences shaped his biographical identity (including his beliefs and vision of the world). In this way, in the main line of his spontaneous narration – stories about the family (both of this origin and the one he had started), its fragments about the person of his grandfather stand out clearly. This thread is extensive in both the preamble and the autobiographical coda of Paweł’s account. The narrator in both segments, looking at the overall entirety of his biography, tries to show himself and the listener the sense of his life. He reproduces insights regarding his biographical experiences, using them through these patterns of behavior and view of the world that his grandfather followed. I will now quote both passages from the interview with Paweł that are important for my analysis of this case:

Preamble segment in Paweł’s narration:

N: OK, I was really wondering what it would look like and what things I should remember and relate right here. And I really think that generally speaking the way my life looks now, well, [...] depends on how and where I was growing up, how I made friends with, err, in the past. [...] It had the biggest impact. [...] Obviously, with hindsight, well, I might have chosen different people, who/ I’d like to model myself on and who could be my guiding patterns. But. OK, what’s done can’t be undone. [...] So perhaps I’ll speak about the past which, to the biggest extent, which shaped me in my view, which shaped my character, which shaped me the way I am currently and what my life looks like now. [...]

[Here, the narrator mentions that he was born in a small city in central-eastern Poland and that as a child he liked to spend holidays in a town in northern

Poland where his mother's family came from. He talks about the time spent with family, children's games, and being carefree. Thus, in this part of his spontaneous narration, he falls into the coverage of his childhood. However, he interrupts them and in the next fragment of his narration he returns to the thread of reflecting on what shaped him as a person; – J.W.].²⁰ So with hindsight, I think it was at that time, err, that time when I was being somehow shaped in my early childhood and I started to see how I'd like it to look. [...] I really think that even when I speak to someone close or someone else I really say that my grandpa is my role model. Even in my primary school, we were assigned to write about, I remember, no, it was in my secondary school, I guess it was the beginning of secondary school. It was about giving examples of people, who we'd like to imitate, to act like them, *who is the role model for you?* I remember I wrote about my granddad.

I: Hmm.

N: And [...] I'll really discuss it at length because I think it was the time, which for several years, err/ showed me the way to live. So from that point of view, err, it was rather poor in the countryside. They weren't people who came from some higher classes, even for farmers. Notwithstanding, my granddad was incredibly [...] well-read. He enjoyed, just devoured books. And I remember even today how he told us poems about Stefek Burczymucha²¹, it was amazing and he was using special intonation. The only thing that/ I somehow remember it, he was smoking cigarettes. No, not so terribly, in the kids' presence, he would always go out of the home. However, he would sit somewhere in the granary and would smoke those cigarettes. And my grandma would tell him off. Anyway, he would typically sit with his grandchildren and would tell them stories about his times. He was writing an incredible diary. There are several dozens, I don't know for sure, a couple of thick several-hundred-page notebooks. One of his grandsons keeps them at his place at present. It was there where he was describing what his life looked like practically day after day. (.) So in fact, yes, my grandma was incredibly lively, she was insisting on keeping order and tidiness. She was ordering my granddad a bit about and he would tolerate it patiently and with his, well, I don't know his knowledge from books and understanding how the world functions, well, he was incredibly in that area where they lived, he was greatly respected. My grandma would even laugh that he must have been some general's son, as it would have been impossible to come from a peasant's home and be so obsessed about gaining knowledge. [...] Another thing/ an introduction why I think that that place shaped me. Rarely does one meet people from the country who achieved

²⁰ I made the decision not to provide the whole fragment of the introduction segment and to relate some of its parts in a form that informs the reader about their content due to their size. Assuming that in this way I still do not lose what is most important in Paweł's reflection.

²¹ Stefek Burczymucha is a character of a poem for children written by Polish author Maria Konopnicka. It's about a boy who liked to brag and show off his alleged courage. But, finally one day he was frightened by a little mouse.

quite a lot. In fact, he was born in a relatively poor family, but through gaining knowledge he wanted as an adult/ err, he graduated from secondary school and passed the final exams. But, after the war he started, I mean after the war/ during the war even he started dealing with financial matters, he was working as a head accountant, yes. And it passed down in the family. After him two daughters out of four, who have/ used to have/ have/ dealt with finances. They were working as accountants, including my mum. In a way, it also impacted me, so I consider myself a continuation of what he ... what he represented.

I: Hmm.

N: How to live, how to behave and what is important in life. [...] I still recall his words when he said: if you're an accountant, I don't know a financial advisor, err, an accountant rather than, regardless of the political system you'll always be useful. If you calculate it doesn't matter if it's communism or socialism or free-market economy, financial specialists are always in demand and you'll always enjoy a quiet life and opportunity to find your place in life. [...] Alright, that'd do as an introduction of sorts. [...] So, for me, let's say, it's some beginning, kind of.

Coda segment in Paweł's narration:

N: If only I had/ plenty of time, I believe it's before me, still. [...] I approach this issue cautiously because speaking about politics I have very clear, very strong convictions in terms of what is good in my view and what is bad. And I decidedly support one of the political parties. It is, it leads to some tension between me and particularly my in-laws, they are very religious let's say, and support one political side, which I can't stand, [...] I can't stand, [...] to put it differently, I can't stand that pressure and my attitude is most negative to it. And when it comes to some/ I try to avoid those issues or taking part in meetings when such issues are discussed, but of course, you can't avoid them altogether. Anyway, if I were to assess my, err [...] my life, I know that my in-laws don't like my attitude to political matters. And they particularly bear a grudge against me because my wife has a similar attitude to mine. She's religious, that's a fact, I'm a little less. Or I'll put it differently, I'm a believer, but, but I'm far from what the Catholic Church in Poland, the way it acts now, and that it is the right way. Or let's say God, God or the power of creation had imagined what it would look like. Therefore, there are tensions between us, I know they don't like it too much. However, my personality hasn't been luckily shaped by them, it's not from recent years, but mainly from what I had taken from my grandparents and my parents. Leaving it aside, my grandma from my mum's side was also a very religious person. But, she also had common sense and separated faith from the way the Church should act and look from its political tendencies. Besides, the time when they were living, cause my grandpa died in 1997 and my grandma in 2001, so it's been a while/ and the divisions back then weren't so deep as they are now, at least they weren't so/ perhaps the divisions

were into post-communists and freedom-oriented ones. But still, even then she knew what some people from this freedom-oriented side, which they strongly supported. And even in that camp, she had her favorite candidates, grandma and grandpa had their favorite candidates against the whole group, so to say. Or they couldn't stand some of them, who are close to the top right now, or on the top. So looking at time I was really shaped probably by my teenage years. All those holidays I spent with them and their attitude and understanding. [...] If I could say two things more, which, which in spite of my forty years, which I have, which will probably remain till the end of my life. One of the stories, I didn't witness it, I don't even know if my mum witnessed it, I only know it from somebody's story. My grandpa was incredibly honest, I mean he never wanted to harm anybody, or that they could face consequences of his dishonesty, or that he would want to act dishonestly. I know from other people's accounts that he was to take a sack of rye, I don't know, some grains to the market, I don't know. Anyway, he went there, took it and sold it. When he came back home my grandma asks him how much he got for it, how much he sold it for. And he said some amount. Anyway, my grandma got to know later on that the prices on the market were somewhat higher that day, I don't know, a little higher, you know. Anyway, she says, how come everybody sold at this price and you came back, you sold it for less. And he was like that producing it cost him so and so and it would be unfair to earn too much on it. I know it from some account.

I: Hmm.

N: Another thing I remember I was going with my grandpa, my grandma would leave us home, and we would go on holiday to feed geese in the pasture in the surroundings. And on the other hand, with my sister, with my sister we went to the cinema at school, at home, and somewhere her friends showed a dried dragonfly, it was violet I guess. I don't know where they got it from, how they caught it. Anyway, I really liked it, because it was in vivid colors, nice, they were shining. And when I went with my granddad to feed geese in the pasture I wanted to hunt such a dragonfly to dry it and keep it like those buddies did. Anyway, my granddad saw it and was like: *what are you doing?* And I'm like/ you know I said I wanted to catch it and have it. And I remember even today his words: *but why do you want to do it? It's a living creature who wants to live and not only delight your eyes.* I was shocked that he says that even such creatures want to live and why you want to take its life away to be delighted. So it was a very, very deep [...] awareness of [...] life and [...] to act decently. And I think that these things really shaped me. Go ahead ask me, what I haven't said and I should have, or what I should expand on.

Looking at the quoted passages, one can see a certain double narration about Paweł's grandfather and their mutual relationship. On the one hand, Paweł is trying to "recreate" the person of his grandfather in his autobiographical relationship, thus pointing to the importance of these memories for building a story about his own life. On the other, by pointing to the person of the

grandfather and through him in his narration, Paweł is facing his own biography. In other words, he accounts for himself biographically, interpreting his experiences and life decisions regarding the pattern of behavior he considers to be right. In this way, at the same time in the preamble, referring to the essay he wrote about his grandfather in secondary school, as well as in the coda in which he returns to the story about his grandfather, he recalls his “very deep awareness of life and how to act decently.”

In the preamble, moreover, Paweł points out the relationship between his biographical experiences located in the past and his perception of himself from the perspective of the biographical “now.” As Fritz Schütze observes:

In autobiographical narrative interviews, the relatively rare cases of elaborate preambles would normally be a sign of extended rethinking and reassessment work as it could have been accomplished in reflective mental reaction to a severe life crisis and, connected to it, through intensive communication with a significant other about it or with a professional in a biographical counselling situation or even in the context of a psychotherapeutic setting and treatment relationship (Schütze 2008a: 176–177).

In Paweł’s case, both in the preamble and in the coda, one can see the biographical work which the narrator performs “consciously and critically referring to life experiences and events” (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116). Importantly, the biographical work is self-interactive, but also involves working with others (e.g., family members, therapists, counsellors), yet it does not exclude the role of significant Others in the process (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116, Strauss 2012a: 518). In other words, a person who performs biographical work undertakes “the effort to interpret one’s own biographical experiences in relation to one’s identity, self-perception, behaviors, activities undertaken or not” (Każmierska 2008: 29, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 116). Fritz Schütze (2008a: 160) states that: “Biographical work is basically an inner activity of the mind and emotional psyche, and this inner activity is essentially constituted by a conversation with significant Others and oneself.” In this approach, biographical work allows the person to perceive one’s life as a separate whole (*Gestalt*) and is “a kind of special reflection on the entire history of life, the conditions of this history in which the central issue is to address the question of embedding and influence, the participation and importance of the individual in the course of biographical processes and mutual relations between them and the identity of the social actor” (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014: 118).

Paweł, through his references to his grandfather’s figure and his relationship with his grandfather, undertakes this “special reflection” regarding the history of his (whole) life. Thus, he is struggling with important epistemological questions about who he is and whether the pattern represented by his grandfather is

present in his personal conduct. In the words: “So perhaps I’ll speak about the past which, to the biggest extent, which shaped me in my view, which shaped my character, which shaped me the way I am currently and what my life looks like now” – thus outlines the sphere of his experience that allows him to justify: “the way his life looks now.” This kind of reference appears again in the coda, where Paweł states that: “So looking at time I was really shaped probably by my teenage years. [...]” Then recalling the thread of his grandfather’s, he adds: “If I could say two things more, which, which in spite of my forty years, which I have, which will probably remain till the end of my life,” closes this part of his narration with two stories from the past in which he sees an important component of experiences which, as he says, “shaped him.” It is apparent from the preamble that his grandfather influenced his biographical decisions by showing him: “How to live, how to behave, and what is important in life.” In addition, it is due to his grandfather’s beliefs about a certain “timelessness” of performing the accounting profession that his professional path is associated with work in finances, as mentioned in the cited preamble segment. For Paweł, granddad is also an example of an honest man who treated other people and beings with respect. Therefore, he is a significant Other who influenced Paweł’s perception of his life and identity in relation to the values represented by his grandfather: dignity, honesty, and sensitivity towards others.

Marzena Farnicka, writing about everyday life in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, notes that a grandparent as a significant Other can have a strong impact on the development of a grandchild’s personality and identity. Often, his role focuses not only on the care and transmission of family traditions, but can also relate to the indication of best practices and to explain the importance of following specific moral and ethical principles.²² Grandparents can also play the role of “support points,” that is, those who show their grandchildren with their attitude what is permanent in life, how to deal with others, what is worth striving for (Appelt 2007: 91). In addition, research on the role of grandparents in the development of grandchildren shows that:

Grandparents feel that they exist in their grandchildren, they see the continuity of their family, first of all through the transmitted genes, but also through the possibility of passing on their life achievements, both in the material aspect, but also through their own values and memories. Thanks to this, the oldest and youngest ones develop a sense of continuity. Grandparents play an important family integrating role (*kinkeeper role*) – thanks to them, the family meets more often, shares more family stories and customs, has a stronger sense of family ties and a stronger sense of commitment to support each other when needed (Appelt 2007: 92).

²² At <http://encyklopediadziecinstwa.pl/>. M. Farnicka *Dziadek w codzienności dziecka*. Retrieved November 12, 2019.

In the case of Paweł's life history above, the quoted passage about "the sense of grandparents' existing in their grandchildren" can be slightly reformulated and it can be stated that Paweł "has a sense of his grandfather's presence in him." Thanks to his self-reflective references, he reassures himself whether he is behaving properly, whether he is like his grandfather. This is clearly seen in the quoted coda segment, where Paweł again checks himself against his grandfather's ideal pattern. It is a broken coda, which means that the "ordinary" coda sequence associated with the summary of the general form of the biography is divided by extensive theoretical and argumentative commentary (Każmierska, Waniek 2019: 70). A broken coda is also an important interpretative resource. Its presence in Paweł's autobiographical story indicates that he is under the pressure of argumentation and evaluation of specific experiences for his life course. As Fritz Schütze writes, in special cases we find in the coda segment: "argumentative commentaries of balancing the pros and cons of one's life and biographical work in general, and therefore they deal with the global storyline and the overall biographical shape of the life history of the narrator" (Schütze 2008a: 180). In this segment of the coda of Paweł's spontaneous narration, it can be seen that the narrator is looking for answers to the questions: Am I a good person, am I a good Catholic, are my political views correct, or am I acting in a dignified way? On the one hand, there is a tension between the clash woven into the contemporary perspective between the narrator's (political and religious) beliefs and the tradition and views represented by his in-laws. On the other hand, the interlocutor struggles with the awareness of growing up in the period of socialism in Poland and with the involvement of his biographical experiences and the experiences of his parents in this system. This time in Paweł's biography is presented in opposition to the figure of his grandfather, who is characterized by honesty and opposition to injustice and social inequality, which Paweł attributes to the socialist system.

The narrator also addresses the grandfather's person in the coda by referring to two stories related to the pattern of behavior represented by the granddad, which he considers important for the formation of his own biographical identity and which he is facing in assessing his current life. Fritz Schütze (2008a: 179) states that:

The coda element of extempore narrative storytelling consists of two parts: (a) One part is dealing with the closing up of the content of the autobiographical story, that is, with bringing the flux of recalled lifetime and its experiences to an end. And this activity encloses intensive biographical work of characterizing the general features of the overall biographical *Gestalt*. (b) Another part (mostly a sequentially second part) is dealing with the activity of refocusing the communicative attention from the time of the life story contents, that is, the autobiographical experiences, to the time of the actually "here and now" ongoing communication and situation of the interview setting (Schütze 2008a: 179).

A particularly important analytical issue is that the last fragment of the coda quoted is an exact reference to the content with which Paweł begins his autobiographical story. Thus, through theoretical and argumentative comments, he tries to assess his life history, giving it meaning through the opening and closing story of the relationship with his grandfather. Additionally, we can try to justify the narrator's construction of these segments of his biography by referring to the concept of "biographical view." Fritz Schütze, considering the cognitive figures of narration (e.g., *The global storyline*), writes that:

If there is a conscious image of it or even a self-theoretical reflection on it, it should be called *biographical view*. Biographical views quite often are the result of sober and intensive biographical work taking into account the authentic experiences of the biography incumbent, and then they have the power to help the biography incumbent to work realistically on her or his biographical problems. But, biographical views could also be constructed in contrast to the authentic experiences in order to fade out or to mystify the difficulties and problems of biographical experiences or even of the overall biographical ordering or the biographical process structures involved in it (Schütze 2008a: 181).

In this view, it can be stated that Paweł, basing his main line of spontaneous narration on the family theme, undertakes his own conscious reflection on the shape of the history of his own life. Interestingly, in Paweł's entire narration, whose main theme is the family, he devotes relatively little space to stories about his father and the relationship with his father. We only learn that he is already a pensioner and that he comes from the southeastern part of Poland and that he graduated from economics, and his professional career was primarily associated with trade, where for a long time he held a managerial position in a network of nationwide stores. However, we cannot find in Paweł's narration references to their shared biographical experiences or relationship. Now let us look at one of the few passages in which the narrator talks about his father:

During the socialism era, it was really, I mean it was [X Company – the name of the company in which Paweł's father worked], a countrywide cooperative. I also think that leaving aside some of my dad's opinions, I mean in human terms, which I don't quite approve or I wouldn't like to follow them. In terms of knowledge of things, duties, I think that my dad was very good at what he was doing. And among other things, the fact that this cooperative survived all those years of change because many of them have collapsed, in bigger cities or somewhere, they surely still exist. However, in smaller towns, the free-market economy caused that these types of enterprises couldn't, didn't manage to compete on the market. And my dad at some point, while he was beginning his career he wasn't at the top of the structure, but after many years he held one of the two or even the top position in the cooperative in our town in its last years. So I guess that to some degree it

was thanks to his approach and his organizing skills, so he was able to, managed to ensure that those stores were succeeding on the market.

In the quoted passage, Paweł says directly that he doesn't share his father's views. The narrator's statement: "I don't quite approve or I wouldn't like to follow them" may indicate that the interlocutor puts the figure of the father in a way counter to the pattern of honesty and sensitivity attributed by him to the figure of the grandfather. At the same time, he emphasizes that his father coped with his work (during the socialism era and in the first years of transformation) thanks to the beliefs and skills he possessed. Paweł states here: "In terms of knowledge of things, duties, I think that my dad was very good at what he was doing." Adding at the end of his account: "So I guess that to some degree it was thanks to his approach and his organizing skills." In another fragment of his biography mentioned previously, which I discussed in Chapter IX in this book, Paweł refers to the operation of the socialist system, reflecting on it from the position of empowerment that he experienced thanks to his father's professional work. The narrator recalls:

So I can remember such things that that system harmed people by forcing them to look for solutions in ways, which didn't look as they should or weren't honest/didn't have anything to do with an... anything to do with an honest attitude to life. So you know [...] there are such moments which make me wonder whether the man acts wrongly or well when they act like that. It wouldn't change the situation if I hadn't taken those opportunities, which were presented thanks to my dad's place of work, my situation wouldn't have improved, the situation of other people wouldn't have improved either. It was the economy of eternal shortages and if it wasn't me then somebody else would have used it.

I cited this passage to show that Paweł was again reflecting on the activities of the socialist system in Poland and the topic of work done at that time by his father, weaving the thread of references to an "honest attitude to life" represented by his grandfather's figure. Paweł also says that the system in which his father found himself hurt people and was based on injustice. Here you can see an analogy to two stories about the grandfather quoted by Paweł in the last fragment of the coda. For the narrator, the grandfather embodies, as I have already mentioned, completely different features, expressed not only in the pattern of honest life, but also in sensitivity to the harm of others and fair behavior.

Thus, referring to the notion of the "biographical view" mentioned above after Fritz Schütze and the assumption that "it could also be constructed in contrast to the authentic experiences in order to fade out or to mystify the difficulties and problems of biographical experiences," it can be stated that Paweł, although he doesn't say much about his father's biography, nevertheless

juxtaposes his experiences with his own picture of the world, developed on the basis of his relationship with the grandfather. This is only one of the possible research interpretations of this autobiographical story. In this way, it can be concluded that by using his own biography through his grandfather's thread, Paweł may obscure the difficulties he experiences in the relationship with his own father. However, this is an analytical thread difficult to develop in further considerations, due to, as I have already mentioned, Paweł's scarce references to his father, both in his spontaneous narrative phase and in the additional questions phase. That is why I see him only as one of the possible interpretative frameworks of Paweł's case.

The grandfather as the most important significant Other also appears in Paweł's story about his adolescence, related to the time of the first democratic presidential election in Poland in 1990. A teenager at that time, Paweł supports one of the independent candidates,²³ which from a biographical perspective of "now" he is ashamed of in his autobiographical story. Let us look at this fragment of Paweł's narration:

Anyway/ it means it was probably the eighth grade, it seems to me it was the seventh, the eighth was the breakthrough of 1989. And I remember the thing I've been a little ashamed of ever since and which also shaped me politically. However, it had a negative impact, including the elections of 1989. I can't quite remember if at home our parents engaged us in it or explained it in any way. It was more about my experience, let's say a political attitude related to grandparents/ grandfather was a member of Piłsudski's legions.²⁴ He had two little torsos of Piłsudski and had a very negative attitude to the authorities which took over after WWII. But, he didn't rebel, somehow he wasn't an individual who'd fight. Besides he had hardly any chance 'cause he wasn't working in a manufacturing plant, he wasn't a laborer. And even if he was I don't know if he'd take such actions. My parents/ parents didn't even speak out clearly about it. I can't remember whether they openly told me that what surrounded us was bad, or if it could be any better. We weren't travelling the world, we had no such

²³ This is about the figure of Stanisław Tymiński (Stan Tymiński), a Polish businessman doing business in Canada and South America. In 1990 he ran in the presidential election in Poland as an independent candidate, unknown on the political scene, having no backing crediting his candidacy. He returned to Poland again before the presidential elections in 2005, in which he ran as a candidate of Ogólnopolska Komisja Obywatelska (OKO) – a political group of a centred character, established in 2005 as a result of the transformation of the Ogólnopolski Komitet Obywatelski established in November 2003. After the 2005 elections, the activity of the coalition faded.

²⁴ Polish Legions in World War I. The I Brigade of the Polish Legions under Józef Piłsudski, formed in mid-December 1915'.

opportunities. I remember my trip to East Germany also in the 1970s, and I was shocked then. [...] In Frankfurt upon Oder, we crossed the border, I guess we had left the car on the Polish side and crossed the bridge on foot. Yes, it was that for sure, I remember even that the German guard said: *Pawel, Pawel* and sternly pointed his finger at me. So I remember also, a memory flash from Frankfurt, which surprised me a lot, that behind the window in some huge shop were cars, Wartburg and Trabant. We were laughing out at those cars as such, but for me, it was a surprise that it was possible that cars were standing there available for buyers. Boy, you know, not to mention that it wasn't even possible to get a passport to travel freely, but only to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, I was completely shocked, probably I went to some, Paris or Rome or Bonn. But, but, even in East Germany, it was an enormous change compared to Poland where everything was rationed and available only on coupons. [...] Therefore I guess that deep inside I supposed it wasn't quite as it should be. But, we didn't have any examples or any major discussions besides the fact that my grandpa didn't support it. and I remember those holiday trips where he tried and listened to Radio Free Europe and those interferences and all. For a child, it didn't mean much. ***Probably if I were five, seven years older I would learn more and perhaps my parents, I don't know, with my sister would discuss those issues more.*** Therefore I can't remember the elections of '89 too well. OK. I remember, but I don't know now if it's that poster with a sheriff, poster with a sheriff or from a reproduction which are somewhere now. Anyway, I remember presidential elections, the first ones, won, actually not won, when Jaruzelski was appointed president as a continuation. Nevertheless, I remember those first elections and it was the first moment of my political involvement. Of course, I couldn't vote then yet, but I was conscious of what I was doing and that it was worth doing it. But, it was also a moment of my, moment of incredible shame on the other hand, cause I remember that on the meeting of scouts, it was a shame, a real shame that at the meeting of scouts [...] we were wondering where to gain money for our trip, some subsidy for it. And I came up with this stupid idea when I had seen those, those TV programs, as one of the candidates/ because it's shameful I won't mention who it was, he boasted what a good scout he was. And [...] I said if he says he was such a good scout and he has possessed substantial wealth we should engage in his support. And because of/ and that teacher of mine should have said that 'listen, you're talking rubbish and that way isn't good', they followed my advice and said 'alright, let's take some fliers and we'll support him'. [...] And it's regardless of the fact that we didn't benefit financially from that action at all. Thank God that candidate didn't win, didn't become president then. But, I've remembered ever since that as a teenager, I don't know I was fourteen, fifteen let's say, I had/ I was making decisions emotionally. [...] But, it was an enormous internal shame for me. [...] My parents know it 'cause somehow/ they didn't oppose it, it's strange, but they weren't opposed to it. They didn't say, listen, no way. So it was a moment of shame.

First of all, it should be noted that in the quoted passage we encounter a background construction. This phenomenon is related to the narrator's introduction to the main narrative line the events, descriptions, and explanations (argumentative commentaries) which did not appear in the chronological order of the story. Thus, through their introduction, the narrator performs self-correction and refers to the omitted events and experiences trying to show his autobiographical story more reliably and consistently (Schütze 2014; Kaźmierska, Waniek 2019; also see Chapter I in this book). In the case of the quoted fragment of Paweł's narration, the first and last sentence belonging to the background construction is in italics. Here you can see that the narrator, introducing the background construction, goes back in his story to return to it exactly at the moment when he suspended the main storyline. Paweł refers here to his growing up and the turn of 1989/1990. In a broader socio-historical context, he places his story during the first democratic presidential election in Poland. The narrator focuses here on a shameful event for him – showing support for one of the candidates.

Going back to the experiences of his childhood, Paweł includes in the story a comment about the lack of shaping of his worldview of that time by significant Others. He recalls again the figure of his grandfather, who, according to his narration, at that time did not break the passivity of Paweł's parents in this matter and did not make his grandson realize that his choice was not right. Additionally, the narrator also introduces here a contrast comparison of the PPR and the GDR – mentioning the time when he visited the GDR as a child. In this way, he tries to show that he was trying to understand the significant differences between these two socialist realities. He also mentions the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, which he listened to as a child, but which he could not yet fully understand. He ends the quoted threads with the statement: “Probably if I were five, seven years older I would learn more and perhaps my parents, I don't know, with my sister would discuss those issue more” – thus trying to authenticate his political immaturity and unconsciousness, and to emphasize that his parents did not familiarize him with this knowledge.

What is more, this passage concerns an important moment in Paweł's biography which the narrator struggles with in the biographical perspective of “now” when talking about his life. Thus, he legitimizes his actions by referring to his grandfather and parents as significant Others who did not protest at the time against his bad decision, did not show him that he was wrong.

To sum up the topic of the importance of the relationship with the grandfather for the formation of Paweł's biographical identity and for building a story about his life, I would like to refer to the concept of *dramatis personae* (Schütze 2008a: 182). They are *event carriers*, that is, social units, also those from outside the human world (e.g., illness, home), who: “are introduced into

the autobiographical narration rendering by a narrative statement of what they did in terms of higher predicates or by descriptive characterizations often connected with personal evaluations; sometimes an additional characterizing story is told depicting personal (or individual) features of the respective event carrier” (Schütze 2008a: 182). In this approach, significant Others are the most interesting “of the story carrier and biographical incumbent,” because they influence the course of his biographical work by being “central helpers, mirror images, and counsellors” (Schütze 2008a: 182). In this understanding, we can include Paweł’s grandfather to the *dramatis personae*. As the main significant Other in his biography, he becomes a mirror image for the formation of Paweł’s views, his identity and building the story about his life. He is also an important adviser in the narrator’s choices and a model for his behavior, carrying within him a timeless vision of an honest and dignified life. Through references to his grandfather’s figure, Paweł performs biographical work which allows him to perceive his life and identity as a separate whole (*Gestalt*) (Schütze 2008a, b). At the same time, in the preamble, in the coda, and during the spontaneous narration, Paweł recalls the grandfather’s thread, assigning him the role of the person who shaped him as he perceives himself today and how he would like to see himself in the future.

Another important person and also another significant Other in Paweł’s narration is his mother, who accompanies him in subsequent stages of his life story. The narrator also links the biographical experience of his mother and father with the justification of his choices made in early adulthood. His parents finished their studies, which, as he notes, was not the norm at that time. “So both of them graduated from university. And generally speaking, it was some time in the late 1960s so there weren’t too many people like that. That’s why they were welcome everywhere they went and job opportunities were abundant to them” – says Paweł. The parents, as he adds a few lines later, also made sure that he and his older sister not only have a higher education, but also a certain profession (this is a strategy typical for many parents of our narrators – this is what Julia’s parents discussed; for example, see Chapter IX of this book). According to Paweł, it was thanks to his parents, mainly thanks to his mother, and also thanks to his grandfather that he managed to complete his studies and work in the profession.

In his story, the narrator refers to his mother first by mentioning trips to grandparents (her parents) for holidays and their family meetings. He notes that his best childhood memories are related to his mother’s family. The relationship of Paweł and his mother, as an important resource for him, appears in his narration mainly during the reconstruction of difficult biographical experiences. This is evidenced by a fragment from the initial pages of his biography, where the narrator mentions a hard time for him in elementary school:

My place of living was relatively near the school because the town isn't large, as I've said it's 20, 30,000 people. The school was about a kilometer away from my home so I used to walk. However, my mum was walking me to school practically all the time. And I also remember that I wasn't affected by the school, I wasn't emotionally attached. I didn't used to go to kindergarten, but only attended preschool. And that school of mine wasn't for me [...] the place too friendly as I perceived it. And I remember that always/ sometimes it was also that my mum would wait for me during the breaks when she had nothing to do she took either a book or something and somewhere on the bench near the school or somewhere there was waiting and during the breaks I would go out to my mum so, err, so I can recall such things.

Paweł's mother, who at that time was working at the school which the narrator attended, is from the present (time of interview) perspective considered by him as a person who helped him survive the early years of learning. Let us notice here that in the case of Agnieszka discussed below, her grandmother plays a similar role. It is the closeness and support of significant Others (biographical carers) that allow Paweł and Agnieszka to control difficult experiences and to normalize these situations from the past in some way. Additionally, Paweł only in the further part of the narration, when talking about the teenage period, introduces the thread of peer bonds he had experienced. They become a new social framework, next to references to family ties, for the reconstruction of his experiences.

Another moment when his mother supported him is an episode from his adult life. He also introduces the topic of relations with his wife and refers to the issue of biographical costs which he had to incur due to his extended stay in Russia, where he was sent to work by his company. It was an extremely difficult biographical experience for him, which he describes as follows:

Here, since I joined the company there were some little advances, moving between departments and so on and so forth. But, this big, significant/ big, significant change in terms of business or professional development was this offer to relocate to Russia. And I decided to take the offer. 'Cause I didn't know/ I was getting a bit bored here with what I was doing. It wasn't clearly defined what you could achieve here/ what I could achieve, so we decided to give it a shot. [...] And we decided to move there with my wife. [...] My mother visited us, she was here when we were here, she stayed twice the longest time allowed, for three months. She was helping us, but generally speaking, I consider that stay as a failure. Besides the fact that I found out how different people are and what pressure they could use to get what they want. Right, if I hadn't gone there I would've regretted till now because I would've thought to myself *boy, I wonder how it would have worked out*. With the benefit of hindsight, I regret a little because of my wife, how hard it was for my wife. For me it was exhausting. And I probably got older, I stayed there for a relatively short time, some nine months. But, even as little as three months of staying there

I knew that I didn't want to stay there any longer, I had to escape from there. We had a huge problem with our daughter as well, the eldest one, who was about to attend the first grade. [...] We managed to arrange it and she attended the first grade, but still, it posed a huge problem for her as she was learning that language in kindergarten. [...] It was particularly painful to her at the start 'cause when [...] she was under enormous stress when she didn't understand what they said to her, what she was expected to do, right. And once/ oh, and my mum went, of course, and similarly to the time when I attended primary school when during the breaks when the gate was closed or something, my grandma was standing behind the fence and was waiting so that when Ola goes she could see that grandma is around, that there's somebody close near her. [...]

This experience bears the hallmarks of the trajectory of suffering understood as a process of biographical experience which, although resulting from a growing disorder, is internally ordered in its course (Riemann, Schütze 1991, 2012, Schütze 2012, Waniek 2016). This process is discussed in more detail in Chapters IX and X, among others, which is why I will not describe it analytically again. I will proceed to discuss the fragment of Paweł's story quoted above. The narrator's indication of the biographical costs associated with living in Russia, for him, as well as his wife and daughter, shows Paweł's biographical work and self-reflection regarding this difficult time. In addition, in this story, he combines the perspective of his experiences from elementary school and the experiences of his daughter, which is linked by the figure of his mother. She appears as a significant Other at the time of Paweł's childhood, related to his difficulties in elementary school, as well as during his adulthood, which includes the difficult experience of working and living in Russia. Paweł's mother also plays an important role in the experience of his daughter, who, leaving to Russia with her parents and attending one of the schools there, is struggling to adapt to a new place which is foreign to her. However, thanks to the support and physical presence of her grandmother – like her father in the first years of his learning – she is not alone. The grandmother accompanies her in her daily duties and supports her in the moments of loneliness. The narrator's reflection on this subject strengthens his conviction about the importance of the mother in his biographical development (indicated by an earlier narration about the support he received from his mother). Also, he also shows that without her presence, the experience of this trip would have been much more difficult for his daughter and could have disturbed the formation of a positive image of her biographical identity. In the next part of the interview, Paweł closes this difficult episode for him and his loved ones, telling:

So after only three months of staying in [name of a city in Russia], I knew that this is not the place where I could stay for a long time. That my attitude to life

and my understanding of another man, rather than attempts to put pressure on him to gain what one expects, that this is not the place where I could be able to work that way. That's right, even my boss said at that time when we talked, she said: *you'd better not introduce democracy here*. So, it isn't OK any more. It isn't/ to put it differently, they're used to working differently, that's right. They're ordered and they go. Poles are different. We need a little rebellion and freedom, at least it seems to be the case. After those three months, I knew I didn't want it. [...] I said to myself that enough is enough and I can't take it anymore, I would physically do myself in. And I decided to break the agreement, I give up, do whatever you want, I'm coming back. And then I received a helping hand from a director here in Poland. He said: *stay a little longer, and I'll bring you back to Poland*. And there was really such a, such a possibility that a person or people from here were going abroad so I was able to come back after a nine-month stay and we managed to conclude the deal [...] So we returned in May 2010.

The quoted passage clearly shows that in the course of developing trajectory, Paweł's "organization of everyday life" and his "orientation towards herself," in case he would not control them, could collapse (Schütze 2012: 429). In the words: "I said to myself that enough is enough and I can't take it anymore, I would physically do myself in. And I decided to break the agreement, I give up, do whatever you want, I'm coming back" – Paweł from the biographical perspective of "now" describes the moment when, if he was to stay in Russia for longer without being aware of returning to Poland in a short time, he could experience a "breakdown of self-orientation" and then fall into the trajectory. Importantly, in an unquoted earlier passage of this part of his story about the stay in Russia, he also draws attention to the difficulties of his wife. In order to accompany him along with the children during his official delegation, she had to adapt her professional plans to this situation. Paweł, recreating their stay in Russia in his biography, repeatedly emphasizes that for his wife it was, in a way, a more difficult experience than for him. He also adds that if they did not come back in time, perhaps he would lose what he considers the most valuable, that is, their relationship and family. Explaining the situation his wife was in at the time, he says:

She started working shortly after her graduation, took an internship, started work in our home town. She completed her specialization because they have to take that specialization exam so she was returning from [name of a city in Russia]. She was studying there in [name of a city in Russia]. My mum was helping, that's why she also arrived there to help to take care of the children so that she could hit the books. And then she left for Poland with two kids, to take the exam, from there.

In order to introduce a comparative perspective, one can refer to Katarzyna Waniek's considerations regarding the biographical analysis of the experience

of Polish immigrants who left for Germany between 1989 and 1999. She focuses on, among others, Marek's case. The narrator went to Germany with his wife, who, like Paweł's wife, modified her career plans – suspended her career for some time, also in the medical profession. Unlike Paweł – Marek, however, does not take into account the perspective of his wife, and what is more, he deceives her with the promise of a temporary departure, thus hiding from her the desire to stay in Germany for longer. Katarzyna Waniek defines this form of covering one's biographical choices and entangling the other person in the biographical costs as "the conning practice," writing that Marek "who emigrates willingly" in his narration "describes how he 'conned' his wife and coerced her into settling in Germany. It's likely that for the fear of his wife's strong resistance Marek gave a false and dishonest picture of their stay abroad" (Waniek 2012: 162). Such a situation is, therefore, a counter-example illustrating a different perspective from the one presented in Paweł's biography. In the case of Marek, who deceives his wife with the promise of returning to Poland soon, and also does not try to understand the difficulties she faces, his marriage fails. Therefore, this is the biographical cost which, in the case of the trip to Russia reported in his biography, Paweł is most afraid of. Being aware of the difficulties of this experience for his wife, Paweł also reflects on her feelings and in relation to them justifies his decision to return to Poland quickly.

In other fragments of the interview, Paweł also turns to the presentation of his wife's experiences inscribed in their joint and individual biographical choices. It is significant that they met in elementary school and they had been a couple since the second grade of secondary school. The wife is, therefore, his first girlfriend and the first love. She is also, next to his grandfather and mother, another significant Other – a person in relation to whom Paweł constructs himself in his biography.

Analyzing Paweł's autobiographical narrative in a problematic sense allows the capturing of a story contrasting with a contemporary discussion about the individualization and self-realization of an individual. In addition, through the above structural analysis of the text of the interview with Paweł, one can also see how the narrator builds the main line of his narrative and thus how the family thread organizes his biographical experience. In the *demonstration markers*: segments of the preamble and coda (Labov and Waletzky 1967, cited in: Schütze 2008a: 175) the interlocutor faces the search for the roots of his biographical identity. He does this additionally by referring to his grandfather's person in a detailed way. In this way, he tries to show a certain timelessness of the pattern represented by his grandfather and emphasize following him in his biography. This "timelessness" of this pattern presented in Paweł's story is related to the biographical work which the narrator performs giving sense to his biography by referring to his grandfather's figure. The relationship with the

grandfather thus becomes the main frame for organizing his life history. Other significant Others are also Paweł's mother and his wife.²⁵

It can also be said that reconstructing who Paweł is would not have been possible without interpreting the importance of the family thread in his biography. The narrator, seeking an answer to the question: "what shaped him?" does not reveal other dimensions of his biographical experience in the story of his own life. He is rooted in the family *milieu*. His family is a biographical resource here, which allows Paweł both to develop his autobiographical story and also plays an important role in his work on the trajectory.

Agnieszka's case

Agnieszka was born in 1976 in a large city in central Poland, where she grew up and has been living with her family until now (interview time, 2016). An important aspect in her biography is the time of childhood and adolescence spent in what she describes as a "multi-generational home," in which she lived with her maternal grandparents, parents, and younger sister Hanna. Interestingly, from the accounts of her sister Hanna we learn that the family at that time did not live at home, but in the grandparents' three-room flat. In her entire narration, Agnieszka uses the terms "home" or "multi-generational home," describing the places where she lived and currently lives. In this way, she turns rather to the symbolic understanding of the word "home." By associating a "home" not with a particular place, but rather with a place where the family can stay together, where one can cultivate intergenerational bonds.

Agnieszka's parents are doctors by profession and both are still professionally active. Her father works in a hospital and her mother works in a private clinic. Her younger sister Hanna followed in her parents' footsteps, graduated from medical studies and works in a hospital (an analysis of her biography can be found in Chapters X and XI). For Agnieszka, her younger sister's graduation from medical studies and work as a doctor is an important reference point for giving sense to her own biographical choices.

Thus, remaining in the field of biographical decisions of the narrator, it should be pointed out that initially after graduating from secondary school she studied law. However, it was a short episode in her life and, as she comments, not a fully conscious or good choice. After quitting law studies, she decided to try her hand at psychology. This field was a place where she found herself very quickly and in Agnieszka's narration this stage of her life is connected

²⁵ When talking about his life, Paweł also talks about his sister, who is older than him and with whom the narrator "maintains good relations." However, he does not devote as much space to his sister's story as his stories about grandfather, mother, and wife.

with many good memories. After graduating and defending her master's thesis, she started her first job in the administration department in one of the largest medical institutions. Then, for many years, she worked in private companies as a medical representative. However, in her opinion, this job was not interesting and stable²⁶ enough for her to just continue working. Thus, after rethinking her situation and, additionally, consulting her choice options with her mother, sister, and husband, following mainly the mother's suggestions, she decided to do postgraduate studies in speech therapy. At the time of the interview, she is working as a speech therapist in one of the private clinics.

She met her husband, who is an engineer, during her studies. In 2004 they got married. They have two children. Their biggest common family passion is mountain hiking, which Agnieszka talks about in the spontaneous narrative phase. They also bought a piece of land near one of the Polish mountain ranges and in the future plan to build a house there, where they will be able to come not only with children, but also with the narrator's parents and sister. At the end of this introduction to Agnieszka's biography, it is also important to recall the narrator's idea of an additional paid job, which she was implementing at the time of the interview. Together with her friend and mother-in-law (the topic of her good relationship with her parents-in-law is also important for Agnieszka) they were planning a business in the field of education.

Before starting the analysis of Agnieszka's narrative fragments, it is worth noting that in the pool of interviews we collected, this is the only case in which we have the stories of the lives of two sisters (Agnieszka and Hanna) and thus people so closely related. I have conducted both interviews, which is related to my own short research reflection. I first interviewed Hanna, and it was thanks to Hanna that I also managed to reach Agnieszka. Despite the research fears that Agnieszka might be prepared for the interview situation by having talked to her sister, which could affect the spontaneity of telling the story desired in the autobiographical narrative interview, I soon realized that those were unnecessary.

²⁶ Here Agnieszka refers to the specifics of the profession of medical representatives. She says that when they do not work for large pharmaceutical corporations then they work for smaller private companies which find it harder to stay on the market. This situation is associated with job insecurity, and the way out is either to work in a corporation or to go self-employed. Employing such people is more profitable for small companies due to the elimination of many employee costs. However, Agnieszka considered becoming a self-employed medical representative as an experience too marked by uncertainty markers. In the interview, she is much more enthusiastic about the idea of her own business related to the production of educational toys. Here, as she comments, she could do this work in her spare time apart from being a speech therapist. She does not explain in the interview why she did not work for a large pharmaceutical corporation instead of working for small private companies.

Additionally, although in many places the sisters referred to similar threads in their narrations, they are very different, however – both in the layer of experience (which is obvious in a certain way) and in the sense of building a story about their own lives. Thus, this unplanned attempt to gather biographical experiences of people so closely related has proved to be a valuable research experience. From the point of view of my considerations, I can thus point out that just as Agnieszka's narration is rooted in the family *milieu* (e.g., in the story of her relationship with her sister), whereas the main narrative line of Hanna is the theme of work and other areas of life experiences are subordinate. The moment when both biographies meet the most is the story of both sisters about their maternal grandmother. And it is from this common thread that I will start analyzing the interview with Agnieszka.

To reconstruct the narrator's account of her relationship with her grandmother, as in the case of Paweł, I would like to look at the beginning of her spontaneous narrative:

I was born in '76, in April to be exact. [...] Turning to these nice memories, because I have very, very nice associations with my childhood. Although my parents were always busy, they always had a lot to do, they nevertheless tried to create such a warm, family-friendly home, where a lot would be happening and a lot was happening. Although my maternal grandparents played a very important role in my childhood, because as it happened, at the beginning we lived with them and my sister was born, but I will tell you about it in a moment. And, and there my life went on with my grandmother and my grandfather. And these were/ are still very, great memories. In any case, grandma rose to the challenge and was such a rock of the family. And, and, and took care of our upbringing very much. Because it is probably this memory that is firmly grounded in me, that if anything happened or the day was not so great, I could always count on my grandmother and stay at home. And we would spend this time together. Also, there was always a four-legged creature in the house, there was a dog or a cat. Anyway, a lot of different things were happening. We also spent wonderful holidays, Christmas holidays together, Christmas Eve. But, there are also grandparents from my father's side who were a little bit further away. And these are mainly family gatherings, mainly some festive ones. It also stays in memory, it's all there. However, this upbringing because my grandmother was with us all the time. I spent the first five years of my life with my grandmother in one house. And, and, and it was the grandparents who were my carers. Well, without diminishing the role of my parents of course.

Agnieszka, in contrast to Paweł, begins her narration with a story about her childhood, without preceding it with an argumentative commentary. Thus, in the early phase of Agnieszka's narration, there is no sphere of searching for the sources of formation of her own biographical identity and giving sense to her biographical experience, which can be seen in Paweł's narration. What is the

common point in both analyzed cases is the turning of both narrators to point out the significant Others for the development of their life stories. Paweł refers here to his maternal grandfather and Agnieszka to her maternal grandmother.

Considering that the very choice of the narrator as to how and in what order she will tell her experiences should be an important part of the analysis (Waniek 2019: 137), I will look at the quoted passage. What emerges here are three aspects of the narrator's biographical experience and the main line of her narration. First, remembering her childhood, Agnieszka points to the important presence in her life of her grandparents, mainly her grandmother, to whom she returns in subsequent stages of her biographical account. Secondly, she introduces here the perspective of her parents and sister, who, like her grandmother, also become another important framework for her biographical references. Thirdly, there is the experience of growing up in a multi-generational home, which the narrator also talks about further on. Additionally, she mentions her paternal grandparents – she also returns to this thread in the interview coda. The “catalogue of characters” outlined in the first lines of the story – the significant Others in Agnieszka's biography, in the next lines of the story is supplemented with the characters of her husband and children. In the first lines, therefore, she presents the threads important for the formation of her life history, which form the main line for the subsequent phases of her account. The most important people in the history of Agnieszka's life are her grandmother, mother, and sister. One can get the impression that without them her biography would be incomplete.

Turning to the story about the significant Others in Agnieszka's biography, I will refer to the fragment of the narration about the period of her childhood, into which the narrator weaves the story of the birth of her sister Hanna. On the other hand, she shows how important her grandmother was to her at that time.

'81, OK. Hmm, the birth of Hanna was also a great experience, I remember that when I saw her for the first time in the hospital. Everyone was crying because of the tear gas on Dabrowski Square. Generally, all the hospital staff cried and it wasn't good. The windows were open, although it was December, it was terrible. And Hanna, when she saw me, opened her eyes/ I got a camel from my parents. I also remember, it was such a wow experience, where they managed to get it from, I have no idea, but it was the greatest treasure. And this little Hanna looked at me and then I thought: *I think I have a sister*, a really great event. And, and of course, later, little Hanna also started crying. Dad quickly took me home. And then the common life began and, and times began to change a little bit. And I was already at school then, hmm (wonders) at school? Was I at school? Actually, yes. These were my beginnings of school. I have no great memories of primary school. I know I was so/ stressed with everything. And that's what I'm still like, unfortunately. Maybe some kind of school trauma, I don't know what to call it.

Now I think I am growing out of it a little bit, luckily. But, again, primary school was not so easy nor wonderful for me. And, and maybe it's not the time to make some bigger confessions here, but I know that, yes, there were many such things and a lot of emotional oppression, my feelings and these nerves, and my grandmother would just help me out saying: *Agnieszka, don't worry*. And I used to go to my grandmother's to read together, then there was absolute peace. We would open a book and without any stress, we read the book with my grandmother, I mean I was supposed to read. My grandmother, with divine tranquillity, listened to everything I did with this reading. But, I remember this and I know that I used to go there with joy. And it was so pleasant.

The account of the birth of the sister outlined in the first lines of the quoted passage, despite being located in a broader, difficult socio-historical context of the imposition of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981,²⁷ is remembered by the narrator as a joyful time in her childhood experience. In the following lines, however, she abandons her enthusiasm and points to the difficult experience of the first years of primary school education. Here, the figure of the grandmother comes to the fore, devoting time to Agnieszka who is having learning difficulties, and giving her support in this difficult experience. Agnieszka mentions her problems with reading and how under her grandmother's care, without feeling nervous or stressed she would catch up. She says: "[...] a lot of emotional oppression, my feelings and these nerves, and my grandmother would just help me out saying: *Agnieszka, don't worry*. And I used to go to my grandmother's to read together, then there was absolute peace. We would open a book and without any stress, we read the book with my grandmother, I mean I was supposed to read. My grandmother, with divine tranquillity, listened to everything I did with this reading. But, I remember this and I know that I used to go there with joy. And it was so pleasant." The grandma is, therefore, Agnieszka's first biographical carer. She is with her in difficult times and, most importantly, at a time when Agnieszka's parents devote a large part of their daily lives to the development of their professional careers.

In addition, the above fragment should be referred to the entire autobiographical account of the narrator, who as a child of doctors despite having problems at school tries to follow the pattern of her parents. In secondary school, Agnieszka attended a class of a biological and chemical profile. It was only during the questions phase when I asked her to explain why she actually

²⁷ Martial Law was imposed on 13 December 1981 throughout Poland. General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced it in his morning radio and television speech. The communist regime hit the NSZZ "Solidarność" and the opposition gathered around the union, trying to save the system. It was suspended on 31 December 1982 and abolished on 22 July 1983. Hanna was born in the second half of December 1981.

started studying law, which she briefly mentions in the main narration before she enters the path of a longer story about studying psychology – she explains to me this important thread. She says that when she was in elementary school and then in secondary school, her parents, and mainly her mother, expected that just like them, she would finish a “good” field of study and be sure of finding a job. In the quoted passage, Agnieszka says: “I know I was so/ stressed with everything. And that’s what I’m still like, unfortunately. Maybe some kind of school trauma, I don’t know what to call it.” This “school trauma” accompanies her for a long time and, as we will see in the fragment of the coda closing her spontaneous narration, analyzed in the next part of the text, only the biographical experience of her sister Hanna, who meets the expectations of her mother and becomes a doctor, seems to relieve Agnieszka of the feeling of not meeting these expectations. I will return to the topic of the role of Hanna’s biographical choices and Hanna’s character in building a positive image of her biographical identity. To complement the grandmother’s image in Agnieszka’s biographical experience, I quote below a fragment of her biography from her secondary school times:

Anyway, I went through elementary school and then there was secondary school. (...) In fact, a very nice secondary school, and also a nice time. Some trips have already begun, to camps, sailing camp, trips to the mountains. And here this environment that slowly began to draw me in. We were already getting on well with Hanna, even though she was/ I mean there was some age difference, practically six years. But, but, I know that we always got along. [...] This period of growing up in my case probably wasn’t terribly turbulent. I didn’t have a terrible rebellion, I think my parents can’t complain. Well, but, the period of secondary school and actually my starting of secondary school was also associated with unpleasant events. Well, what I’m getting at, it was the time when grandma passed away. Grandma got sick, it lasted a short time. Grandma was at home. I knew something was wrong, my mother was constantly crying. I couldn’t explain it to myself. Because on the one hand, I saw that my grandmother was recovering, that she had had surgery. That all this was getting better, but she was losing strength and, at some point, I realized that it was not good, that something was ending. That some part of our family is leaving and that for me this, I don’t want to say the most important one, because my parents and all that, but yes/ because with my grandmother it was something more than just such relations granddaughter-grandmother. It was some kind of friendship, something, it’s hard to describe in words. We understood each other. We/ she knew perfectly well what I feel, what I think, how it’s all going. And, she really did a great job when it comes to my entry into life. And, and I think it would all look different if it wasn’t for her help in those, such, my struggles with those earliest/ err [...] my adolescence. Well, she was extremely important and, and later I terribly missed her. And it was something that was really difficult to come to terms with. And I know that I had dreams about my grandmother, that, that I don’t really know until now, maybe it’s

just my imagination, but I have the feeling that if I make an important decision in my life or something, I think about her and somewhere I hear her telling me *to do this, it's good, you can just do it*. So I think that, well, my grandmother, my childhood is her.

Referring to the last phrase of the quoted passage: “So I think that, well, my grandmother, my childhood is her” you can see how important a biographical thread it is for Agnieszka to remember her relationship with her grandmother. In Weronika’s case I analyzed in Chapter IX, as well as in the case studies of Julia, Inga, and Hanna in Chapter X and Kaja Kaźmierska’s considerations regarding Róża in the introduction to this part of the book – among all the narrators, we find similar references to their relationship with grandmothers (although Weronika treats her aunt Ida as her grandmother). The memories of grandmothers are also close to the perspective of the relationship between grandfather and grandson, described by Paweł in his biography. What distinguishes Agnieszka’s narration in this way is the reduction of her childhood experience mainly to the topic of the relations with her grandmother. The narrator also mentions her sister and parents, she talks a bit about her maternal grandfather, but it is the grandmother who fills this time the most. Thus, Agnieszka’s words “my childhood is her” reflect exactly what she recalls about her experiences at that time.

Agnieszka’s other significant Other and biographical mentor is her mother. However, this type of bond developed between them only in the adult life of the narrator. This does not mean, of course, that she did not previously have contact with her mother or lived in conflict with her, it is rather associated with the fact that the two women became closer at the time when Agnieszka started her own family. As she says in the interview, even though her relationship with her mother was close before, it was only the moment of marriage and then motherhood that allowed her to understand better how difficult her mother’s task in life was to reconcile such hard work with looking after the family. It was then that Agnieszka appreciated that thanks to her mother’s efforts, after the death of her grandmother and grandfather, such important family ties had not disappeared. She also recalls this time from the biographical perspective of “now” as very difficult for her whole family, but especially for her mother.

It is often the case that when people are very much together, at some point something ends and the other person [passes away – J.W.] [...] I don’t know how this happens. But, that’s what happened in our family. Grandpa indeed lived about a year longer and passed away. I didn’t have grandparents from this side anymore and my mother was left without her parents, which for a person who works and professionally everything is going well with her family, this can be explained. But, if someone has such a relationship as we had, which my mother had with her parents, well, that’s for sure it must be scary and I understand it more now.

Because then you lived your life, so young, growing up. But, now I understand it, better and better and I realize this that it was very difficult, that it was impossible to take a break from work, break in such coping, you just had to carry on with this life and go on. But, it was difficult, for sure, also a lot here, I have respect for them, for my mum's perseverance in all this, because she didn't lose her head. But, but, it was difficult and it lasted for a long time before she got over this, yes. Well, such deep memories.

For Agnieszka, this fragment of her biographical experience is important in understanding that the deceased grandmother disappeared not only from her life. In this way, the narrator undertook the reconstruction of this difficult experience also in relation to her mother's experiences. In the entirety of Agnieszka's life history it is clear that from the moment when she refers to her grandmother's death, a lot of space in her story is taken by references to her mother's person. This moment of connection of the grandmother's and mother's in her biography is summarized in this fragment:

Well, that's the way it is, grandma is grandma. I say I feel, I feel this grandma. She is in me. And that's it. But, Grandma Waleria was awesome and really, it was friendship, it was something so wonderful. What is interesting and what I discovered is that my mother has always been my mother. But, the mother is such a person about whom one could go on for a long time, a lot and all the time.

In addition, thanks to the advice and support of her mother, Agnieszka decided to change jobs and take up postgraduate speech therapy studies. This presence of Agnieszka's mother in crucial moments in the narrator's biography is shown in the fragment in which she refers to the time when she became pregnant. For her, it was a time related to the uncertainty in maintaining a permanent job as a medical representative, when she was considering leaving the company and looking for a new source of income. The narrator mentions this period as:

But, but, that's exactly the crossroads, this completely different dimension of life, that is, the appearance of Ania in the world. I know that when I found out I was pregnant/ I totally panicked. Well, it was a joy and it was great/ I say: mom, will everything be OK? I called my mother. All in all, I could have conveyed it to her in a nicer way, but I remember I was treating an infection at that time. And because this [first – J.W.] test came out negative, so I did not limit myself to treatment and, and later I realized that I had done it too early. And all this, I call my mother, crying on the phone, I say: mom, she says: listen, I have patients here, what is [it – J. W.]. I say: mom, I'm pregnant, I don't know what to do. It's a disaster, generally speaking. She says: wait, take it easy, these are not such important medicines, don't worry, it will be OK, so/ And again such peace because when my mother says something, it's OK.

It can, therefore, be concluded that Agnieszka, by recalling positive stories about her family relations, escapes in some way from a longer narration about difficult issues. In the passage quoted above, she normalizes this situation very quickly by first referring to a conversation with her mother and then with her husband (which she does not elaborate on, but only states that she talked with him and that, like her mother, he convinced her that everything would be alright). Agnieszka's story undoubtedly shows that the family as a biographical resource allows the narrator to give sense to her experiences, while the reflections on the difficult moments of her life are presented mainly in relation to the opinion of significant Others who supported her behavior or made her aware that she should not worry, much less often from the perspective of her self-reflection. This is a certain attempt to interpret Agnieszka's experience, which in my opinion, devotes only small fragments of her biography to discussing themes subordinate to the main line of her narration. I am not saying that Agnieszka does not take up a biographical work or cannot be reflective. However, many people are involved in her life story, including those who act as biographical carers, and thus understanding her experiences without placing them in this "collective" context is not possible.

Before I refer again to the thread of Agnieszka's biographical carers – this time, to her sister Hanna, I will focus on one more important aspect of her story. For the narrator, the most important reference frame in her adult life is her own family – the husband and children. She talks a lot about their shared mountain passion and about plans to build a house among mountain peaks. She also mentions that it was her parents who 'infected' her with the mountain passion, showed her how great it is to spend time hiking in the mountains. This thread also appears in the story of her sister Hanna, who, talking about her time of growing up recalls a trip to the mountains with her dad and Agnieszka as one of the important elements of her biographical experience. Hanna talks about this episode as follows:

N: The winter break trip was just as much of a highlight that both my sister and I still recall it. We often recount this story and the town we went to had this amazing name, Z. We spent around 2 weeks in Z. with our father, in winter. He came up with a variety of fantastic games, for instance when we came across a frozen puddle he told us how to lift it. And he actually lifted the puddle using a tiny branch so we were both amazed by how ingenious he was. He came up with agility tasks, as when, for example, we walked/ went for long walks, we had to hold a stick right in front of us that was of relevant weight, I had a smaller one, my sister had a bigger stick and my father held the biggest one and that's how we hiked in the area. Then we had/ we dined in a diner where you were faced basically with only thick smoke upon opening the door. They would place wobbling pork knuckles in front of us, with fluttering hair on it. My sister and I were disgusted by it so my father would

usually have three pork-knuckles. We would be served some pancakes. Anyway, it was really nice. There were no restrictions, no one bossed us around. It was really nice and to make things even better, our father read “Paddington Bear,” “The Adventures of Paddington Bear” to us. And we would be eating this powdered milk, a dry one, powdered milk with sugar, as he was reading. I can’t imagine anyone eating this, it is revolting, and it is horribly sweet if you add sugar to it. [...] My father was, however, displeased at times because when he wanted to grab a bite we would not let him do it as he would have to stop reading. So this trip actually stayed in my and Agnieszka’s, my sister’s, mind.

Although Agnieszka, in her autobiographical narration, does not take up the topic of the sisters’ trip, however, she talks about their dad, who occupies an important place in her biography. She mentions him referring to his difficult profession, which for many years was associated with long hours spent in the hospital. She also speaks about the very good relationship he has with his grandchildren – her children, how much time they spend together and what a great grandfather he is. She also talks about the fact that she enjoys spending time with her dad, especially now that now being retired, he does not have to spend so much time working in the hospital. Moreover, what Agnieszka is still trying to do is maintain in a way the close contact between her family and her parents, so that her children would be close to their grandparents just as she once was. She also emphasizes the good contact she and her children have with her husband’s parents.

Referring to Agnieszka’s childhood experiences, outlined in the introduction to her story, it should be noted that what significantly marked her perception of family ties is the aspect of growing up in a multi-generational home. In one fragment of the narration, she recalls the time when she, with her husband and children, lived for three years in her parents’ house (while renovating their own house during this period). In this way, she combines two time perspectives – growing up in her grandparents’ flat (together with the parents and Hanna) and her adult experience of living with her children and husband at her parents’ home. At the same time, she points to the disappearing tradition of such homes and families functioning in such a way. In this view, on the one hand, she is trying to show some important, qualitative change associated with moving away from the tradition of three-generation families living together in one house in modern times, related, among others, to the progressing processes of individualization of societies, modernization, and the phenomenon of individuals postponing the decision to start a family. According to Agnieszka, multi-generational houses are now a much less frequently encountered element of the social landscape. On the other hand, the narrator states that in her family the everyday understanding of family relations and bonds understood in this way are still nurtured. Let us look at how she says it herself:

And besides, it seems to me that it was because we lived together. What we have created a multi-generational house, which don't exist anymore and they are wonderful. This is a fantastic experience for me and for the children. And I lived in a generational home and I know how much it gave me. I talked about it a lot because it gave me a lot, these are the memories. And we had a generational home. [...] This is really fantastic. We grow up together, we learn each other. And those were wonderful years. I, that's why I have a house here, not at the other end of Łódź. I had a choice to buy a larger house with more expansion options. In general, larger to start with, for a similar price, but in [name of the part of the city where the narrator's parents live]. And I say: Wojtek [narrator's husband – J.W.], how will that be? I will have to get into the car to get to my parents. And here, we are so close that recently we were bringing a table upstairs to the kids' room. And my father tells us not to bother unscrewing the legs, and just carry it. I say no problem. We just took the table and carried it. We had to unscrew the legs to bring it upstairs to us, because actually, the stairs are too narrow, that did not work out. But, this is great, we are close, we are together and it continues to shape us and I hope this remains.

To understand Agnieszka's rooting in the family *milieu* better, I would like to refer here to two fragments of the narrative coda, which, as in the case of the interview with Paweł, in some way connect with the threads raised by the narrator in the preamble. In this part of my discussion, I will also address the role of the story about Hanna in Agnieszka's biography. The selected fragments of the coda are quoted below. Because of their length, I will start by referring to the first one.

The first fragment of the coda segment in Agnieszka's narration:

Yes, that's how it looks professionally. And [...] and this is such development in all this. And my immediate and distant family is included in all this. I know that the person who always said it on the phone and told me/ my paternal grandfather was calling me, grandpa Witek. He said, you know, because *you are my first granddaughter and I believe in you very much*. And I would say *that's cool*. Well, this year grandpa Witek is no longer with us. Just before Christmas, and since then, well. And I thought, wow, I didn't even get the chance to get to know this man so well. And, and, and it has always been rather casual, how are you, how are things. There were no such strong bonds. But, but, I know that these thoughts, these memories are here now. And I say what life they had, these grandparents of mine. Because there were completely different times. And they raised three children. And they have lots of grandchildren. [...] Well, but, it is difficult to talk about your experiences, especially because they are so fresh. I regret that even these last moments when it was already known, that grandpa is not feeling well. I was also aware of what this will lead to. I put off meetings. We will have time. [...] And, and my dad was with him all this time. Although we all knew that it

would be like that, I did not catch the moment that it is already happening and I did not manage to. And, and I really regret it somewhere in me, that it looks that way. Well, that's it, that's it. Oh, but I'm sure these grandparents also had an influence on who we were. That they would visit, there were meetings at my [maternal – J.W.] grandmother Zofia's, they came round. [...] That's what these memories are like. You reminded me of those memories here. I wonder what else is extremely important to talk about. Maybe ... [here the narrator talks about her children that she appreciates that she has them and about the fact that she did not expect to become a speech therapist, then the fragment cited below appears].²⁸

In the final part of her spontaneous narration, Agnieszka touches on the topic of paternal grandparents, about whom she did not speak much in her biography, emphasizing each time the important place they occupy in her biographical experience. Referring to the assumption that “Dealing with coda and pre-coda phenomena is dealing with the overall order of biographical rendering and the overall order of biography” (Schütze, Wildhagen 2012), it can be concluded that Agnieszka settles here in a way from a sense of unfulfillment in the relationship with the deceased grandfather Witek. This is a thread she is struggling with in the biographical perspective “now” and which is not yet worked on in her biography. Here, too, the narrator's self-reflection can be felt, because in this part of the coda she refers to her relationship with her grandfather, by thinking about what she could change, do better while the grandfather was still alive. That is why this thread appears when she closes her biography and therefore devotes so much space to it. Let's now look at the rest of the coda segment.

The second fragment of the coda segment in Agnieszka's narration:

And I have the impression that my life/ I am very happy with it at the moment. Although for a long time I had such a feeling, I cannot meet, no, no, I am not sorry, I cannot meet certain expectations of the environment, the family. That I was never in my life jealous of my sister, absolutely, no. I even thank God that she managed to finish this medical studies. That she is a great doctor because I know she is great. [...] I felt this when she got into this medical studies and later she was good at it. And the specialization and now, it's a weight off my mind. I say wow, she managed, one of us did it, it's great. Well, now I'm working in a clinic too. And this job suits me because it is, I'm coming back to this again, maybe I'm repeating myself. It's not cool to repeat yourself, but I really feel that I'm finding

²⁸ I made the decision not to quote the whole fragments of the coda segment and to report some of their parts informing the reader about their content due to their size. Assuming that in this way I still do not lose what is most important in Agnieszka's reflection.

myself professionally. I wish Hanna that she, I think that she wants it and I would really want Hanna to experience what I had, to have a child and start a family. And it would be great and fantastic. Well, and I would like to be able to get these professional matters together. But, I promised myself one thing. Whatever I do, I must have time for my kids. And, and already, and this speech therapy also gives me these possibilities. [Here, the narrator returns to the idea for her own business, saying that next to speech therapy this is her “current topic.” And then this segment of her narration saying] And so the story goes on. I don’t know, you can say a lot of things about everyone. And I was supposed to talk till twelve, it’s almost twelve, thirty. I think I exaggerated.

In this passage, it is clear that it is very important for Agnieszka to consider the perspective of others and to put her adult, biographical choices into the experience of being a wife and mother. Summing up her life, the narrator says: “But, I promised myself one thing. Whatever I do, I must have time for my kids. And, and already, and this speech therapy also gives me these possibilities.” In this way, remembering her own experiences of being a child of busy parents, she tries to make her children’s experiences different. Although the narrator does not tell in her biography why she did not decide on a well-paid job in a medical corporation (at the time when she was a medical representative), from her whole story, and above all from the content of the coda, it can be concluded that such a job would require her to be available and committed. As a result, she would not have too much time for her children, which, as she emphasizes, is an important aspect in her current life.

In the last part of her life history, Agnieszka also returns to her sister. Earlier, she emphasized their strong sisterly relationship, as well as similarities and differences in their perception of the world. Therefore, we are dealing with a contrast set introduced by Agnieszka in her biography (Schütze 2008a). It is an important cognitive figure serving primarily to indicate those biographical features which Agnieszka does not have, and which in her opinion are necessary for being a good doctor and thus meeting her parents’ expectations (mainly the mother’s). Secondly, through the contrast set with Hanna, Agnieszka also shows the important features of her biographical identity and her vision of the world, and thus reflects on her own life. She says among others:

We are different, Hanna is different, I am different. If I have a problem, I have to talk about it, I can’t contain it because it is killing me. However, Hanna is probably such a person that you need to reach her a little bit. And she says everything is OK, but somewhere I think she is just as sensitive and, and that also needs to be taken into account. But, all in all, it’s great that of the two of us, she became a doctor. She has absolutely better features to be this doctor. To be able to do all this, have it under control and be a good doctor. Because I think she’s a great one.

Agnieszka's indication of her sister's medical studies and becoming a doctor present in the coda fragment cited above, requires a few more explanations. As I have already mentioned, as a daughter of doctors Agnieszka attended a class with a biology-chemistry profile in secondary school. Although she did not want to follow in the footsteps of her parents and become a doctor, despite mainly her mother's expectations, feeling that she was "unsuitable" for this profession, her mother decided that in this case studying law was the alternative. Agnieszka points out that she followed her mother's command at that time, though against her will. Therefore, after trying to study law for a year and the difficulties she experienced in normalizing this situation of her biographical experience, she decided to change the field of studies. In this perspective, the beginning of the last fragment of the coda: "Although for a long time I had such a feeling, I cannot meet, no, no, I am not sorry, I cannot meet certain expectations of the environment, the family," we can assume that it refers exactly to this situation in which she could not become a doctor or a lawyer. On the other hand, Hanna's success, that one of them is a doctor ("one of us did it, it's great") seems to take away from Agnieszka some burden of the responsibility for "not meeting the expectations of the family."

Thus, the "admiration" of Hanna's life can be of dual nature here. On the one hand, it probably results from the closeness of the sisters' relationships, from the strength of their bonds. On the other, it may also be that Agnieszka, knowing how much effort it cost her to face the fact that she would never be a "great doctor," tries to support the sister in her choice so that she would not doubt herself. Hanna is not just a sister to Agnieszka, just like the mother and grandmother, as I have already mentioned, she belongs to the narrator's triad of biographical carers. It is she that Agnieszka shares her ideas with, consults important decisions and gives meaning to her biography in reference to their relationship.

In Agnieszka's autobiographical story we can, therefore, see how the narrator's biographical carers change. First, the maternal grandmother – she looked after Agnieszka as a child, she was her friend and confidant of secrets. Then Agnieszka's mother, who advises her in difficult moments, whose presence becomes crucial for Agnieszka at the time of her first pregnancy and currently when she is raising her two children. Thirdly, Agnieszka's sister – Hanna. They are very close, Agnieszka often emphasizes this in an interview. In her eyes, Hanna is more organized, less susceptible to emotional imbalance, persistent, and consistent in achieving goals, self-oriented – which Agnieszka often misses on her path. Hanna is also an important "mirror" in which Agnieszka sees the sense of who she is. In the case of Agnieszka, her rooting in the family *milieu* is, similarly to Paweł, related to embedding her biographical experience in the frame of a narration about the family. In analyzing her life story, an attempt to reconstruct her experiences in a different frame would also be a very difficult analytical task.

Conclusions

As Kaja Kaźmierska mentions in the introduction to this part of the book, the sphere of biographical experiences embedded in the family context was, next to the sphere of work, one of the main threads to which our interlocutors referred. Such a situation, as further commented by Kaźmierska, is probably not unusual considering that both these orders of life of individuals organize their experience of everyday life. However, a certain non-obviousness and research thread, which in the face of the phenomena of an individualizing society (e.g., Jacyno 2007) and changes of the family and the family life (e.g., Szlendak 2010, Sikorska 2019) we did not anticipate was the issue of the importance of the family to which I refer in this chapter.

The contemporary perspective of research on the family shows that the family is more and more often becoming a temporary contract, based on the pursuit of the self-fulfilment of the family members rather than a permanent union of a community character (Marody 2015: 144). The second important issue is also the retreat from the nuclear family towards other forms of family life (Marody 2015: 144). It should also be noted that in the contemporary perspective of research of the sociology of the family, it is the changes in family life that are becoming the subject of interest for many researchers. However, it is not only about the transformations in the very functioning of contemporary families, but also about drawing attention to contemporary family life practices and transformations in this regard (e.g., Sikorka 2019).

In the perspective of contemporary times, the family is increasingly rarely a certain integrity in its traditional understanding, and less frequently from sustaining its existence, individuals “cease to develop a sense of their lives” (Marody 2015: 145). Moreover, in the discussion on an individualized society, work, including the individual’s work on himself or herself understood as self-fulfilment, is regarded as a sphere to which individuals devote most of their lives. Thus, the family, in this arrangement of meanings, is often treated as a kind of obligation which in some way takes away the individual’s time for this self-fulfilment. It should also be stressed that for family research itself, the natural aspect is the concept of change, inscribed in the broader social-historical mechanisms of change in the structures of social reality. The diagnosis of the impasse of the family is therefore inscribed in the discussion on the crisis of the family, in contrast to the normative model of family life. This makes the discourse on the crisis of the family refer to the negative effects of contemporary social changes, which lead precisely to the crisis or the decline of the family as an important aspect in the course of the life of individuals (e.g., Slany 2002, Szlendak 2010, Ostrouch-Kamińska 2011, Chambers 2012).

In addition, because of the transformations of family life inscribed in the optics of contemporary times, the researchers of the scientific subdiscipline of sociology of the family are reflecting on its meaning. This is due not only to the ongoing discussion on the crisis of the family, but above all to a certain implicit need to supplement it with important trends such as the sociology of the couple or the sociology of intimacy, as well as the need to speak about the sociology of family life rather than the sociology of the family, due to a certain difficulty in matching the definition of the family with the subject of analysis in nowadays perspective (Sikorska 2019: 57).

Therefore, due to the contemporary discussion about the crisis of the family as a value, the interviews selected for analysis in this chapter and many other interviews collected in this project show a completely different perspective. It is related to the narrators' perception of family ties as a permanent element of the landscape of their biographical experiences. Our interlocutors, reconstructing the social change which took place in Poland, indicate, among others, situations as the uncertainty on the labor market, financial uncertainty, and the disappearance of some old reference communities (e.g., the yard community). However, despite these uncertain threads in their biographical experiences of the post-transformational reality, in most of the narrations collected in our project – the family – is situated on the side of something permanent. Regardless of whether we are talking about formal or informal relationships, having children or merely expressing the desire to have them in the future, starting a family with someone is an important thread for our narrators to which they refer.

Moreover, it should also be noted that the family understood as a biographical resource is above all a resource that is available. This is a particularly important aspect when we talk about the Polish reality, where society is devoid of medium-order structures, that is, in many situations it is difficult to talk about the phenomenon of institutionalized biographical carers in Polish social reality. Thus, the family as a close and accessible resource allows, on the one hand, the elimination of the socially created state of uncertainty, inscribed in the functioning of the individual in contemporary times. On the other hand, as Małgorzata Sikorska (2019: 57) notes, living in a family, regardless of its crisis, is still “the experience of most individuals.” Therefore, in the perspective of the biographical research described in this book, it seems appropriate and important to discuss in the context of discussion about today the family life of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases.

Moreover, narrations such as Paweł and Agnieszka's – as I emphasized in the introduction – stand out from our collection. They are rooted in the family *milieu*, and the story of the family plays the role of a biographical resource. This means that by referring to the family thread ordering their biographies, Paweł and Agnieszka give sense to their biographical experiences. In the analyzed

stories, the biographical identity of the narrators is not formed on the basis of the professional world, peer relationships or relationships with people with whom they share common passions (who are not members of their families). Here, the family context is the point of all the biographical references. Writing about the family as a value in society, Wojciech Świątkiewicz states that:

The family is often treated in the social consciousness as a kind of extended personality, a perspective in which a person perceives the sense of one's own life, aspirations, and life goals. Through the eyes of the family, the individual looks at the surrounding world, one's place in this world, learns to name and classify, to recognize the world as friendly or hostile in one's own or another way (Świątkiewicz 1999: 120).

This quote can be referred to the significance of intergenerational relations in the narrations of Paweł and Agnieszka. On the one hand, they are a dimension of their search for their biographical identity (which is shaped by references to the grandfather in the case of Paweł and the grandmother in the case of Agnieszka). They are also a determinant of what they strive for in their lives, a certain pattern inscribed in the tradition of multi-generational families. They both place their biographical experience within this perspective. For Agnieszka, this thread is also problematized in a wider, macro-social perspective. She notes that multi-generational homes like the one she grew up in are gone. She also emphasizes that she tries to be as close as possible to her parents, nurture their frequent contact with their grandchildren, and care about spending time together with the family. She presents this issue as appropriate for her biographical experience, while not seeing it in the social landscape which surrounds her.

Finally, answering the formal questions about the sense of the researcher taking biographical case studies, while remaining in the perspective of the biographical method in the view of Fritz Schütze. I believe that such a research approach primarily involves the ability to reproduce more precisely those threads which are associated with broader social processes, and which are often overlooked during the analyses of extensive empirical material. In addition, focusing on individual cases gives us the opportunity to trace the common features of the autobiographical accounts we have collected. Therefore, before I chose to discuss in this chapter – the biographies of Paweł and Agnieszka – I looked at how the analytically important topic of the family was presented in the remaining interviews gathered in our project. In this way, I considered the narrations of Paweł and Agnieszka to be unique (against the background of other autobiographical stories contained in the collection).

The biographical analysis that I present in this chapter does not escape the perspective of certain generalizations. I have already mentioned that the family

theme appeared as an important frame of reference in many of the narrations gathered in the project. Very often, our narrators also devoted a lot of space in their biographies to the story of grandparents who supported the process of their upbringing and socialization. Thus, by weaving the experience of Paweł and Agnieszka and our other narrators into the perspective of the present, it can be seen that the role of grandparents is still a very important aspect in the analysis of the topic of the family undertaken by social and pedagogical sciences. Małgorzata Sikorska, analyzing the modern family and parenting practices on the basis of in-depth dyadic interviews with pairs of parents and in-depth individual interviews carried out with single parents, indicates that both in their individual experience and in their reconstruction of the children's experience, by far the most important significant Others indicated by the interviewees were the grandparents (Sikorska 2019: 110).

Thus, the analysis of Paweł and Agnieszka's cases conducted in this chapter also touches on issues important from a contemporary perspective. Namely, those related to the role of significant Others in the process of forming the identity of the individual and the role of family and intergenerational ties for the experience of individuals, inscribed in social processes relevant for the present time, such as individualization, modernization, and retraditionalization. In this view, the cases I have analyzed show the biographical experience of people whose life choices (including professional ones) do not belong to the sphere of individual decisions and self-fulfilment, but are rather inscribed in the perspective of their family relationships, which both Paweł and Agnieszka treat as the most important frame for their experiences. Additionally, these case studies can also be used to introduce the reader to this aspect of the biographical experience of the time of transformation in Poland, in which social change is a theme subordinated to the topic of a family story. It is the family theme which is the frame organizing the analyzed biographies. My aim in the considerations was, therefore, to indicate what constitutes the sense of the biographies analyzed and to reconstruct the sphere of references important for the general conclusions contained in this book, which for our narrators was, along with the topic of work – the family theme.