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CHAPTER VIII

THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING AND DEVELOPING A CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SOCIALIST REGIME IN POLAND

The chapter attempts to explore the socio-biographical conditions under which a far-reaching change in subjective understanding and interpretations of the socio-political system in post-war Poland may have taken place. The findings to be discussed are based on five autobiographical narrative interviews with well-educated people: intellectuals, academics, and artists born between 1947–1954 who were raised and educated in the Polish Peoples' Republic (PPR) and who were adults or young adults during the so-called “real” socialism era. What makes their biographies intriguing is that the socio-political system in which they grew up (“taken for granted” and “natural” world of everyday life) has become questionable and problematic, that is, it has ceased to be coherent, plausible, and trustworthy. Hence, the key questions to be considered here are: how (or by whom) the process of “awakening” or “alternation” was initiated, why it was possible at all and how it unfolded?

It should be noted that the individuals whose autobiographical renderings will be investigated here were not prominent figures or players in the anti-communist civil opposition organizations. They rather played second fiddle in developing a regime critique and contesting the system, still, their experiences and interpretation of the social and historical processes are of great importance for the understanding of individual and collective mechanisms and phenomena. It should also be mentioned that there are many publications in which the life histories of people who – according to Alfred Schütz's concept – may be called “the well-informed citizens” or “the experts” (1946) were presented (e.g., Mucha, Keen 2006, Torańska 1994, 2004, 2006, Kondratowicz 2001, Grupińska 2011). They were rather not meticulously discussed and analyzed in the light of the autobiographical narrative interview method. The aim of this chapter is thus, not only to enrich the spectrum of the possible variants of biographical experiences and their social and historical consequences among well-educated Polish people, but

also to show complexity and a multi-levelness of individual and collective transformation processes.

Within the broad scope of empirical data collection, there are some compelling life histories of people who were born into the world in which the communist and later also the real socialist political system was taken for granted and seen as a world beyond question. Their everyday reality initially created and maintained by their parents, then supported by the education system and the omnipresent communist propaganda were both biographical and structural conditions fostering "attuning to the system." For a long time (sometimes till their adulthood) it was sufficiently coherent and consistent to let them "unwittingly" benefit from the opportunities given by the state and ignore political turmoil. However, at some point in their life course, they were confronted with alternative definitions of the socio-political system. This made them radically change their attitude towards the world of their daily life and profoundly reinterpret the meaning of the past, re-evaluate their identities and reconsider their life orientations (cf., Strauss 1959), as well as to search for new sense-making resources. Among the cases discussed below counter-definitions that put the reality of the interviewees' daily life in question were: 1. the consequence of some critical "awakening" incident in the biographical experience which is a turning point marking "some sort of movement in identity" (Strauss 1959: 93–94) – the case of Wanda; 2. discovered and adopted after entering social worlds that (sometimes in passing) were criticizing, contesting and/or actively fighting against the regime; and 3. mediated by politically active significant others.

The sequence of events and related inner changes, as told by the aforementioned interviewees, seem to correspond with Berger and Luckmann's description of alternation processes "in which accents are radically re-assigned" (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 176) and consequently one "must cope with a problem of dismantling, disintegrating the preceding nomic structure of subjective reality" (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 176). This nomic structure – which should be remembered – is guaranteed by an overreaching symbolic universe that also "provides order for the subjective apprehension of biographical experience" (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 115).

While gradually (mentally) abandoning the old reality and the unquestioned and consistent world of everyday life, the interviewees had to systematically broaden and reformulate their stock of knowledge at hand (and sometimes even acquire a new one) which would help them understand and legitimize the new order. It is very much apparent in the formal features of their storytelling: there are a lot of argumental commentaries which are to explain to the listener and themselves how the process of alternation was triggered, how its dynamics developed (cf., Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977, Schütze 1987), and how this change has influenced their life then and now.

Before discussing in detail individuals' cases it is important to mention and discuss some common frames and features of their biographical experience: 1. they are all children of the war generation and in their childhood and adolescence they have to deal with "overprotective" parents and suspicious awareness context; and 2. they go through the alternation process that implies reflexive and critical (re)thinking of their past and thus they are forced at least to initiate some sort of biographical work.

Post-war generation

It is remarkable that in all cases discussed in this chapter there are extended passages in which informants deal with World War II experiences of their parents or their suffering in the era of the Stalinist terror just after the war and (sometimes implicitly) show their effects on family life and on maintaining or developing certain attitudes towards the communistic regime and the real socialism era. Often their autobiographical accounts start with an extensive reconstruction of their family members' background and engagement in remote historical events (not only the fight with the Nazi occupation). We should note, however, that the very interviewees neither were participants in the war nor eyewitnesses to the war atrocities, but were born into the world that was "saturated" with traumatic (and/or silent) recollections of that time. As many other people of the wartime generation, their parents had to struggle with painful experiences of threats of imminent death, of losing close family members, of fear, of hunger, of powerlessness, of seeing other people dying or suffering, but also with consequences of destruction of moral basis of social cooperation associated with a mutual lack of trust and loyalty (cf., Schütze 2014: 257). To put it in other words, they were entangled in the collective trajectory of suffering and (at least some of them) were trapped in the collective moral deterioration (cf., Schütze 1992). Thus, there is no doubt that war exerted a deep influence both on the narrators' parents and (through the processes of transgenerational transmission) on the very narrators' schemes of interpretations, frames of reference, systems of orientation and hierarchies of values.¹ In other words, parents often had to "fade out" their sufferings that were too painful to be remembered, but still, as if "unconsciously," affected their lives. Usually, the parents – sometimes being morally trapped – did not want to admit how much they had to sacrifice to ensure emotional and financial security for

¹ Silencing or veiling the experiences of the Second World War by parents usually has damaging consequences both for themselves and their children. This issue was, among others, widely discussed from different perspectives by Gabriele Rosenthal (see 1998, 2003).

their families and to give their children a sense of autonomy and freedom. This usually meant introducing a suspicious awareness context, that is, concealing their true identity and genuine reasons for actions. Yet, keeping their children from realizing or even suspending their real motives, aims, and biographical costs (cf., Glaser, Strauss 1964: 670) may lead to a risk of misunderstanding and growing distrust in the family.

Undoubtedly, the experience of war and (in some cases) the repressions of the Stalinist era had a significant impact on the way the “new” post-war reality and the Soviet-dependent authorities were perceived and defined by the wartime generation. Being very tired of painful memories of those years, first and foremost, people desperately wanted to return to a normal life and the “normal order of things.” They employed different strategies of (re)normalization of their mundane life in order to find peace and quiet. The overwhelming fear of war and the need for security (usually associated with the idea “no more war”) prevailed and probably held many people back from thinking about the socio-political system in a critical way and from objecting it directly. Many of them were ready to support any “agendas” which provided a sense of social order and guarantee some sort of equilibrium in order not to expose their children to any harm and danger. Still, it must be remembered that the war-time generation’s attitude to the system was very much differentiated: there were people who were devoted, ideologically-involved followers, some others felt (at least for some time) privileged and therefore obliged to be grateful for their advancement.² There were those who believed in its modernization project, some were pragmatically obedient citizens, some were indifferent, and still, others were conciliated with the (political) situation and did not believe that anything could be changed. Regardless of their more or less conscious attitude towards the communist regime, the parents wished a normal life for their children. Some of them, consequently, became overprotective in different ways and very demanding. They devoted themselves to protecting their children and securing a better future for them.

Finally, we must also take into account that a considerable number of people of the war and the post-war generation believed that the state-socialist system would never end. Even those who did not accept it aimed rather at transforming it and creating independent arenas of discourse, than at bringing it down.³

² There were mostly workers and impoverished who – as Padraic Kenney puts it – “were anointed the new ruling class” (Kenney 1997).

³ Bogdan Borusewicz in Dariusz Rosiak’s book described the situation in Poland at the beginning of the 1970s in the following way: “Then [...] nobody thought about overthrowing the system and breaking alliances seriously” (Rosiak 2014: 62).

1. A critical transforming incident in the life course of Wanda Nemec⁴ (b. 1954)

The course of events in her life – until she was a law student finishing her final year – seemed to be almost a perfect scenario⁵ for “a socialistic development of a young woman.” She was a clever and diligent student coming from a “model” socialistic family with a strong figure of a father⁶ – an engineer who held many managerial positions in the electronics industry in Poland and who believed in modernization. She says: “My parents belonged to the generation which started their careers [...] in fact they had completed their studies right before the Polish October⁷ and were about to start working and were full of hopes that something would change in this country.” There is no wonder that Wanda also believed in the promise of equality and social justice, the processes of modernization and industrialization and opportunity structures that could be used by all who were ready to work for the common good and the benefit of a community as she did. She was a member of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association and then she was active in the Polish Socialist Student Association (an organization supporting the socialistic order). This “idealistic” picture might have “pulled the wool over her eyes” and impeded her will and ability to systematically reflect on the political, social, and ideological issues. Yet, a certain (cited below) critical interactional episode forced her to recognize that there is something wrong with the taken-for-granted reality (and the state-socialist ideology) she used to believe in.

[...] and a third- or fourth-year student approached me saying: you know what, Wanda, maybe you would like to become a member of the Party?” I said: “You know what, Mary, I haven’t thought about my future yet and what I will be doing in

⁴ All the names are anonymized.

⁵ In other words, her biographical development was seamlessly organized by institutional expectations of her parents and the socialistic society.

⁶ At least from her current perspective (i.e., presented at the time of the interview) it seems that although her father was a devoted “Builder of the People’s Poland” he did not accept the system without reservation. Wanda mentions that he was very critical about the politics of Władysław Gomułka (see also the note below) and he very negatively experienced and evaluated “the games within the Communist Party by means of those catchy anti-Jewish slogans” in 1968.

⁷ In October 1956 Władysław Gomułka took power as First Secretary of the Party and offered a “Polish road to socialism” which marked a major change in the Polish political system (later called “small stabilization”). It is believed that then the era of the Stalinist repressions and terror ended and Poland recovered (at least partially) its sovereignty and liberty.

three years, it is a long-term perspective.” “Well, think about it, your grade average is very good, erm, if you become a member, then we will find a place for you in assistant lectureship.” I looked at her [...] and I was usually enthusiastic also when it came to social life (laughing) I looked at her and it was like a bucket of cold water thrown in my face. I came to realize that all the people around me joined various organizations to later find a proper job. Anyway, I was deeply grateful to Mary because if she had approached me trying to talk me into party membership by saying “you know, Wanda, erm we shall reconstruct this department, it is all rigid and the country needs changes and so on and so forth,” if she had started in the modern vein, then who knows, these were the mid-70s, I might have been convinced (laughing). And it made me realize that those young Party members are careerists, well [...] it made me look at them in a totally different way, [...] And only, only those who had a certain social and family background had a chance to get a good post.⁸

It is noteworthy that the face-to-face situation of receiving an offer to join the Party is told in a very detailed and vivid way and reconstructed in the form of direct (quoted) speech, that is, the interviewee attempts to quote her own and her colleague Mary’s sentences in their original wording. This makes the scene very authentic and confirms its importance to Wanda’s identity transformation. The episode is thought-provoking, leaves a modicum of doubt about the world taken-for-granted so far and results in questioning the interviewee’s self-concept. It is one of these experiences that Anselm Strauss defines as turning points and argues that “there are [...] certain critical incidents that occur to force a person to recognize that “I am not the same person as I was, as I used to be.” Such critical events usually initiate biographical work and force a person to think over, re-consider, and re-evaluate his or her identity and life situation. Strauss mentions a number of different types of turning points. One of them corresponds to the experience of betrayal (Strauss 1991: 321) in which “the agent of destruction is less personal,” that is, in which people (like Wanda does) notice that they “have been deceived, not by any specific person, but by events in general” (Strauss 1991: 321).

The conversation in which a student puts forward a puzzling idea of joining the Party for consideration is described by Wanda as “a bucket of cold water” – an incident that radically transforms her attitude towards the “socialistic reality” and its societal formation. Suddenly, she realizes that the normative order of the world that has been taken for granted has to be questioned. She abruptly understands that people cannot achieve their status through their abilities, hard work, and devotion to the community, but they

⁸ See: It is a serious breach of reciprocity of perspectives manifesting itself in: (1) the idealization of the interchangeability of the standpoints, and (2) the idealization of the congruency of the system of relevance (Schütz 1990a: 11–12).

have to join the Party if they want to succeed. Moreover, it becomes clear for her that she was drawn by her colleagues (similarly to the experiences of Don Quixote analyzed by Alfred Schütze) into the “let’s pretend” world that should be taken as reality (Schütz 1976: 145–146). Consequently, she fails to establish a universe of discourse with her peers which makes her more and more aware of “breaches” in her interpretation of the everyday reality and the “ideological” frames of “real socialism.”

In the light of this critical experience, her system of relevance and the scheme of interpretation breaks down. Her former biographical experiences and orientations are seriously undermined (cf., Schütz 1976: 231) and receive a new interpretative meaning. She is bewildered, confused and disorientated. Moreover, she admits that she could have been even more deceived if the proposal had been formulated differently (this means not at face-value, but in a more hidden way, implicitly). Her anger and irritation caused by her “naïveté” (and the credulous assumption that people are honest and straightforward) add to the feeling of deep and bitter disillusionment.

This “eye-opening experience” – as it was mentioned earlier – intensified (or even started) the biographical work⁹ of the interviewee and subsequently brought about crucial changes in her attitude towards her world of everyday existence and biographical identity. Furthermore, this resulted in reshaping her image of the “incorporated collective figurations” and social constellations. Thus, her scheme of interpretation, the established order of relevance and frames of reference have changed dramatically. Wanda became much more sensitive to the basic contradictions and incoherencies within the real socialism societal system (and its “hidden” logic). She also became much more circumspect about the intentions and motives of other people. In all probability, from then on the organizing principle of her life in the public sphere was the “limited confidence” rule. She seemed to develop a more objective, rational, and critical viewpoint towards (any) political system and/or ideology. This has had crucial importance for her biographical development and her world view. Moreover, the process of her identity transformation was then intertwined and deepened by the biographical experience of many years’ stay in another socialistic country (which her husband came from and where her two children were born). Consequently, she learned to take into account and consider different perspectives. This enabled her to build contrast sets (especially of the everyday life, social relationships, the degrees of confidence between members of the “we”-community, the forms of political opposition and attitude towards economic and political dependence

⁹ “The aim of biographical work is to: re-knit the past with the present and future, in order to achieve a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness about one’s identity” (Corbin, Strauss 1991: 366–367).

on the Soviet Union and its oppressive (often military) actions, et cetera in Poland as compared to the other communistic countries).

As we learn later in her rendering, Wanda was very involved in politically autonomous Polish reform movements of the 1980s – especially in the reform of the administrative court system. Her attitude and concern were probably rooted in her biographical experience of exposing the falseness of the political system in communist Poland.

2. Entering social worlds that criticize, contest, or actively fight against the regime

Basically, it may be said that the social worlds¹⁰ of the Polish anti-communist resistance normally cross-cut and intersect with (or even emerge from) the social worlds whose primary or core activity is to look at society in a critical and reflexive way and/or contest it. Thus, even those who had joined the latter groups without a strong sense of concern for political issues and the need to fight the communist regime were as if incidentally engaged in civil-resistance struggle with the system and became more and more politically conscious. Three autobiographical accounts discussed below will illustrate the issue in regard to: a) the social world of academia – the case of **Henryk Kwiatkowski** (b. 1947); and b) the social world of the hippie subculture – the case of **Tomasz Lubecki** (b. 1954), and c) the social world of alternative theater – the case of **Adam Malec** (b. 1950).

It is remarkable that all the cases analyzed below basically follow a very similar storyline. While talking about their childhood and adolescence they explicitly and/or implicitly address the strained, turbulent relationships with parents and the “suffocating,” tense home atmosphere. This defines the logic of their alternation process which finds its roots in their desire to break free from home. The interviewees talk about emotional (and/or intellectual) distance between the parents, fake feelings, hidden issues, ambivalences and a loss of trust, which are intertwined with their parent’s strenuous efforts to build some sort of isolated, free-from external influences, overprotective shelter for their children. Consequently, the children feel trapped and cornered.

¹⁰ The Arenas/Social Worlds framework implies exploring the social world as different arenas, where multiple worldviews coexist within the processes of negotiated interaction (Strauss et al. 1964, 1981). Clarke (1991: 128) defines social worlds as “[...] groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about building their business” (Clarke 1991: 131) and an arena as “[...] a field of action and interaction among a potentially wide variety of collective entities” (Clarke 1991: 130).

This frustrating feeling of being discontent, of being very tired of all the limitations and the unbearable, overpowering conditions at home, forces them to break free from the subjectively defined emotional insufficiency and to (re) gain the sense of authenticity (Kaźmierska et al. 2011). Consequently, they wish to emancipate themselves from their parents in the quest for meaning, authenticity, individualization, and autonomy. They start to look for open paths and autonomous space that would let them develop their own biographical plans, explore new possibilities, as well as discover and form their new identities (this includes exploring new independent “me’s” (Mead 1934). They search for opportunities to assert themselves, to increase their independence and to define their life orientations. These are normally offered by many different social worlds. The cases discussed below show how joining such groups triggers the process of alternation and emancipation, as well as creates a new system of meaning.

2a. Contesting a structure as a biographical orientation of Tomasz Lubecki (b. 1954)

The life course of Tomasz Lubecki who leaves home at the age of sixteen and joins the hippy subculture groups lets us reconstruct the process of becoming a “backseat” oppositionist who – being a rebel – as if “by the way” takes part in actions directed against the ruling authority. But, in order to understand his biography, we must first take into account that he was brought up mainly by an overprotective mother, “wrapped in cotton wool,” in a “censored” home and in the atmosphere of distrust between his parents. All of these he wanted to escape from and leave behind in the quest for meaning, authenticity, individualization, and autonomy.

Tomasz comes from a working-class family. He was an only, late child – his mother was 34 years old¹¹ and his father was 40 when he was born. His mother (and especially grandmother) was an advocate of communism and the father rather opted for socialistic principles. He describes his mother as a very possessive person who “tended to keep me only to herself” and when he talks about his father he says: “like many men from his generation (...) he left the child’s education and housework to his wife without taking responsibility himself, but came from time to time and wanted to order everyone about. So he was rather aloof and when he came then/ then he was a grim figure, forcing his various ideas on others, so I remember I was quite afraid of him and felt rather alien to him.”

¹¹ Having a baby at the age of 34 was considered to be late motherhood in those times.

One of the most important reasons for leaving his home so early is probably some sort of “taboo” in the air that entails the very cold family climate. He finds out much later in his life that his parents had been separated during the war (his father was working as a war captive for a *Bauer* in Germany and his mother was hiding at her aunt’s place) and they were probably accusing each other of having an affair. The interviewee’s explanation of the “cool relations” between his parents might be accounted for by the concept of a suspicious awareness context (Glaser, Strauss, 1964: 670). Since the true identity of the other is falsified (although its true “version” is assumed) it normally destroys the moral basis of interactive reciprocity and undermines mutual trust, thus presenting a potential for the sudden destabilization of their life situation.

They were very focused on the existing time, on managing somehow, perhaps they were even hiding some of their various views, or memories before me because they feared that err if I knew them I would tell everybody around about it and that could get me into trouble. I guess they really had that specific, to me, incomprehensible fear at the time when I was a child and when I was a little older, fear not to show too much, so/ so as not to speak out their views, so as not to stress any opposition against the then authorities [...] I was living in blissful ignorance as to post-war history, for example.

As a child and a teenager, he unwittingly became a beneficiary of the system because a friend of his grandmother – a well-known figure in the local communist movement supported and protected him during his school education. Moreover, he was protected from external influences, certain historical and political issues were not discussed at home.

Towards anti-structure

Drawing on Victor Turner’s explanation of the terms structure and anti-structure, we may define Tomasz’s biographical orientation as primarily opposing the modality of a society that is described as “a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less” (Turner 1969: 69). Referring to Van Gennep’s concept of rites of passage (a change of status in a society), Turner pointed out their three-part sequence: separation, liminal period, and aggregation and put emphasis on the experience of liminality and *communitas* (both constituting anti-structure) in which persons are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner 1969: 95). It is, however, important to remember that the process ends with reincorporation or reassimilation which means returning to society with new roles and statuses. In the case of Tomasz, however, the process

(which should temporarily “extricate” individuals from their social statuses) never stops. Whenever he is confronted with social alignments, irritated with arbitrariness and artificiality of social norms and customs, bored with the routine of everyday life and whenever the existing social structure seems to limit his sense of freedom, equality, and the need for developing new alternative actions, he starts to oppose or at least does not feel comfortable (for instance: the description of his obligatory army service resembles the fateful adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk, when he was offered a position at a University which he soon found dissatisfying and got bored with and its institutional ceremonial rituals which seem to have horrified and overwhelmed him). In other words, Tomasz was constantly experimenting with alternative ways of living and often refused to conform to fixed standards of conduct. He tends to withdraw if his new innovative practices seem to structuralize (formal institutions and laws start to emerge). In order to manifest his involvement in the anti-communist opposition (or to be more precise: to manifest his anti-structure attitude) he closely cooperated with the activists of Rural Solidarity (*Solidarność Rolnicza*) and Fighting Solidarity (*Solidarność Walcząca*) since his mates from the hippie group were settled down in the Bieszczady Mountains (that was very typical for the hippies in those times). Still, he remains very much critical of himself. There is no wonder that he has become a recognized addiction therapist who deals with young people at the margins of society.¹²

2b. The academic arena of discourse which absorbs Henryk Kwiatkowski (b. 1947)

Henryk Kwiatkowski is an academic teacher holding a PhD in humanities. He is the elder son of a Jew coming from an extremely poor family living in a middle-sized town in central Poland. His father is the significant other who – according to the interviewee – has shaped his identity and who (in a more or less explicit way) has influenced his biographical orientations and evaluations.¹³ Since, consequently, there are a lot of narrative passages addressing his father’s biography, as well as many elaborated argumental commentaries dealing with the complex father-son relationship also the father’s life history should be reconstructed here. It seems to be crucial for his life course that he had been imprisoned twice: in the interwar period as a young adult he was sentenced to

¹² We must remember that *communitas* is manifested through liminality, marginality, and inferiority.

¹³ This might be empirically traced via the analysis of the interplay between institutional expectation patterns and biographical action schemes. Both process structures are described in the *Methodological note*.

four years for his political activity in the Communist League of Polish Youth¹⁴ (and only while in prison did he learn to speak Polish), and at the beginning of World War II he spent about a year in jail in the Soviet Union where, ironically, he escaped to look for shelter. Henryk recapitulates that when his father returned to Poland with the Second Polish Army (created in the Soviet Union in 1944 as a part of the People's Army of Poland)¹⁵ he was given a choice either to join the Secret Police or the Prison Service (both being the agendas of the newly established communist regime in Poland and both considered to be employing a large number of Jewish people especially in the top positions).¹⁶ His father decided to work as a prison administration staff member claiming that he had gained a lot of experience on the other side of the bars and he knows how the prison works. He was a highly-ranked prison officer (later he was upgraded and worked for the administration of the prison service) who was valued for his managerial skills and therefore was regularly transferred from place to place.¹⁷ Consequently, their family moved very often and the father was hardly ever at home.

But still, we must take into account another feature of his life history – very typical for the majority of Jewish people – he was the only one who had survived the war. He belonged to the generation which had to hide or “fade out” their sufferings, which were too painful to be remembered, but still as if unconsciously, impacted their life courses. Sometimes they did not want to admit how much they had to sacrifice to ensure financial and emotional security for their families (for instance while being morally trapped) and attempted to keep their children away from realizing or even suspending their real motives, aims, and biographical costs. Henryk explores that all these experiences had left his father emotionally wrecked. Thus, these might be reasons for being overprotective and for his desperate attempts to become Polish after the war. Both issues will be discussed later in the chapter.

He married an 11-year younger, simple, lovely, nice, and very beautiful Polish girl (who was barely 18 at that time). Henryk describes his parents in the following way: “He [the father] was a man who created us [...] Created intellectually. We owe to him our talents. Our mum was lovely, good, and she

¹⁴ In Polish: “Związek Komunistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej.” This was the youth wing of the Communist Party of Poland between 1922 and 1938 and a part of Young Communist International.

¹⁵ It was a Soviet-controlled army led by a Pole Karol Świerczewski, who from the beginning of the war had served as an officer in the Red Army.

¹⁶ Although the interviewee does not admit it, due to his position in the state institution, his father must have been embroiled in the system or had even served it.

¹⁷ Henryk says that his father was often defined as a rolling stone and implicitly suggests that therefore he was forced to change his work locations so often.

was a wonderful housewife, caring, but she used to look at us and she still does as if we were [...] not her own offspring.” Henryk claims that his father did everything to avoid stigmatization (mainly of his sons) and save them painful experiences of disapproval and rejection he himself had endured while trying to cross the cultural borders and assimilate. In this sense, his biographical experiences illustrate the life course of a marginal man (Park 1961; Stonequist 1967) who, on the one hand, was never fully accepted by the Poles¹⁸ and, on the other, was excluded from his Jewish community because of not being religious. It is worth mentioning here that Robert Park pointed out that by definition a marginal man has a more civilized, more intelligent, and more objective, rational viewpoint (Park 1961: xvii–xviii), but during the period of transition that “is inevitably a period of inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness” (Park 1950: 355) he experiences inner conflicts and moral dichotomy (Park 1950: 355). Furthermore, Everett Stonequist stressed that the marginal man’s sense of loyalty might be doubtful and therefore he may suffer from being torn by two loyalties and responsibilities (cf., Stonequist 1967, Schütz 1990b). Presumably, his allegiance to Poland before and during the war might seem questionable to many people. His strenuous attempts to overcome his fragile “me” image in the eyes of others and to become recognized and accepted as a Polish person were associated with gaining some sort of cultural valence (and expecting his sons to do the same)¹⁹ in Antonina Kłoskowska’s understanding.²⁰ His efforts to become Polish and to secure a better, free from stereotypical judgments, and the sense of a (self-)alienated future for his sons culminated in the change of the family surname from Blumenfeld to Kwiatkowski in 1966.

It is crucial for the analysis of Henryk’s overall biographical orientation to investigate how the image of his father is outlined. Generally speaking, taking his account at face value we may say that the interviewee sees the relations with his father in a symmetrical way (emphasis is placed on harmony between a very wise, intelligent, loving father and his extremely clever son). Yet going deeper, the picture seems to be much more complicated and ambiguous. In

¹⁸ Till the end of his life he was mangling the Polish language and therefore his ethnic background was probably recognizable at once. Moreover, the kind of occupation he did for a living and his (former?) ideological engagement in communism might have aroused reluctance or disgust among Poles.

¹⁹ For instance, he was exceptionally happy for his son’s school achievements in all subjects, but especially in Polish.

²⁰ Kłoskowska (2001: 117) defined cultural valence as: [...] not only the appropriation of a certain essential, including canonical, part of national culture, but, above all, as the acknowledging of this culture as one’s own, as familiar, as satisfying hubristic needs (that is, the need for self-worth, personal dignity, and a feeling of participation in the community).

many (recessive) passages we learn that he was abusing alcohol, that he “was unbelievably overprotective and we were not allowed to do many things,” but also very demanding (at least his sons wanted to please him, to meet his expectations, and to win his approval). His father almost obsessively supported the education of his two sons and took pride in their school successes and achievements. He introduced them both to the world of books, in which Henryk finds some sort of shelter when he needs to escape from the harsh reality of everyday life. His immersion in the utopian world of literature, imagination, and abstraction help him struggle with the ambiguous life situation. Furthermore, Henryk mentions that when it came to his choice of university, it was also (and maybe in the first place) motivated by its distance from home and adds that his father “while being sensitive and wise he was also a type of an autocrat, well, a DESPOT.” Both, Henryk’s immersion in books, and his decision to go to study in another city might be interpreted as a sort of escape from the unbearable conditions at home. It is also interesting that his father would not talk about his occupation (although his wife often asked him about it) and warned Henryk against doing the job. It is most likely that these unspoken issues and the complex relation to his father resulted in an emotionally ambivalent relationship with him and led to some sort of disorientation and disorder in his life. The untimely death of his father, due to the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, was a shocking experience for Henryk, who was then only 19 years old. This resulted in a serious breakdown of self-orientation and the feeling of self-alienation (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 343). This is how these vague feelings and experiences are expressed in the background construction:

Oh! Our father used to assign a very strict [...] demarcation line, barriers between his professional occupation, which he considered nasty, and our world of imagination. So, in fact, we were living in a utopian world of literature, we were given an immense sense of emotional security, our father provided us with it, he used to be tough on those/ if one has crossed, err, the line calling me again “a Jew a Jew,” he could [...] manage it pretty easily, he was a high-ranked official, so he had power over thousands of people, I must say. So we were living with this sense of security, but it was not the security provided by a civil servant, but the security given by our father, who [...] really loved us [...] very much. And when we lost him [with trembling voice, trying to restrain emotions] (longer pause) IT WAS DESTROYED [...] this destroyed the sense of security and then [...] my problems with depression started and so on.

In 1965 Henryk entered the academic world of humanities with its arena-discourse structure and (mainly because of the people he met) became more and more aware of the illusions of the system and more and more open to

other perspectives, alternative sources of meaning, and systems of reference.²¹ As a second student, due to his intelligence and well-reading, he was noticed by a recognized professor who nominated him for a scholarship. This was the first step in his academic career and the beginning of his many years' cooperation with professor Antoni Talar. Henryk makes a psychoanalytic diagnosis (being aware of his malfeasance) that professor Talar replaced his father. He became his mentor and "shaped his scientific identity." But, this coaching relationship (Strauss 1969) did not mean following the footsteps of his master uncritically, but was rather based on endless intellectual debates and discussions with him (and his students). Henryk says for instance that: "I was really attached to him, though I didn't share most of his [scientific] views." Thus, his intellectual profile was rather developed in contrast to his master's works, but his admiration and respect regarding Talar's knowledge and intellectual curiosity strongly supported his alternation process (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). It must be mentioned, however, that Antoni Talar was well-known for his anti-communism attitude and involvement. His moral stance and principles strongly affected the young intellectual for whom the experience of (value, identity, ideological) disorientation was still a dominant one. In this context, it might seem to be absurd, but just after March 1968²² Henryk joined the Party. But, besides his supposed ideological "enticement" and leftist convictions, we should also consider what Henryk could irretrievably lose in the consequence of the political turmoil: his plan (to some extent imposed by his father) to become a Polish intellectual already carried out partially in 1968 could come to nothing. This would be a dramatic turn of events especially if we take into account that he was the first in the family who went to university, that his father had been then so happy and enthusiastic about his son's achievement that he visited all his neighbors and acquaintances to boast about his son's success, that the academic career was the only one Henryk could imagine for himself. There is no wonder that in the light of a real threat of losing crucial parts of his identity (i.e., Polish and intellectual) joining the Party seemed to be necessary.

²¹ Although he says that even earlier his attitude towards the system was critical and he would often criticize his father.

²² March 1968 – a series of student demonstrations triggered by a removal of a theater play *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) by Adam Mickiewicz from the playbill in Warsaw. The interpretation of this most important work of Polish Romanticism by Kazimierz Dejmek was considered by the communist authorities as unacceptably anti-Soviet. The protests spread to many towns and cities in Poland, but were quickly suppressed. The propaganda claimed that Jewish students and intellectuals were responsible for inciting the Polish youth. The anti-Semitic ("anti-Zionist") campaign developed leading to expulsion of thousands of Polish Jews.

But, there is good reason to believe that with time, along with other dramatic events in Poland (Henryk mentions the events in 1970, 1976, and 1980)²³ and under the influence of his master, he systematically changed his biographical orientation and attitudes toward the “socialist reality” of everyday life and imposed an ideological system.

Moreover, regardless of his involvement in on-going discussions in the academic *milieus*, he also observes and is deeply moved by the moral attitudes of one of his colleagues (active opponents of state socialism) who is arrested during the Martial Law. Consequently, he becomes more and more tired with the “as if, fake life” and with “apparent activates” in all spheres of social life.²⁴ But, first and foremost, we must remember that he is very sensitive to the “mechanism of negative social labelling and stigmatization.” Henryk gradually becomes aware that the communist ideology is aimed at humiliating and degrading people, especially when he observes what happens to people who dare to openly criticize the regime and actively fight with it (putting their lives at risk and danger).

2c. Taking over the role of an opponent after joining an alternative theater group – Adam Malec (b. 1950)

Adam Malec was born in 1950 in a small town in Western Poland (from now on referred to as B.). He was the only one out of seven children to be born after the war and the only one to be born after his father spent a couple of months in jail as a political prisoner. Adam’s mother did her best to get her husband released from prison. Interestingly enough, she was acting as if on two levels: on the “rational” one she hired a lawyer (and paid a lot of money for his service) and on the “transcendental” level she promised to God to deliver another baby and dedicate it to God. This is how Adam Malec was brought into being.

In order to understand his initial attitude towards the state socialism and then his biographical change, we must take a closer look at Adam’s family’s fate

²³ December 1970 – riots in Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin, motivated by a sudden increase in food prices; hundreds of shipyard workers were killed or wounded by the soldiers, June 1976 protests in many Polish cities against prices and workers’ riots in Radom; 1980 strikes in the shipyard in Gdańsk and the emergence of the “Solidarity” trade union led by Lech Wałęsa.

²⁴ This might be compared to the “second grade” activities described by Hanna Świda-Ziemba. The “first grade” meant rituals of formal participation in activities imposed by the communistic authorities, while the “second grade” meant taking part in different kinds of niche, informal activities that only seemingly fit the scope of the current institutional and legal framework (Świda-Ziemba 1997: 73–75).

and see how he talks about his father's experiences, especially those connected with his imprisonment. It is very intriguing, since, as we have already learned, our interviewee was born after his father's stay in prison.

Adam's father came from a very modest family that could afford to educate only one child. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, he was a teacher in B. and surrounding villages and towns. Just after the war he was elected a Vogt (wójt) of B. and still he was very much devoted to the Catholic Church and connected to the PSL party.²⁵ His local social status was surely very high. But, then Adam reports that: "In the [19]50s the situation of my family was very bad." The dynamics of the storytelling force him to go into details and to explain the causes of the situation. We learn here that his father was imprisoned without any court sentence. The circumstances were as follows: when the Archbishop of Poznań was planning to visit B. in 1948, Adam's father was advised by the state security officers not to welcome him officially in the church. He did not obey these commands and, consequently, was put in prison for about 7 months. Then his farm and household were burnt down, his land was taken over by the state and he was a victim of a press witch-hunt. This probably undermined his reputation and status within the local community. There is, however, hardly any commentary on what had happened in prison. We learn only that when Adam's father returned to civilian life he had to commute about 60km to his work in the Department of Agriculture in Poznań (that was somehow connected with his membership in ZSL²⁶) and spent little time with his family. Then he got involved in setting up agrarian schools in B. and cared very much for the education of farmers. He also established an amateur theater with farmers and formed a theater troupe performing in little villages.

But, it seems that from the perspective of the then-state that Adam's father's imprisonment had the intended effect and his re-socialization was successful: he was not critical about the system anymore and started to behave in accordance with the political system's expectations of the totalitarian state (please note that he was arrested and released during the Stalinist era in Poland that ended in 1956). It seems that his actions were "tamed" and became compliant with the ideology (at the level of "doing"). Moreover, we may guess that he had been changed and his old self had been – at least to some extent – "mortified" (Goffman 1968). Adam mentions that politics was not discussed in his home

²⁵ The Polish People's Party (Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), sometimes translated as Polish Peasants' Party, is an agrarian and Christian democratic political party in Poland. Opposing the pre-war Sanation regime and aiming at preventing the communists from monopolizing power in Poland. Its functioning was forbidden in 1947.

²⁶ The United People's Party (Polish: Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe, ZSL) was an agrarian political party in the Polish People's Republic formed in 1949. It used to be a satellite party of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).

and that the authorities (via practices in total institution – see: Goffman 1961) were able to break a person down. In consequence, the father's political past and involvement, as well as his imprisonment, became a family taboo. Thus, as a young man Adam was not very much aware of the political situation in Poland. In his adolescence, as a chair of his school council, he gave a speech criticizing the "Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops" (sent on 18 November 1965) and then went to Poznań to support Władysław Gomułka in his counter meeting to the Christian Millennium celebrations led by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1966). These strongly oriented political activities were discussed neither with his parents nor his much older brothers. It must be stressed that both events are presented in a passive form. Moreover, a couple of times he repeats that he was very immature. For instance, while referring to the events of 1966, March 1968 in Poland, and Czechoslovakia (the invasion of the Soviet Army and those from the Warsaw Pact in 1968) he says that things were "very strange" that he and his friends "did not know what is going on," that "everything was some sort of mystery, sensation" (March 1968). The following passage that is a background commentary illustrates his attitude towards the political events in 1968 in those times:

[...] to be honest [...] I was still... I still felt like a child, I had no idea what it is all about... Politics was never talked about in our house, so I was not involved in any option, my option was my family. And there were so many issues passed over in silence, taboos that were connected with my father's imprisonment, so we never talked about politics. The Jewish issue and politics were never talked about in my home.

Some lines later he adds:

It resulted from my father's prison experience, that still the authorities if they want to destroy a man they can do it...

Adam's alternation started only some years later, that is, in the beginning of the 1970s, when, as a student, he was seeking a vent for his acting passion (interestingly, aroused by his father). Paradoxically, through the Polish Students' Association performing under the aegis of the communist government, he could meet some members of an alternative (artistic) group which he eventually joined. His involvement in its activities (theater performances) that were defined as rebellious and mocking the communist political system both by the audience and by the Security Service constituted a turning point in his biography (Strauss 1969). He took up the challenge and successfully, as well as genuinely, performed the role, at least to some extent, imputed by others (McCall, Simmons 1966: 139). But, this required a fair amount of biographical

work that has to be “carried out in service of an actor’s biography, including its review, maintenance, repair, and alternation” (Strauss 2010: 98) that was aimed at “[re-knitting] the past with the present and future in order to achieve a sense of biographical continuity and wholeness” (Strauss 1991: 366).

While Adam talks about his involvement in the alternative theater movement, his language changes radically. He strongly identifies with the group via a “we” form that becomes dominant in this part of his experience and rendering. Moreover, he obviously places it on the other side of the barricade and defines it as an “enclave of freedom,” says that during their performances “we were having an hour of freedom and we were using it to a maximal degree” and that “we were fighting for getting rid of fear.”

This is how Adam Malec became one of the most recognizable members of the theater movement strongly associated with the cultural opposition in Poland.

3. Meeting with and the guidance of (politically involved) significant others – Makary Dostatni (b. 1949)

While analyzing the socio-biographical conditions under which the process of alternation is possible, Berger and Luckmann point out that the transformation of subjective reality cannot be started and continued without establishing a highly effective (similar to emotional dependency during primary socialization) identification with significant others (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). Furthermore, they emphasize that “These significant others are the guides into the new reality” and “provide the indispensable plausibility structure [...] that must become the individual’s world, displacing all other worlds, especially the world the individual ‘inhabited’ before his alternation” (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 177). Such important *dramatis personae* playing a crucial role in the process of alternation may be found, for instance, in the autobiographical rendering of Makary Dostatni. Thus, in this part, the focus will be on the case in which a politically involved significant other (here: Gutek Mochnacki) – is “the guide into the new reality”²⁷ and provides an alternative direction in biographical development and orientation. He “teaches” the interviewee to notice certain discrepancies of the system and to criticize its paradoxes (primarily economic scarcity and social inequality), as well as to make them sensitive to the experience of those who are victims of the regime (invigilated, imprisoned, persecuted, and oppressed).

²⁷ These significant others here might be also defined as “coaches” in the process of status passage (Strauss 1959) guiding, counselling, and advising their “political” development.

The case of Makary Dostatni (b. 1949) and his friend Gutek Mochnacki will be considered here as an example. Based on the detailed analysis of his storytelling, we may presume that the parents of Makary Dostatni were rather attuned to the system and benefited from it. For instance, when Makary describes his life as a young boy it seems to be much more affluent than a life of an average teenager in those times. He recapitulates for instance: “My father [...] he was an economist, an accountant, he always had the opportunity to arrange a three-week stay at a summer camp, and we were the only ones or among a few who could go to a summer camp, most often to the seaside.” Yet, then his privileged position was “seen but unnoticed” (Garfinkel 2007). Although he started his secondary education from a vocational school as a very gifted student he could move easily to a technical college opening the path to higher education.²⁸ Consequently, Makary Dostatni could step-by-step develop his professional career (ultimately leading up to a doctor’s degree in chemistry). Moreover, as a young promising sportsman, he was awarded several grants and was given advantages placing him in a better position. There is no wonder that at that time the state socialism (rather being a social frame of his experience than a consciously accepted political system) seemed to him as a world of countless opportunities in which every man is the architect of his own fortune. Accordingly, with a high degree of probability, we can describe his attitude towards everyday life then as “uncritical” and “unreflective.” Even later when Makary Dostatni as a husband and father had to struggle with the scarcity of goods at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s he still used to treat all the impediments in everyday life as a “normal” challenge that has to be faced in a skilful and resourceful manner.

Only when Makary Dostatni got to know Gutek Mochnacki at work did his attitude start to change. With time, their acquaintance turned into a strong friendship. Thus, Gutek Mochnacki, who was a well-known and recognized member of the Solidarity Movement both in his local *milieu* and in Poland, became a significant other. He guided Makary Dostatni through the complexities of the apparently “normal and fair” social system. He pointed out and explained to him the paradoxes, contradictions, and abuses of the system, how communism limits people’s freedom et cetera. This is how Makary Dostatni remembers those times:

And, err... and if anyone talks about the communist time, aaa, it was the time of my studies and so on, it was when I got closer with Gutek Mochnacki. He was also a student at the Polytechnic and he graduated in 1974 I guess, he often visited us, came for a glass of milk, because as a chemist I had to drink milk obligatorily,

²⁸ Note that the system of education in communistic Poland was very much different for instance to the GDR system in this respect.

so he came for a glass of milk or a cup of tea or to talk. So we got closer and we became friends. [...] He hiked, climbed while I practised running. We both got married at that time. And we became even closer because we lived close to each other [...] So, we met more often. He was my true friend until the time of *Solidarność*. Frankly speaking, I didn't know much about what was going on around until that time. I can remember '76 when there were food coupons, for sugar, when it was necessary to deal with the everyday reality, you know, at all costs. If there was a need. I never searched for alternative access to anything, like knocking at the back doors, no, I didn't. The authorities wanted us to live like that, so we got used to the situation. And then Gutek started to indoctrinate me: "listen, the *Solidarność*, here, here, no, not *Solidarność* only, we must kick the communist system." Err, I was rather sceptical about it. Because I didn't mind Gierek, there were some problems, but the way out was to learn to deal with the new reality or eat a little bit less (laughter). Err, and it was a big surprise for me, that Gutek was so involved in *Solidarność*, you know, he became [an important figure in its structure] Gutek Mochnacki was the person who knew the facts best and knew how to convince people.

It seems obvious that this relationship shaped Makary Dostatni's biographical attitude and political orientation to a large degree. He joined the Solidarity Movement and was ready to put his life in danger in order to support Gutek Mochnacki. But, first and foremost, he started to see the political system with the eyes of his friend – he eventually noticed its paradoxes and oppressive character. It must be stressed in the end that even though Mochnacki died many years ago, he is still a significant other in the life of Makary Dostatni.

Conclusions

Although this chapter did not explicitly deal with the dynamics and processes of social movements, let's look at the quote in which Bill Moyer writes:

Social movements are collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated, and mobilized, sometimes over years or decades, to challenge the powerholders and the whole society to redress social problems or grievances and restore critical social values. Social movements are a powerful means for ordinary people to successfully create positive social change, particularly when the formal channels of democratic political participation are not working and obstinate powerful elites prevail (Moyer et al. 2005: 111).

However, the question remains: how does it happen that people join specific social movements? Where do the supporters of their activities really come from? It seems that the considerations made in this chapter indicate one

of the possible resources “cumulating over years and decades” and perhaps not the most obvious ones. In this way, they show how it happened that the (considered by many to be) communist system in Poland was overthrown also due to a kind of accumulation of encouraged antagonists of the oppressive system.

In other words, assuming that every social movement needs not only a “definite” number of leaders, but simultaneously and necessarily an “infinite” number of (usually nameless) secondary supporters. These supporters should not only recognize and legitimize the social problems raised by it, but also mobilize their action and participate massively in a collective biographical action plan (cf., Blumer 1971, Moyers et al. 2005, Schütze 1992a), the chapter shows the mechanisms and processes that “transform” the former opponents, the morally compromising beneficiaries of the system or the passive bystanders into emotionally involved and motivated boosters. Consequently, they became engaged in the developing of a collective action scheme (Schütze 1989) which is related to an intentional mode of experiencing events in life and has its source in the inner spontaneity of individuals.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the modalities of the alternation process associated with the change of political and life orientation described in this chapter based on the analysis of five life stories are not at all isolated. For example, the fate of Wanda Nemec seems to have similar dynamics and many common features with the experiences of Zofia – a social reformer described in this book by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (see Chapter V). The role of a significant other and the commitment to the world of the academia can also be found, for example, in the autobiographical account of Krystyna Lutyńska, for whom her husband – an outstanding sociologist Jan Lutyński – became the one who taught her to look critically at the political reality of post-war Poland and became a guide to “alternative” reality (see: Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015).