

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: POLAND

**Transcript of Anna Lipowska-Teutsch
Interviewer: Sławomira Walczewska**

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Anna Lipowska-Teutsch was born in 1944 in Warsaw, Poland. She graduated with a Master of Arts in Psychology from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 1969. She worked for the Acute Poisoning Clinic in Cracow where she counseled victims of suicide, especially women who had been victimized by family members. In 1990, she co-founded the Society for Crisis Intervention designed to intervene in cases of domestic violence. Since 2002, she has also worked for the rights of Roma (often incorrectly referred to as “gypsies”) women in Poland.

Sławomira Walczewska founded the Women's Foundation (eFKa) in Kraków in 1995. In 1999, Walczewska published *Ladies, Knights and Feminists: Feminist Discourse in Poland*, the first Polish book about women’s emancipation from a historical and a cultural perspective. As a feminist activist and a scholar, she is interested in international women’s movements and is firmly committed to understanding various differences and intersections of global feminisms.

Anna Lipowska-Teutsch
March 2005
Kraków

SW: Hanka¹ Lipowska-Teutsch is a psychologist and a women's movement activist. Can you tell us about yourself, about how feminism found its way into your life? I mean feminism, or rather some sensitivity toward gender differences, toward consequences of these gender differences. Tell us about yourself.

AL: Well, feminism first appeared in my life in the early 80's. A friend of mine came from Italy. Her name is Marzena Smolenska,² and she was telling me about her activism in the feminist movement in Italy. And this was the time of martial law³ in Poland, when this kind of political, human energy, including my own, was kind of concentrated around issues related to our... stifled young democracy. And I remember that I said something like that to Marzena Smolenska, that well... that I believed that feminism was some sort of a marginal phenomenon, that important problems were elsewhere, that important problems were related to people's inability to effectively work together – women, men, children, all genders and age groups – to resist human rights violations against all people, that this had some universal value, and that there was nothing like that here. But it was also in the 80's, when I started having these personal experiences... I mean personal in a sense that they were related to my work, where I began to notice some amazing stories of women, stories that had been completely invisible to me before. These were women who showed up in the Acute Poisoning Clinic after suicide attempts and who had suffered some inhuman kind of abuse by their husbands, fathers, brothers, boyfriends and so on for many years. And finally they tried to take their own lives, because for many years, they had been seeking help, trying to escape, trying to get some protection from the law, trying really hard

¹ “**Hanka**”—diminutive for “Anna.”

² **Smolenska, Marzena**: a friend of Lipowska-Teutsch who lives in Italy.

³ **Martial Law**: limitations on civil liberties implemented on December 13, 1981, in order to stop social activism aiming at fundamental reforms of the social and political system in the Polish People's Republic. It was confirmed by the National Council's (Rada Państwa) decree, even though issuing decrees was unconstitutional during Parliament's (Sejm) session. Prepared since August 1980, it was justified by a threat of coup d'état and take-over of power by the opposition gathered around “Solidarity,” economic collapse, and a possibility of Soviet intervention. The chief administrative organ during Martial Law was the Military Council of National Salvation (WRON), led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski. Martial Law regulations limited basic civil liberties, introduced curfew, and suspended all activities by social organizations and trade unions. Martial Law militarized main branches of the economy, banned travel, and introduced censorship of correspondence and summary judicial process. Activists from “Solidarity” and political opposition, as well as some politicians from the pre-August 1980 regime, were interned (approximately 10 thousand people in all). The remaining “Solidarity” activists went underground, organizing demonstrations and strikes in factories and coal mines, suppressed by riot police (ZOMO), which often used heavy military equipment (9 coal miners were killed in the Wujek Coal Mine in December 1981, and there were fatalities in Lublin in August 1982). Demonstration participants, underground activists, and “Solidarity” members were fired from their jobs, harassed, and coerced to sign “declarations of loyalty.” With the collaboration of Secret Police, employees of the judicial system, education, public administration and mass media were being vetted. The society at large reacted with organizing a boycott of all organizations and institutions controlled by the authorities; underground press and publishing ensured the independent flow of information. The Catholic Church undertook a broad campaign of helping those persecuted by the government. The underground “Solidarity” was receiving moral and material support from international organizations and labor centers. As a result of a deteriorating economic and political situation, martial law was repealed on July 22, 1983 (but repressive practices and some parts of the legislation survived till 1989), and in February 1992, the Sejm decided its implementation to have been illegal.

but to no avail. Finally, death seemed the only option left to them. And some of them died and some didn't. As a matter of fact, in our Acute Poisoning Clinic⁴ we had about thirty deaths a year, with really big numbers of patients, and we had about 1000 to 1800 suicide attempts. And a big part of this group was made up of women, whose biographies hid long histories of horrific abuse, abuse in their personal lives. I remember my amazement, you know, that there was some very important experience of very many women, who, as it kind of seemed, were constantly trying to talk about this experience to other people, but nobody would listen to them. And the one important meeting for me was meeting this one woman who had tried to take her own life after a long history of extreme abuse by her husband. She was a village woman, a Catholic, who suffered through all this abuse, violence, and humiliation, through this endless "concentration camp," with no result but silence and loneliness. But she thought that if she performed all her duties as a mother, a wife and a Catholic, and if she carried her cross in this life, she would perhaps be rewarded after death. Perhaps. That that's what one needed to do. But the situation evolved, and her husband started to sexually molest and abuse the children, and it wasn't possible anymore to reconcile all these roles of a good mother, good wife and good Catholic. She found herself in this trap she couldn't resolve and couldn't escape, so she tried to take her own life by drinking some caustic substance, but with the idea to not die right away, so that she'd have time for a confession to get absolution, so that she didn't go Hell. Not to go to Hell, after all. And she did exactly what she had planned, and she died a terrible death. And this... this horrifying story kind of finally motivated me... that I had to do something. This was some kind of an element that was personally very important to me, this kind of an obligation... specifically a personal obligation toward these women who suffer abuse, who are tormented and die and... and... it's like... And I could say it's still... it's hard for me to define it, but I have this impression that they're received... I'd say, with some sort of reluctance in... let's say, in feminist salons. That the kind of person who is a very clear example of how terribly oppressive, cruel and ruthless this patriarchal system can be... of how it floods all these huge spaces of women's experience with silence... That these kinds of spectacular examples could be perceived as... as some kind of information that it's only cases that get to this point should elicit interest. That here you are, dear ladies, here you have these suffering women, these women who are tortured, raped, killed, abused, who die, and take care of them, you know. Well, there is something about this that makes you talk about these women. It's a bit like a sound of a nail scratching a board, you know. There is something kind of tactless about this. This kind of showing... flaunting of this... this suffering. There is this talk about some kind of negative effect of the victim's feminism, this kind of showing the stigmata and baring the wounds, and that, on the other hand, feminism slides down into this kind of hole, where all well-meaning people meet and they want to help somebody, you know. But that kind of dulls the blade, let's say, the political blade of feminism and focuses on the universal suffering of a human person. That there is some sort of... a gap here, you know. And it needs to be said that working with... people... women threatened with this radical abuse is terribly exhausting. And I mean... you're flooded with all this information and involved in all these absurd altercations, one after another, with the whole bureaucratic system, and finally... together with your clients, so to speak, you go through this exhaustion, this sense of helplessness and anger, this kind of helpless anger, so that it's probably the case that it's very hard to find a place, where this experience of everyday work

⁴ **The Acute Poisoning Clinic** (*Klinika Ostrych Zatruc*): There are nine of these clinics in Poland—one of them in Kraków where Lipowska Teutsch has worked. The clinics treat patients who became poisoned. They also perform tests for toxins, and share information about toxins and ways to aid those who become poisoned.

could be shaped into some specific political action. There is too much of this work. And there is also this kind of a danger or a trap for these women who suffer the abuse. When they get support from a person or an organization that's identified as feminist, they may end up losing the battle with the court, with the social services, or with some organization that runs a shelter. Because these institutions... As people who deserve being believed and being helped... then they are good victims, classical victims. You have to meet many conditions to be a good victim who deserves being helped. And the person who gains more confidence in her own strength, her own rights, and who begins to identify with a broader group, struggling for its place in the world, defending its right for speaking up, to safety, and to freedom, becomes less credible for institutions. And they try to cross her. And finally the outcome is that this person who believed in standing up and fighting for her rights loses everything. I know such women from my work, women who lost everything... I mean they lost everything, apartments, children, jobs. And they came out without children, without an apartment, without a job but with a stigma of a person... a bad mother, a bad mother, whose children are now being raised by the father, the violent perpetrator, who came out of this with his social status, his apartment and his custody rights. And that's, even though, like in the case I'm talking about, he was officially sentenced by the court for abusing his family, but this didn't become an obstacle for him to gaining everything that it was possible to gain in this case. So this is a very difficult... difficult experience. And... there are always two things that make up this burden. One is related to the fact that these specific [concrete, sic] people are being exposed to danger, that when they gain some sense of their own rights and some hope that they would be able to live like free human beings, like free women in a free country, this hope may be just the beginning of their defeat. This is one serious difficulty. The other is related to the fact that finally very often... at least that's true about me... that I often kind of leave certain things unfinished. I mean I have an impression that these bigger... such as diligence and ability to find support could bring some results, could bring some change, could change the law, could change the execution of the law. That it could change the women's attitudes toward other women in those various little villages, small towns, excluded ethnic groups, and social groups and all these others, you know. That something will change. And... it doesn't mean that I don't do anything about this, but I constantly feel that I do too little and that I lack consistency. That I am not able to focus enough on building this kind of... this front ... this group... this strategy, which would be carried out in the longest possible time frame. That all this information, all these crazy, terrible things related to radical infringements of rights of abused women... that every time there will be some reaction... and that's not the case, you know. And... all of this strikes me as some chaotic, interrupted action, including my own inability to collaborate, you know. That maybe something would change if I were better able to collaborate, if I were better able to assume the necessity of ... kind of wrapping up individual stages and reacting to specific events. I feel flooded by it all. And that's what's so difficult that this whole... a big chunk of my life, after all, didn't end with any real change in the lives of the women I've been talking about.

SW: Let's talk a bit more about you. You worked in the Acute Poisoning Clinic for ten years, and most likely you weren't the only person working there, but I've only heard about you as the person who got involved in some activism for women, including with [sic] this one third of your female patients. Where has it come from in you? Where has this kind of sensitivity come from? Is it a result of some type of upbringing, of some sort of experiences in your childhood, youth or in college? Did you have some friends or some

family members with whom you could develop this kind of sensitivity? After all, you were the only one who reacted this way to this one third of your patients.

AL: I mean... I mean, in me... I mean... what may be the key... it's something, something personal... it's that my personal way to react is anger. I often feel anger. And... I mean... it made me angry. Not just despair, even though there was enough to feel despair about, but more than anything else, it made me angry. And I thought to myself that I could do something. Because this link between my anger and my high self-esteem is crucial here. The kind of conviction that I can and should do something. And that the way to do it is anger. That it is possible for these women themselves but also for all the people to feel angry when they see around them this whole ocean of some absurd and monstrous injustice, that they should feel angry. But is it in some way related to my family or to my personal life? Well, maybe only in the sense that I always lived a very comfortable life. Comfortable in a sense that my whole family was the family of outsiders. In various ways, it was exposed, excluded but at the same time with some silent sense of superiority. This is what was perhaps significant. And I often tell this little story about my mom, who... The situation was that we lived on selling off our property, and the land was divided into home construction lots and the new owners, I mean the people who bought it, were moving in one by one. And at some point, one man bought the lot across from our house and, together with his family, started building a house. And day and night, they were working on the construction site, mixing cement in concrete mixers, carrying mortar, marking walls and so on. And I remember my mom sitting on the stairs to the terrace and laughing to tears. She's looking at it all and laughing to tears, and she says: "See, Hania, see what they're doing! Life is passing by, it's unclear if the world is even going to last three weeks, and they are building this house!" And it made her laugh. I mean we were weird. And looking with irony at these kinds of human comings and goings. And this... this... this certainly had its impact on... on who I am. This is kind of... it has the kind of connection that... is if I have a feeling I can afford doing a lot, you know. And nobody can do much to me. That nobody can really do anything to me. Unless they kill me. I mean I never felt this kind of a discomfort that other people think something different from me. Or that they say something different, or that they observe me, that they laugh at me, or are mad at me. Not really. And I mean... This was, you know... you know, some form of freedom, freedom of outsiders. And I'll add one thing, you know. In this toxicology clinic, it was the first time I came into contact on such a massive scale with something I consider the petty bourgeois mentality. I just didn't have this kind of personal experience before, not in my life in general and not in the psychiatric clinic, where I had mostly worked with schizophrenics. I never met this kind of a manifestation of petty bourgeois mentality face to face [in French]. But in the toxicology clinic, I was terrified... by this kind of weirdness of normality. For example, when I would meet families of these people after suicide attempts, and they would, for example, show deep worry over what the neighbors were going to say after the ambulance left and so on, these were some strange labyrinths, amazing to me, of people's imprisonment... It was some kind of resignation from their own life and subordinating themselves to some kind of seemingly obvious idea about what life should be like and how we're supposed to take other people's opinions into account and so on. And on all of this as if... in the middle of it all, like some sort of amoeba, like some kind of nuclear explosion, something kind of grew in front of my very eyes, and it was this phenomenon of this terrible subordination – squishing into the ground – crashing, yes, kind of crashing of women in these terrifying family systems, in some terrifying nets, stifling them in all possible ways. It was a terrible subjugation.

And... well, it was surprising to me... I... I never had any personal experience like that, so I was simply amazed.

SW: You're talking about your sense of otherness, of freedom, freedom related to it, and... It's not a tricky question... I'm simply curious. You were born in the year when one totalitarian system was falling down and another was to be born in a short while. You graduated from college in 1969, so most likely you experienced the 1968 events⁵. How was it possible to be a free person? How did you live with your freedom in a country of socialist realism and with everything that's related to it?

AL: I mean... maybe some biographical detail here. I mean... this... I'll say this and this is at least how I heard it from my family. I mean my family didn't experience freedom, you know. I mean they didn't experience political freedom. What I mean is that it was a standard element of family conversations, what happened to my grandfather and my grandmother during the October revolution, and how terrible it was, the sea of blood and so on. I won't go into details, but there were weird and cruel scenes related to the October revolution⁶ and adventures of my grandmother and grandfather and other family members, including some specific stories. But I think I'll just skip the stories, but they dealt with some radical acts of cruelty, and, by the way, it was cruelty against women from my broader family in the period of the October revolution.

SW: That means... since the revolution affected your family, was your family... The family members recalling the revolution must have been living in Russia or in the Eastern...

AL: The family members recalling the revolution lived in the Russian territory, and my grandfather was Polish, you know, but he graduated from this military school, and as a white officer⁷, he was fighting in the Baron Wrangel's troops⁸, trying to save... save Western European civilization. This... this was his main mission: the Western European civilization. My grandmother, dressed up as a nun, with one stable-boy, Siergiej, went to Caucasus to join my grandfather, through burning Russia, having left my mother in the care of her Ukrainian nanny, in the village of Szarograd. It means they had a lot of adventures. Well... they survived. They survived but barely. And... I mean, this kind of... this burning Russia was the kind of background for my mother's stories. Well, later on... My grandfather was the person who was

⁵ **March 1968:** a political crisis initiated by student protests and accompanied by a wave of anti-Semitism, as a result of which around 20 thousand Polish citizens of Jewish descent left the country. The direct cause of protests was a student demonstration in Warsaw against the censorship intervention and removal of Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* on January 10, 1968. The demonstration participants were harassed and some were expelled from the university, which caused mass student protests, brutally suppressed by Militia troops. The protesters demanded liberalization of political life. Student protests were put out by the end of March 1968.

⁶ **The October Revolution:** The October Revolution, also known as the Bolshevik Revolution or November Revolution, was the second phase of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the first known as the February Revolution. The October Revolution was led by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks and marked the first official Marxist communist revolution of the twentieth century.

⁷ The **White** movement, whose military arm is known as the White Army or White Guard and whose members are known as Whites or White Russians comprised some of the Russian forces, both political and military, which opposed the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and fought against the Red Army during the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1921. The designation *White* stood in contradistinction to the *Reds*—the Red Army who supported the Soviets and Communism.

⁸ **Baron Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel** (or Wrangel) was Commander-in-Chief of the White forces.

terribly... he had a very critical view of “sanacja”⁹ and the fascist tendencies in inter-war Poland. He saw it as a threat. He was anxious about what he perceived to be the development of Poland toward a fascist state. There were some... perhaps, some family legends, I don’t quite remember, about a meeting, I think, between my grandfather and Biernacki, a Parliament member, and he yelled at him about the topic of Bereza Kartuska.¹⁰ Well, he was a very smart and active man. He was active and he dragged his own family behind; during the inter-war period, he moved around twenty times, because he’d run into conflicts with people around him. And then, well, there was the occupation,¹¹ you know. And then, finally, the Stalinist period¹². But... this was... this was... at this point, I mean it was very soon afterwards, my family consisted of women only. My father died in 1945, and, by the way, he died as a result of a very sloppy, so to speak, bombing by the Soviet army at the market square in Grodzisko Mazowieckie¹³, so that a lot of Grodzisko Mazowieckie’s inhabitants lost their lives, including my father. They were running away, because they had lived in Warsaw and escaped from the Warsaw Uprising,¹⁴ and stopped in Grodzisko and this is where it happened. Well... and my grandfather, this grandfather I mean, died in... in 1950, yes. Well... and after grandfather’s death... and by the way I remember that from my childhood memories that grandfather was somehow able to keep... probably through bribes... to keep some kind of a barrier around our house, so to say. And the moment he died, some people came to the house and started tearing fixtures off walls, “oh shit, these are pretty walls” [laughter], and pouring gasoline from canisters. Strange stuff was happening, so we moved out of Sopot¹⁵, where we had lived till grandfather’s death. And later on, for years, for many long years, as a child, I lived in this kind of a capsule, created by my mom and grandma, who didn’t work but were selling off various things, and this was our only source of income for many years. This may be the source of my mom’s amusement by the construction site across the street. I mean... it was a strange place, this kind of... an anti-world in a way. But it was very nice, very nice [thinking].

SW: Were you the only child?

AL: No, no. I had a brother. And well... of course, the benefit of it all was that we were so free from pressure. Any pressure, you know. And in our house, we’d spend a lot of time talking. For

⁹ **Sanacja** (sanitation) is the popular name of the political camp supporting Jozef Pilsudski’s government, which carried out the so-called May coup d’etat in 1926 under the slogan of “the moral sanitation,” or, in other words, the moral renewal of the political life in the 2nd Polish Republic.

¹⁰ **Bereza Kartuska** is a small town in Beloruss, which belonged to Poland in 1921-1939, and which became the symbol of fascist tendencies of the Polish state during Pilsudski’s government. In 1934, the sanacja government opened up a concentration camp there, for Ukrainian nationalists, sanacja opponents, and communists.

¹¹ **Occupation:** World War II which is often referred to in Polish as “the occupation (of Poland)” since from 1939 to 1945, Nazi Germany occupied Poland.

¹² **Stalinism:** The period of Stalinism was a power system created during Joseph Stalin’s regime and characterized by Stalin’s single-person rule, an extensive apparatus of suppression and control, and an economy based on rigid central planning.

¹³ **Grodzisko Mazowieckie:** a small town near Warsaw.

¹⁴ **The Warsaw Uprising:** (1 Aug. 1944 – 2 Oct. 1944): a struggle against the German occupying forces undertaken in Warsaw by the Home Army (AK) troops. The lack of perspective for a successful turn of events as well as the casualties suffered by the Polish forces persuaded the AK commanders to start capitulation negotiations with the Germans (9-10 Sept.). On 10 Sept. 1944, when the Soviets started their offensive toward Warsaw, the Poles broke off their earlier negotiations. However, the Red Army offensive stopped at the other side of the Vistula River. Warsaw was left mostly in ruins; its reconstruction started right after the war and took three years.

¹⁵ **Sopot:** a city on the Baltic Coast in Northern Poland.

hours, we were sitting and talking to each other. For long hours. We would tell various stories to each other and... you know family stories. We would talk about things. I liked reading various books out loud. My brother was into talking about cowboy movies he saw and... and some other stories, so we would talk for at least a few hours a day, more or less for six to eight hours everyday.

SW: Can you say that you and your brother were raised a bit differently? Or that you were simply different? A boy and a girl, close in age, raised together, were there any differences?

AL: You're touching upon a problem that's kind of important to me. My brother was a very beautiful child, very beautiful... and passionately loved by the whole family. My grandfather's ways of loving varied. But it was weird, weird... I remember one scene, and I remember it well. We had a balcony and there was an outside gutter around it. The house was in a park. And I am in the park with my mom and grandma, and we see that my grandfather is leading my brother on the gutter, hooking his neck with his cane; he is leading him around the balcony and then back inside. And then my mom and grandma reacted: "Kazik, what did you do? Why did you do something like this?" And my grandfather responded: "Because he's the person I love the most." And this is... But he did love him very much. In his own way. And that's how I... how I... They played "garibaldka," this card game, with my brother. I wanted to learn how to play, but grandfather told me: "You're too silly for that." And I'm thinking, "You just wait!" [laughter]. I just thought, "You wait!" And we went to... My brother, who was a year and a half older, and I were attending the underground school together [sic], and later, we went to first grade... no, straight to second grade. I had better grades than my brother. And my grandfather... when he saw the report card, he cried. So I was very jealous of my brother. And I used to beat him up. Even though he was a year and a half older, I would get him when nobody else was in the room and I would start beating up on him. And he didn't defend himself and only after... and he was trying not to scream, either [bursts out laughing], because if he did begin to scream, somebody would come to the room and start beating me up. And I don't know why... it's... it's some mystery, but my brother loved me very much, and I also, after this period of... let's call it early childhood rivalry, I also appreciated his goodness. He was a very good person, extremely caring and kind of... kind of amazed that people could be aggressive. You know, it never occurred to him that when I was beating him up, he should fight back. The case was that also later on, when we were already older and we lived in this place, Kozielnice, we were kind of weirdoes, you know. We were being perceived as foreign objects. And we were always going home from school through this little forest, and from time to time, there was the so-called "Apple-core's" gang, a group of some kids, waiting for us to fuck with us. And my brother didn't fight. I mean he was standing there and allowed them to beat him up. I was fighting back, and he simply didn't fight back. And well... he was this kind of a quiet, careful, and caring person, a very good person. And he was trying to take care of me all the time. That's why... I was lucky in my life to... lucky in my life to meet these incredibly caring men, who saw some meaning in supporting me in various life situations, in cushioning me. So... and my brother, brother, mom, grandma and I... we used to spend a lot of time together. We spoke to each other a lot and made no demands on each other. I mean nobody demanded anything from anybody. Well, the end result was that our house was often dirty, and we didn't go to school if we didn't feel like it [laughter]. So there was much... I mean we would be sitting and talking about some stuff for half the night and then we'd all be late for school. It was as if, well, on the one hand, there was this outside

world somewhere, which was a necessity, simultaneously funny and gloomy, but we really had nothing in common with it, simply nothing.

SW: And when you went to college, wasn't that the moment when it became necessary to get more in touch with the world, to somehow try to confront it, to get integrated, something like that? Wasn't this "capsule" of yours opening up a little at some point? Was this the time of college, or earlier, or later?

AL: Well, I mean... I think that quite an important role in my personal life was played by this friend of mine, Ewa Minge. I met her during my freshman year of college, and my first major was in Polish studies. And when I got there, I was still just a kid; I wasn't even seventeen when I got into the Polish Studies program, and I saw her the very first day, during the college entrance exams, but I had met her briefly before in Zdunska Wola¹⁶, where I lived at that time. She was a beautiful person, beautiful... kind of incredibly... interactive. I was actually a bookworm; I read all the time. When people came to our house... and they did come, since our house had a lot of charm for people, for people our age, even though it was radically weird and so on, maybe it was out of curiosity, or for whatever other reasons, but anyway, people would stop by, our friends, and... I mean, when somebody came, I did come down, of course, but I always came with a book, holding my finger to mark where I was at. So I kept my finger right there in the book, so that when that interaction was over, I'd be able to go back to the book right away and start reading. I really liked reading books; I read a lot.

SW: What did you read?

AL: I mean... well, I read Shakespeare, for example. I read all of Shakespeare's plays. I loved reading theater plays more than prose. I had a *Dialog*¹⁷ subscription since early hours of the day, so to speak; I was perhaps something like twelve years old when I started subscribing. So I really liked reading plays. I liked... well... then they had first editions of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Camus; I loved French existentialists. Also, I read... and it was like a habit, you know, reading was like a real habit. For example, I read Gabriela Zapolska's¹⁸ *Collected Works*, from cover to cover. What else did I read? Above all else, plays. Oh, I read all of Slowacki's¹⁹ plays... I read all of Norwid's²⁰ plays. Yes, yes...

SW: So, how did the capsule begin to open?

¹⁶ **Zduńska Wola**: Small town near Warsaw.

¹⁷ **Dialog**: a professional literary journal.

¹⁸ **Zapolska, Gabriela**: a drama writer, journalist and novelist from the turn of the 19th and 20th century, was a representative of naturalism. In her dramas, comedies and novels, she ridiculed hypocrisy and duplicity of the bourgeoisie. She is most famous for such works as *Mrs Dulski's Morality* and *Zabusia* (nick-name – Transl.).

¹⁹ **Slowacki, Juliusz** (1809-1849): one of the most eminent Polish poets from the period of Romanticism. Considered to be one of the national bards, he is most known for such works as *Kordian*, *Balladyna* and "The Hymn" ("I'm sad, oh God...").

²⁰ **Norwid, Cyprian Kamil** (1821-1883): a Polish poet, dramatist and artist. A representative of both romanticism and classicism, he is known for such works as "Chopin's Grand Piano," "Promethidion" and "A Piece in Two Dialogs with an Epilog."

AL: I mean... I lived in a dorm... I lived in a dorm, and I was younger than the rest of the population, so to speak, and... a bit lost in Warsaw as I studied in Warsaw. And my mentor, kind of, my guide out of that alienation was this charming friend of mine, Ewa Minge, who always enjoyed an incredible popularity. I mean there were always a lot of guys around her. And we... we partied. But she didn't have like a favorite, you know her boyfriend, but she was always in a big group, and that's how she spent her time. So I kind of started following her to all these parties, here and there. Well... I have to admit I didn't really feel passionate about my studies. Polish studies really disappointed me. I thought I'd just be reading books and it turned out the whole thing was about something else. And there was one spectacular incident, which may have had some significance. It so happened that my room-mate was raped. And she came back to the dorm in the morning and was kind of plastered... I mean not quite sober, and she wanted to commit suicide. Since we lived on a fifth floor, she was talking about jumping out the window. I didn't know what to do, so I decided to get her completely drunk. I ran downstairs, got half a liter of vodka, and encouraged her to go on drinking, so that she got completely drunk and fell asleep, and I gained some time to come up with something, you know. And I decided to buy a dog. I figured that if she saw a small dog after she woke up from her drunken stupor, it would change something. And I carried out my plan. I went out and got a dog, a German Shepard, a small puppy. I brought it back to the dorm when she was still asleep. And this dog... It really turned out to be a smart psychological move. When she woke up and saw the dog, this puppy, which was going around and squealing and so on, the whole thing kind of passed. But the dog remained and lived in this dorm, pooped and peed and so on. I wanted to move it home, but I didn't get a chance since what happened was that the so-called sanitation committee came to our room. I opened the room, since I brought in some package, put it on the table, and went to the kitchen to get a towel, and before I had time to return to the room, that committee came in. And there were these suede shoes with little holes that were in style then, and a doctor, wearing these shoes, walked into poop, so we all started yelling really loud. And I pushed them out of this room, I mean my room. I said, "Fuck off! For now, I still live here!" But I didn't live there much longer, because I was soon evicted from the room, specifically for this. Later on, my mom came to Warsaw to try to defend me somehow, because I had no money to support myself in Warsaw if I didn't have a dorm room. So she went with me to see some Dean of Students, but he also got on my nerves. So it became impossible for me to remain in Warsaw in the dorm. And well... and then what? Well, I just went back home, to Zdunska Wola and decided that next year... to take another college entrance exam, and I wanted to study acting. I learned some fragments from all these plays, came to Warsaw and again met this friend, Ewa Minge, and she said she'd be interested in going with me to that exam to see what it looked like and so on. And she looked on at people performing, talked to people backstage and... I didn't make it to the Drama School, but Ewa Minge decided to quit Polish Studies and take her exam to the Drama School next year. Because the same... this way... and I also passed an exam the same year, because I had the second... I mean because as a back up, I also wanted to take an exam to Art History in Wroclaw... I passed an exam to the Art History program in Wroclaw, but Ewa Minge said that since she would not study... she could study Art History in Wroclaw, so that meant that we ended up living together in Zdunska Wola; we lived there for a year. And, yes, that's it. And well... and then, I mean, Ewa also entered into this "capsule" of ours and our family just incorporated her, plus... well, a group of up to twenty people, Ewa Minge's admirers. Well, this more or less looked like this: Ewa and I read books and plays, and every day, a big group of Minge's admirers would show up in our house with various things to drink, and we would drink,

and they would leave, and the next day would come... [laughter]. We spent a year like this, and it was a very nice year. And later on, Ewa Minge took an exam to the acting school, the Film School in Lodz, and I was supposed to get into the Fine Arts School in Lodz, but I didn't prepare any works, and in the end, I landed in this Cultural Education Institute. I wanted to be in Lodz; I wanted to be where Ewa Minge was. So that's how it was. Ewa Minge was in the acting school, the Film School, and by the way she graduated from there... and I didn't finish this Cultural Education Institute in Lodz, which I think was a blessing then... I won't be going into any detail here. At any rate, next year I tried to get into the Psychology Department in Cracow. And after a year, I made it.

SW: What year was this?

AL: You know what... it's hard to... I could count it going backwards. I graduated in 1969, so it must have been 1965. Well... and... And what? [reflecting]

SW: And then, five years in Cracow, right?

AL: Five years in Cracow.

SW: Without the “capsule”?

AL: Without the “capsule.” I lived in a dorm. All that time, I lived in a dorm. Well, in Cracow, after I made it into the Psychology department, I started living in a dorm. First I lived in “Nawojka”²¹ for a year, and then I lived in “Piast.” In “Piast,” I lived for four years and later on I lived there, too, for three years, when I was enrolled in the PhD program. So “Piast” is... Well, I spent a good piece of my life in “Piast.” And what I liked about living in dorms was that all social life would be so effortless, and kind of random as a matter of fact, you know. You just find yourself in a crowd of human beings. We would talk and so on. You don't have to worry about anything. It was still in the times of real socialism, so everything was free. You'd live for free, eat for free, everything was free, you'd study for free. And... so it was all really nice. And all my years in the Psychology Department went by in the social orbit of the Mroczkowski family... the Mroczkowski family. The Mroczkowski family consisted of two brothers and a sister. One of the brothers studied psychology with me, first in my class, and then he kind of got delayed a bit. And I have to say that the Mroczkowski family's way of life was about constant partying. And so... Well, in Warsaw my way of spending any free time involved participating in Ewa Minge's parties, in Zdunska Wola, there were parties with Ewa Minge, a year in Lodz, parties with Ewa Minge, and later on, as soon as I stopped participating in Ewa Minge's parties, I started partying with the Mroczkowski brothers and their sister. And five years passed in a blink of an eye [laughter]. And I mean... I have to add... when I think about it now, since you asked these political questions... you know about the world... about 1969 and stuff, totalitarianism and such, about what I was doing at that time. So I have to say I always drank a lot of booze, and I always read a lot. And I liked sitting in cafes, talking to people, joking around, partying, taking long walks at night, when we'd hike in the hills, up and down, you know, and traveling with the Mroczkowski brothers and their many friends. It was always a group, you know, in fact, a large group, you know, I mean something like a team, or something. I was well liked in this group as

²¹ Nawojka and Piast are names of dormitories.

some sort of a weirdo, and a bit of a child, a person a bit unprepared for life, not noticing its dangers, so it was all really comfortable. And, well, I read, I read a lot, and I studied psychology, you know. I was then thinking... since, as a matter of fact, I always wanted to become a theater director. This is what I really wanted; I wanted to be a theater director... And when I tried to get into this drama school a while back, this was my goal, to become a theater director and to create these politically engaged performances... I had this fantasy that I would create this kind of a theater group. And, actually, all these different groups of friends among which I was circulating were like such theater groups. Admittedly, their mission was not to create some artistic masterpiece, but the mission was to create a public and political alternative space in the open. And it was about playing, you know, playing, laughing, ridiculing, and my mother... us on the stairs. And about some sort of dodging. Dodging life. Not treating all this seriously. But I imagined that maybe at some point, after I graduated from psychology, I would study theater directing. And I thought that I would turn my inclination to create and live in this sort of a group, this sort of a theater group, you know, into a profession. And it would have possibly happened that way if not for the fact that in my junior or senior year of psychology, I had an opportunity to come into contact with Professor Kepinski²², and even before that, I came into contact with Professor (?), Professor Tischner.²³ I mean, these were incredible minds, and the one particularly significant here was Professor Kepinski, his role, and... then I really wanted to become a psychologist. I started to want to become a psychologist. I really wanted to work, so that I could get to understand... yes, to get to understand people. It was like swimming into this... when I had contacts with Professor Kepinski, I understood it was a simply incredible adventure. Something like swimming into dark waters. And that it was an incredible adventure, incredible adventure. And, well, as a clinical psychologist I never had this... this... focus to help. And I was often accused after I became a clinical psychologist of having this “aesthetic” attitude toward people. That I was getting hyped up in this kind of contact but that it was also very egocentric. Well, that I was fascinated with the disease, that I was fascinated with another human being and not really eager to bring about any changes, because I was simply admiring it. And... and what? Well, that was really true. That is true. And what I saw in the people I worked with in the psychiatric clinic was not what we all shared, political, social, universal, but it was something very different. Every time what struck me was the exceptional character of this person’s experience. And just as... as I... for example, as I liked reading books, I was reading the author here, I was reading the author. It was very interesting to me, particularly when I was reading the whole series, like the whole Shakespeare, or the whole Zapolska, or something like this, you know. I liked reading the whole series and I kind of wanted... I was really interested in what his head was like from the inside, as if through the work, I was placed kind of inside, inside of this exceptional person, exceptional sensitivity, and exceptional way of building the world. And it was the same thing here, and I was trying to get inside this... this person and from the sidelines, I was trying to notice what was absolutely exceptional. And what was kind of... I mean some political aspect, so to speak. It was that I was terribly... terribly irritated by treating the patients,

²² **Kepinski, Antoni** (1918-1972): a psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry who is one of the best Polish researchers in the field of psychiatry. His theories are well known and his scientific work covers over 140 publications and several books: *Psychopatologia nerwic* (*Psychopathology of neuroses*), *Schizofrenia* (*Schizophrenia*), and *Melancholia* (*Melancholy*), among them.

²³ **Tischner, Józef** (1931-2000): a priest and one of the most eminent contemporary Polish philosophers. He was the founder and Dean of the Cracovian Papal Academy of Theology and lectured at the Jagiellonian University and the State High School of Theatre in Cracow. He was Solidarity’s first chaplain and wrote and published more than 600 articles and books.

first of all, and by defining them... Yes, I had a sense of a really bad fit. And because I had an opportunity to read a few various anti-psychiatry pieces, so to speak, in the psychiatric clinic, I acted from an anti-psychiatry position and criticized various treatment methods, particularly electric and insulin shocks. And also the kinds of relationships that led to the fact that these people were pigeonholed. And here is where Kepinski came in, you know, who had a huge ability to... from this kind of platform, perhaps not anti-psychiatric, but undoubtedly in his way of thinking, he was before his time and before the people who worked with him and... even though the whole team was very good, yes, really very good and... That means that the psychiatric clinic in Cracow, even though they used these abominable biological methods, there was this an anti-psychiatric spirit there. The spirit there was very similar to this kind of thinking about the human person. So it was possible for me to fit in there, you know. Also, there was a lot of freedom there as far as expression of our own views and negotiation of some decisions were concerned, even by people who, like me, would come to the clinic and were inexperienced, young, and even a bit crazy, to put it mildly, you know. There was also high level of tolerance for people's behavior. So, in reality, it was like a theater, like a theater group once again, you know. A big group of people with clearly medical interests and spending a lot of time together socially... and... well, it was really the same, really the same. And... this... this... maybe what also helped me to enter this group socially was the fact that I volunteered for the first year and I also basically lived in the Professor's office. I simply slept there and I was the person he liked and took under his wing. I've mentioned this... this chain of male subjects who took me under their wing, and one of them was Professor Kepinski. The Mroczkowski brothers always took really good care of me as well. And... so I was like this mascot, living in the Professor's office [at the clinic, ed.]. This was related to the fact that every time people wanted to invite Professor Kepinski for a drink, they invited me, too and... [laughter]. So nothing changed, nothing really changed... And if... if not for the fact that, well, I had to leave the psychiatric clinic, most likely my whole life would have passed in this idyllic, alternative space. And it was really pleasant. Well... it did happen that I had to leave the psychiatric clinic. It was related to the fact that my mother was hospitalized in this psychiatric clinic three times, and three times, I would discharge her on my own request before even a week passed. And I got this warning from Professor Szymcik that if I discharged her again, I would be kicked out of the clinic. And well... This is exactly what happened. Professor Szymcik told me that he wouldn't fire me because I was a single mother raising two children on my own, since my husband had already been dead by this time, but as long as the Professor was alive, I would not be allowed to touch a patient again [laughter], as long as he was alive. So I decided that it was pointless for me to just sit in some room in the clinic, doing I don't know what, possibly translating books from French into Polish or writing essays. Here, I have to say that it was many times that I would get offers like this, also as a result of my superiors' nurturing instincts, that I could do whatever I wanted, really whatever I wanted, as long as I would stay away from patients. Well, at any rate, that was Professor Szymcik's proposal, and I concluded that it made little sense. And I applied to the Medical Academy's President for a transfer to the Toxicology Clinic.

SW: And why there, exactly?

AL: Because I was thinking about a transfer anyway. Well, I was happy working in the psychiatric clinic, because it was clearly the clinic I wanted to work in till the end of my life. But since I couldn't work in the psychiatric clinic any more, I figured I'd be willing to work with

people after suicide attempts. I knew they had no psychologists there, and I knew they really needed one. I thought I was the kind of person... and I think I was a good clinical psychologist, with a broad clinical experience specifically. And I worked in that clinic for more than ten years; I went through all the wards. Well, I conducted therapy in numerous contexts, so that I learned a lot. I worked with eminent psychiatrists. My husband was an eminent psychiatrist. And... I mean, I learned a bit from just being there and a bit from all these men, you know, from Professor Kepinski, from my husband, from all these outstanding men who were there. There were also two women who were very smart, Dr. Proszkiewiczowa and Malgosia Dominik, a very good psychiatrist, very good. I mean, there were a lot of smart people there. And we'd also talk a lot. There was a tradition there... this is simply how the clinic worked, that every day at noon, there was a meeting of the whole team, and the point was to discuss one patient. Every day. For all these years. And this discussion about one patient sometimes lasted an hour and a half, you know. They were long conversations, where people pondered on... well, on what his illness was all about, how to treat him, how we understand him, what the various treatment options were, so that it was a process of self-education for the whole team. It was, after all, a very good place, very good. Marysia, after all, also has an incredible mind. A lot of really smart people. And it was also this kind of an open space, these department meetings in Garden Tischner... I remember them best from these department meetings. This kind of constant thinking process. And... I mean, I felt competent enough to work on my own. And I wanted it, you know. I wanted to work on my own, so that I could make my own decisions. And that's how I found myself in this Toxicology Clinic, where I was simply flooded by... well, by these terrible human stories, and where there were relatively few people with psychiatric diseases, really very few. And the majority of the people were just incredibly... stifled, destroyed by... well, specifically by their lives, you know. Well... and what they always failed at teaching me, so to say, at the psychiatric clinic... I mean getting me off this carnival-like anesthetizing, off these violent exchanges... they succeeded at here. I mean this incredible responsibility, I would say incredible... for these hundreds of people. It was something really strange to me that they were all simply left to their own devices. And... these awful conditions this team of doctors worked in, you know. The terrible situation of these doctors, since in the Toxicology Clinic, you know, death lurked around every corner, so to speak. And it was up to these doctors, up to some kind of absolute mobilization of this team, whether these people would survive or not. And there were some nights when they were on call, when 19 people would be admitted in a single night, you know. They'd admit 19 people and hospitalize four of them, so the team there had to face this challenge. It's incredible, you know. It's terribly hard work, and a very different kind of work than in the Psychiatry Clinic, of course. There is no way to have a social life, some lunches or something... there is this incredible tension all the time. And this kind of... kind of fear, and this kind of trying really hard. I have a great respect for these doctors from the Toxicology Clinic for... for being so responsible. Because it never occurred to them... at least that's how I remember it... to run away, to run away from responsibility. It was the kind of clinic where you don't choose your patients, because they're simply brought in and they're there. There was a risk of contracting something from a patient. Patients were often terribly violent as a result of intoxication, but also for other reasons. There was death. And there were a lot of... kind of like a bee hive, I don't know, like a blizzard... at any rate, there were a lot of relatives swarming around. I mean these people whose relatives were dying there, you know. They were desperate, terribly anxious people, kind of entangled into their miserable captivity, so helpless about what had happened in their lives, what had happened with their loved ones. And there was this kind of

a buzz around this clinic... a buzz of their... their voices, questions, all of this. Terrible work, but, on the other hand, it gave a sense, well, absolutely, a sense that you were doing something important, that if you didn't do it, somebody could die. Or this terrible misery that's stuck there. And it starts from this completely wrong interpretation of reality, and it turns into stone, it solidifies, it becomes this terrible iron cage, in which this person will end his life, and he'll spend all his life there. And there is this great opportunity of this kind of change, of getting into this moment when all these destructive, toxic... like some heap, yes, like a heap... interpretations of reality, defense mechanisms, attempts at finding some sense in this experience are all kind of solidifying to close down on this person like some claw. And you can sneak in and change it. And there is only a small window of opportunity for this. And it was then, in the Toxicology Clinic, that I discovered crisis intervention. I mean, I read somewhere that there was something like crisis intervention, and that it's this kind of... kind of an intervention, which is not treatment, but it's about preventing this kind of fatal course of events. It's like marching into this area of looking for meaning or searching for a solution. It's putting a stop to things. And it's calling forth all the kinds of inner forces inside of these people, inside this whole context that's there, you know. It's like trying, after stopping it all, to do some kind of taking stock, together with these people, and to look for solutions from this kind of a maze, you know. And it was possible. It was enough to just catch the right moment, you know. To take this kind of stock. To concentrate, together with these people. And it's like sneaking out of a siege. There is... you know... you can see it's possible to get out, you know. It's like... literally, like some sort of a micro... micro-intervention, you know, which is not at all like psychotherapy, which tends to drag on and on, but it's like some illumination, like... like solving a puzzle, together with these people, so it's extremely attractive. And there was another aspect in this Toxicology Clinic, a political... political aspect but kind of different from the one related to the oppression of women. It was a political aspect related to the 1980's. And here, this... political trend of the 1980's, of martial law²⁴, was reaching my life through these people who ended up there after suicide attempts. And well... I'd do various sorts of favors for them, various favors... Yes, but I won't

²⁴ **Martial Law:** limitations on civil liberties implemented on December 13, 1981, in order to stop social activism aiming at fundamental reforms of the social and political system in the Polish People's Republic. It was confirmed by the National Council's (Rada Państwa) decree, even though issuing decrees was unconstitutional during Parliament's (Sejm) session. Prepared since August 1980, it was justified by a threat of coup d'état and take-over of power by the opposition gathered around "Solidarity," economic collapse, and a possibility of Soviet intervention. The chief administrative organ during Martial Law was the Military Council of National Salvation (WRON), led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski. Martial Law regulations limited basic civil liberties, introduced curfew, and suspended all activities by social organizations and trade unions. Martial Law militarized main branches of the economy, banned travel, and introduced censorship of correspondence and summary judicial process. Activists from "Solidarity" and political opposition, as well as some politicians from the pre-August 1980 regime, were interned (approximately 10 thousand people in all). The remaining "Solidarity" activists went underground, organizing demonstrations and strikes in factories and coal mines, suppressed by riot police (ZOMO), which often used heavy military equipment (9 coal miners were killed in the Wujek Coal Mine in December 1981, and there were fatalities in Lublin in August 1982). Demonstration participants, underground activists, and "Solidarity" members were fired from their jobs, harassed, and coerced to sign "declarations of loyalty." With the collaboration of Secret Police, employees of the judicial system, education, public administration and mass media were being vetted. The society at large reacted with organizing a boycott of all organizations and institutions controlled by the authorities; underground press and publishing ensured the independent flow of information. The Catholic Church undertook a broad campaign of helping those persecuted by the government. The underground "Solidarity" was receiving moral and material support from international organizations and labor centers. As a result of a deteriorating economic and political situation, martial law was repealed on July 22, 1983 (but repressive practices and some parts of the legislation survived till 1989), and in February 1992, the Sejm decided its implementation to have been illegal.

go into detail about what kinds of favors I mean. But anyway, there were a lot of quite drastic things related to people who were persecuted, interned and so on. And, among other things, this theme of oppression in the totalitarian system of the 1980's in Poland and how it was reflected in lives of people who committed suicides was the subject of my presentation... presentation I had in the Psychiatry Clinic. And it was preceded by some work, work... my work toward pushing for the creation of the Crisis Intervention Center within the Medical Academy, whose purpose would be to provide care for people after suicide attempts, but also, in general, for people who... who well, who were in hospitals, in Cracow clinics, and who were going through some very odd things. All these bits of information about these odd things were getting to me through these suicide patients, but I also really learned something new. I mean it's possible to imagine this, but somehow I didn't quite imagine... and, for example, I was under a big impression of dilemmas faced by parents of children with cancer, who have to make amputation decisions. I remember one man who made a surgery decision about... because his child had cancer of the eye, but before the operation they hoped to save the other eye, but it turned out not to be the case, and he decided to go for it without the child's participation, and the child was fourteen or something. And you know it's your... that's what you decided and the child has to... But no eyes are left. It's hard... hard to talk it over, you know. I mean, it's terrible when there are situations... when people make decisions not about themselves, but other people, like parents do. And you know, later on they just stew over this decision, maybe this but maybe that, because there is always some miniscule... you know, some chance that things would turn out differently. And well, for me, these were the bigger things, so to say. I mean, certainly a complete lack of services for people who lose a loved one, practically nothing. No services for these decision makers. No services for people giving birth to... to terribly handicapped children. Well, I mean it's all handled somehow, but it's... it's... the point is to talk to these people and not just "good bye" and that's it. I mean... this... this was so terribly odd to me, and really visible from the vantage point of the Toxicology Clinic, how lonely people in crisis situations really were. And how terrible it is... the depression they experience in these various closed systems, like the army, a psychiatric hospital, and a family, you know, where underneath the metal dome they're simply... they're like poppy seeds, rubbed into the walls of the mixing bowl. That's how they're being destroyed. I mean, this... and, well, and this was the time period, that is the 1980's, I don't remember which year, when we met, right? It was something like... you came to the Toxicology Clinic, was it like this?

SW: And I wanted to talk you into participating in a conference, I think.

AL: Possibly. I don't remember but I know we initially talked around this time. And somehow... I don't remember, but you'll remember what year it was, but I don't remember what year, only that it was in some... in this... somehow... you were opening this center of yours, so it was really crazy. What year was this?

SW: Well, that was already 1993, I think.

AL: It was already 1993, right? I've somehow quite forgotten; I kind of pushed it back in time. It seemed to be still at the end of the 1980's, but it doesn't matter. At any rate... at any rate, still going back to this whole issue of this Crisis Intervention Center, of the crisis intervention, there was a meeting of some department, whatever. It was probably 1987 and I had it all lined up... It

was Monday, and I had it all lined up that the Crisis Intervention Center would be created at the Medical Academy, and I was supposed to be the manager, or the director of this center, but on Tuesday, there was the department meeting and I delivered my presentation, which also included some political sub-text, about suicide attempts in the 1980's. And it turned out impossible to create the Crisis Intervention Center there, at the Medical Academy. However, it turned out possible to create the Crisis Intervention Society, made up of all the big wigs from the democratic opposition in the city of Cracow. And that's what happened. And that's how the Crisis Intervention Society came into being, with a very good cadre of founding members. Female founding members. And I envisioned that when the Crisis Intervention Society was created in these years... in 1990, in 1990, it was registered, and in 1991, the Crisis Intervention Center at the Lvov Council. And I thought that the Crisis Intervention Center would be the kind of place where... above else, where it would be possible to carry out social change. I mean noticing all these mechanisms responsible for crisis situations, of course not the kind that somebody has to decide about operating on a child to take both eyes, or that somebody dies in a car accident, but these ones which are related to all these closed systems, with all this harassment and torment of people, when they get deprived of a voice, of a possibility of acting out. So I was thinking that this is what this center would look like. And in theory it was possible, because there was a mechanism included in the statute, which was later changed, but which allowed for a kind of collection of information about all events, such as murders, assaults, police interventions in domestic violence situations, accidents, and death in violent circumstances, or in other words, events related to violence. This information was to be collected by people responsible just for collecting data. Every week we were supposed to know how many... about all such events in Cracow and its outskirts, and that we would compare that information with information about the people who came to the Center. And this weekly comparison of one set of data with another set of data was to show us... so that we could see what kinds of people and in what circumstances were generally kind of... who didn't take advantage of declarative... of the available crisis intervention services, and we could see where there were some pockets of... and where misery grew to some extreme dimension, but there was no information... no will to pass on the information or to take advantage of the information, no imagination about possible solution such an institution could bring to the table and so on. And we imagined while constructing this scheme that this is how it would be... that every time we got information about the lack of information, about something going wrong, yes, that every time we would try to reach these people through the fire department, through the police, through whomever, that we would try to understand why they... why nothing ever reached them, that it would be some kind of fishing for people in these extreme situations, reaching these kinds of closed, silent pockets of misery and turmoil. And that we would also inquire about the mechanisms causing exclusion, or some kind of oppression, responsible for the fact that large groups of people were finding themselves in extreme situations without even knowing what to do about it, either, you know. This is not what happened. We had an inner conflict within the Crisis Intervention Center. An important element of this split was the attitude toward people in endangered by domestic violence. The split was mostly about if and in what circumstances we should turn to the legal system in order to prosecute the perpetrator. It was about the kind of responsibility of the Center and of individual professionals for ensuring there was effective protection from further domestic violence. And here... one, one... one of the events that kind of... exacerbated the conflict happened when we received information from... it's actually a long story, but anyway, at some point of this story it came up that the husband of a woman who came to us was locking himself up in the bathroom

with their six year old son for long time periods, and that the boy was later complaining to his mother that the father was putting a carrot into his anus and French kissing him. Well, the situation seemed quite clear. This woman, together with a psychologist, went to the prosecutor's office to notify them. The prosecutor didn't accept it even though she could have accepted a verbal notification. She remarked that it was a very serious accusation of him and warned the woman... whether she was aware of all the possible consequences of this information and told her to file an official complaint in writing. Then, the woman backed out. She didn't want to file in writing. Because the psychologist and the Center's management knew about the case, my position was that it was the management's obligation to file the official complaint even if the woman at this point was not willing to do it. However, another solution was selected: family therapy. The family therapy for which the perpetrator never showed up, and the woman rarely came, and that's what this family therapy was like. Well... there was no will to respect the law and to offer some effective protection from further abuse of the dependents. And these... these tempestuous conflicts at the Crisis Intervention Center ended with firing a few people, including me. I was sixth or seventh to go. On the way, I was offered some scholarship in France or another option was staying in the office and doing some intellectual work, since I had such a creative mind. But I gave up on these offers, and after a sequence of some incidents, I was fired from the Crisis Intervention Center. I filed... filed a complaint against this decision to Labor Court, but I lost. And...

SW: When was this going on? What year?

AL: It was 1993, no, 1994. Anyway, I had some... some... Finally... Actually, I even have this... what shall we call it... a brief, several pages long, explaining the sentence. Several pages! The court, I have to say in its favor, had a lot of doubts and called in a lot of people as witnesses. Finally... that was... that was the decision that it wasn't really clear what crisis intervention was. And that this approach, which involves some active work for these groups of people, active work toward changing the law, and some active search for these, let's say, victims of these critical situations and so on was only one possible approach to crisis intervention. But there might also be another kind of crisis intervention, more kind of in-the-office, more psychological. At the same time, while the case was being decided by the court, the Crisis Intervention Center filed a legal complaint about the case I've mentioned, the one with the carrot, you know. After nine months, they finally decided it was worth filing. And well... and it hurt a little, hurt a little bit, because it was so... to me it seemed so... it seemed obvious to me. That nothing was simpler and clearer than the fact that in crisis intervention cases, you have to try to reach these excluded groups. That you need to understand the real reason why these people suffer abuse and find themselves in this kind of oppression. That you have to take advantage of the law, and if this law is inadequate, or the whole system is resistant, you have to change it. That it's an obligation. That we can all agree about this. That it's clear. But it turned out not to be the case, not at all! I was amazed. I was simply shocked. And also... like many people probably, I... well, I had high hopes related to our young democracy. It was this kind of... kind of hope... like some elation, faith in this... that we can, well,... build, build the kind of world, kind of Poland, Poland... where we'll care about justice... Also, by the way, I think I imagined that this... this Poland would be, well, that it would be the Poland... well, let's call it, of the anti-totalitarian left²⁵, the

²⁵ Lipowska-Teutsch is speaking of her political preferences since, instead of becoming left-leaning and liberal as she would have liked, Poland has become right-wing and conservative since the systemic changes of 1989.

anti-totalitarian left. Since my hard work in the Toxicology Clinic, I had really been very strongly attracted by the anti-totalitarian left. Everything I was... going through... experiencing there was pointing toward this... this solution as something a decent person, you know, could accept. Some minimum... minimum ethical standard, exactly, was to me associated with the anti-totalitarian left. And well... and again it turned out it's all off the wall, and whatever I was thinking... everybody around me was thinking differently. And, well... and then... it was then, I think, when I started seriously thinking about feminism, feminism as some sort of search for a political force, for some political group, well, for some kind of space, in which some social change, specifically, would become possible. But in reality it was always, so to speak, a kind of field of interest, as far as excluded and oppressed groups were concerned, that was broader than just women, you know. I mean I had enough of a foundation when it came to discrimination because of gender, or the oppression of women, or whatever, from that Toxicology Clinic, where there were heaps of stories about oppression, discrimination, violence, and attitudes toward people excluded for whatever reason. And... also... I think that at that point, when I met with the Cracow feminists, with you, what also attracted me was... was this kind of... that it was also political. That... from this kind of... well, from this simply terrible, depressing, and overwhelming sense of responsibility in the world of the Acute Poisoning Clinic, here I could see an opportunity for some kind of... breathing, of being able to play and have some joy, of meeting people, and for this kind of mocking attitude toward the world. It was some kind of return to my favorite folksy and ludic attitude about life. It was like a breakthrough, like an option to catch a breath of fresh air. And... at this point... what's important to me is some kind of connection... connecting what's related to the oppression of women with the activism I've been involved in for a long time, which, above all else, addresses people endangered by violence, and all this by including some sort of space for... diversity. It's about how to build these... plans, the plans... of escaping this... siege, plans of overcoming the oppression of, for example, Roma women. For a few years... for the last three years, I've been more deeply involved in this... this world of Roma women in Poland. And their oppression has a few dimensions. The ethnic descent oppression is connected to the oppression because of poverty, and to the oppression... because when you're a woman in a radically patriarchal society, you also live in the world denying you any right to participation, justice and information. And at this point, I somehow found myself in this world of Roma women.²⁶ I'm thinking about in what way... about how this kind of contradiction... how my real propensity for guilt, actually, guilt toward... toward other people, toward, for example, Roma women, and for feeling obligated to do something, in my own life is constantly being overcome, or kind of pushed sideways by this propensity for play, for play and for looking at life with curiosity, and for swimming into more and more... kind of seas of darkness. And... I started my story with this idea that I feel guilty because all these endeavors of mine have perhaps lacked consistency. I'm thinking to myself that it may somewhat be related to this... that in some way, I'm trapped in some ambivalence. On the one hand, there is this perspective of guilt and responsibility, and on the other hand, there is also a sense of alienation and a propensity to create alternative, political spaces.

SW: I'd like to thank you for this conversation.

²⁶ **Roma women:** The Roma are one of the ethnic minorities in Poland. The Roma people (singular Rom), often referred to as gypsies, are a heterogeneous ethnic group who live primarily in Southern and Eastern Europe, Western Asia, Latin America, the southern part of the United States and the Middle East.

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1969 graduated from the Department of Psychology, Jagiellonian University in Cracow

1990 founded The Crisis Intervention Center

1995 organized and ran Shelter for the Victims of Violence