

Poland Thematic Film

Walczewska: Over the past four years, we've conducted ten interviews with Polish feminists. These are neither the most famous nor the most recognized of Polish feminists, but they do include a few well-known names. We based our selection criteria on diversity. They include activists and politicians, academics and students, from smaller and larger feminist and academic centers. They are between 20 and sixty years of age. All of the interviews are very personal. This came about because each interview was preceded by a lengthy private conversation and most of the interview questions were open-ended, which gave the women an opportunity to talk about themselves at length. Now, I would like to introduce each of the ten interviews briefly. And I'd like to begin with Anna Lipowska-Teutsch. Hanka is a psychologist and a feminist based in Krakow. She is the founder of the first in Poland center for victims of violence. As is obvious in her interview, she is a person who has never much cared for social conventions. But despite her unconventional life choices, she has always been lucky enough to find support networks of people, who, like her, didn't lead conventional lives. Hanka began to call herself a feminist rather late in life. It really all began with the center she founded where the victims were all women and children—victims of their husbands and fathers. But in reality, Hanka's entire life demonstrates that she has always been a feminist.

Lipowska Teutsch: 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.

Walczevska: Agnieszka Graff is one of the few feminists whose voice has made it into the mainstream media. For the tenth anniversary of Solidarity's victory, Agnieszka published an article in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the largest Polish newspaper, reminding readers about the women who played key roles in Solidarity but who later did not make it into any positions of power within the newly formed and male-dominated post-communist government. This was a topic already discussed in feminist circles, but thanks to Agnieszka, it was finally noticed by a larger audience. Her article created a two month long debate in the pages of *Gazeta Wyborcza* about the role of women in Solidarity and about feminism.

Graff: I also remember giving an interview, which I still have somewhere in my drawer, to another little opposition publication, different from ours, and which was titled "I'm an Opposition Fighter's Girlfriend." And it was... it was a serious part of my identity. I remember situations, for example, when other opposition guys would hit on me, and since he was an important guy, he was the boss of our group, they would get a beating because they dared

impinge on my dignity, or my virtue, so to say. But at the same time, there were girls in the group, whose rank was much lower than mine, who were sold off, for example... I mean I remember this... and it was quite shocking to me then, but more from a catholic and moral position than from a feminist one... since feminism came later... but I remember the girl who was sold off by one young, seventeen year old, opposition guy to another for... for a case of beer. And she later found out about it. I mean it was... the way it happened was that the first one broke up with her and the other one hit on her and she became his girlfriend, and much later, she found out that a case of beer was also involved in this... this transaction. And it seemed immoral, or sinful, to me at the time. And... and now, I see it from a completely different, feminist perspective.

Walczewska: Inga Iwasiow is a professor of literature at Szczecin University, a small academic center on the Baltic Coast. Iwasiow has incorporated gender perspectives into her pedagogy, creative writing and literary criticism. But she also plays a less formal, but nevertheless important role on behalf of her female students' rights. In doing so, she has often entered into conflict with her male colleagues and scholars.

Iwasiow: It was probably the first such notorious scandal in Poland, and I became its heroine. The point, in short, was that a certain professor indulged in this harassment trade practically forever. He had come to Szczecin already with this kind of reputation, after being fired elsewhere, from another university, and he had been doing it ever since I could remember, which is probably since my sophomore year, when I had a class with him. Of course, when I was still a student, it made me laugh rather than inspire to any other kind of action, but after I graduated,

the issue became more notorious. And actually, some female students came to me, personally, and asked for help in dealing with the issue. Apparently, his actions escalated, and it was actually impossible to pass an exam without letting him touch you. And I participated in the disciplinary commission's work, I was a witness in the course of the disciplinary trial, and it also opened my eyes to a lot of things. There was one moment, in particular, when I felt that during this whole trial, or pseudo-trial, I was actually the one being on trial, and not this professor. That's how I felt. I was being questioned in the way... the questions were asked in the way that clearly implied I was in the position of the accused. And what's best, I was being referred to with the word "feminist," even though I had not yet written a single feminist text.

Walczewska: Barbara Labuda was one of the best-known activists in the anti-communist opposition movement. She was one of the most active government representatives arguing against the repressive abortion law instituted soon after the fall of communism in Poland. Currently, Barbara Labuda is Poland's ambassador to Luxembourg. She first encountered feminism while a student in France during the 1968 student revolts.

Labuda: It was not just the fact that women were discriminated against everywhere, which was obvious to us. Nobody had to convince us of that. We got together, so to speak, because we believed that. We were discussing discrimination, how to get rid of it, how to change it, and particularly in France, there was a lot that needed change. It was much worse than in Poland at the time when it came to that. I know that nowadays people don't remember that, but in France, even many years after the second World War, actually till '68 or '70, but at any rate, certainly till the events that happened in may '68, which ploughed through... which changed France, this

bourgeois France, a lot, really a lot, and not just French universities but social norms, mentality, institutions, laws and so on; it really changed it a lot. These were the incredible, healthy fruits of this '68 revolt, this revolt in politics, social mores, and social issues. For example, in France then, for a long time, they had a law... I don't remember till what year, and I don't want to lie about it, but probably till '69, or '70, or even later than that, they had a law, which made it hard for a woman to have her own bank account. Very often, women had to get approval from a husband or a father... or a father to do something independently. It's simply incredible but that's how it was. It was incredible for Polish women, because it wasn't like that in Poland. But, on the other hand, there weren't that many banks in Poland, so one couldn't really have that many bank accounts anyway, but this was for other reasons; it was simply a poor country, so bank accounts would immediately look suspicious... But some things there in France were shocking to me, because in Poland the norms were different, and the mores were more pro-... the norms were more egalitarian. In France, there was the rule that men talked, and women sat in the kitchen, or in the drawing room, and chatted about crocheting and mostly exchanged food recipes. It wasn't like this in Poland, right?

Walczewska: Bozena Uminska expresses her liberal views as a publicist. She is a passionate and humorous writer whose articles identify and stamp out all forms of individual repression especially anti-Semitism and misanthropy.

Uminska: I have traits that can clearly be defined as masculine and others as feminine, and well... they're strongly interspersed. And I'm aware of that... what's known as cultural gender. I'm aware of that. And after my first marriage, when my husband was kind of... I'd say he had

this... he represented this kind of a model... well, like... this is what I'd say: he wasn't a typical man from a small town and at the same time he was... and at the same time he was. There was this kind of masculinity... he has this kind of masculinity which is like this, an aspect of a very traditional masculinity. I... I started feeling I didn't like it any more, I didn't like it any more, and, for example, my second... my present partner... and for me this is a thing that's absolutely at some level of consciousness... he has a lot of feminine traits, he has many feminine traits. And at the beginning it was even kind of striking for me and well... it was even a little scary that oh my... I might have ended up with a woman (laughter), but I think that if it is the case that I've ended up with a woman who is a man, it was meant to be, because I really like it a lot, so yes, yes that's simply how it's supposed to be. And here is where all these kinds of various aspects of my sensitivity come together, yes, I do mean sensitivity. The first thing is this permanent childish aspect... since childhood I mean and that's like, "don't touch my identity, don't touch my identity, don't invade my space, don't tell me what Jews are like, what Poles are like, what Americans are like, what women are like, don't tell me this," because I simply hate these messages. I hate these messages that "the woman is a neck that moves the head," and I hate these messages that "Jews have nine lives," even when all six ended up in gas chambers. I... I hate it... it simply wakes up in me... even now when I'm just talking about it... It wakes up this kind of aggression in me...

Walczevska: The following three Polish feminists all work internationally. Barbara Limanowska co-founded the Polish Feminist Association at the same time as she was and is active in a variety of international projects such as feminist projects in Thailand and Croatia. Joanna Regulska immigrated to the United States from Poland and is currently director of the

Women's Studies Center at Rutgers University. Malgorzata Tarasiewicz was active in the anti-communist opposition movement. She now lives in Gdansk and directs the Network of East West Women, which includes several countries.

Limanowska: La Strada was created, and at the same time, I had some contacts with organizations working against women trafficking in other places. Among other things, something like GAATW was created, the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women.¹ It was an international, global organization as the name indicates, and it was located in Bangkok. And they offered me some work on the project, which was supposed to look for links and trace certain mechanisms of human trafficking in Eastern Europe and Asia. We had this idea to go beyond the “first world,” beyond the language and methodology, which kind of reflected Western feminist imagination, to look at it from some Eastern vantage point, and to try to describe this phenomenon, to work on it kind of... from the inside, from our perspective, without appropriating... or... or accepting the language, which, as we felt, didn't quite reflect what was really going on in trafficking. At this point, it was already kind of... since, after all, already in Beijing, there were terrible fights and discussions between the abolitionist option and this, let's say, human rights option; there were terrible fights... At the same time, it seemed to us that it was much more about economic issues, about immigrants' rights, and about the need to look at what's happening to people in this whole process of migration, or... or... work exploitation than it was about some big philosophical discussions.

¹ **The Global Alliance Against Traffic of Women (GAATW)** is a network of non-governmental organizations and individuals from all regions of the world, who share a deep concern for the women, children and men whose human rights have been violated by the criminal practice of trafficking in persons. GAATW is committed to work for changes in the political, economic, social and legal systems and structures which contribute to the persistence of trafficking in persons and other human rights violations in the context of migratory movements for diverse purposes, including security of labor and livelihood.

Regulska: And I stayed in Rutgers as a result of a very deliberate choice, because I believe that there are no better conditions than the ones created for me by this institution. I mean the climate of feminism, the fact that I'm currently heading a department of 30 people, the Women's and Gender Studies Department, that I have 120 graduate faculty members, who are working... who are willing to work with the students, and the fact that I have 80 more affiliated faculty members. This is simply a completely unique situation. The fact that I have five institutes, centers, with which I can collaborate. It simply creates the kind of climate, where, well, I feel great, I simply... I'm really alive there. I'm alive, and it's not that I live like... you know, I have a job and I go to work I hate, but I have friends there, I have feminist discussions, I have the right kind of climate. It doesn't mean I don't have problems. It doesn't mean, you know, that some higher-ups and the administration don't do various things like... that they don't want to give us stuff and such. But there is this vibrating kind of atmosphere. Something is going on, people are coming all the time, and it's possible to do things. It's enough that we sit down together, four or five of us, and we can come up with something. I have simply... I have a feeling that everything is possible. I have a completely... like... like it's happening right now. And, of course, there are some limits, but I really have a feeling that I can go and do things, and that it's really just about having ideas.

Tarasiewicz: While I was still working for Solidarity, I was invited to a meeting of kind of feminist leaders from Central-Eastern Europe, which took place in Dubrovnik and was organized by feminists from the US and from Croatia. There was Slavenka Drakulic,² for example, Ann

² *Slavenka Drakulic*: noted Croatian writer and publicist.

Snitow, Shana Penn,³ I mean many women from the US who were interested in the Central-Eastern Europe region, because, for example, their roots go back to Central-Eastern Europe. And there were many women from our region, from Central-Eastern Europe, who wanted to work together to get more strength. And it was a kind of important impulse for me, it was, intellectually but also in terms of organizing, because this is when the organization I work for today, the Network of East-West Women, was created. And since that time, which means for ten years already, perhaps more than ten years, I have been affiliated with this organization even though I had some breaks, because for a while I worked for Amnesty International, had a baby, and for some time I lived in the United States and wasn't involved in any activities. It was as late as the end of my stay in the States when I started working for the Network, and then I got a proposition to... since I was going back to Poland, going back, wouldn't I want to organize such an institution here, in Poland, that is to organize a branch of this organization in Poland. And that's how it all came into being. In 1999 the Polish Network was created and it has been developing ever since.

Walczewska: Ania Gruszczynska is the youngest of our interviewees. She was graduating from college when we interviewed her. She is an activist in the gay and lesbian movement in Poland. Thanks to her determination and organizational skills, the march for tolerance took place in Krakow in 2004. It was the first public and on such a large scale march of this kind in Poland. About 1500 people marched on behalf of equal rights for gays and lesbians. Aside from being a hard-working activist, Ania is also a perceptive observer of the hetero-normative, patriarchal social order and its influence on the self-perception and sensibility of gay women.

³ **Shana Penn:** a U.S. scholar and a visiting professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California in 2005. She directed the Jewish heritage Initiative in Poland. She is the author of *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (2005).

Gruszczynska: It didn't matter that I found the book that fascinated me and the topic that I liked... because basically since October till this moment... and now there is one more year of entertainment, I mean the editing stage of working at the final draft of this thesis... Anyway, for the whole year, my mentor didn't even pronounce the word "lesbian"; if at all, she talk about "relationships between women," and she's try to persuade me to... I mean between lines... that if I really had to work on such an awful topic as women's literature, and the starting point was that women's literature didn't exist, then, then why did I have to focus on lesbians? If it had to be, be on women, then let them be normal women, heterosexual, and preferably in novels, actually very common in the Latino tradition, about women who suffer because of love, whose love is exploited, and there should best also be a husband, a true Latino macho husband. And it'd be even better if a husband were to be an important politician, a dictator, because then everything would wonderfully come together: the plot... the dictatorship plot, the Marxist plot, the plot about some hysterical woman, who'd immolate herself completely in love. This is what I should have been working on, but not on a woman trying to find her own place somewhere, somewhere completely beyond this dictatorial framework.

Walczewska: Anna Titkow is a well-known Polish sociologist. In her interview, she spoke about a very difficult and rarely discussed, in her opinion, topic in feminist thought: relations between mothers and daughters and between women of different generations.

Titkow: And as I already mentioned earlier, as soon as I manage to write this book about the identity of Polish women and all... and the transformation in the continuity of this phenomenon,

I would still like to work on the issue of relations between mothers and daughters. I mean as... as... I mean, it's hard to say... hard to investigate this problem in full, and I'd be a buffoon if I thought I would, but anyway, I'd like to devote some attention and some time to this issue, because it seems to me that particularly in such societies as the Polish one, where the woman's role is also strictly defined, where the mother's role is very specific, and where the society is entangled into this incredibly dense network of cultural taboos, it is a fascinating theme for me. And because at this point, there is more and more, I'd say, openness, not my own, since this happened a long time ago, but more public openness toward treating it as a research inquiry, with the various so-called quality techniques, like interviews or research done, let's say, with the focus technique, which produce completely different data from those in quantitative sociological research, and I would be very happy if I managed to carry out such a project.

Walczewska: There were more interviews. We selected ten from the dozen or so that we conducted. But I would like to mention those that did not find their way into the ten used for the Project. In selecting the interviews, we were mainly concerned with format. The remaining interviews were simply too short. Some of them were only 20 minutes long. But even those short interviews showed some interesting features. For instance, even conscious feminists have difficulty speaking about themselves, about their own accomplishments, about their own importance. They even have difficulty in using the first person singular... They have difficulty speaking about themselves. This is especially evident in the three fragments I'd like to show now. Maryla Ciechomska is one of the co-founders and one of the most active people who initiated the second wave of the women's movement in Poland. She is one of the co-founders of

the Polish Feminist Association. She is an accomplished publicist. Well, she agreed to be interviewed, but that interview did not fulfill our criteria. It was very short.

Ciechomska: Well, I don't know... I think I stated it clearly enough, but it was obvious to me that the situation of women was not good and that something needed to be done to change it. Except that before I didn't really see any possibility for change. At the same time, I have to say that it seemed to me like I was the only one who had such problems. That none of the other women cared about it. And only after 1980, it was possible to see that there were many more of us interested in change.

Walczewska: Elzbieta Pakszys is a Professor of Philosophy and founder of the Women's Studies Department at the University of Poznan. She also does not like to talk about herself at length.

Pakszys: For ten years now, since my return from the United States, because that was an important time for my development and my feminist identity... So, for ten, eleven years now, for ten years exactly, I have led and organized an interdisciplinary seminar and I have a feeling that I'm exhausting this formula and that I'll be looking for something new. Of course, I also led and lead a parallel seminar having to do with these same issues. How are they received? It's difficult to say because of course I can't say that I have enough perspective on my own work to figure it out. I do have a feeling though that students are becoming more open to the issues I present. During the recent years, it has simply become a more fashionable topic among students.

Walczewska: Agnieszka Godfrejow wants to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church. And she has been very diligently and consistently working towards that goal. Technically, there are no obstacles to her goal, except that the Lutheran Church in Poland is very concerned with the opinion of the Catholic Church, which is absolutely against women in priesthood. That's where the difficulty comes in but with her determination, Agnieszka will certainly succeed someday. Unfortunately, she was also very modest in talking about herself.

Godfrejow: Because I didn't find any arguments in the Bible... No, I mean I found arguments for and against it. But I never found anything that would clearly convince me that it couldn't be this way. I believe that God works in various ways and through different people. So, a calling is not dependant on gender. Well, of course, even just such views were considered horrible whenever I expressed them. And, well, everything sort of came to a head when I began my internship. I mean that I began to meet with various people some of whom were positive toward me and some who were not. And I began to think about it all even more. And I thought of it in a way that not only am I a woman and a feminist, but also that, from the perspective of faith, I am a person who is in the hands of God who leads me. And this is where my calling, which is so important to me, comes in. And I tried to explain to people that it's not like I, Agnieszka Godfrejow, am so arrogant and I don't know what, that I want to talk about God, but that God has called me to do so.

Walczewska: My work with the Global Feminisms Project has been an interesting and an educational adventure. An adventure for me, for my collaborators at the Women's Foundation eFKa, as well as the students of contemporary Polish feminism in the Feminist Academy. I am

also extremely pleased that, thanks to the Project and my collaboration with its initiators in Ann Arbor, Abby, Kris, Magda, and Justyna, I was able to gain such a valuable and unique insight into American, Indian, and Chinese feminisms. Insight not accessible in any other way.