

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

SITE: POLAND

**Transcript of Anna Titkow
Interviewer: Sławomira Walczewska**

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Anna Titkow was born in Przeworsk, Poland in 1942. She has a doctorate in Sociology from the University of Warsaw and has worked as an instructor and researcher in medical sociology since 1979. She is currently a Professor of Gender Studies at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in Warsaw. Titkow is a notable feminist scholar and one of her earliest efforts was an invitation to contribute to the *Sisterhood is Global* anthology edited by Robin Morgan and published in 1984. Titkow's work often challenges Polish social and cultural taboos around gender and sexuality. She has a son and lives in Warsaw.

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 TITKOW
November 16, 2004
Warszawa

Slawomira Walczewska: Professor Titkow is a well-known Polish sociologist. It is the 16th of November, and the year is 2004. I am in the office of Professor Anna Titkow, an author of most likely the first Polish feminist text, which was written for Robin Morgan's¹ publication...

Anna Titkow: *Sisterhood Is Global*.

SW: *Sisterhood Is Global*.

AT: Yes...

SW: I'd like to ask how it all started out. How did your alliance with feminism begin? At what moment of your life did you start thinking about feminism, about gender, and about relations between genders? This is a request for you to talk about yourself...

AT: It's really funny since when I remembered yesterday that we had an appointment for today, for today's meeting, I took the anthology you've mentioned and looked at the date we put in when we signed each other's copies, since it was a book promotion. It was exactly 20 years ago; it was exactly on November 16, 1984, and I think it's very funny. I like things like this a lot, and they are, I think, meaningful in a way, since it'd never occur to me that I'll run into stuff like this in my life. The book promotion for *Sisterhood Is Global* is... there are a lot of authors there, but only 25 had been invited. I had the honor to be among those 25. And it was this kind of a meeting at a table, a round table, and we were all introducing ourselves and talking about ourselves. It wasn't a known custom, and we didn't have such experiences in Poland in any situations, really. And women would get up and say, "I am divorced," "I am a lesbian," and would talk about some stories from their lives that were important to them. And I was terribly embarrassed; it was very difficult for me to say something about myself. This was the time when I was getting divorced, so I said I was just getting a divorce, but in general I didn't think I was a feminist, because while I was listening to their stories, I mean about things they did in their lives, what it was all like, I decided I didn't fit the kind of definition of feminism which was in the air. To which Robin Morgan, I think, responded, "Oh no! Because you've written this piece, and you're here with us, you're a feminist." This way I got to be defined as a feminist, kind of externally by... and it was by a high authority in feminism. I think it is... when they're using this technique, which I like more and more, as a general instrument, not only for political struggle, I'd say, but also for gathering materials, which may become a source of scientific inquiry... I mean what used to be called "herstory," what is called "herstory." I like it more and more as a way of getting to know the world, including even various social processes. I think that perhaps in

¹ **Morgan, Robin** (1941-): a feminist writer and activist. She worked in the civil rights, antiwar and feminist movements from the 1950s through 1970s. She helped revive *Ms. Magazine* in 1990 and has served as its editor-in-chief or contributing editor for many years. Editor of *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), *Sisterhood is Global* (1984), and *Sisterhood is Forever* (2003).

the majority of cases, except maybe... I mean in Poland except for very young people, and maybe it's happening differently abroad, but I think that in a place like Poland, in case of women my age, you know, or in other words sixty... women in their sixties, it's much more complicated. I mean, well, that the appearance of this word happened much later than when they were actually building... well, it'll sound really jargon-like, but I mean building their feminist identity as such. I think it was made up of very many various elements. Because, on one hand, I remember that I really, really wanted to be different than my mother, and here is a paradox, it wasn't because she didn't want me to get an education, just the opposite, or because she wasn't an independent, self-supporting woman, no, it wasn't that. It's only that I believed she didn't have enough feminine traits, so it's possible to say that at this point I missed something... even though, admittedly, some feminist trends directly speak about the essence, the gist... and it's simply a basis for defining separateness of women. At any rate... it was... but it was important because at this point I became rebellious... I was maybe 12 or 13 years old, and I decided I would be different. Of course, I didn't know what I would be like, I had no clue, but I knew I would be different. Now, after many years have passed, I think that, paradoxically, I didn't miss the traits that are important in promoting and carrying out careers, or some professional programs, but the ones that are simply feminine. But at any rate, what mattered was that I rebelled that I would be different, also that I'd be a little different from my friends. Since I was born in a small town, I was a bit of a foreign child, different because I came from a house where there were books, and I had music lessons, for which I'm grateful to my parents, since it's still a kind of passion of mine today. There were also newspapers and journals, so, in all, it was a little bit, I think, it was a little bit hard for me to communicate with other kids, which was painful at this age. So it was also that I kind of didn't want to be like them, because they kept talking about boys, and I wasn't really into it, because I was overweight and full of complexes, and just in general it wasn't my thing. So I think there was this sense... that perhaps I have to count only on myself, and this is another important element, I'd say a second element, which... of course, I can't place it in time when it happened, but for sure there was this moment I realized I had to do something. It wasn't very clear what exactly I had to do. Anyhow, going away to college certainly helped, and what's happening in the western world when children, you know, get separated from their parents more or less after high school and stand on their own two feet really helps in building the ability to think about the world, in general, and about oneself. But we're still very far from any kind of thinking in feminist categories, no matter how we'll define feminism here. I mean I'm talking about myself. And the situation in college was conducive for developing this kind of independence, which, let's say, is a certain... it seems to me a very important foundation, a starting point, a basis for building some kind of unconventional orientations, let's say. And I was lucky enough to still have such eminent teachers as the Ossowskis,² Ajdukiewicz,³ Tatarkiewicz,⁴ Kotarbiński.⁵ So it really was the world... of the people who, when they saw a

² **Ossowska, Maria** (1896-1974): philosopher and sociologist, director of Theory and History of Morality Department at the University of Warsaw and Director of Theory and History of Morality Department at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Author of *Bourgeois Morality, Social Determinants in Moral Ideas, Moral Norms: A Tentative Systematization*, among others. **Stanislaw Ossowski** (1897-1963): sociologist and cultural studies theorist and one of the best known intellectuals in post-World War II Poland.

³ **Ajdukiewicz, Kazimierz** (1890-1963): professor of philosophy and author of many theories and concepts in the fields of philosophy and logic.

⁴ **Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw** (1886-1980): philosopher, historian of ideas, historian of art and aesthetician, who was a well-known figure in Polish humanities. As a historian of aesthetics, in *History of Aesthetics*, he introduced *implicite* and *explicite* aesthetics, which became internationally recognized.

freshman student... When you were a Professor Tatarkiewicz, you'd come up, extend your hand, and ask, "How are you Ms..." So it was, it was this... these weren't the males, who showed up later, who showed up in various places where I worked. I mean I'm talking about my male colleagues who behaved exactly like males, males with a sign, "Well, you are different." At this department, I had a feeling it didn't really matter whether I was a girl or a boy. It was perhaps very important, it was...

S.W.: And it was the Department of...

AT: It was the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at the Warsaw University. And I think that if... I selected Professor Maria Ossowska to be my thesis mentor; she was my mentor for the thesis. And if there was this kind of attitude toward students that she'd write me letters to my parents' house during the summer about what her vacations were like and that if I needed her help in writing my MA thesis, here was the address... So I think that this incredible first-rate quality and culture of the faculty were tremendously significant, and this perhaps also helped to gain this kind of self-esteem. Which doesn't mean that when I fell in love, the kind of crazy puppy love, even the greatest complements from professors mattered... like from Ossowski after some presentation, or from Professor Maria Ossowska and so on, the kind of complements which when I look at them in retrospect today, I'm still impressed. But when a young man said that for a girl the most important thing was to be this and that, and not to get into presentations, this truly had an impact on me for years to come. This... I honestly have to say that's how it was. But evidently, there was this... I don't know, I'd say this background, this starting point I was talking about earlier, this thing that you have to take care of yourself, that it's not really worth it. So, nonetheless, I didn't just disappear at a certain point, I didn't yield to this pressure that it's not... I graduated, and right away started working, which was important, since I was from outside of Warsaw. But... feminism? There was no source... no sources... there was no inspiration, that's how I'd say it. Because even if it was... I belong to a generation that read Orzeszkowa,⁶ but it was read more in terms of exploitation, you know, of lower classes by upper classes, and Marta⁷ wasn't really a woman as much as she was a representative of the exploited social class. And so it wasn't... wasn't really read that way. In general, there were no... no... in the times I was growing up, and I mean Stalinist times and the October⁸ period, I mean when I was a child, you know, and I graduated from high school in 1959. So then the whole period when my identity was forming, in the 60's in Warsaw, no... there was an outburst of these... a few short whiles after October. It simply didn't work out that way, and because I was part of the group where girls were treated... no matter what my private meanderings were, you know, these... these are as if in a different dimension...

/a cut, per Professor Titkow's request/

⁵ **Kotarbinski, Tadeusz** (1886-1981): professor of philosophy and author of numerous theories. He influenced Polish philosophical culture and became its guardian spirit of sorts.

⁶ **Orzeszkowa, Eliza** (1842-1910): writer and pioneer of Polish Positivism. Author of *The Forsaken or Meir Ezofowich* and *The Argonauts*, among others.

⁷ A character from one of Orzeszkowa's novels.

⁸ There was a de-Stalinization period of the Soviet regime following Stalin's death in 1953. As a result, there were calls and protests (some violently repressed) for a liberalization of the Soviet hold on the Polish government. The events culminated in October of 1956 with the selection of Wladyslaw Gomulka, a political moderate, for the position of the First Party Secretary of the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR).

SW: And how about the family relations between your mother and father? And what about your grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts and uncles? Was there anything there that was a challenge for you, that provoked you somehow, or maybe with your siblings? Was there anything that would give you a basis to think about relations between men and women differently, and to think differently about the role of women? Was there anything like that in this early period?

AT: (a long pause). But this... yes... this, this was... but up to a certain point, it worked without... I'd say it wasn't liberating me from the traditional, you know, from the traditional way of thinking. It wasn't like... that you know... No. It was more directed toward the idea that for myself I would... that when I had a family, it would all be different, nicer, you know, something like this. On the other hand, on the other hand it wasn't something I could say was directly steering where I was going, you know, toward... into thinking that the family wasn't necessarily... No, no, no. It was rather about some gaps in the family life that were there, my mother's influence, this... and let's say my father's warmth and involvement in my life. I think he played a huge and positive role in this... you know, in my... in shaping my psyche simply, in building what my friend, a therapist, calls my indecently healthy psyche. Here, I think, it was my father, who played this kind of role, because he was very stabilizing, secure, I mean I was always sure of his, you know, of his stable emotions. A very suppor... kind of like... to him I was always this... he confirmed my sense that I was great, that I could even become a dancer, which was my dream, of course, against other parameters. However, then I was rather... then, I mean that... as I can, as I can say it today, these relations gave me... or maybe it was a result of my grandmother's presence, and she was a very rigorous Catholic, and I think it was her doing that when it comes to the Church, I'm absolutely, totally against... Since it was enough that I had religion lessons with a priest who was a crypto-pedophile, and other things that simply offended my intellect, yes, because it was on such a level that in general... and grandmother with her rigor and celebrating every first Friday of the month,⁹ you know, so this whole thing was already a done deal, for good, you could say. But I think that at that time and even while entering adult life, building a home, I was thinking that I... that it would all be a bit different, and because of this, I was a very, let's say, a very traditional wife, for example, because I believed I was the one who should do everything. I mean not only did I support the family financially, because it happened to be the time when Andrzej¹⁰ was black-listed after 1968,¹¹ so my PhD scholarship was the source of income, but also the child, well, everything, taking care of the house, different things, so I think I... yes, when I look at it in retrospect, it's simply... I can't almost believe, but that's how it was. I was this very, I think, this very traditional wife. At least I was trying to follow all these stipulations, models of a good wife, you know. I mean I was certainly always like this, and I'm sure it... it also had some negative impact, I can say, because most likely at some point it all piled up, and marriages fall apart for very many reasons, and various things

⁹ **First Friday of the month:** a ritual where Catholics go to confession and then attend mass to take communion every first Friday of the month.

¹⁰ Titkow's husband.

¹¹ **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.

contribute to it, you know. I think it was piling up like this, to wrap it up, and I believed was a traditional... and so on. Possibly, feminism is perhaps also... not only some, some, let's say, defini... ideology, or something, you know, that can be defined in political issues, you know, in political categories, and sociological ones, but it may also be a matter of some attitude, because... of this thing in a person. A few years ago, I remembered Professor Wesolowski, who, by the way, was my teacher, an assistant professor at the Sociology Department, and there was some situation, I don't know if I was presenting a dissertation prospectus which smelled of feminism and gender studies to the dissertation committee, or something like this; something, something must have... there must have been some intellectual provocation. And I remember Professor Wesolowski say... and I think this is a very apt characterization, and he said, "You know, the thing with you is that you were a feminist even when you didn't know that." And he remembers me since, as I've said, since, well, almost since childhood, when I was very young, when I was... when I started college, since college years. So you know... I, well, what can he remember? He most likely remembers, sees me, since, you know, we've been working together, in the same Institute, for a few decades, and he sees me in various situations, and he most likely sees a certain person, who behaves in a certain way, and who doesn't even define it, I'd say, you know. Because, as I've said, in a situation when I was put on the spot, so to speak, twenty years ago, you know, and asked to describe my, my path toward feminism and declare if I was a feminist, I believed that to be honest I had to say I wasn't, because it seemed to me that things that were being discussed during this meeting didn't quite apply to me, you know. So I think that this, this, this is some truth about feminism that most likely there are a lot of women, who didn't find themselves in this kind of comfortable situation I faced because of my profession and because of opportunities for foreign travel at a certain time, and it certainly was tremendously important, so that they couldn't name some things, couldn't define them, explain, clarify, and so on and so forth, and couldn't even understand their behavior, which, following Professor Wesolowski's description in my case, was feminist when it didn't even occur to me to call it that at all, because maybe I didn't even know the word yet. I think there are many women like this, that there are very many women like this, but as usual, there is this painfully obvious problem of consequences and... of this kind of anathema, these bad things which are out there, out there and are linked to the term feminism. I think it is... it is... But there are a lot of women who are feminist even though they don't know it themselves, I think. And as I've said, I belong to this category of... you know, of chosen women,¹² quote unquote, of course, because I could go... go abroad when I was still relatively young, in spite of the generation I belong to, and I was able to come into contact... And my first long trip, a scholarship stay, was at Columbia. I was affiliated with Columbia University in New York, under the tutelage of Cynthia Hoockstein [sic: Cynthis Fuchs-Epstein]¹³, who arranged things for me very well, because she said, "It's all up to you." I had everything taken care of, I mean, my stay, you know, in terms of participation opportunities in all possible classes in women's studies, as we'd say. I attended seminars, but she gave me a fee reign, and she gave me time, so that I could run free, and I was running around like crazy to all these academic areas of New York. It was 1981, and I simply attended everything I could... I

¹² "Chosen women:" Titkow is referring to the difficulty of travel beyond Polish borders during communism. It was difficult to obtain a passport and special permission was need to travel abroad. There was no such category, of course, as "chosen women," but Titkow phrases it this way to emphasize how lucky she was to have studied in the U.S.

¹³ This is, of course, a misspelling of **Fuchs-Epstein, Cynthia** (1933-) who is an American feminist legal scholar currently teaching at CUNY and Columbia University in New York.

could attend. And the American sisters didn't necessarily always welcome me with enthusiasm, and when I wasn't from whatever kind of organization or something, they'd kick me out, because, contrary to appearances, it was all very... they were then... I didn't know then that they were fighting so much against each other, that there were factions; of course, I had no clue about this. But what was I doing? I was making tons of Xerox copies of various types of articles from women's studies, I mean about women and sex roles, something like this. It was something completely new to me that there were so many publications and literature on this. And it was interesting to me for reasons, I would say, not directly related to feminism, because I always had... I was always professionally sensitive to... I mean as a person, of course, too, but also professionally sensitive to what I call a façade, a façade character of social life, and to façade declarations. I remember that much earlier, much before I came into direct contact with the western feminism, I had always been very annoyed, you know, with these myths about the Poles' attitude toward children, toward the value of a child. I wrote this little book and published it in 1982, *A Child as a Value*, which, I believe, is one of my best books, because in it, I proved empirically and statistically that it was not really the case, and that it was something else to declare, "A child is the highest value," but the reality was very different. If we look carefully, if we use some slightly different techniques, it's not really the case that all women have this incredibly emotional and positive attitude toward it, and it resulted from the fact that I spent a lot of time by a sand-box with my own child, and I was listening and looking... looking at mothers' approach to children, and it was the empirical reality, I'm sorry to say, that inspired me to do this kind of research. So I was inter... I'm sure it's important what one reacts to, how one gets to... I'm talking about... Perhaps when I'm looking at my female students these days, most likely all of these... this whole process doesn't even come into the picture, because they just kind of slip into the soft slippers of feminism right away; they get everything on a silver platter, they have books, they have libraries, they have Ms. Ania,¹⁴ you know, who will give some reading advice if they're interested in something, and it's a completely different era. But then, I think, not liking the façade was a helpful personality trait, leading toward... And that's why when I went to the States and saw and read that there were different roles and not necessarily... that motherhood in our species was social and not necessarily only biological, it had a huge significance, I think. And this, I think, was something like... I didn't... didn't feel a feminist when I came. Actually, I don't know when I felt... if I felt one, but, in fact, it seems to me that, perhaps, I was one in a sense. I mean, I didn't have to out myself, so to speak, or didn't have to label myself this way, but it's simply possible to talk about it in the categories of... to look at it in the process categories, depend... my professional life was going on, you know, also and at the moment when... for sure... And there is one more important thing. For many years, my boss was Magdalena Sokołowska. She is a person who has done a lot of work for, above other things, for the sociology of medicine, since I worked in this kind of a program, but apart from this, she was also interested in women, and then we didn't speak about... there were no other terms, only "women" or "women's problems." She taught a seminar on this, and everything, of course, was happening in this kind of a defined aesthetics, a paradigm like a women's work outside the home, time budgeting, and leisure time, but she's the author of a 1963 article, which was published in *Sociological Studies* and was titled "A Household – an Unknown Work Environment." So, you know, it also matters who you're keeping company with, you know. I mean, there is one issue here that she was this kind of a woman, she was... most likely you could define her as a feminist, but she would, in turn, exclude... I mean she wasn't strongly accepting

¹⁴ "Ania:" a common Polish first name.

of these other roles, I mean roles related to personal lives, the fact that we were also mothers. To wrap it up, she didn't really like this, but she was the kind of person who... who, let's say, because of the fact that she was going abroad a lot, would bring in news, and would tell about various admirable women, in WHO¹⁵ or some place else, and this certainly had some significance. Besides, she herself was the kind of person who... you know, it was fun to look at her, so dynamic; she was almost like an institution. This, I think, was based on the idea that you could do it like this. I mean it was never my genre. I never liked it. I mean it wasn't my... it wasn't really my blood type, so to speak, this need to shine, this need for power that she had, but I think it also had some positive impact, because she was also an elegant woman, witty, and classy, so it all had some significance as well. But coming back to these stages, like rebellion and the need for independence, we've got it all covered. And there is a point, for instance... but I must have felt obligated, I suspect, I mean the kind of general decency toward those who sent me abroad, you know, where I spent some time, you know, thanks to Margarita Papandreu,¹⁶ since it was 1984. I went for this book promotion to New York, and I found myself in this kind of a situation of a chosen person. I suspect that this... this also strengthened these interests I had kind of had, you know. And I certainly was in some way psychologically prepared for the situation that when I came back to... school, the School of Social Sciences, here in the Institute that you've graduated from, you know, and the opportunity came up to teach this kind of class... even though I was terribly scared, because I had never taught, since in the PAN¹⁷ institutes, there is no teaching. I simply had an impression that one would have to go mad to do it, I thought, to start teaching at my age. But I took it upon myself and now it's the favorite aspect of my work. And I think there is something beneficial, I'd say, in building consciousness, in developing... well, even the fact that here, in the Institute, we have the Program for Research on Women and Families, that we have doctorates which aren't, you know, traditionally formulated but sometimes it's even necessary to maneuver a bit to explain they're interdisciplinary, but it's possible to do it in a political way and convince our male colleagues, you know, if we do it in a kind of... way. And I think that... that I simply am a feminist, in a relatively full-time sense, and most likely it started a long time ago. I mean I don't know how it is, whether feminism forgives for having been a traditional wife or not, but these are silly jokes, I think, but I must have been born with it, in a way. I mean, it's hard to say, there is no... and we talk about constructs, and I'm very careful myself to say it this way, that it's a social construct, that we're learning this. I think that if... if... in my case it was a situation, a good situation, because in my whole life cycle, my rebellions and my needs to define myself as a person, who I wanted to be, what kind of a woman I wanted to be, coincided in a way with all these good opportunities, you know, that I could have contacts with the western world, and we're still talking about the previous... previous system here, that there happened... that, you know, there was a situation... you know... What was the publication year of this book *In Full Voice*, yours, of which you were the editor?

SW: *It's Women't Turn?*

AT: *It's Women's Turn!*

SW: It was published in 1992 and there was your...

¹⁵ WHO or *Who's Who*: biographical information about accomplished individuals.

¹⁶ Papandreu, Margarita: Former First Lady of Greece and a long-time international women's and peace activist.

¹⁷ PAN – Polska Akademia Nauk (The Polish Academy of Sciences).

AT: In 1992, right?

SW: In 1992.

AT: In 1992. So I think these for me were the things... I felt... I'll say that, I felt honored that I could, for example... I really mean it, I mean I believed that because I never perceived myself as the kind of person, you know, who carried the banner, fought, declared, you know, got into head-on collisions and so forth, because of that they might have perhaps thought that I was a true feminist. But now, in retrospect, I can see that this has been a kind of positivist work, a kind of grass-roots work that's about the students and journalists, about the type of undertaken research, you know, the kind of research that's carried out in the Program you're heading, let's say, what we're working on, that it's the kind of work which is, well, definitely related to... it's very definitely closely related to, let's say, to the minimum definition of feminism, you know: men and women are in different situations. There is... the division is... some things are divided unfairly and something needs to be done about it. And now, it's perhaps a matter of an absolutely private choice and temperament, of course, when it comes to how it's carried out. And I think that I carry it out through my professional work, research and teaching, in which I'm trying to do my best, so to speak. I have simply always been like this, with a mentality of the best student in a homeroom, always a perfectionist, in other words, but I simply can't do things in a slap-dash manner, and particularly... and I'm politically aware of this, particularly when I know... when things are about women, then everything has to be just perfect, because it'll always be judged by different criteria, I mean harsher, less accepting than when it's about, you know, society at large, or some universals, something like this and not something directly related to women. This is always... I know that every time... even if these are just student works, or pieces students publish, or when doctoral students ask for comments, I know that... I always keep it in mind... it's like some, I'd say, some party vigilance, that it has to be very good, spotless, that there can't be anything that could be used to... because I perhaps have this sense of ongoing struggle, that here... I mean it doesn't have to be flaunted in any way, so to speak, but if you want to achieve something, you need to be very, very cunning... you need to have a thought-out and cunning strategy. You've got to be careful, I mean. And do things right. That's the most important.

SW: As a woman?

AT: As a woman.

SW: You've got to do it a tiny bit better?

AT: Yes, you do. I mean I think... I mean I suspect that if I were a man, I'd be doing the same. Perhaps, I'm not speaking precisely, but if something is related not just to my work, if it's, let's say, some team work, or something that's going outside, like a publication, then I know that various types of... that because it's about, let's say, women, men and gender or, or... that it'll undergo a different assessment than if it were about coal, men, or Gross National Product. I know this... I know this, because in my circles, even nowadays, it's still possible to hear that something is a women's issue, you know, that there are... that, you know, it's just a women's

issue. And this comes from our very educated male colleagues, who travel around the world, but still use the language “of women’s issues.”

SW: There are no men’s issues. That means something slightly different.

AT: Yes, yes, yes. But that it’s just... yes, yes, this simply is... a woman’s issue as a general area of research... a woman’s issue and that’s the kind of language that already in the 60’s Magdalena Sokołowska was generally trying to avoid, you know, if though there was no other term.

SW: And would you, perhaps, be willing to say some more about your own life experience. You were talking about college years, and at some point a husband and a child appeared in your story. What moment of your life was that? Was it still in college, or afterwards? Did you succeed at integrating your personal life with your professional ambitions? Was it well-integrated, or not really?

AT: It was very hard. It was very hard. It was... it was hard. I mean this time, one can say, this so-called best time, as it’s said sometimes, in a woman’s life. I mean when you’re already over 25, you know, which is already... it was hard, because I absolutely... and it wasn’t even the point that it was the source of money, but I absolutely wanted to work. I mean I wanted to work outside of the home. It interested me. I... I... my job... no matter how unfavorable... let’s say, because there always are some unfavorable conditions, but I like my job. It is simply... I know how to find joy in some things, like in all jobs, and from this... as well and in my job as well, and I’m still finding them today, which surprises me a little bit, but it happens. I wanted to work very much, and it was very hard on me, because my child was getting sick a lot. Later on, it got a bit easier in a way. On one hand, it was easier because of my mother’s help, because, after my father’s death, my mother came to live with me, but on the other hand, these were very difficult years for me. It was the kind of situation that... I think that, that this... Well, I mean I could say it decades later, but then, at the point when mother came to our house... when it became clear that mother would come to live with me... Nobody helped, since my husband took... backed out and said, “It’s your decision,” and my brother simply decided that would be best, since he was then divorced, and didn’t, in fact, have his own apartment, and so on and so forth. Mother who was always used to the fact that somebody would always... well, you know, even though she was my age now and in a great shape, you know, and so on and so forth, but she said there was no way she would stay there alone, you know, because before the war, she used to live in Warsaw, and it seems to me it was... And I... as... I think it was very hard on me... it was almost 25 years that she lived with me, with us. And, God forbid, I’m not going to try to blame the divorce on her but I think it certainly was a factor which very strongly contributed to this divorce of ours, but did it have, you know, any impact on my world-view? You know, I can’t tell you using these categories. I think not everything can be defined in these categories. I know one thing that that’s certainly the case... that, on one hand, she was helping out, and you... you know how it is when you’re working, and I worked all that time, and there is a child, and my husband was little involved, very little. But, on the other hand, I think that the cost, the cost of her presence was huge, my own psychological cost. And all I know... I remember this... this situation when there is a child, a husband, a mother, and I am in the middle of it. And all of this is happening in the space of a Polish apartment, 46 square meters, and two people working irregular hours. Mother has her room, we have ours, for two people with irregular hours, and

Tomek has his room. And I remember this; these are such moments, like I told you at the beginning, that when I was a child, I suddenly decided to be different than my mother, and I didn't exactly know what was going on but it was simply this kind of a creative moment: just different. I remember what I was wearing, what the circumstances were, where we were going, I remember these details, which I wouldn't have remembered in other situations. I will be different. When it comes to this, on the other hand, I remember this moment, in turn, when I undertook... when I thought to myself, "I can't cope," I mean that I wouldn't be able to have it all, to be on good terms with everybody, you know. Who do I feel responsible for? I feel responsible for Tomek, you know, for the child, and that means that my behavior will be defined by what's good for Tomek, by my relations with Tomek, and that's it. It doesn't matter what, who... who will get offended, who, who will leave me, and how it will all be. It was the moment, I think, it was very... it was the moment of a very conscious decision that I wouldn't manage to be like the UN and that I had to make up my mind. And, you know, when I look at it in after many years, when my son is an adult man with three children, I think that he is the kind of man he is... a partner, I think... even though his views are incredibly conservative when you talk to him, but I think that that he is simply the feminist ideal of a partner. This is simply... I'm looking and I can't believe my eyes, because he's really, in general, like from books, you know those published already by Teresa Hołówka,¹⁸ you know, about the time budgeting. He's simply incredible, even though, you know, he didn't get such a model from home. But when I look at him like at an adult, I think that this decision, then incredibly dramatic for me, you know, particularly since it was about my marriage, you know, that I simply wouldn't be able to cope, this... this I remember. It is also perhaps an element of building, you know, building the kind of thinking... feminist thinking, I think. I think that simply when you talk about it, the point is, perhaps, also to perceive each other as, you know, finite beings, having a right to decide about various things, and I think that even this already happens to be feminism per se.

SW: And your relationship with your mother, in turn, reflects this topic, difficult for feminists, the problem of female genealogy, of a mother-daughter relationship.

AT: Yes, listen, I mean I... if... if I still have any of the so-called professional acumen left, when I'm finally done with this book, you know, my book about women's identity, and with all these projects, grants, and so on, I would really like to work on this issue of mothers and daughters, because it was... it was an incredible burden for me. I mean I'll tell you... In short, when I talked to a friend once, since it was sometimes very hard on me and I wasn't coping, so I needed to talk, he was saying something, as far as I remember... I remember what he told me and this is, perhaps, a real explanation. This was a point when I was making an effort, you know, and I was suggesting to my mother... because financially, we were, let's say, doing well, I mean when we were still married, so that my mother could have moved out, you know. I mean I was saying, "Mom," and I remember the conversation. "Mom, my marriage is falling apart. We have to be on our own. We can afford renting a studio for you nearby, so you'll be close to us, and so on." Well, and I will never forget when mother said to me, in this impersonal kind of language, "Now, leave the room, please, and I will never live by myself." And of cour... you know, I had no guts to go against this. I didn't have the guts, the psychological capabilities, to get my mother's stuff out, you know, or to do anything. I had no room to maneuver, no options, because I had no family members, you know, to whom I could say, "Listen, take my mother to your

¹⁸ **Hołówka, Teresa:** Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw and author of *No One is Born a Woman*, among others.

place, at least for a few months, because I have to at least try to save this marriage,” or something like this. In other words, I think that... I was asking him, listen, why am I doing this? Why didn't I do anything bad yet? Why am I not... not? Why? To which he responded, and there is something about it, and he said, “You know, you're just a decent person.” And because... with one reservation that it's possible to say... it's possible to reinvent every type of experience into the so-called positive thinking. I mean, nothing, of course, will balance out my effort and hardship, you know, the kind of deficits I incurred through the quarter of a century of living under one roof, you know, of various kinds of limitations and so on, but I think that to me, it was also... as if... I knew this, in a way, I was aware of all of this, you know. I mean I... I knew and, paradoxically, it perhaps helped me survive, so that I can look straight into the mirror, you know, and I don't have, you know, I don't have... mother is already deceased, and I don't have, you know, this feeling that, you know, that I did something that makes me feel miserable after all these years, and so on. Because, you know, I was aware of this. And I think that it's also related to this... this... immanent trait of my personality, this rebellion, or, in other words, some kind of awareness, that I'm aware of this and I know... I'm aware that I can't just say no. But I think that this awareness, this knowledge of myself, that I'm aware I'm not behaving like a wimp of sorts, simply, because that's how it's done, because of this and that, or because I'm a good daughter, oh no. No good daughter, you know! No good daughter, nothing like that. I'm just a decent person who doesn't kick people out of her house. These were the terms. And I remember, for example, when my mother... there was something, some issue of going to the symphony, and I said, “No.” No. No. And mother was going to the symphony by herself; she had her season tickets. No. Or, later on, there was an issue about going for walks. “I won't be going for walks by myself,” to which I said, “Too bad, I won't be going.” So, you know, there were, I'd say, feelers and attempts at... but I think there was also some awareness of this situation, an awareness, you know, of these relations that were kind of deprived of tenderness. Because I can't say, you know, I can't deny... whether or not she loved me, because I believe these are the things one has no right to do, you know, because these are very private, very individual matters. I think she was doing it the way, you know... like she was raised, since this tyrant of a grandmother couldn't have raised my mother any other way. And apart from this, mother was very bitter, perhaps, all her life, because she wanted to be an actress and wasn't allowed to, because, you know, she was born in 1909, so it was a long time ago. And she obeyed. I think it was something that was really poisoning her all her life. And it poisoned her, it poisoned us, it poisoned father, poisoned... you know, our family life, since she was so unfulfilled. So, like I'm saying, for example, there was no... from her side, just the opposite, when it came to the issue of college. You want to be a doctor, go ahead; you want to be a sociologist, go ahead. A great help, you know. It wasn't at all easy for my parents to support me in Warsaw, because as a child of the intelligentsia family¹⁹, I got no scholarships, nothing, so father, you know, had to earn it all by himself. But she was, I think, that all her life, she was, you know, more like this unfulfilled person than like a mother.

SW: And this ban on acting came from her family?

AT: Yes, from her parents, yes. There was no way. There was no way. And she obeyed. I mean she didn't have, you know, this... this will power and strength, I'd say, to... to, you know, yes,

¹⁹ During the communist rule, students applying to universities were ranked according to a point system which accorded more points, thereby increasing chances of admission and possibility of scholarship, to children from proletarian families.

and she just lived with it, but I think she was compensating for this all her life. I remember that, and it was also interesting, you know... and it's interesting how professional and private things get interwoven. It was a paradox... it was strange, the way it was working out, that when my mother died it was perhaps the same time when Bogusia Budrowska²⁰ was finishing her dissertation, *Motherhood as a Turning Point in a Woman's Life*. I was doing, you know, a final editing, this kind of reading right before accepting and putting out the work, and I was thinking to myself, "God, what an idea! The shoemaker's children always go without shoes, you know. Here you are, right after your mother's funeral, you know, and you still have to do this kind..." But, contrary to appearances, it was good, this situation, because suddenly, for the first time in my life, I asked this question while looking at the final draft of Bogusia's book. Suddenly, you know, I asked this dramatic question out loud, "Why didn't you love me?" So, you know, this interweaving of things, I believe, is also very important in the case of people like me, because it's very likely that if I hadn't been in the situation when I had to do it, well, had to, because, you know, there was a deadline, and the gal was waiting for me to finish the book, maybe I wouldn't have asked this question, not ever. And it's very important to ask this question and, at any rate, to define this situation, and I have finally defined it in full, you know. I mean, I'm not saying... I'd like to stress it again that I'm not denying her, my mother, a right to feelings she was perhaps convinced she had, no. But from my perspective... all of a sudden, editing a dissertation, this question, "Why didn't you love me?" And I burst out crying, so... And... and now I'm very happy, because one of my doctoral students wants to write on relations between mothers and daughters. I mean she will do her PhD. For now, I don't know where it's going to go, but it doesn't matter if a doctoral student will want to write her dissertation on this or not, but I can say one thing that experiences with my own mother, well, when supported... supported... supported by this kind of professional back-up and certainly by a personality type, allowed me to experience something very interesting, because it turned out that it's a taboo topic: relations between mothers and daughters. Well, in our society, there are many taboo topics, and this topic, in my opinion, is particularly affected by this kind of a taboo. And I remember that... because I have this habit, and by the way I do it in class very often that when I want to bring forth an argument, to show a perspective, I very often use my own life experiences, simply, my own. I refer to my own experiences, which I have a right to do, you know, so I don't infringe on anybody else's rights. And I remember that at the time when I already was aware of what my relations with my mother were like, but still before... before this dramatic outburst, I was saying things delicately, tactfully, you know, because it's not my style to go into, "You know, she's this and that," no, no, no, nothing like this. I remember when I said to a close friend once, "You know, I really envy you your relations with your mother." Because this... you know... I'm saying to her, "Because as we grow older, it's all becoming more and more important and I very much envy you your relations with your mother." And this woman is turning toward me and says, "You're forgetting I'm an actress." So it turned out that it's something like, you know, like it's enough to just touch it, and, in many instances, the whole flood of information spills out. But what this has to do with feminism, I don't know at this point.

SW: It may have something to do with it, because feminists very energetically undertook this theme of female genealogy. It'd be also interesting to know what these relations were like between your mother and grandmother, because it looks like...

²⁰ Budrowska, Boguslawa: Prof. Titkow's doctoral student (1993-1998). Currently, a professor in the Institute for Research on Women and Family at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

AT: It may have. I mean I think that it... that if the situation doesn't occur... if you're following various expectations, you know, commands, and norms, which follow the defined... which are of the specific type, you know, then, well, most likely, well, you'll repeat the cycle. Yes, you may become, well, some kind of a tyrant grandmother, or you may be a repeat mommy. I mean, I think that these attempts... that this mechanism of cutting oneself off is significant here. I mean cutting oneself off not to repeat certain patterns, you know, from these... from biographies of women close to you, and I think that this element of a kind of a rebellion, as I say, is the most important here. Besides, there are also various things later on that have an impact. If later on some women appear... and they may be completely unrelated to this awareness of women's separateness, or wrong done to women, or anything like that, no, it's enough if they only bring in some kind of elements... new elements into the life you've got as your heritage after... after, well, a grandmother and a mother. They only suddenly show you a color of life, that, for instance, some lady... I know that it had some tremendous significance in my life that my godfather's wife, who lived in Warsaw... I visited them once and something, something... They had a really beautiful place, and she always took great care about, you know, about setting up the table, about things like that. And I remember when she said, "You know, after all, all people have their favorite teacup." To me as a little girl, it was a revelation, I remember: "After all, all people have their favorite teacup." But it was very important, you know. It was very important. All people have their favorite teacup. So such things are very important, exactly this kind of things, as I've said, about teacups, and I remember that this lady, who is now deceased, and I saw her... I was fortunate enough, before she departed, and I remember that we talked about this teacup. And I have to tell you that this very old woman was pleased. I say, "Ms. Zofia, do you realize how big of a role this teacup had? That all people have their favorite teacup, to which I brought my attention?" She was the kind of a woman also... I think that if she had been born a little earlier, she would have been a feminist. "Oh, Hanusia, was that so? That's wonderful!" She was 95. So this... this I think, you know, these are perhaps various little pebbles, which work this way, and it's not necessarily about having a feminist environment. It's a paradox, I'll say, but the specifically feminist circles aren't always necessary.

SW: And how was it with these feminist circles, with this Polish movement, which was being born when I started working on these issues, exactly these issues you got acquainted with during your stay in the States? How were you looking at what was going on here, in Poland?

AT: I mean I'll tell you this: I, I can say, I immediately... because of my line of work, I had it easy right away, since if the situation is that I'm an academic, who, well, may be useful, you know, to do something for women... And I realized very soon that it's not necessarily the case, and I saw it earlier in the States, that it's enough... that it's enough of a glue, I mean the banner of "feminism," or that, you know, here we are doing something in the women's movement. It's not at all the case. I had already seen that in the States, and I was... It really shocked me, to say honestly. You know, because it was... and particularly that I had to really explore it in depth, because I had no clue, you know, about why, what, where and how. It was simply shocking, all these factions, this infighting, and it had really little to do with sisterhood. Here, very soon it was, you know, because it's a very small group and very soon it was possible to figure out that X may not necessarily like Y or Z, and vice versa. And because for me... of course, I also liked some people more, on a personal level, and others less, I didn't have to go into, you know, into

these kinds of relations that would, let's say, locate me... like I'm with this faction and not with that faction. I was trying not even to know about all this, because it is very, you know... it, it, it disrupts, it disrupts... because I don't fight politically in a sense of belonging to a specific wing of Polish feminism, but rather if... I try to provide a forum where various wings meet and talk about things, you know. I know that this infighting isn't specifically Polish, but perhaps it makes me sad because there are so few of these women. And it is something different from like when you're in New York and looking, you know, at a meeting of whichever faction, let's say, and there are three or four hundred women showing up at the meeting place, you know, and however many for another faction, you know. Also... it's all going on in sports arenas at various universities. Or, when I was already at Rutgers later on, and when there is a meeting, well, the place is full and there are, you know, 900 participants of both genders, so these are slightly different situations, and they can afford factions. Here, on the other hand, it's like... but OK, it's like an old lady's sentiment that it's such a pity it's this way and not another. On the other hand, as I'm saying, I believed that if the situation was that in the 90's, at the beginning, when the fight about the abortion legislation started out, and the Freedom Union²¹ turned to me to write an expertise, you know, on this issue, I'd write the expertise. Even if, you know, another party had turned to me, I would have written it then, too, because, as I say, such things are very much needed, and not everybody is able, you know, able to do it. And, of course, you know, all that happened simply happened, but I have this, I'd say, this formula of a feminist struggle that if big words need to be used, I use them, you know. And I think that if... if... if there is this situation now that somebody calls from the office... the existing Office of Women's Affairs and is asking me to come, because there is going to be some training session for women's reps regarding the glass ceiling issue... That's how, you know, how it works here, in a definitely feminist way, with a feminist philosophy, and I think that it'll be even more like this when this book comes out – this phone call was from the editor – when the book comes out about the unpaid woman's work, *Myths, Conditions, Reality... uhhh... Perspectives*. So I think it'll also be the book which will touch upon, well, these things, which are... you can say they are “tabooized,” to use such a big word. And most likely, as long as I'm active, my feminism is going to manifest itself exactly in this way, but if someone asks me a question if I'm a feminist, I'll say, “yes” for sure, because it really makes me laugh when... it really makes me laugh, you know, because it's so... I don't know, don't know why it makes me laugh, but it does make me laugh a lot, because it's done by people who really wouldn't have to do it. On the other hand, if somebody denied me that, I think I'd enter into an argument, for sure. I mean by presenting, you know, the whole spectrum of ways to conduct a political struggle that we can have, yes, and I believe that in feminism, there is room for various forms. You know, not everybody has the temperament, you know, for dressing up and organizing a rally. It never was my thing, you know, no matter how old I was, not at all. So I think I prefer this kind of rallies [*pointing out toward the pile of books*]. It was, for example, a form of a rally when I chose this cover [*showing the cover of her book, What It Means to Be a Woman in Poland*], yes, I did have an impression it was, you know, a rally. The book *Child as a Value*, published in 1982, was probably my first publication written from a woman's perspective, even though, let's say, from the viewpoint of women's studies' methodology, I made a mistake,

²¹ **The Freedom Union:** (*Unia Wolności*, UW) a liberal party founded in 1994 out of the merger of the Democratic Union (*Unia Demokratyczna*, UD) and the Liberal Democratic Congress (*Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny*, KLD). Both of these parties had roots in the Solidarity movement. It represented European liberal tradition, i.e., it advocated free market economy and individual liberty, rejected all extremism and fanaticism and favored European integration (in the form of European Union membership), rapid privatization and decentralization.

shared by all sociologists, because a lot of charts had no split into men and women, into “What Women/Men Think,” “What Views Women/Men Have,” because it was like... I’d say this: we had it printed into our thinking, into our professional training, that these things weren’t to be split, in general. But there were some chapters there already that were devoted to women. It was already... it was the first publication that was definitely... I treat it as a kind of a beginning of my, let’s say, activities in the area of women’s studies, if someone really needs some definition. But, as I have 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. So, we’d start with a child and end with mothers and daughters.

SW: Well, not end yet perhaps...

AT: Well, maybe not! Maybe, but anyway... anyway, it’s something that... that even during this conversation... I have to say I wasn’t thinking about... most likely since I’m tired of carrying out current obligations, I wasn’t thinking about any projects, but I think that during this conversation, it came together, and I know perfectly well what I want... what kind of a grant I want to apply for from KBN²² in June. Thanks a lot!

SW: Oh, and may I ask you one more question?

AT: Yes, you may.

SW: It’s really a bit like a reporter’s question, a question about the kind of knowledge you would have equipped a daughter with, but you have a son, right?

AT: I have a son, but I also have a granddaughter.

SW: You have a granddaughter. What would you say to her, to a woman living in the world you know as a woman and as a sociologist?

AT: I mean I think it’s probably a rare situation when it’s possible to pass something on directly. I think I will certainly... I mean at this point I’m in this incredibly... the family situation is very comfortable for me in a cognitive sense, apart from emotions, because I can just look at...

²² **KBN:** State Committee for Scientific Research (Komitet Badan Naukowych – KBN) has been transformed into The Ministry of Science and Information Technology (Ministerstwo Nauki i Informatyzacji).

Because the age difference between my grandchildren is only two years, I'm looking at a three-year-old little boy, and I'm looking at a one-year old girl, so it's very interesting, because, on one hand, the girl does all the things her brother, Kostek, does and that is planes, dinosaurs, and all absolutely male toys, but at the same time, there is a doll, and it's not because she's being showered with dolls, but it's a doll that was there when she was about to be born. Kostek got it, this rubber doll, to get him used to the baby, and she simply started... it all started with this doll. So there is this doll, and it's all very interesting when you're watching these things, you know, from the vantage point of research, articles and such, about whether or not girls and boys are different, what it's all like. It's very interesting. But I think that as she's developing, I will probably... you know, very discreetly, discreetly, it'll be guarded, of course, but I'll watch out to... so that she... to build in her the maximum amount of independence. I mean I'll probably pay attention if... if she isn't... if she doesn't have some kind of, I'd say, inborn... as her own thing, an inborn, let's say, predisposition, or this kind of an independence trait, acquired very early for whatever reason and in a way that's hard to explain, then I will, you know, try to, I think, pay attention to that. You know to this... I will probably pilot this, in such a way, of course, that nobody knows about it, because, after all, it's a very discreet and delicate matter, and grandmas have a very, you know... you understand. But I have a lot of opportunities to influence the children, my grandchildren. I already know this, since I have one big grandson, a twelve-year-old, so I know that grandmas have various kinds of opportunities. And for sure, a girl... I know that if I'm only still around, she'll always be able to count on me. In every situation she'll find herself in, whoever's involved and in whatever issue, she'll be able to say no. And this is the most precious thing to be able to say no, even when it's the silliest thing in the world, but simply not to stifle this, this capability of saying no, you know. I mean it'll sound a bit self-congratulatory but even though I was not able to say no to this love of my youth, you know, and started getting bad grades in college and some other things, it fortunately didn't last long, you know, and it didn't determine... didn't define my whole life. I simply returned to this kind of, I would say, something I value in myself, I probably value it particularly strongly, that I did say no, no, no, and that I will write my Master's thesis in a week, I'll be on time, everything will happen. Yes, my granddaughter probably can... My granddaughter... I mean my granddaughter can... on one hand, I will be intrigued, and on the other hand, I think she can certainly count on me, certainly, because it's not simple at all. It isn't at all simple to be an independent woman, not simple at all. And there is always a use for a person who'll say that all people like to have a teacup, always a use, that everybody has a favorite teacup. Such a person is always needed... such a person should always come up in everybody's life. I will be happy if I will be this person for my granddaughter.

SW: Thanks so much!

ANNA TITKOW

- 07/05/1942** Born in Przeworsk
- 1959-1964** Studied sociology at the Warsaw University
- 1964-1969** Worked at The Institute of Mother and Child
- 1968** Got married
- 1969** Gave birth to son Tomasz
- Since 1969** Philosophy and Sociology Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences
- 1979** Earned a Ph.D. in Sociology of Medicine
- 1993** Received Habilitacja²³, a post-graduate degree

Works at the Philosophy and Sociology Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences and teaches Gender Studies in the School of Social Sciences in Warsaw

²³ **Habilitation (Habilitacja):** is a term used within the university systems in Poland, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary and other European countries. It describes the process of qualifying for admission as a university professor.