

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

**SITE: POLAND**

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**Joanna Regulska** was born in 1951 in Warsaw, Poland. She studied geography at the University of Warsaw in Poland and at the University of Colorado in the United States. In 1989, she co-founded the Foundation for Development of Local Democracy in Poland. She directs the Department for Women and Gender Research at Rutgers University in the U.S. Regulska has a daughter and divides her life and work between Poland and the United States.

**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.

Joanna Regulska  
April 15, 2005  
Kraków

**Ślawomira Walczewska: Today is the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 2005. I will be talking with Professor Joanna Regulska. Good morning. Could you tell us about yourself and about your feminism? How did feminism find its way into your life? What place did it find? Where did it come from?**

Joanna Regulska: Well, that's how it happens with feminism. It is... its symptom is... at least in my case, some kind of gradual growth. It wasn't quite the case that one day I woke up in the morning and suddenly it turned out that I was a feminist, but it was, most likely, a coincidence of many factors. I think that... I mean there was a moment when I... something got to me. It was, I remember, in 1978, I think, after I had already left Poland for the U.S., and I was a doctoral student then, at the University of Colorado, in the Geography Department. And there were meetings and discussions there and I realized that I was very often asked about the situation of women in Poland: What is it like, what's going on, and how about women? And, of course, these questions forced me to reflect on what I actually knew, how I was beginning to shape these responses, what I was speaking about and what I was not speaking about. And there was a moment that... that at first, I was responding to these questions in quite a naïve way, "Well, it's all good," simply without thinking about what this question meant and how... and what I really knew about this topic. It was kind of a "socialist" response, well, people are all equal, you know, and we're all fine. I mean we weren't all fine but just in terms of equality... But there's something to it, because as for education... there was access anyway, so it wasn't like as a doctoral student in the U.S., where I had to worry, you know, where the money was coming from to pay for these studies. Here I was immediately able to figure out the class system: I either have the money, or I don't have the money. It wasn't enough that I got in, but I also had to pay for it somehow and pay a lot of cash. So... so these answers I gave... the answer was... well, a result of some sort of life experience, you know, of having access to education. It wasn't, of course, access for everybody, because even though we didn't have to pay, you know, access was also regulated. So these were my first steps in thinking about what my attitude was toward what it meant to be a woman and what kind of a woman and in what kind of conditions. Later on, the element that shaped me more was my dissertation, of course, because I wrote my dissertation about migration of women, which was of course... well, I was a migrating woman myself, since I had just come to the United States from Poland, and here I was doing research on differences between women who left big cities for small towns in the U.S., who came to Colorado, and those differences were between single women, who were professionally involved, and women with families, who came because of their families. That means it was about how you looked at an individual, at self-fulfillment, at these women's rights, at what they gained and what they lost as a result of this migration; all of these had already appeared in this research. But I wouldn't say it was a fully feminist work. It was more of a work that... would describe but not yet... this feminism of mine was not a mature feminism. It was... it... it... I was definitely interested. I was definitely observing, but, well, most likely, I hadn't yet quite worked through, no, not yet, hadn't yet digested it and hadn't yet created some sort of my own version of what I was interested in.

I'm sure that if I was doing this work now, for example, I would ask different questions. I would concentrate on more... since we were sending out questionnaires. Maybe I would have used other methods, more feminist methodology. I was using a rather standard social sciences' methodology, which, of course, has a basic impact, because of the closed questions and the statistical methods' analysis... and well, the way these questions were formulated. It doesn't mean that we can't use statistical methods in feminist work, but, well, it shouldn't be the only way, but rather there should be a broad spectrum; the methodology should be much more comprehensive, so that it was just one part of it, without privileging one method, you know, and one kind of analysis. So today I would have written this dissertation very differently, but that's what it was. That's what it was, and it definitely gave me a different sense of direction for what was to come. And also, well, this experience of this migration definitely shaped in me... in a way, my identity in terms of how I reacted to certain things, how... I have no doubts that I had to be much more aware of what I could do and what I couldn't do, aware of my status as a migrant and my status as a Pole in the American environment. It was a feeling... a multiple sense that it was an unequal status, a will to be... to climb to other levels but impossible to accomplish because of the language and culture gap, a will to become somebody else. And this I have no doubts about. And at the same time, it was about possibilities. And because of that, to be somebody else, but it was also about looking at what being different is going to give me, what kind of new possibilities. Being different also has big advantages, because it allows us to grasp new means. We may take advantage of this position, well, the position on the margins, which is not... not in the middle of what's going on, to look at it, to analyze it differently. So that's how feminism was born for me. It was born through experiences, through emigration, it was also born through the fact that in the 80's when I was... well, I was there once in 1979 and then as late as in the mid-80's, because it was the time of martial law<sup>1</sup> and later on relatively rigid restrictions and... and in the meantime, I had a daughter and... by the way, I was supposed to come to Poland with my daughter on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December [laughter], for Christmas, and this visit fell through, of course. So there was this feeling of being a Pole in the United States and it caused...

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<sup>1</sup>**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.

I mean a Pole... being a woman from Poland... it wasn't really about nationalist... no, not really, not this direction, but being... being from Poland, being a woman in the United States, but at the same time having family and friends in Poland brought about this feeling of being in-between. That I'm kind of there but there are links here, too, and this... this has remained with me. I am always... always... home is here and home is also there... that is home is in Poland, but home is also in the United States. And well, as a matter of fact, I need this flight over the ocean, this kind of space... something Homi Bhabha called this kind of third space, or in other words, the space in-between. I need it to change in some way... I mean not really change but to re-group, to leave some things and some issues behind, and depending which direction I'm flying, to start thinking about things and about the context and about what's going on, and what... what I'll be waiting for and doing and so forth. And I noticed this in a very conscious way that when I'm flying, for example, I read different newspaper depending on the direction, or what I start thinking about... or... well, definitely... these are... this is this kind of time of transition. But this... this is also a part of feminism. It is this... this kind of consciousness. This is the consciousness of who I am and what... what kind of an impact the environment has on me, what... what the priorities are, what's important and so forth, and that means this context, this awareness of the context in which I function, work, teach, and act is very important to me. And it was definitely growing with... let's say with the growing intensity of my actions, my involvement. So one thing is definitely in the area of personal experiences. I think that the second element that was very important to me was definitely getting a job at Rutgers and becoming something... which is really unique... And I had offers and options of leaving the university and relocating to another university. Because my husband works at UCLA, in Los Angeles, we've been traveling for 14 years. And this was the moment we could get out of that to live together somewhere, that means one of us could move to the other's university. And I had this offer, but I ended up staying at Rutgers. 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. And this gives me some incredible sense of power and maybe... also some lack of understanding of how the world works outside of this institution, because one gets used to things. And, of course, when we speak about having difficulties and others talk about their difficulties, these difficulties are very often quite different. Others say to us: Well, you have no idea what you have. And, of course, we have no idea, and, of course, we want more and better things. In other words, what shaped me was obviously the fact that there were... that there was this working together, since

after all I've been at Rutgers since 1982, and these 23 years of building things together, teaching together, and together bringing about the creation of the department. The department was created as late as 2000, and before that there was only the program. Well, at the same time, this year we're celebrating the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the moment when Elaine Showalter<sup>2</sup> first taught her course "Women and Literature" in 1969. So for the last 35 years, this institution has been working on creating, you know, this... this feminist context. And there are tensions, of course, and there are struggles, because feminisms vary, everybody has different visions about how to act, how to create this kind of lively interdisciplinary discourse, how to depart from individual disciplines. And here, in the department, with these 30 people, I collaborate with ten departments. I have connections, so it's with English and Political Science and Sociology and... I don't know, with Geography, with... with Spanish Lit and so on, and so on. So there are very many opportunities like this. But it's interesting, and it's very, very influential. In other words, it's about the people and the institutional context... an opportunity... some kind of trust and, you know, some kind of safety that I can speak about certain things, that I can teach certain things and it won't be used against me, that I'm not acting against... let's say... and that is often a problem in academic circles. On the one hand, you know, people are being expected to do certain things in order to get these different degrees, to get tenure, to get promoted. On the other hand... in other words, I'm supposed... people are supposed to be innovative, smart... to publish and so on. But if you're a feminist, building programs and so on... and of course we're doing a lot of things, which later on don't really translate into getting promoted, you know. So here is this conflict, this tension. Being a feminist in the academy is actually very difficult, because it requires extra strength, work and activism, because, on the one hand, we're keen on building and creating things and so on, but on the other hand, we have to respond to a certain promotion formula used in the academic community. And these two don't go together at all, so there is a strong tension here. Rutgers, however, gives some opportunities to lots and lots of people, and I don't want to say here that there are no problems, but it has created this kind of context, which is quite essential. So people... so, so institutions, well, well, are very important. The third thing is, of course, that if you're involved in ... when you have this sense... this sense of feminism, understanding and accepting certain values, well, it's obvious you need to carry it out practically. And here, this theory and practice is for me, for my version of feminism... since there are, of course, feminists who are only involved theoretically, but in my version of feminism, this practical activism is very, very important. So how do I link practice and theory? What am I getting out of theory and out of practice? And my approach here is... these are not two different things, but rather these are... it is some kind of a joint area... where while teaching... lecturing, I'm just using this feminist practice. At the same time, when I organize education workshops... or work for NGOs,<sup>3</sup> I draw on theory a lot, both consciously and unconsciously. I translate what I've read, most likely not even thinking I'm translating anything. For me, this opportunity for activism and the necessity of connecting the academic community... translating things into practice was very important. It started with me at the end of the 80's or rather during the 1980's, because at that time I had already tried arranging some formal contacts between Rutgers and the Warsaw University, for example. Because I'm a graduate of the Warsaw University, already in 1985 or 1986, I managed to arrange the first such contract. As a result, people started to come.

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<sup>2</sup> **Showalter, Elaine** (1941- ): feminist literary critic and Professor of English at Princeton University.

<sup>3</sup> **NGO**: Non-Governmental Organization.

Ania Titkow<sup>4</sup> came then and many other people. Magda Środa<sup>5</sup> came, and quite a few other female sociologists, as it happened, so it wasn't just lawyers [sic]<sup>6</sup>– Eleonora Zielińska<sup>7</sup>, Mirka Marody<sup>8</sup>, well, the whole group of them came to Rutgers then. So this was already some form of activism in a way. And then 1989 came and I really went into local democracy issues, into issues related to civic society. It was a conscious decision, since I was never too excited about parliaments and these other central institutions, but for me, this whole issue of democracy, or transformation, was to a large extent situated on the local level. I mean the local level of various activities, because at the beginning I got really involved in local government structures, and in general, in the reform toward decentralization, and this was my area of research and work and writing. What's interesting is that in spite of the fact that on the one hand, my feminism was really developing in the 80's, that period of transformation... its first years were very... Women's and feminist organizations had already begun developing, but I had some difficulties with introducing women's issues into these local government institutions. It was hard to talk about them, because local governments were strongly dominated by men. It was... there was a certain lack of awareness, both among men and women, but right away I did some research, for example, on mayors, city presidents, female mayors, well... or in other words with the female cadres in local governments. There were so few of these women that it was simply possible to interview all of them, to get their addresses and do it, and I still have these interviews. And it's such historic material. I wrote a few articles based on it, but I hold on to this material, because it's... I'll go back to it. I know I'll go back to it. And some of these interviews are fascinating. So this meant that I already had some material to work with and I could see, for example, what the barriers were and what the difficulties were. And later on, while organizing various education workshops for local government people, well, I was always trying to arrange for the same numbers of men and women, so that, you know, some standards were kept and people could be drawn in and taught. But there was this moment in 1992 or maybe in 1993 when I realized... We have... we had this kind of a program for activating local communities. It was organized by the Local Democracy Development Foundation,<sup>9</sup> which I helped create, and it was carried out in a few centers, and we had various groups and seminars there. It was this kind of a two-year program, financed by Pew Charitable Trusts,<sup>10</sup> and in a second or third seminar, I realized...

<sup>4</sup> **Titkow, Anna:** Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Leader of the Research on Women and Family Group. (Ania is diminutive for Anna.)

<sup>5</sup> **Środa, Magdalena:** Commissioner on the Status of Equality in Marek Belka's government. An ethicist and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw.

<sup>6</sup> Regulska most likely meant to say "sociologists" not "lawyers."

<sup>7</sup> **Zielińska, Eleonora** (1945- ): Professor of Law and Administration at the University of Warsaw. An expert on violence against women.

<sup>8</sup> **Marody, Mira:** Professor of social psychology at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw. Her areas of interest include theory of social behavior, theory of social representations, socio-linguistics, political-values studies, methodology of science.

<sup>9</sup> **Local Democracy Development Foundation:** (alternatively, The Foundation in Support of Local Democracy [trans.]) aims to disseminate the idea of civil self-governance, perceived as the fundamental form of democracy. Training is the main activity of its support of local self-governance. Aside from training in local self-governance, local leaders, councilors, representatives of local authorities and non-governmental organizations participate in a number of other programs such as study tours, seminars, and meetings in the effort to support local governance. [<http://www.wmd.org/wbdo/oct-nov02/capacity.html>]

<sup>10</sup> **Pew Charitable Trusts:** an independent nonprofit, which is the sole beneficiary of seven individual charitable funds established between 1948 and 1979 by two sons and two daughters of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph N. Pew and his wife, Mary Anderson Pew. It serves the public interest by providing information, advancing policy solutions and supporting civic life.

Even though since the very beginning the selection criteria were... we were taking... creating small groups and there were both women and men in these groups, so that if we're building something, we could also build this dialog between them. But I realized these women weren't there. The third meeting, the fourth meeting and I lost them. I'm going into the room and thinking: What's going on? I'm thinking... Is there something special going on today? Have we chosen some bad day, or what? They aren't there. No, well, they're not there; that's no good. So we're going on with the seminar, but right afterwards I say we have to do some kind of an intervention, we have to get back to these women who haven't come today and find out what happened, why these women aren't here, since I can see some of them aren't here and when I talk to them later, they're saying they've withdrawn, they won't... and so on and so forth. So we did these quick interviews with these women, and it turns out... here is "the mayor hasn't let me go," here is "my husband hasn't allowed me to go to the seminar," here is "I was so exhausted, so tired that I simply couldn't do it," and so on and so forth, or "the men from my group are treating me badly and I can't cope with this rudeness. Or, in other words, all these barriers I was fully aware of worked in such a way that we were beginning to lose these women. And this is a rather important moment for me in my activism when I said... and it may be interpreted as a certain radicalization of my feminism, but I said to myself: Enough is enough! If that's the case, I'm going to organize seminars just for women. Democracy is great but that's enough. I kept fund-raising, and I did get a lot of funds for the Local Democracy Development Foundation and all the actions... if that's the case, let's do... let's begin creating programs only... anyway, at least the ones I'll be involved in... and I don't have... I'm tired and life is short... I mean I have the strength but I'll do it differently in some way... I have no strength to haggle with... with these barriers and I may change that, but my method of changing these barriers will be, well, through empowering women. Because of this, we're organizing programs, which are definitely targeting women. And, well, with my collaborator Anne Graham<sup>11</sup>, we created a whole sequence of programs for activating women. And it was about some... about creating conditions to, first of all, make women think what they themselves want to do, what skills they have, and about supporting them psychologically, giving them certain tools, creating... Through such programs, some mechanisms are also created, which allow women to go back to their own communities and using this as some sort of a stepping-stone like... they can say something, they are, you know, elected, they're active in this program, they are... and this gives them an opportunity to get in and to ask questions. So we had this one exercise to kind of... so that they went and did this so-called inventory of town issues... or village issues. But the main goal was to make it possible for them to go and interview the mayor or the deputy mayor, or some specific local government staff, or business people and so on. What did... did this kind of an exercise give them? First of all, it gives them an opportunity to gain some knowledge. Second of all, it gives them an opportunity for personal networking, so they begin to be known in their local communities. That means that I stay away, I don't really have to deal with it, because I just gave them the idea and they had to carry it out. On their own, they mobilize people locally by their actions. They become visible. They try out what they can do. They had to prepare for it, and they did all the work! It was generally... I left and I was gone. But whatever they heard... and by the way, they were saying themselves that what was really important was the fact that it gave them an opportunity to gain some existence in this local space. And to gain some awareness. And, of course, the result was that this sense of empowerment and awareness also woke them up to

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<sup>11</sup> **Graham, Anne:** Member of the Center for Russian, Central and East European Studies at Rutgers University. In Poland, Graham organized workshops to involve women and citizens in local governments.

feminism. They hardly... as it usually happens, they hardly admit they're feminists, you know, because everybody is often afraid of this word "feminism" and this is another chapter of this conversation, but... but the result was that they, nonetheless, started acting, functioning... They would come back after this exercise, well, simply as if the new world had opened up before them. It was, first of all, because of what they found out there, and second of all, they got to understand how these local relations were working... like what some people tell them and others don't, and how they were being treated. So they gained some experience, experience they didn't have. So they felt more... visible and more... able, more capable of acting, and so on, and so on, and so on. So this is also this kind of... in part, creating feminism, very much from a distance and with the assumption that these women are really doing this on their own, and it doesn't matter what I'll do, or what other people will do.

**SW: That's right, but let's talk about how it was with you. You were also active in the feminist movement; you got involved in the Polish and American feminist organizations. Was this an important stage in your life? Was it...?**

JR: I mean... this involvement... involvement in various organizations... was gradual and it was at the same time... because together with these other programs it caused, of course... and here doing these programs... with women was later transformed into involvement in NGOs and activism. From 1993 to 1994, I was in Poland for a year when I was on sabbatical. At that point, I generally worked on public administration reform, since I was at Michał Kulesza's<sup>12</sup> office, in the Council of Ministers Office, so, for a year, I was exactly in the very center of some political changes. I had... had a General Marshall Fund scholarship, but at the same time, together with Grażyna Kopińska<sup>13</sup>, I created this informal women's group "Women, Too." And this was my moment of informal activism, but it was again a very formal connection between what I saw in these programs, this lack of women in the public sphere, in the political sphere... but it wasn't related to political parties, because I wasn't at all excited about parties... I'm not... I'm totally not interested. And creating this informal group "Women, Too" was great, well, a great experience. And it was also sort of an influential moment, of course. We just started meeting at my place, in Warsaw, and started organizing these monthly meetings. It was before the local elections, in the spring of 1994, and there was another wave of elections and we wanted as many women as possible, of course. So I organized these meetings. We created a whole series of materials... materials, and publications. We wrote a guidebook on how to win elections... how to win elections and how to run. I initiated contacts with the American organization... National Women's Political Caucus, which is a national... women's... this kind of organization like a political caucus, political organization, which in the States publishes these kinds of materials for female candidates running for office. We asked if we could use their materials, translated them and then made adjustments to Polish movements. There was little time, so writing everything from scratch... when some things had already been done, even though I always have some doubts, since things don't always work, but at this point it was like a short cut. So we took it, did a translation, and kicked out all the American stuff, since we saw it was written for Americans, and we were creating this Polish reality, since it's obviously a different culture and you can't run a campaign like in America, you can't... there are different rules and so on, and so forth. And, in

<sup>12</sup> **Kulesza, Michał:** Professor of Law and Administration at the University of Warsaw and the School of Business in Nowy Sacz.

<sup>13</sup> **Kopińska, Grażyna:** Director of the Program "Against Corruption" sponsored by the Batory Foundation.

addition, we wrote this whole... like a guidebook about local government. We were doing meetings, we were doing this kind of a local government emergency, and our girls were traveling all over Poland with these materials. We managed to get the money even though we were an informal group, from the Norwegian, Swedish, and Canadian Embassies. It was all foreign money, since at this point, there was no way we could get any Polish resources. But we did get the money and we were publishing these... these materials. We did some seminars for... because one thing is clear, of course, that the press is this force, which shapes our space... and stereotypes and so on in a very fundamental way. Because of this, we asked... we got in touch with *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*The Electoral Gazette*) and invited... and organized this two-day seminar for female journalists, for journalists from the local press, from these local “electoral gazettes.” Our point was to make them realize that when they’re looking at the candidates, when they’re looking for candidates, they should realize that there are women there as well, so let them promote women, let them ask questions, let them ask political candidates about what they would do for women, let them promote female candidates. And here we got together a lot of various male and female journalists. And again, there were seminars and materials again and again... because at this point, in 1994, journalists still needed to be educated about local government. So the situation was rather complicated, because on the one hand there were these women’s issues, but on the other hand, it was necessary to tell them about local governments, because they really didn’t understand... they didn’t quite know what kind of questions they should ask about local governments, since it was this early period. So... so we took... invite... asked some people for this seminar, for example. I remember Jacek Kuroń<sup>14</sup> speaking about citizenship, about the civil society, and Jerzy Regulski<sup>15</sup>, a former government official in charge of local government issues, spoke about local government structures. But there were also female activists, feminists, female leaders, so that these two groups could get... you know. And these were all super kinds of actions... Well, it was very... a bit... a bit... I won’t say that we’ve completely revolutionized the local government market and that we’ve had some tremendous achievements, but in this first stage... the flood of information certainly went out, things were certainly happening. This feminist group... or maybe not quite, you can’t really say that it... At the beginning there was perhaps more and later on, it might have changed a bit. But, but... because there were women there and there were feminists, too, and it was kind of more... Well, Grażyna Kopińska continued it as... as a co-founder, and this group has survived and it’s still there. They celebrated their tenth anniversary a year ago. And it is still an informal group. Later on, there were some spectacular actions, where these women also did books... did great... they did this campaign during parliamentary elections when they would ask questions of political parties, when they organiz... , when there were..., when they bought billboards and ads on street cars, and soon,

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<sup>14</sup> **Kuroń, Jacek** (1934-2004): a politician and political writer. A youth movement activist from 1954 to 1961 and a member of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR), he was expelled after publishing an open letter to the Party members. As a result of his opposition activities, he was imprisoned from 1964 to 1967 and 1968 to 1971. In 1976, he co-founded the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR). An advisor to the national leadership of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” in 1980-1981, he was interned and imprisoned in 1980 and in 1981-1984. In 1989, he was a co-architect of the Round Table agreements, which initiated the fall of the Polish People’s Republic. Since 1989, he was a deputy to the Sejm (Parliament). In 1989-1990 and 1992-1993, a Minister of Labor and Social Policy, he was a co-founder of the Democratic Union in 1990, and after its transformation, in 1994, became a member of the Freedom Union. He received unwavering popular respect and received a medal of the French Legion of Honor.

<sup>15</sup> **Regulski, Jerzy**: an expert in local government and professor of urban studies. One of the co-founders of the Foundation for the Development of Local Government.

and so on, and so on. It was a very big organization... various opportunities for activism. Well, and for me, it was a very short but very intense period of feminist activism, so to speak, in my own organization, and later on it was with other organizations. Of course, with Ośka<sup>16</sup>, we did a whole series of programs and we published a series of books, including a guide on how to be... on how to be active in public life, on how to be active in political life. At the same time, of course, I have this... this second life there, in America, and because of this, I live here and I live there, so of course, I was commuting back and forth, but the Network of East-West Women<sup>17</sup> was created and I too was in Dubrovnik, with Ann Snitow<sup>18</sup> and Sławka Walczewska<sup>19</sup> and with many other people, at this first organizing conference in Dubrovnik. And, well, I have remained with the Network<sup>20</sup>, getting involved with building this organization, in building this dialog over the ocean, in building various programs... in the board of directors, and later I was the chairwoman of the board. And that's how it was. I was active all this time, because this gave me an opportunity for extending a bridge between me in Poland and me [laughter] in the United States, of this fantastic bridge, actually a feminist bridge, so more and more, this is a group in which... this feminism of mine may develop, act and shape.

**SW: Yes, exactly. You were talking about these two homes: the Polish one and the American one. Could you possibly talk some more about the Polish home, since you've said that the migration experience was so significant in terms of your interest in women's issues, feminist issues, but it's not the case with all immigrants, female immigrants and female migrants. Do you remember anything here, in Poland, any situations, events, contacts with parents, friends, male and female friends from school, anything that caused the fact that these feminist ideas found a fertile soil in you? Could you tell us about something like this? Or, perhaps, there was nothing like this?**

JR: It's hard. I mean, there certainly were... there certainly were, there certainly were events, which... which did in some ways... because at home it wasn't like that... I always had a lot of support and... I never really fought with my parents... because they believed that I was kind of

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16 **Ośka**: the Information Center for Women's Groups is a non-profit, independent foundation, initiated in 1995, which supports women's organizations and initiatives, promotes women's participation in public and social life, and provides knowledge and information for all people interested in the situation of women and in feminism in Poland and in the world.

17 **Network of East-West Women**: founded in 1991 NEWW is an international communication and resource network supporting dialogue, informational exchange, and activism among those concerned about the status of women in Central and Eastern Europe, the Newly Independent States, and the Russian Federation. NEWW coordinates research and advocacy that supports women's equality and full participation in all aspects of public and private life. NEWW's overarching goal is to support the formation of independent women's movements and to strengthen the capacities of women and women's NGOs to influence policy regarding women's lives.

[<http://www.neww.org/en.php/home/index/0.html>]

18 **Snitow, Ann**: a feminist activist, literary critic, and essayist. Snitow teaches literature and gender studies at Eugene Lang College and the Graduate Faculty of the New School University. She is the chair of The Network of East-West Women.

19 **Walczewska, Sławka**: Director of the Women's Foundation eFKa in Cracow, Poland and Global Feminisms Poland Site Coordinator. Co-founder of the Green Party 2004 and author of *Ladies, Knights, and Feminists: Women's Discourse in Poland* (1999).

<sup>20</sup> The founding meeting of the **Network of East-West Women** took place in Dubrovnik in June of 1991. An international network of women and women's organizations in Central and Eastern Europe as well as countries of the former Soviet Union and the United States. It works to support the development, cooperation, and education of women. [<http://www.neww.org/en.php/home/index/0.html>]

independent and kind of maybe... radical in my views and in saying things and at the same time kind of saucy, since... I... I, well, I knew... knew what I wanted and so forth. But my parents never forced me to do anything, to do this or that, like playing the piano... No, I... I actually regret, for example, that I never learned how to play an instrument, but my parents... I didn't want to, so my parents didn't force me to do it. So I had a lot of freedom to act and to shape my own personality. I came up with the idea that I would major in physics, which later, when I was already a student in the Physics Department, turned out to be a completely senseless idea, because... because as a matter of fact, I wanted to study biophysics, but it was a long way and, in general, that wasn't it. Because of this, I came up with the idea of studying geography later on, because... this kind of social geography, geography of populations... something like this... I didn't know... I was looking for something. For example, if anthropology had been more developed, I would have most likely seen myself in anthropology rather than in geography, but I absolutely don't regret it, because it gave me... it gave me a lot. And later on, there was this... this new geography now, on the socio-political space and so on, so here... here, so to speak, I have found myself. But my home gave me this sense that... that I can do things... that I should; my parents always supported me. For example, this idea of going to England for... in the 1970's... I don't quite remember, most likely, it was my father's idea that it would actually be a good idea for me to go some place and work somewhere, to do something professionally. My parents believed, for example, that if I were to go and so on, it would make sense to develop professionally. And in 1973, I went to Great Britain for more than a year, for almost a year and a half, where I worked as an urban planner, because my field was geography of urban centers. And my father, who knew some British planners, came up with this thing... It turned out that urban planning seniors had this so-called internship in the City Hall, in the office... in the Urban Planning Department, and I jumped right into it, and it was a wonderful year! Mostly because I really learned a lot. There was this moment, for example, which was also important in shaping my awareness, when we were doing the so-called social planning and it wasn't about this rigid..., you know, sitting bent over a map and drawing, but we were going into the city and asking people about the borderlines of a given... given district, or a given... given local community, about how these borders were being shaped, and what they... what the problems were and so on, and so on. These were my first attempts of seeing this... this variety in people's identities, because Coventry, for example, in spite of its fundamental similarities to many Polish cities, since it was also bombed during the last war, and also had a very strong car industry, so there were these mosen... these elements. That is, it's strongly diversified ethnically and racially. And because of this, for me, it was a look at ethnic issues, at racial issues, at class issues, or in other words, a confrontation with a strong social stratification. And that was something... something never quite discussed here... something we never paid any attention to, you know, since we were all equal in all respects. And here was this confrontation. And it certainly made me sensitive, because I still remember it vividly at this very moment. I remember exactly the moment of standing there and asking people questions, and I remember the answers about how things were happening and, you know, this... this... this diversity. So this was also a shaping moment, very... very much so. And it was, so to speak, related to my home, because... you know.

**SW: But earlier, in Poland, among your family, relatives, in school or college – was there anything that would get you...?**

JR: Well... I'll tell you... kind of, no, no, no, I don't have such... such... The only... only element that definitely shaped me as a person, including also this issues of being different or having a different identity, was my health thing, because I had many surgeries. I was born with a bilateral congenital dislocation of the hip and I had ten surgeries. Actually, my whole childhood, elementary school and high school, was between hospitals and schools, one way or another. And this certainly shaped me as a fighter, a toughie, knowing that it was possible...because there were no limits, no, no obstacles; one simply has to figure out how to overcome these obstacles. So this definitely shaped me, and my parents, of course, played a major role here, because they didn't shape me to become a poor, sick person in need of care, who couldn't cope with things, and who was in some way handicapped and because of this couldn't do anything. They rather pushed it to the other extreme, and that is, well, it's hard, it is, but you need... it's normal and you need... you need to go forward, and you need to function, and you need to think about... about how to organize it the best way you can. And, as for... So again, my home shaped me as a person. Well, and there is no doubt that I was different and I am still different, because it's simply... it's physically clear that something is... that there is something wrong with me, or in other words, that I'm different... and this is the physical stigma related to some limitations. This, of course, also causes me... that I kind of have these layers of being different in my identity, the layers... that I'm different because... because I'm physically limited. Children at school are cruel, so they often reminded me about it, running after me and yelling that I was a duck or something like this. So there was this awareness, this sense of awareness that people are different and have different capabilities, but for me it was, again, not that I was in some way handicapped, but rather that I was different. I have different limitations and simply different capabilities than somebody else has. Therefore, for me, it's not the so-called "disability" but rather it's "ability," but a different level of ability. It definitely shaped me in some way. And, well, migration definitely shaped me, because here again I'm different, traveling back and forth. So here are these levels of being... being different. So here my home undoubtedly shaped me, too, maybe not in the clearly feminist discourse, but it shaped my identity in a conscious way by giving me these opportunities, by treating me this particular way, and by seeing me... not as just some future mother or head of the family or... or as some other... other, you know, label but rather by seeing me as a professional woman, a woman who has interests and skills she should develop. And also by giving me this opportunity or even..., for example,... and I remember it very well that my parents really wanted me to go abroad to work in my field and not to go and just work somewhere washing pots or...or...or dishes. It's not that I have anything against washing pots or dishes, since when I left for the United States, for the first six months I did the most diverse things and I did sewing piece work and so on, so it doesn't really matter, since all work is honorable. There is, however, a certain awareness, you know, about how they see my role and my position and who I'm supposed to be, and what kind of expectations they had for me, and how they were willing to use their experience or their contacts and so on to make it an easier start for me. And certainly, this trip to the States... to... to England, well, changed me very much, because... because it opened, you know, some completely new opportunities to see things. I learned a lot; again, it shaped my... my identity, my intuition, my perceptions and so on, and so on. So these elements, well, were somehow very influential. My home in America, on the other hand, is obviously the whole area of completely different experiences such as the experience of landing with two suitcases and twenty dollars, of having a boyfriend and later on having a daughter, and later I was a single mother. So I went through all these stages of development, marriages, divorces and so forth. It was very, very hard, and at the same time, I was working,

getting... doing my doctorate, getting a job. And later on, it was “let’s move, since I got a job,” and as a result of that, of course, there was a divorce and so on. So this was a very important period of shaping my professional position in the United States, but at the same time, there was a custody fight and courts. I remember this one moment, when I’m standing there and the other party’s lawyer is asking me: “So are you a professional woman? Do you work at the university?” “Yes, I work at the university.” “So, in order to get tenure, you have to write whatever many articles?” “Yes, I have to write articles.” And I still don’t understand where we’re going with this. Well, and suddenly, I begin to realize, because the next question is: “And how much time does it take you to write an article?” And I’m thinking to myself, well, this question is like... that whatever I’ll say now, the next question will be: If you have to write five articles, and it takes you, well... I don’t know, five months, let’s say, it means you have no time to take care of a child. And this was, of course, a custody fight about who will take care of the child. And... these were... this consciousness, and well, I was just standing there and had this sense of how hard it was. Here was this fight, here is you know... this thing... here is my professional life and whatever I’ll say will be used against me, and here is the child. Women who were supposed to come to court to testify... were afraid, I mean women from the day care or something like that, since they were needed, and the woman who came later was harassed by the other side in a terrible way. So this home, this early home was really making it very hard, because... this... this feminism of mine was at this point becoming more and more radical, because, after all, these were my rights, my future, my life, the life of my child, and so on, and so on. And later on, it was just a regular life and being a single mother for a few years, and that involved some strategic... undertaking some strategic decisions, you know, about... about how to shape things, how to build this new home and how... how... how to set things up financially, and so on, and so on. But it all allows you to pluck up some courage; this kind of an experience causes... these experiences are very important, because they allow different outlooks on things – I’m not claiming everybody should go through this – but they shape... again, they shape both your identity and your understanding... your looking at others and ... just some kind of an opportunity to see what matters.

**SW: So now, let me ask this typical reporter’s question, really a reporter’s question, but... but maybe... well, at any rate, I’m interested in what you’d say to your daughter. You have a daughter and you’re involved with feminism. What is a feminist message from you to your daughter?**

JR: Well, she learned feminism at home [laughter], and feminism was often discussed at the dinner table... She was learning that she should make her own decisions and that she should... have a feeling that she’s able... that she can do things. I remember, for example, when recently she told me: “You know, actually, after all these...,” because she had a very difficult relationship with her father, and it’s actually still rather complicated nowadays, but she said to me: “You know, I have this feeling that I can really cope with any situation.” And for me, no matter which direction she’ll follow, whether she’ll be a radical feminist or whether... And, actually, now I really don’t know... Last year, she got married, so she has a husband, and they’ve been traveling around the world for the last two years and... but there is that feeling... it’s possible to claim that she’s aware she’ll always be okay and that she... So, well, I think I’ve done a good job, since I must have given her something like that, either through my actions, or through talking, or through what she saw and did at home, but she did, well, inherit this. So this is very good. By the

way, she has this deep sense of social justice, a need to get involved in social issues. She's a professional photographer, she was a photography major in college and..., and when she was a student, she got involved locally with various ethnic groups, using art, working with children, and so on. So, this is... She... we kind of laugh together that I'm a more radical feminist than she, that here... She's simply laughing about it... when we talk, that I'm kind of more... But I know that some elements have been passed down to her and this... she's got feminism inside her, this sensitivity... this sensitivity toward the other... toward other groups, toward diversity, and so on, and so on, it's really there. So it's definitely there. I think she's politically radical, so that these elements have been passed down to her.

## JOANNA REGULSKA

- April 7, 1951** Born in Warsaw
- 1975** Graduated from the Geography Department of the Warsaw University
- 1973-74** Student internship in Great Britain
- 1976-82** Doctoral studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences
- 1980** Birth of a daughter, Anna Maria
- 1982** Employed by Rutgers University
- 1989** Co-founded the Local Democracy Development Foundation and the Program “Local Democracy Partnership” (early name “Local Democracy in Poland) in the U.S.
- 1992** Founder and director of the Center for Central and Eastern European Studies at Rutgers University
- 1993-94** Worked in the Ministry for the Public Administration Reform in Poland. Co-founded the group “Women Too.”
- 1996-98** Co-director of the “Gender and Culture Program” CEU in Budapest, Hungary.
- 2000** Director of the Women’s Studies Program at Rutgers University
- 1996 and 2004** Awarded important state medals in Poland

*Lives in the United States and Poland*