

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

SITE: POLAND

**Transcript of Barbara Labuda
Interviewer: Sławomira Walczewska**

**Location: Warszawa
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Barbara Labuda was born near Wrocław, Poland in 1949. She studied Romance languages in Poznań, Poland as well as Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, France. Labuda became active in anti-communist organizations in the 1970s for which she was imprisoned in 1982. In 1996, she began serving in President Aleksander Kwaśniewski's Cabinet. She admits that the anticommunist organizations with which she worked did not support women's rights for which she has actively and publicly criticized and chastised them, often to her political and personal disadvantage. 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.

Barbara Labuda
November 2003
Warszawa

Slawomira Walczewska: Could you say something about yourself, about... about your family, your closest environment? Did the environment you were raised in have a connection to your later involvement in human rights issues, in women's rights?

Barbara Labuda: I don't know if there is a connection, for one. We can never know whether there is a connection... Of course very many psychologists, both men and women, would notice a connection, but I don't know that. It could have had, it could not have had, but I don't know that, but of course I can say a couple of words about myself. I was born after the war, after the second World War, in 46.¹ I had four siblings, there were a lot of us at home, five people, and both parents. And... my mother was a very sincere, nice, warm person, but emotionally immature, that is she couldn't take care of and take responsibility for raising such a big group of children, particularly because things were very hard in Poland then money-wise. She really wanted to be a good mother, and she had many wonderful character traits, but she didn't always succeed at being a good mother. My father, in turn, was, one could say, a very difficult person. He was a doctor, so in Poland's case it was not... I mean, we weren't a poor family, but generally Poland was a poor country, so with that many children there were sometimes financial problems, just like in the case of most families in Poland. Our home was dominated by an atmosphere of great... discipline, or even intimidation because father was a very stern, incredibly stern person, and my mom wasn't able to cope with this. Did this have an impact on me later in life? Frankly speaking, I don't know. We could very easily say that it did, we could accept this version that it had a huge impact, because my mom was dominated by a man; she was a person who was not independent, but subordinated to him, above all else she was financially dependent on him, and perhaps also emotionally dependent. She would try to solve very difficult situations or play them out... in the so-called feminine way, that is by evasions, ruses, small deceits, and tricks while father was seemingly macho. One could say that it had an impact, but could have just as well not had an impact. I don't really know. It's hard for me to say what could've been, since perhaps some of these things are, it seems to me, too simple. I mean the warm, nice but not very mature mother, you know the stereotype, who can't control this situation and the domineering father, seemingly powerful, who was an alcoholic and, practically speaking, a house tyrant, intimidating the children, but, all in all, after the years, I got to understand that he was a weak man, pitiful, in a way. He was very intelligent, very talented, a great doctor with a soul of an artist, he had great, huge talents, he was musically talented, there was a lot of music at home, but the atmosphere was really heavy. I had a difficult, the so-called

¹ **1946 Referendum:** On June 30, 1946, a popular referendum was carried out in order to check the public opinion and support levels for the opposition parties. It was also intended as a litmus test for organizational effectiveness of parties gathered around the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). After publishing the referendum legislation and the content of questions, which did not include anything truly controversial for the governing parties, PPR and its allies began a period of intensified propaganda. Treating the referendum as a form of plebiscite, the main opposition force, Polish Peasant Party (PSL), as well as the internally divided Labor Party (Stronnictwo Pracy) rallied for expressing authentic views of the society. Underground groups, participating in the referendum to manifest their negative attitudes toward communist rule, did not formulate any unified voting strategy. Some underground groups appealed for boycotting the referendum. PPR and its satellites, on the other hand, were leaders in active campaigning, taking advantage of all available means, both legal and illegal, to openly attack the opposition, whose activists were undergoing mass arrests, harassment, beatings and even assassinations. The referendum results were announced as late as July 12. According to official reports, the turnout was 85.3% of eligible voters. The opposition as well as the majority of the population considered the results to be forged; true results, however, proved impossible to determine.

difficult childhood. I came from a discordant, unharmonious family, where there was a lot of this damaged love. That's how I can describe it.

SW. Did you get involved in any public activity during your school years, for example, or in college?

BL. Very early. I'd get involved in these community-related issues as early as in elementary school and in high school. I was always elected a chair of something or other, of a class or of some other group, or I would organize some clubs myself. But I remember both elementary school and high school as very difficult, as something... as a difficult experience, hard and difficult, traumatic; I recall a lot different conflicts.

SW. Because it was a school in the previous system?²

BL. It was a school... a school like army barracks, every time. These days, when I'm personally involved in school curricula work for children, I can see in what kinds of great schools these young people can learn, and I really envy them. In these wonderful... where you can really learn a lot, in a manner having nothing to do with fear. And in my life, almost all of it, there was a lot of fear. There were many nasty, unpleasant things for years and years. And of course, when I later learned about Eastern philosophy, the mysticism of the East, and I really got interested in it and I've been interested in it for many years now, it seems to me that I understand why it was happening, why I perhaps attracted such situations, where there are a lot of conflicts, a lot of tension, a lot of struggle, a lot of stress, and a lot of fear for somebody, or from something, from some situations, or from some people, situations which I have had to cope with and face. And this was the case both with my father, from whom I often had to protect younger siblings physically when he was simply beating up on them, or abusing them, and later on when I was older, and I was in similar circumstances in school...

SW. You were the oldest in...

BL. It's also important to me that... not to see my parents and all these different people who took care of us as evil to the core, absolutely not. And that's exactly what the whole tragedy of that situation was all about, and most likely still continues to be about that. And perhaps that's why, possibly, I choose social issues, and I get interested in how to improve people's lives, particularly those of children, how to make them happier, how to make them feel safer, because I've come to know life in fear. But I know perfectly well that every time, all these people, whether my father or mother, or my teachers, or other guardians, even if they didn't know how to care for us, they really wanted to, they tried very hard; it's only that they didn't know how, they simply were not capable of taking good care of little creatures.

SW. You were the oldest... of four siblings, right? Were you the oldest of all your siblings?

BL. No, I was the second oldest.

² The education system in communist Poland—the PRL (Polish People's Republic)—included mandatory schooling (8 grade levels) for children from 7 to 15 years of age. The next level was general high school (lyceum), technical high school or vocational school, after which it was possible to transfer to a technical high school. The educational system ended with passing of the final exams (matura or efit exams), which opened up a route to college.

SW. And you had an older sister or brother...

BL. I had an older sister, whom you've met, an older sister who was older than the rest of us but she was... I love her dearly to this day. As you can see, we have a great relationship, and there are great contacts and relationships among all of our siblings, and we love each other. But she didn't know how to take care of us. So, I took on a role... for my younger siblings. A caretaker of my younger siblings.

SW. You said that times were hard, that the family had financial difficulties, but you started college. Was...?

BL. Yes, financially it was hard, as it was hard for 98% of Poles, but in comparison to a lot of others, I had it easier, because I came from a so-called intelligentsia family, where father, as a doctor, made quite a decent living, and my mother also worked for a while; she was a manager of something or another. Yes, of course, there was college; I got to go to college, because I couldn't imagine life without a higher education.

SW. But why exactly the French Department?

BL. I think there were a few reasons. At this point it's hard for me to remember exactly why, as an eighteen or nineteen year old girl or seventeen-year-old girl, I chose French then. Probably for a few reasons, but I suppose that the main was the fact that studying western languages, or other such areas, meant some way out of the country, some travel possibilities from the closed country. In a communist country, where a passport, my passport, wasn't sitting somewhere in my desk drawer, like in a normal free country, like in Poland today, but somewhere at the police station, and I mean the political police, there always had to be some justification to be allowed to leave the country, to go, to see things, to get to know other people, other cultures, other languages. So, to me, it was always associated with an opportunity to travel, to see things, to get to know things, to leave, associated with freedom, to put it shortly. It was associated with freedom and with learning something new outside of the country, the country that to me seemed gray, sad, and poor, and a little bit like my home, a bit stifled, kind of, a bit frightened. And this really was the case, because when I left Poland for the first time and went to Paris, it seemed to me an oasis of freedom, a completely different country, where people would often laugh in the street, were happy, and did what they wanted. I even remember small details, like when I would come to a café in Paris, in nineteen sixty..., I don't remember eight, I don't remember maybe in nine when I left Poland for the first time, there was this little fact that people would sit down at a table in the middle of the room. It was amazing to me, because in Poland, people would always sit down at the sidelines, somewhere on the side, in a corner. There was a lot of behavior that I found shocking. People weren't afraid to sit down in front rows in college; nobody would hide in the back, but students... And I started college there. We liked sitting close to our professors, to the teachers, because they were nice, likable and warm people, who wanted to share their knowledge with us, and not some castrators who would just... as I became used to in Poland, check attendance and enforce, almost with a whip, learning something, often quite useless.

SW. So college in Poland was like a kind of elementary school or high school, would you say?

BL. Some classes were very good, on a good level, and I met very intelligent, competent people, but almost all of these people, these professors I had, were also, in a way, victims of the system. I mean that people were very distrustful and fearful, and it came up in a variety of ways, in such little things, for example, as the fact that they very rarely smiled. They didn't know how to show emotions, didn't want to, or were afraid to, so that classes were always like... I don't know, like some paramilitary

camp, or something. And I remember it quite well, since after I came back from France, after a few years there and after going to college there and such, I started working at the university myself, as a teacher, as an assistant professor.

SW. And what year was that?

BL. In '74. And I introduced... this... practice, this practice which didn't exist in Poland at the time, but which was common in France and which I liked there; that is I got rid of what you'd call typical rows of desks, you know, like... that there is a lecturer, and students sit in rows, and the lecturer comes in, almost with the sound of the bell, checks attendance, says his stuff, then good-bye, thank you, or quizzes people, and leaves. And I introduced... First of all, I didn't check attendance. I just said that I wasn't interested in attendance but in what they knew, so I didn't take attendance at all, which was a great shock to both the students and to some of my colleagues, who believed that by this I was undermining them for checking attendance, which was then mandatory in college classes in Poland. Second of all, I got rid of rows of desks. I mean I arranged them into a square, you know, rows arranged into a square, I made a square out of desks, and we all would sit together. And during class time, we would select a person to take charge of class, who was responsible for preparing the next class, which meant that she had to do a lot of reading, studying and consulting with me, and then we would teach the class together. Later, I introduced the idea of leaving the college walls, mostly because to me they were too much like military barracks, and we would have class in a park or in some café. Or I believed it was worthwhile to take them... and I taught a class in mass culture then, so I would go with them some place where I could show them something, look at comics, think about them, or go to the movies together and discuss the issues. I taught classes in the French Department and in the Polish Studies Department, and I was trying to introduce this slightly different style. And, above all else, I introduced a habit, which was then quite revolutionary, and I think it may still be in Poland and in many other countries. I mean, in our countries, where turning to another person is formulated differently, in terms of language, linguistically, it is shocking... since I introduced the habit of addressing each other by first names. In English it's simpler, because you simply say "ty/you," right, but not in Polish, where there is a very strict division between "ty," meaning "you" and "Pan/Pani." I got rid of this, and I was on a first-name basis with my students. After a while, I realized that it was so far from what they were used to that they were trying to take advantage of it, not understanding that there was a difference between this type of informal relationship and taking advantage of it. So, that was something they needed to mature to. But, in any case, we addressed each other on a first name basis. And, by the way, the age difference between us wasn't that big. So that's what I did, and I kept it up for very many years. It was also reinforced in the social tradition later introduced by Solidarity,³ that is in our trade union, our rebellious, anticommunist union, where everybody used first names. This tradition seemed to me... Later, there was the underground, and when I was in the underground... and later, it was like that in prison, too. I also brought this tradition here, where I'm at now, to the President's Office, where at the beginning... now I admit I've changed that, but for the first few years I

³ **Solidarity: Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" ("Solidarność"), NSZZ "Solidarity"** came into being in August and September 1980 with a wave of social discontent about the deteriorating economic situation and the methods of governing the country used by the communist authorities. In the latter half of 1980, workers' protests took up a form of strikes, at the beginning in small industrial centers and later in bigger cities. The climactic point happened in the Sea Coast region, with the occupation strike organized in the Gdańsk Shipyard on August 13, 1980. The majority of enterprises from Gdańsk and the Sea Coast region joined in and organized solidarity strikes, including the Szczecin Shipyard. The strike was also joined by the Coal Mine in Jastrzębie. On September 17, 1980, at the meeting of strike committees' and founding committees' representatives in Gdansk, NSZZ "Solidarity" was constituted, and the delegates also elected the National Coordinating Commission with its chairman Lech Wałęsa. At the moment of registration, the Union had approximately 10 million members (80% of all employed).

was on a first-name basis with all my co-workers, even though some people criticized this and believed it was too much like fraternizing in an institution that is, by definition, rather hierarchical, not to mention other more rational reasons for it. I'm talking about it, without resolving whether it's good or bad; I'm only explaining my needs then, and how long they survived. I mean the need for closeness with people, the need to talk to them, this freedom-and-equality need. I have no idea how somebody will manage to translate this... this kind of egalitarianism, exchange, sharing things with people, treating the fact that I was a professor as some sort of public service, as the Buddhists or Hindus would say service, serving, and that is, among other things, sharing and not speaking *ex cathedra*⁴, not dividing people into lower-rank students and higher-rank professors. I have never done that.

SW. And when you went to France for the first time, and to the West for the first time, it wasn't just any year. 68, 69, was, after all, the year of the student revolt, so you ended up in the very epicenter of a volcano.

BL. Of course. Yes, exactly. It was fantastic. That was, among other things, the reason I went, because I felt so passionate about this. Of course, I had known a lot about this thing earlier, through friends, since some friendships had already started, because of the fact that some French people would sometimes come to Poland. It was very... really, awfully rare, wouldn't usually work, really, the iron curtain, and Poland was a closed country, but I was somehow able to meet foreigners, in a variety of ways, and they were really very exotic to me. And, above other things, in Poland, in March and that was before May, the famous Paris, or French May 68⁵, there was the Polish March of 68,⁶ in which I was a very active, lively participant. Studying then at the Poznan University, I was one of the leaders of the student revolt then. I had some problems because of that; I was supposed to be expelled from the University, but luckily I got off somehow, etc., etc. So I was already experienced, so to speak, in anti-communist and student revolt in Poland. I somehow managed to leave for France for two months through, I don't know, some kind of a miracle, since it was terribly difficult to leave. It was right in '68, maybe in '69, I don't know, but, at any rate, in France, I was lucky enough to fall right into the arms of students of the Sorbonne⁷, which had by that time already split up into thirteen universities, and make friends with them. These friendships, by the way, have lasted till today, and they're very strong. One of my friends whom I met at that time was a lefty, just as I had become a lefty-a "gaucheist."⁸ In the meantime, our views have evolved, of course, and he's a social-democrat now, but he fell in love with Poland so much that, thanks to us, my husband, me and our friends, Polish men and women, for years and years, he has been interested in Poland, was helping Poland a lot, was helping Solidarity a lot, was helping the Solidarity underground, to the extent that he became a chairman of the Polish-French Association.

⁴ **Ex cathedra**: Latin for "from the throne."

⁵ **French May 1968** (usually referred to as **May '68**): marked by general strikes at universities across France. It all began as a series of student strikes that broke out at universities and high schools in Paris. It was followed by a general strike by students and strikes throughout France by ten million French workers, roughly two-thirds of the French workforce.

⁶ **The March events 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.

⁷ **Sorbonne**: commonly refers to the University of Paris or one of its successor institutions.

⁸ French for "left."

SW. And then, when you ended up in France during this period of a huge explosion, of the student revolt, did you perhaps have any contact with women who participated in it, with these spiritual daughters of Simone de Beauvoir?

BL. [laughs] With the daughters, yes, and I actually even met her. That was when I went to France for a longer period of time, not just for summer vacation, a month or two, but for four years. I chose for my studies one of these thirteen Sorbonne universities, a very leftist university, not communist but Gaucheist,⁹ that's how it was viewed, and still is actually, even though a lot has changed there, but it's still being remembered in France as left leaning. Every time I'm in France, I always try to stop by and see what's going on in my department, in these buildings of mine, quote-unquote. And this was Paris *Sept*, Paris Seven,¹⁰ in Soursieu, that's where the university was, and it was absolutely dominated by lefties of all kinds. It's amazing that I ended up there. I also got to know French workers there, which was very interesting, because in Poland I didn't really know workers. I mean I knew there were factories somewhere and some workers worked in them, but I was from an intelligentsia family, and I was dug deep in typical intelligentsia circles, academic in particular while there, in France, I had contacts with people from various social circles, including those from this real lumpenproletariat, real proletariat, people who were workers, generation after generation. Feminist circles, on the other hand, were dominated by people... sociologically speaking, they were mostly from the intelligentsia, intellectuals for the most part, from various universities, or actresses, or artists in general. This way, I started being active in a feminist group, which was called Psychoanalysis and Politics. I was really interested in psychoanalysis then, incredibly interested, so I was in this group. We even wrote some little brochure; my input in writing this brochure was not big and mostly through discussions, but it got written, I had it, and later on, it disappeared, most likely later, in some house search during martial law.¹¹

SW. That's too bad, really.

⁹ Leftist.

¹⁰ Paris is divided into a numbered system of twenty districts or *arrondissements*.

¹¹ **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.

BL. And that's where the name Simone de Beauvoir appears, and those of other women, and mine, too. Among these co-authors.

SW. And do you remember, perhaps, more or less, what was in that brochure, what found its way there? In general, what were the most important topics in your group?

BL. Oh, a whole multitude of various... a multitude of various, various topics, starting with those huge, I could say, strategic topics, such as peace in the world, how the world is ruled, what the goals are that are followed by the human race, to various major social problems. This huge concern of ours, really, was what brought us together, and not just the fact that women were discriminated against everywhere, which was obvious to us. Nobody had to convince us of that. We got together, so to speak, because we believed that. We were discussing discrimination, how to get rid of it, how to change it, and particularly in France, there was a lot that needed change. It was much worse than in Poland at the time when it came to that. I know that nowadays people don't remember that, but in France, even many years after the second World War, actually till '68 or '70, but at any rate, certainly till the events that happened in may '68, which ploughed through... which changed France, this bourgeois France, a lot, really a lot, and not just French universities but social norms, mentality, institutions, laws and so on; it really changed it a lot. These were the incredible, healthy fruits of this '68 revolt, this revolt in politics, social mores, and social issues. For example, in France then, for a long time, they had a law... I don't remember till what year, and I don't want to lie about it, but probably till '69, or '70, or even later than that, they had a law, which made it hard for a woman to have her own bank account.

SW. And what about...

BL. Very often, women had to get approval from a husband or a father... or a father to do something independently. It's simply incredible but that's how it was. It was incredible for Polish women, because it wasn't like that in Poland. But, on the other hand, there weren't that many banks in Poland, so one couldn't really have that many bank accounts anyway, but this was for other reasons; it was simply a poor country, so bank accounts would immediately look suspicious... But some things there in France were shocking to me, because in Poland the norms were different, and the mores were more pro... the norms were more egalitarian. In France, there was the rule that men talked, and women sat in the kitchen, or in the drawing room, and chatted about crocheting and mostly exchanged food recipes. It wasn't like this in Poland, right? Wouldn't you agree with me? In my house, for instance, my husband would cook one hundred times better than I did. I didn't like cooking; I have no culinary imagination. I don't think there is anything wrong with cooking, obviously, but for a lot of reasons, I'm not crazy about it. Perhaps in my subconscious, there is some conviction that cooking would push a woman into the kitchen, and maybe I didn't want to be pushed into the kitchen. It doesn't matter, but I'm not crazy about cooking while my husband loved it and my son, too, by the way, and to this day, they do it one hundred times better than I do. So I was never into it; they would do the shopping, they would cook, they would make me tea, etc. But let's say that this is quite exceptional even in Poland, but in France it was completely, completely... I simply never saw... almost nowhere, except in leftist circles, I never saw women not removed, not pushed to the sidelines, into this drawing room, or another room, or the kitchen. It was a rule that men would talk about politics, about huge strategy goals for their country, for the world, and they, the women, would go on about these food recipes. So in these feminist circles, it was obviously very different; their rebellion was even stronger, because the more stifled you are, the more violent the rebellion.

SW. And was abortion law also a topic of your meetings?

BL. Of course, and the abortion law... Just as I came to France, it happened to be at the moment when there was this initiative... I don't remember what it was called; there was this antiabortion [sic.] initiative, this written appeal by very famous women, intellectuals and artists, who came out in favor of a liberal antiabortion law [sic.], abortion law I mean, because in Polish, well, you know what I mean... because abortion was punishable by law in France then. So they said, "Let's admit to having one"; whether it was true, or not, I don't know, and I don't think anybody cared, except for the tabloids. They'd say, "I admit I had an abortion," which meant, "You're welcome to lock me up." And it was clear that this bourgeois state, or as we'd say repressive, police state, would not lock up a famous actress, or some great, eminent, famous lawyer, since Gisele Alienie [sic] was there, among others, a very well-known, very eminent lawyer, who's been taking on the hardest cases to this day, who has successfully defended and still defends a lot of women who have been charged in court for purely... you know discrimination or for reasons of morality. So it was clear that they wouldn't be locked up. And this thing, this appeal happened, in turn... the catalyst for it was the fact that some modest woman, a worker I think, was to be locked up for having an abortion. And this appeal, this solidarity by these women from circles other than the quote unquote, working class, caused the laws to be changed. France got... I don't remember whether it was right after that, but it was relatively soon after these initiatives, after this appeal, which dominoed into more and more and more initiatives, including various actions at universities, and in the streets till it reached the Parliament and was changed, but it must have been soon, because since as early as nineteen-seventy-some, France has had a liberal abortion law.

SW. It must have been surprising to you that in that country, with all of its freedoms, there was a restrictive law, restrictive law relating to motherhood...

BL. Well, yes...

SW. ...it wasn't the case in Poland then...

BL. Well, yes, but remember that this freedom has different faces. This is what I was learning there, that you come to a country, where you have your passport at home, that is to France, where you can move freely around France, or around other countries of Western Europe, but at the same time there is a law so different than ours. We had a law that was liberal then, and theirs was restrictive. I was learning about social norms of the West then, that this freedom can assume different faces. For them it was surprising, too, that, you know... in a police state like ours you could have an abortion anytime. Which was the case, in fact.

SW. When you came back to Poland in '74, you started working at the university and soon after that you got involved in opposition work, right?

BL. Yes. Actually my opposition work started already in France, in anti-communist opposition. It started in France, right away, because, among other things, work in these groups with which I was close, leftist groups, was anti-communist. They were all strongly anti-communist, very anti-totalitarian, yes, you could say that they were more than anti-communist; they were anti-totalitarian and very willing to help anti-totalitarian movements here, which at that point didn't really exist. There were no movements but there were little ferments, tiny, little rebellious groups. Poland was at that point already

after the famous letter by Jacek Kuroń¹² and Karol Modzelewski¹³ directed against the communist party. Later on, they were locked up in jail for this letter, and in the letter itself they appealed for some liberalization of policy. So little, and so much! And they got a three- and a three-and-a-half-year sentences; one got three years and the other three and a half years for the same letter, by the way, and later more sentences, and more jail time, so then the post-'68 opposition was already starting to emerge, a bit more organized, you know. I came back to Poland when there was no KOR¹⁴ [Committee for the Defense of Workers] yet. KOR didn't exist yet, since it was created a year and a half later, but the ferment was already there; there were people who wouldn't hide their anti-communism. And I quickly got close to these people, to Karol Modzelewski, to our friends in Poland, from Wroclaw, from Warsaw, to Adam Michnik¹⁵ with the whole group, which later became KOR. And later, there was KOR, the Committee for the Defense of Workers, which was an illegal, I mean acting legally, not in hiding, but, according to the authorities, an illegal little organization, so to speak, an aid group for workers. At the time when there were repressions in Poland, when repressions started, one more wave of repressions targeting the workers, there emerged a group, made up of intellectuals and members of the Polish intelligentsia, who... We simply helped, raised funds, got people out of prison, looked for legal aid, etc. etc. It was very difficult in Poland then, because people were obviously incredibly afraid. I don't know if I should go into detail here.

SW. No, don't go into detail. But I'm still curious how you felt then, after you had worked in this all-women's group. Since in these leftist, or lefty, circles in which you moved, and about which you're speaking so warmly, there were these women's, I mean all-women's groups, didn't it seem interesting to you, just for your own interest, to try and transfer this style of work into the underground? I mean, was creating similar women's structures, women's groups... did it make sense at all in the Polish situation? Didn't it seem to you that it could have been attractive in a way? Didn't you feel that work was different somehow in these all-women's groups than in coeducational groups?

¹² **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.

¹³ **Modzelewski, Karol**: historian and member of the anti-communist opposition. Initially a PZPR member, he was expelled from the Party in 1964 and sentenced to 3 years in prison for co-authoring *The Open Letter to the PZPR Members*, together with Jacek Kuroń. In March 1968, he was accused of instigating student protests and imprisoned again. After "Solidarity" was created, in 1980-1981, he was a press spokesman for the National Coordinating Committee. Interned during martial law, he was freed in 1984. In 1989-1991, he was a Senator, and since 1991 an honorary chairman of the Labor Party.

¹⁴ **The Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR)**: a public social opposition group founded in 1976, joined by many democratic opposition members and intellectuals. The main goal of KOR was to offer financial and legal support to the persecuted participants of the worker protests in June 1976.

¹⁵ **Michnik, Adam**: historian, political activist, and political writer. In 1968-1969, he was imprisoned for participating in the student protests of March 1968. Since 1977, a member of the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR), in 1978, he became a lecturer at the Academic Courses Association (TKN). He was interned in 1981-1982 and imprisoned in 1984-1986. He participated in the Round Table negotiations (1989), which contributed to the fall of the Polish People's Republic. Since 1989 an editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Electoral Gazette*). He has received numerous awards, including Prix de la Liberte of the French PEN Club (1982), A. Kijowski Award (1985), R.F. Kennedy Human Rights Award (1986), European Journalist Association Award (1995), the Award for Journalism and Democracy from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), IPI Press World Freedom Hero (2000), and the Erasmus Award for 2001.

BL. You know, first of all, when I came back from France to Poland, they almost all seemed to me... and I mean including all the people who were active in this anti-totalitarian movement, they seemed incredibly conservative to me. And I loved them like a family, or I loved my family like I loved them, it doesn't matter which. They were simply the people to whom I was strongly attached. There was this great warmth among us, and we gave each other a lot of support. That's what it was like emotionally that there was a lot of devotion and a lot of warmth. On the other hand, very often, I had different views on a lot of issues, different from those held by the people, who are now very famous in Poland but were yet unknown then. These were views about social norms, and particularly about feminist issues. I had a lot of disputes with such people as Adam Michnik, as Staszek Baranczak,¹⁶ who now lives in the United States and is an important professor, teaching at... Princeton, I don't remember exactly. And they believed I was... I'll give you an example of how it was, and it was symptomatic for my state of mind then, and theirs, too. They believed that I was a wonderful person, but with some loose marbles, with one little screw loose, one little deviation, this feminism. And they often teased me because of that. There often wasn't any malice in it, but they teased me nonetheless. This shows you that if even in such open circles, where people protested against repression by the authorities, but they also gave permission to be repressive, since repression did exist in parts of society, the reaction was so strong, from ridicule to sarcasm to real serious criticism, sometimes quite vicious, of my attitudes and views, it means that these people were impregnated with this kind of outlook to a really large extent. And this together with the lack of understanding for the issue of equality between men and women, of discrimination... They didn't see that not because they were bad people, or stupid, but because it was completely beyond the sphere of their interests. Everybody watching this will perhaps know this by heart, because that's how it is everywhere. In every country, there is some unique element, we know that perfectly well, but... It's a problem that's been described and analyzed thousands of times, etc., why there are still various people behaving like this, enlightened, open people, it would seem. Of course, this anti-totalitarian group had something like that, too, that's one thing, but... of course, there were discussions about this, but it was neither a priority nor an issue planned for, but rather unimportant in my male colleagues' view, and sometimes also in mine. But the difference between us was that I was often terribly furious about it. Even today, I can see how much of my energy went to these issues. Nowadays, I would probably act differently, but then I fought against everything, including such automatic behaviors that have by now become anecdotal, like, you know, "We need to talk about this here, and you, Basia,¹⁷ could you bring us some tea?" It may seem funny, and it was amusing and really no big deal, but that's just how it started but it went further, and when there was something more serious, they'd deal with it among themselves. Or the fact that undertaking the issue, I mean intellectually and conceptually, undertaking the issue of equality for women, sex equality, was not even in the picture. Also, we need to remember that these types of issues were really very often undertaken by the official, state-controlled journalism. I don't want to sugarcoat PRL¹⁸ [the Polish People's Republic], but that really was the case, so these issues were often associated with the official PRL propaganda, with this pseudo-equal perception of male and female issues, where both were prisoners of the communist system. But I believe that today we can certainly say that... with today's distanced perspective to what happened, you know with this good, healthy distance to what happened, to the totalitarian, communist system in Poland... With all the criticism of that system, I nonetheless

¹⁶ **Barańczak, Stanisław**: poet, literary critic, literary theory specialist, translator. Faculty member at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, he later became a professor at Harvard University in the United States. In 1976, he co-founded the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) and became co-editor-in-chief of the underground publication *Zapis* (*The Record*). Since 1981, he has lived in the U.S.

¹⁷ **Basia**: a diminutive for Barbara.

¹⁸ **The Polish People's Republic (PRL)**: official name of communist Poland from 1952 to 1989.

believe that it did something, that it caused the women's issues, and the status of women, to be noticed and discussed, that social norms changed in Poland. And the situation of women in the Polish People's Republic, in my view, was decisively better than in France of the 60s and 70s. You may not agree with me, but I believe that's how it was, and I'm ready to defend it in every court...

SW. I just wanted to ask... No, no, I just wanted to go back to... no, no, God forbid, I'm not going to dispute that. I'd like to go back to this tea story. I laughed not because I believe it's funny...

BL. I know, I know... it's awful...

SW. ...I think it's awful, this direct method of eliminating your opponent, "Basia, go and make some tea." This way, Basia is gone... the most literal kind of marginalization...

BL. Yes, yes, yes, for one... and...

SW. ...she's not there, for example, when a decision is made...

BL. Yes. I'm talking too much... I don't know how this video tape works... because it'll be a lot of work for you later... it'll be too much work for you later... The second problem, which was, in my opinion, harder to solve, to overcome and to undertake was the fact that in these anti-totalitarian circles, this problem was outside of the realm of interest also for women, even more than it was for men. Perhaps they thought that if they undertook the issue, talked about it, it would put them into an even harder position than if they hadn't done it, I mean in relation to their group, where we'd speak about freedom for the workers, where we'd speak about how to change the communist system, which had been repressing us, without violence, and so on. Because that's what our thinking was like, based on the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi's movement, since we didn't want to use weapons, or kill anybody, and yet we wanted to change Poland and its political system...

SW. But that means that...

BL. I don't know a single... I can't remember... and I wouldn't want to be unfair to anybody, but I can't remember a single female acquaintance, or a friend from that period of time who would have been interested in this issue. Yes, it did happen, yes, when they happened to have problems with their partners or husbands, they would come to me for help, yes, but... I mean various kinds of help, psychological, legal, or something. Of course, I sometimes discussed this issue with my friends, and particularly with my university friends, you know. I don't know... perhaps I helped open somebody's eyes to this. I hope so, because it was the issue I was really interested in, obsessively so, as many of them claimed, obsessively because everything would get on my nerves then, upset me. I mean, for example, the fact that my female colleagues didn't want to run for office even within this minimum level of democracy that was available at universities. And, in comparison to other institutions, universities then, in the 70s, or the 80s, in Poland, were these oases of freedom. And at various levels, it was possible to run for office freely, and be elected, and generally there was no cheating. But women regularly refused to run, for one thing, and second of all, they would regularly vote for their male colleagues. I talked to them about this many times, and, frankly speaking, quite recently, a female friend of mine, who is a Provost at a university today, reminded me of our conversation, our discussion, when as early as twenty five years ago, I was trying to persuade her to run for the Dean's Council as a representative of young Assistant Professors, because I believed she would be great in that position. And she would tell me "no", I won't do it because our male friend, some John Doe guy...

who was simply hopeless, had no leadership skills, was not a good organizer, wasn't able to formulate his thoughts well, was very imprecise, wasn't a good listener, so he had all the qualities, which should disqualify him as a representative of employees' interests. And she had all the right qualities, and I believe I had them, too. And she didn't want to become a candidate. And I was already involved in the opposition at the time, so there was no chance for me to be elected, because it was known that I was active in the opposition and that the security cops were after me, interrogating, harassing... Anyway, people were sometimes afraid to talk to me, to meet with me, and it was obvious that a person like that stood no chance of winning a college election, and besides I was already active in trade unions.

SW. Does that mean that...

BL. You know, limited as they were, but I thought I wanted to help people and I was active in the trade unions at our university. I was helping people in taking care of some social issues...

SW. Did you already know at that time that, did you talk to other women about it, that men simply, you know guys, were willing to place themselves at the top, and that it was hard for a woman to get to the top? Was it at this point a topic of some backstage discussions?

BL. Well, yes. Of course it was. I've already mentioned that it was; since I was trying to persuade them to run for office if they were qualified to do so, then it was an issue we discussed. My male colleagues were often good bosses or leaders, but women... I don't know what kind of bosses or leaders they would have made; I don't know this, because they never wanted to run; they would not give themselves that opportunity, you know...

SW. Certainly this topic of a double burden was also...

BL. I, in turn, was with the opposition, where there was no need to run, and nobody would elect you, and nobody would nominate you... nominate you, but you'd choose this path yourself, and it was a very difficult path. But there were a lot of women there; in this anti-totalitarian movement, there were a lot of women, but even there, it'd be the same every time. I don't know... When there were some interviews for the press... journalists from the West, of course, would come, from the West, to talk to somebody competent in a more or less secretive way, to somebody active in this anti-totalitarian movement, to get an explanation of what it was all about, why we were doing this thing and not something else, what our goals were, what we wanted, our goals, what was leading us, how we imagined our Poland... when they would come, they always ran into men. Women would always refuse to be interviewed. When something was associated with importance, with prestige, women would give up on it themselves. Our male colleagues never did.

SW. That's how it was in the movement. And when freedom exploded, so to speak, in '89,¹⁹ the issue of the abortion law came up as one of the first important topics, which also divided the opposition. Was it a shock for you? What was, at the time, the most important issue for you? Was it what was going on at the Round Table,²⁰ or rather these social processes, which could

¹⁹ **1989**: The year of the system's transformation. The Round Table negotiations are followed by the peaceful transfer of power by the communists. It begins with the semi-democratic election to the Sejm (Parliament), which Solidarity wins by a crushing margin. Since that moment, the process of government democratization has been under way.

²⁰ **Round Table**: Talks conducted between representatives of the opposition, mostly people associated with Solidarity, de-legalized after martial law was implemented, and representatives of the governing camp, and mostly The Polish United Workers Party (PZPR), from February 6 to April 5, 1989. The object of negotiations was to establish principles of democratizing the political system and reforming the economy, which would be acceptable for both sides. The signed

have been shocking to you, as a person sensitive to women's issues? Did you get somewhat involved in the abortion law issue already in the spring of '89? Was it the most important thing then?

BL. In '79?

SW. No. In Spring '89, right before the free elections.

BL. So we're leaving out everything before '89, right?

SW. You know there are a lot of materials about that...

BL. Exactly...

SW. And this side of you is quite well known, so one can just read about it in many places...

BL. Well, no... it comes up, I think that she knows about it...

SW. This material will be attached to this interview... unless you want to say something about this topic...

BL. I don't; I'm just asking because it really explains what was going on in '89.

SW. Well... if you wanted to say something not covered in those books, it would be very interesting.

BL. No, no, it's all in those books, but just let me say in a sentence or two that in Polish Solidarity, our Solidarity, there were a lot of women who were active; half of this anti-totalitarian movement, of these ten million, were women. I mean statistically, and it's all researched and analyzed, there were regular membership lists, dues, lists of those who paid dues... In the leadership, on the other hand, there usually were no women, because, as it turns out, this movement was, in this aspect, a mirror image of social norms... it was the same. It was both that women didn't want to run, and I remember trying to talk them into it, and that they weren't usually elected, anyway. There were very few of them. For example, among the nineteen members, if I'm not mistaken, of the National Presidium, that is the national leadership of Solidarity, there was one woman. And that's what it was like in the majority of regions and majority of structures. On the other hand, women very willingly took charge of all the tasks that were very useful but of little prestige, such as office work, archives, press distribution, collecting dues, accounting etc. etc. But everything that was called a political politics, so to speak, in French *politic politisiua* [sic.], was done by men; strategy, action goals, struggle against communism, against the police, and so on, it was all males. And it remained the case for a very long time after that, has been carried on until today, actually. But yes, of course, I was deeply involved with the Round

agreement mandated that reforms of the political and economic system would occur by evolutionary means. The reforms were to be based on political pluralism, freedom of speech, independent judiciary, strong local government, democratic elections for all elected branches of the government, unrestricted development of various forms of property, development of the free market and economic competition, among others. The negotiations' outcomes provided the foundation for principal changes in Poland's political situation, enabled Solidarity's victory in the parliamentary elections, changed the existing Sejm coalition, and led to the first non-communist government in the post-war Poland.

Table. Of course, at the Round Table, it was the same thing; among sixty people, there was one woman. From the Solidarity's side, that is, there was one. A single one.

SW. Who was she?

BL. It was Grazyna Staniszevska,²¹ a wonderful activist from Solidarity in Bielsko-Biala.²² But none of us who played a really important role then in the underground and took part in it... only our male colleagues... who sometimes... many of them hadn't really played such an important role, but they were all elected, co-opted, invited while we weren't. I mean myself and my female colleagues, who, I believe, played a great, incredibly important role; we did a lot for our country and its people. But I had a job all this time. At the Round Table, I was simply producing a bulletin, which we published every day, a bulletin informing the public about what was going on then in Warsaw, about all these incredibly difficult, important, great negotiations, which brought... which simply changed the system. Through negotiations, through evolution, evolution and not through violence, not through shooting people, killing, tortures and prisons, we were changing our country, so I was very much interested in it. Later, of course, there were free elections, and I ran for the Sejm.²³ Most of my female colleagues didn't even want to run, so there were terribly few of us, but there were few of us nevertheless. Later, I became a representative to the Sejm, and when I got to the Sejm, I was interested in issues related to changes, in changing all of this, dissolving the totalitarian institutions, changing the law, and also changing the norms, the social norms, which... So I was interested in everything that's related to these issues, so the issue of abortion became something like a fifth... third... fourth priority, but later it blew up suddenly, so that I had to react somehow.

SW. Are you already talking about the Movement for the Referendum?²⁴

BL. No, I'm talking about the proposal to abolish the liberal abortion law, since it was before the Movement for the Referendum emerged. So, first there was a proposal filed by the right-wing politicians from Solidarity, that is from my side, the right-wing politicians who decided to abolish a liberal law that existed during the times of the Polish People's Republic and to introduce a very restrictive one in its place. It introduced jail sentences for both the women who would undergo an abortion and for doctors and for all others involved in conducting the procedure. And there was a really big splash around this issue. I wasn't that passionately involved in it at that time, because I was busy with foreign affairs. I was in the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I was also busy with the media. I proposed, for example, and it was my first step as a Sejm member, the idea to abolish censorship in Poland. And it was practically a legislative initiative, a historic one, about the institution of censorship,

²¹ **Staniszevska, Grażyna:** In 1989, she was a leader of the NSZZ Solidarity People's University of the Podbeskidzie region, and after she was released from the internment camp, worked as an instructor in a community center. Since 1984, she worked in the Science, Technology, and Economy Information Center "Redor" in Bielsko-Biala. In the 1980's, she was part of the Solidarity leadership, first officially and then underground, in the Podbeskidzie region. She was interned (1981-1982) and arrested (1983). Since 1988, she was active in the national leadership for the underground Solidarity. After participating in the Round Table negotiations, she was elected to the Sejm (Parliament) from the Solidarity Citizens' Committee ballot. In 1990-1991, she was a member of the Democratic Union, and since 1992 she has been a member of the Freedom Union; she is a member of the party's National Council.

²² A city in southwestern Poland.

²³ **Sejm:** The lower house of the bicameral National Assembly (the Senate is the upper house). The Sejm is the more powerful of the two chambers. The Sejm has the constitutional responsibility of initiating and enacting laws as well as overseeing state administration.

²⁴ **Movement for the Referendum:** created in the early 1990s by a wave of debates regarding a woman's right to abortion. Liberal and left-wing groups got involved in an initiative to carry out a popular referendum about the freedom of choice.

since there had been regular censorship in Poland, and I proposed... And this is what interested me, but suddenly abortion popped up into my field of vision. And because I had these feminist views about freedom and equality, it seemed obvious to me that I should speak about the matter, that I would defend my point of view, and that I would defend the free and liberal law. And suddenly it became clear that gradually I was being perceived as some leader of this movement, as the main carrier of the idea that many perceived as terrible, as PRL-like, repulsive and communist. And I was strongly attacked by the Church and by the right wing of Solidarity, and worshipped by former communists, who loved the fact that I was doing that and not just they, but a Solidarity activist like me as well. It just all got really mixed up, incredibly so, and it caused me a lot of trouble and difficulties in my political group. But at the same time, I believed that this issue needed to be taken care of, that it was difficult, and even more difficult because it got involved in all these political games. I was considered a traitor to Solidarity ideals, so in a sense it wasn't just about abortion, because suddenly it turned out that it was the main point of collision between the Solidarity people and former communists.

SW. And when did you notice...

BL. And at the same time it was also a real women's issue, in which women felt incredibly, kind of lost, kind of neglected, pushed aside, manipulated out, and their interests were manipulated with, because the political struggle started between Solidarity and anti-Solidarity factions through this very problem.

SW. And when, from your Sejm²⁵ member's perspective, did you notice that there was a feminist movement at work in Poland? At what point did you notice...

BL. Well no, that happened very quickly, because, first of all, most of these emerging groups would come to me, so it wasn't like something was going on and I didn't know about it. A lot of groups, as they were organizing, and sometimes even just two people would get together, and they would come to me, since they thought that I would become the third person. No... Since the very beginning, I have been tracking, and in a way participating in the creation of very many groups. Between '89-'99, there appeared around thirty-seven organizations. I remember because I had them all registered, particularly since I started the Parliamentary Women's Caucus in the parliament then. It was really atypical, a world phenomenon, in a sense, the kind of an institution that didn't exist anywhere else. And its uniqueness was about... and I say that without any megalomania but just in purely descriptive terms... The idea was to bring together female Sejm members and Senators, female Senators, who would come from different political parties, with different world views, and often with different political pasts but who would agree to act together for the benefit of all women, around this slogan I then made up, "WOMEN FOR WOMEN." And I managed to create something like that. Of course, most of my Solidarity female colleagues didn't agree to participate in it, because they believed it was dominated by former communists. And they... I understood their point of view and didn't bear any grudges, but till this day, I believe that it was a great, wonderful idea and one of the most wonderful things I've ever managed to do, particularly because we really succeeded in doing a lot, in a form of something concrete and palpable, and that is the legislation, which has been a success and has not been a success, so to speak. I mean it was and was not a success, the abortion law, I mean, because it won once. I myself spoke in the Sejm six times²⁵ about the proposal of changes to the abortion law. Six times. Once I managed to win, beautifully, wonderfully win, and our liberal proposal passed in the parliament, but it

²⁵ **Sejm:** The lower house of the bicameral National Assembly (the Senate is the upper house). The Sejm is the more powerful of the two chambers. The Sejm has the constitutional responsibility of initiating and enacting laws as well as overseeing state administration.

was vetoed by the President at that time, Lech Walesa,²⁶ my former colleague from Solidarity, while my former opponent from the communist party, Aleksander Kwasniewski,²⁷ the current President, decided to support it. And, among other reasons, because of that, I decided to support him, in turn, and that's why I currently work with him. I don't know whether it's clear how strongly my life and my behavior were impacted by my attachment to freedom aspirations and equality needs of women, I don't know... because it ultimately decided whom I've supported and where I work.

SW. Could you...

BL. ...you know, I don't know if... I'm saying this quite confidentially now, because many of my feminist colleagues don't realize that.

SW. What is at this moment... What is important for you now? What are you working on now? And what else would you want to do?

BL. Now, working in the President's Office [President Kwaśniewski], I work on issues, which I believe are very important from the social perspective, such as drug addiction. These are mostly very difficult issues. I work on very difficult, and often depressing and sad things, but I believe they're very important. It's drug addiction, and in general some other social pathologies. I work on unemployment. I'm in charge of this really great program, really great program with the Americans. I'm in charge of a program on women's safety, very big, which, in turn, is really nice and really effective, I hope. And I hope that I'm helping a lot of women. Several thousand of women have already gone through this program of mine, and I often meet with them. Of course, I can't meet all several thousand at the same time, but I often come to seminars, which are conducted in a number of different Polish cities. And I see that they're happy about it. And I am happy, too.

²⁶ **Wałęsa, Lech:** trade union activist, politician, President of the Republic of Poland from 1990 to 1995, Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1983. During the first National Congress of Solidarity (September 5-October 7, 1981), he was elected Chairman of the National Commission of Solidarity. From 1980 to 1981, he worked in the Gdańsk Shipyard. Interned from December 13, 1981 to November 11, 1982, he returned to work in the Shipyard and continued underground union activities. In 1986, he created the Provisional Council of Solidarity, in 1987 became head of the National Executive Commission of Solidarity, and in 1988 began participating in negotiations with the communist authorities, which led to the Round Table talks. Recipient of the French Legion of Honor, he also received Honorary Doctor's Degrees from numerous universities, including Columbia University (1981), Catholic University in Leuven (1982), Harvard University (1983), and Gdańsk University (1990).

²⁷ **Kwaśniewski, Aleksander:** President of the Republic of Poland (1995-2005). An activist of the Socialist Union of Polish Students, in 1977 he joined the PZPR. He participated in the Round Table negotiations as a co-chairman of the union pluralism group. After the disbanding of PZPR (January 1990), he became chairman of the Chief Council of the Social-Democracy of the Republic of Poland SDRP. He left the party after the Presidential Election in November 1995. On November 19, 1995, in the second round of the election, he was elected to the position of President of the Republic of Poland. On October 8, 2000, he was elected for the second term. He is a recipient of the French Legion of Honor.

BARBARA LABUDA

- 1949** born in Żmigrów, near Wrocław
- 1965-69** French Department, Poznań/Wrocław
- 1970-73** seminars, Ecole Normale Superieure, University of Paris
- 1974** Assistant Professor, French Department, Wrocław University
- 1976** beginning of collaboration with KOR [The Committee for the Defense of Workers]
- 1980** activist of the Solidarity Trade Union, founding member of the Solidarity Trade Union University, member of the Executive Committee of the Lower Silesia Region, editor of the bi-weekly *Region*.
- 1982** fired from her job for political reasons; during martial law sentenced to a year and a half in jail.
- 1984** defended a PhD Dissertation at the Languages Department of the Wrocław University, author of several research publications.
- 1989-98** representative in the Sejm, founding member and chair of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus, member of the Culture Committee for The Mass Media, Foreign Affairs Committee, co-founder of ROAD, Democratic Union, Freedom Union. In 1995, for reasons of political differences, removed from the Freedom Union's Parliamentary Caucus; in December of the same year, gave up her party membership.
- 1996** Secretary of State in the President's Office

Has an adult son. Vegetarian, practices yoga.