

LGBTQ MOVEMENT IN POLAND AND ONE OF ITS ACTIVE MEMBERS

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Historical Background

The beginnings of contemporary *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer* movement (hereafter LGBTQ) are connected with the wide range of social changes which took place in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s. Contemporary LGBTQ movement is acknowledged as a second stage of gendered social movements – it came into the public arena just after feminist movement. June the 27th, 1969 – the day of riots in the gay club Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City (hereafter NYC) is considered a symbolical date for the movement. The riots were a consequence of police intervention and attempt to arrest some clients in the club; only that this time the club's customers decided not to surrender without a fight. They continued for several days and involved among other things the first historical Gay Power Rally. After one month the Gay Liberation Front was born in NYC and in a few weeks it extended to other American cities. At the same time gay & lesbian studies started to appear at universities. The main goal of both initiatives was the multidimensional struggle with discrimination of homosexual people and an attempt to create a positive identity for this social group.

Here, it is however very important to underline that the struggle with the discrimination against homosexuals has a much longer history and can be traced back to at least the time when the term “homosexuality” appeared in public discourse¹ in Europe.²

¹ The term „homosexuality” was first used in 1869 by a German-Hungarian doctor Karol Maria Kertbeny in the letter to the justice minister of Prussia. The term grew in popularity after the famous article of German doctor Carl Westphal – “Die Konträre Sexualempfindung: Symptom eines neuropathologischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes” (“The contrary sexual feelings”), published in 1870.

² In 1869 the German politician Jean Baptista von Schweitzer was arrested and charged with the crime of homosexuality – in fact he supported the homosexual people's emancipation and fought for its decriminalization. In 1887 Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. Members of the

In Poland the history of struggle for homosexual people's rights has quite different dynamics. The beginnings of the contemporary movement are usually associated with the 1980s, however this is not only because of Solidarność's emergence. For many years in Polish public discourse homosexual people did not exist. Before 1932 a few of the Polish artists and intellectuals (e.g. Irena Krzywicka and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński) were calling for decriminalization of homosexuality and sexual education in Poland. After that, the topic disappeared for a few decades. It emerged again in the 1960s but this time associated with criminal law. For the next few years homosexual men (interestingly women were not defined as homosexual) were suspected of being prostitutes, thieves and members of other illegal groups. The culmination of this kind of attitude was the *Hiacynt* action, which took place between 1985 and 1987. It was a mass action of Milicja Obywatelska³ (hereafter MO) initiated by general Czesław Kiszczak, the contemporary Minister of Internal Affairs in Poland. During the action MO were arresting and collecting information about Polish homosexual men and their entourage. About 11 000 personal files (so called *Pink Files*) were created which contained *Homosexual Cards* and also the statements of arrested people that they are homosexuals and do not have sexual contacts with underage people. The official reason for the launch of this action was the fight against HIV/AIDS epidemic and an attempt to control dangerous groups of potential criminals whom homosexual men were supposed to be. In fact, MO wanted to collect embarrassing information about certain people, which they could later use to blackmail them and force them to co-operate with the SB⁴. *Hiacynt* action

committee were undertaking research and actions, which were aimed at repealing Paragraph 175 regarding the criminalization of homosexual behaviors. Hirschfeld was also a founder of the Institute of Sexual Research. He created a term "third sex" which described homosexual people and that is why he is recognized as a pioneer of gay-rights activism. As Robert Biedroń writes: "*This moment [beginnings of Hirschfeld's activity – KW] is considered the beginning of the emancipation movement by homosexual history researchers". Since then in Berlin, but also in London, overt clubs for gays and lesbians started to arise. Many people started to engage in the early emancipation movement, whose goal was to spread the idea of homosexuality being something normal into the bourgeois world.*"(Biedroń 2007: 148). Also in the United States groups of people tried to fight against the discrimination of non-heterosexuals. Before and after Second World War The Society of Human Rights Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Billits, the most important homophile organizations in the US, were claiming for decriminalization of homosexuality and stopping violence against homosexual people. Contrary to contemporary LGBTQ movement, they didn't try to create the positive identity of homosexual people nor fight for total legal and social equality.

³ The name of Polish Police before 1989.

⁴ Secret Services in Communistic Poland.

was also connected with the invigilation of Polish anticommunist opposition. It was an attempt to fight off the emerging people rights movement in Poland⁵.

The first attempt to create informal group of homosexual people took place in 1980 in Piotrków Trybunalski, where a few people created *MOPS – Miejskie Ochotnicze Pogotowie Seksualne* (Volunteer Urban Sexual Service). In the following years in the biggest Polish cities groups of people, usually friends, tried to build Polish gay and lesbian rights movement. They set up several pressure groups: *Amico* in Łódź, *Filo* in Gdańsk, *Etap* in Wrocław, *Gej, Warneńczyk* and *Warszawski Ruch Homoseksualny*⁶ (Homosexual Movement of Warszawa) in Warsaw. The first student organization – *Różowy Trójkąt* (The Pink Triangle) was founded at the University of Warsaw. Among the leaders of those groups, and at the same time the most active people of early Polish gay rights movement,⁷ were Waldemar Zbolarski, Sławomir Starosta, Artur Krasicki.

Simultaneously Polish homosexual culture was being formed – the first newspapers and gay-magazines were created (*Efebos, Filo, Inaczej*) and homosexual people started to socialize in certain cafés, restaurants and newly created clubs and pubs (e.g. *Literacka* café and *Jama Michalika* in Kraków; *Ali Baba* (...) in Warsaw; *Lodzianka* (...) in Łódź and *Sezam* in Sopot - the existence of which had been mentioned by *Spartacus*, the international gay-guide, already in 1978 - Więch 2005: 260). In 1987 the first half-legal gay discotheque opened in Gośćów, Warszawa.

Generally speaking, with regards to the 1980s we can only talk about the elements of the LGBTQ movement in Poland. People who created this movement were usually friends and friends-of-friends, excited by the atmosphere of conspiracy. They were almost solely gay-man interested not only in political activism but also in finding love and sexual partners within the groups. At the beginning all the actions had very narrow, hermetic and informal character and the scale of those actions was very small. They did not have any influence on the rest of society and enough power to create any social changes - which is essential for a definition of a new social movement. (Gliński 1996, Touraine 1977, 1995, Sztompka 2005, 2006)

⁵ In 1989 in Gdańsk MO was trying to reactivate the action. This didn't work because the policemen demanded to wear rubber gloves (as they were afraid of HIV/AIDS infection), however there were not enough of them in MO's storages.

⁶ This group made a first attempt of association's legalizations (failed).

⁷ We call it gay right movement because the other groups of non-heterosexual people (lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenders etc.) weren't very active at those times.

The outbreak of activity started just after 1989. Because of the political and social transformation in Poland a lot of new social topics appeared in public discourse. One of them related to the problem of HIV/AIDS epidemic and involved general discussion about sexuality of Polish people as well as spreading the idea of safe sex. On the governmental level the two people who tried to initiate wider public and political discussions on these subjects were Zofia Kuratowska and Mikołaj Kozakiewicz. Their endeavors were strictly connected with the activity of early Polish LGBT movement and that is why they became kind of role models for young activists who created the first well-known informal group, Lambda, in October 1989. Lambda was a coalition of many smaller groups, which started to act with the support of ILGA – International Lesbian and Gay Association. On 23rd February 1990 Lambda was registered as Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Grup Lambda (Polish Association of Lambda Groups). It was the first legal and official LGBTQ organization in Poland.

Associations and Organizations

After 1989 Polish LGBTQ movement, like many other social movements in Poland, was in a very specific situation. It was young and the actual political activism has only just started. At the same time in the United States and Western Europe LGBTQ movement stepped in its own “third wave”⁸. In the 90s queer theory started to be more and more popular both in academic discourse and political activism. Queer theory focuses on the negation of any identity politics. Supporters of this idea urge that creation of positive gay and lesbian identity is not a good emancipation strategy for non-heterosexual people, as it excludes everyone who does not fit to the “perfect gay” or “perfect lesbian” image. This type of politics ignores bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersexual and other non-heterosexual people who are beyond the dichotomy of homo/hetero-sexuality. Queer activists are also against methods of acting which were popular with the actors of “second wave” of gay and lesbian movement. They do not accept the evolutionary character of political actions which were (and sometimes still are) focused on slow and consistent convincing of heterosexual majority that homosexual people are in fact good citizens, as the rest of society, and for that reason they should be tolerated and

⁸ The „first wave” of sexual minorities movement is connected with existence of homophile groups and associations; „second wave” of gay and lesbian movement is focused on creating a positive homosexual identity, the “third wave” is a queer-wave.

have exactly the same political and social rights⁹. Queer groups and organizations like Act Up, Bash Back or Queer Nation prefer more radical and controversial methods of acting, which have nothing in common with non-adversary politics characteristic for positive gay and lesbian identity policy supporters. The main catchword of queer activist is: “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!”.

In Poland the influences of all three stages of LGBTQ movement appeared almost at the same time. On one hand Polish actors were in a privileged situation – they already knew which attitudes, struggles strategies and campaigns in aid of non-heterosexual people rights were effective, and which were not, as such they could benefit from rich experience of American and Western European activists. On the other hand Polish LGBTQ movement did not create a chance for a smooth evolution of ideas and politics – discussions about the character and methods of activism appeared since the early beginning in many groups and associations which was very often a base for conflicts and ineffectiveness. Currently there is no single strategy of acting which could describe the specific character of the movement in Poland. Instead, there is a wide spectrum of groups and organizations within the public arena - from homophile through gay and lesbian rights to queer ones. Very often the most important phenomena represent a particular mixture of all of them – from actors sympathizing with homophile attitude to queer-activists.

The Polish LGBTQ movement consists of a wide variety of smaller and a few larger organizations. Some of the biggest are: Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa¹⁰ (Lambda Warsaw Association), Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (The Campaign Against Homophobia), Stowarzyszenie Kultura dla Tolerancji (The Association Culture for Tolerance), Stowarzyszenie Równość (The Equality Association), Porozumienie Lesbijek (The Lesbian Association), Stowarzyszenie Gejów i Lesbijek na Rzecz Kultury (the Association of Gay and Lesbian in aid of Culture), Trans-fuzja – Fundacja na Rzecz Osób Transpłciowych (Trans-fuzja - the Association in aid of Transgender People), Miłość bez Granic (Love Without Borders) and U-F-A (queer- women social and cultural center). The supporters of LGBTQ movement ideas can be also found among the members of the Poland’s Green Party, Zieloni

⁹ Queer activists argue that this strategy proved to be ineffective after the beginning of HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. It showed that heterosexual majority still did not accept homosexual people and accused them of triggering the epidemic. That time the acts of violence against non-heterosexual people started to increase and dozen years of non-confrontational politics did not bring expected results.

¹⁰ Lambda Warszawa came into beginning after the split of first polish LGBTQ organization Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Grup Lambda, which officially came apart in 1997.

2004, as well as members involved in the feminist movement (for instance, eFKa Association, Feminoteka Association, the Federation in aid of Women and Family Planning, The Women's Association KONSOLA and many others). In the past many actors of Polish LGBTQ movement were involved in the activity of feminist groups. Some of them are still linked to both types of these gendered social movements. This is quite a typical situation for Poland and as such it makes it difficult to assess the number of participants in a particular movement¹¹. Moreover, only a few of LGBTQ associations¹² have a formal membership – majority co-operate with hundreds of volunteers who participate in their activities without any regularity. Usually the majority of them are active during the preparation of the most important events like festivals, Tolerance Marches, Equality Parades etc.

With regards to the organization structure there are two types of groups. The biggest and the most well known groups have their own leaders¹³, hierarchies, boards of management, commissions etc. They are divided in certain groups which are involved in different tasks, such as youth group, lobbying group, law group, artistic group, anti-violence group or international group (KPH). The main organizations like KPH or Lambda strongly self-identify with the ideas of “second wave” movement. They work towards creating a positive image of homosexual people in Poland. Smaller groups such as Miłość bez Granic or QUEER ALLIANCE are kinds of affinity groups. They are composed of 5-10 people who know each other and act together but very often without any regularity, usually during manifestations, marches and other spontaneous social actions.

The LGBTQ movement in Poland created their own media and communication centers. Some of the most popular Polish LGBTQ Internet portals are *Innastrona.pl*, *Homiki.pl*, *Gejowo.pl*, *Lesbijka.org*, *Kobiety-kobietom.com*, *Homoseksualizm.org.pl* and many others. There are also several groups on Facebook (for instance, *Les Ploty*, *Portal Bycsoba* or *Queer Café*) which represent queer-popculture character. On their profile's pages users can find news about life-styles, fashion, show business, gadgets, new technologies (*Portal*

¹¹ It is very important to underline, that even though majority of actors and actresses declare non-heterosexual orientation, straight people can be and in fact are members of LGBTQ milieus and organizations.

¹² It is difficult to obtain and verify the information about the number of participants. The only organization which decided to share this information with me was Kampania Przeciw Homofobii. In general KPH has around 500 members and a countless and constantly changing number of volunteers.

¹³ Some of the most famous leaders of contemporary LGBTQ movement in Poland are: Robert Biedroń, Yga Kostrzewa, Szymon Niemiec, Anka Zawadzka. They are active in the most influential organizations like KPH and Lambda.

Bycsoba), films, music, celebrities (*Les Ploty*) and non-heterosexual artists and their work (*Queer Café*).

Political Agenda

The network structure of the movement is reflected in the diversity of ideological agendas, acting strategies and perception of current situation of non-heterosexual people in Poland. The movement can be divided into its “radical” and “reformist” wings which results from the existence of three waves of the phenomenon. One part of the movement prefers more revolutionary and provocative actions while the members of the second part are the followers of “softer” and less confrontational actions. These usually focus on building positive identity of homosexual people, education processes and changes in Polish legislation system. The reformist wing is first and foremost connected with the activities of the Kampania Przeciw Homofobii and Lambda Warszawa. Similar ideas are also shared by some politics from the official Polish parties such as Zieloni 2004, Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej¹⁴ (the Democracy Left Alliance), Socjaldemokracja Polska (Polish Social-democratic Party).

The postulates of reformists are based on changing the perception of homosexual people in the whole society - mostly through educational actions as well as changes in the Polish legislation which should ensure equality between heterosexual and non-heterosexual people in Poland. The reformist wing is usually in favor of the following postulates and initiatives: (1) spreading the idea of tolerance in Poland (2) struggle against prejudices (through educational system) (3) defense of human rights (4) abolition of discrimination of non-heterosexual people in the legislation system (for instance, implementation of partnership act) (5) creation of the positive image and identity of non-heterosexual people. The “radical” wing, which is very often befriended with the various anarchists groups, has radically anti-systemic character and prefers actions which could destabilize normative heterosexual society.

¹⁴ Many activists are disappointed with the fact that SLD politicians often only pretend to be supportive of sexual minorities' rights – in reality they use it only to gain some popularity and do nothing to make the situation better.

Major Actions and Campaigns

Since the beginning of its existence, the Polish LGBTQ movement has been striving to promote its ideas in society through a variety of actions and campaigns. It is impossible to shed light on the complete spectrum of those actions here; however it is crucial to mention those which made the biggest impact on establishing the character of Polish movement.

One of the first significant actions, which immensely influenced the Polish LGBTQ movement was the campaign *Niech Nas Zobaczy* (*Let Them See Us*) organized by Kampania Przeciw Homofobii in 2003. The most important part of the campaign involved displaying posters of 30 homosexual couples in the public space (photographs were taken by Karolina Breguła, the student of one of the Polish art schools). The exhibition did not have any controversial character – in fact, many people found the pictures quite boring. The campaign’s purpose was to prove that homosexual people are exactly the same as the heterosexual majority – all they want is love and the right not to hide their feelings in public. The initial idea was to show the pictures on public billboards and in galleries in several Polish cities. Unfortunately, shortly after the start, the campaign had to be stopped due to many destroyed billboards and numerous protests (for instance by Catholic organization). Many city administrations cancelled their previous agreements to show the pictures in public places – consequently the exhibition was only shown in private galleries. *Niech Nas Zobaczy* became sort of a mile-stone for Polish LGBTQ movement. It triggered wide public debate about the perception of homosexuality in Poland and about non-heterosexual people’s rights. Some scholars refer to this action as the “Polish Stonewall” (Majka 2009) – the symbolical moment for a new age in Polish LGBTQ movement’s existence.

Other initiatives which also gained substantial media’s attention are annual marches and rallies organized in many Polish cities, for instance: *Marsz dla Tolerancji* (*Tolerance March*) in Kraków, *Parada Równości* (*Equality Parade*) in Warszawa, *Marsz Równości* (*Equality March*) in Poznań. The first¹⁵ *Parada Równości* was organized in May 2001 in Warszawa and attracted around 300 people. The following year a number of participants increased to 1000 whereas the third parade gathered a few thousands of gay and lesbian rights supporters from all over the country. Nevertheless, the most significant events took place in

¹⁵ The absolutely first public address of non-heterosexuals took place in 1993 in Warszawa. In 1998 the first attempt to organize the rally against discrimination of homosexual people also took place in Warszawa – three men with covered faces stood in the city centre holding boards with the names of their professions.

2004 and 2005. During the spring in 2004 the first edition of *Dni Kultury dla Tolerancji* (*Days of Culture for Tolerance*) took place in Kraków. The March through the city centre was planned as the culminating moment of the initiative. However, the event's organizers (KPH) encountered a number of obstacles and problems since the very beginning. First, they were accused of making a huge provocation because the initial date of the event converged with the annual Catholic procession into the Skalka Church. Having picked the new date, KPH were accused of the attempt to "spread homosexual ideology" - Catholic *Stowarzyszenie im. Piotra Skargi* (*Piotr Skarga Association*) sent 280 000 flyers to the citizens of Kraków where they urged for the boycotting of the March. Even the contemporary rector of Jagiellonian University was against the festival and because of his decision the scientific conference on homosexuality was moved from the centre of Kraków to the building situated on the outskirts of the city. The first *Marsz Tolerancji* in Kraków ran in the atmosphere of ideological war between supporters of tolerance and human rights and their opponents (mainly Catholic organizations and right-wing conservative political parties and associations). It also ushered a kind of "tradition" – since that moment every LGBTQ movement's mass event has been disrupted by members of far-right organizations such as *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth Association), *Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski* (National Poland Renaissance) and groups of Nazis and hooligans. Another consequence of "May 2004"¹⁶ were the legal problems encountered while organizing the Marches in other cities in Poland during 2004 and 2005¹⁷. Other significant event which greatly influenced Polish LGBTQ movement took place in 2005 in Poznań. Despite the fact that the president of the city prohibited the March, many people decided to break the ban and attend the rally. The police intervention against the protesting people was very brutal and many of them were arrested. Even after the court's rule stating that president's ban was in fact illegal, some of them were accused of taking part in an illegal riot and suffered the consequences. The police action in Poznan echoed in many European and Polish cities, leading to many rallies and demonstrations which occurred one week later under the name "Reanimacja demokracji – Marsz Równości idzie dalej" (the Reanimation of democracy – Equality March is moving forward). Since that moment

¹⁶ The term promoted by dr. Beata Kowalska – researcher and an active participant of the event.

¹⁷ In 2004 and 2005 Marches in Warszawa were forbidden by the president of the city – Lech Kaczyński, who was well known for his homophobic stance throughout his political career. The second planned March in Kraków was canceled by the organizers because of bereavement after Jan Paweł II death.

problems with legalization of Marches and rallies ended – from then on the police escorts participants, which are regularly sabotaged by their opponents from far-right milieus.

Polish LGBTQ movement has also carried out numerous projects, these however do not attract as much media attention as the aforementioned ones. Its members organize many cultural festivals (for instance queer movies festival *A Million different Loves*), do projects like *Football against racism*, *Poradnia Homofobiczna (the Homophobic Clinic)* or fund the annual *Hiacynt Award* for celebrities who spread the idea of tolerance in Poland. Last but not least, all the organizations are trying to help non-heterosexual people with coping with their lives whenever they need it. The majority of them try to co-operate and share competences between one another, because all actors are aware of the fact that they act in aid of joint interest. In general, there are three levels of activities in Polish LGBTQ movement: in aid of movement's members (charity, psychological help), in aid of the homosexual people (creating a positive identity of the social group) and in aid of the whole society (struggle against any forms of discrimination, spreading the idea of tolerance, acting in aid of human rights) (Krzemiński 2006). The biggest organizations also try to share competences because of financial issues. Their budgets usually depend on certain grants from the EU, government and other organizations (for instance Mamma Cash). In lots of instances a few of them apply for the same funds which potentially creates an atmosphere of competition.

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LINKING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC: THE CASE OF MARTA

The Context of the Interview¹⁸

The central office of The Campaign Against Homophobia (in Polish – Kampania Przeciw Homofobii – hence, hereafter KPH) is located in Warszawa – on the second floor of a quite modern building, just above the restaurant *Oberża pod czerwonym wieprzem* (*The Inn Under the Red Hog*). The office is quite spacious, but cozy and colorful, with posters all around. There is also a shelf in the office loaded with numerous KPH’s publications – about the situation of homosexual and bisexual people in Poland, hate speech and other challenges facing Polish Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer movement.

This was where I met Marta and several other members of the movement. All of them left for the smaller room after an introductory chat and left me and my interviewee alone in a bigger one – usually used as a conference room. During the 2 hour interview we were not interrupted at all and had a very fruitful conversation about Marta’s life and the Movement among other things.

Our informant Marta – a 32-years old member of KPH - has been in the forefront of the organizational activities since the beginning of its existence. Marta was one of the founders of the organization and till today she has been taking part in almost every project and action organized under its auspices. During the interview Marta wore black shoes and jeans with a light-blue shirt and a darker sweater. Her answers to all of the questions were elaborate and full of intriguing details. She was relaxed and in a good mood and we both felt like there was a good connection between interviewee and the interviewer. After a few seconds she proposed to drop the formalities and to address each other by our names. After the interview was transcribed, the factual data was cross-checked with the informant and permission was obtained to use her actual name.

Childhood and Youth Experiences

Marta was born in 1978 in Warszawa where her family had been living for a few generations. She is the only child of a couple of journalists¹⁹, who represent “working class intelligentsia”.

¹⁸ This part of the article is based on the fieldwork carried out by Katarzyna Wojnicka and supervised by dr. Konrad Pędziwiatr.

Her parents worked in *Express Wieczorny*, which was the only tabloid-kind of newspaper in Communist Poland until 1989. After the socio-political transformations, Marta's mother started working in *Bauer* Publishing House, where – as a one of the scarce group of women – she became a head of one of the titles, while her father moved to the automotive sector of the publishing industry. Marta thinks that although her mother does not perceive herself as a feminist and does not belong to any of association, her professional experiences, life attitude and political views show, that she has a lot to do with feminist ideology. Also Marta's father can be described as a person with a strong social conscience he always believed in socialist ideology as the only one which could create a fair society.

My father was a member of PZPR²⁰ and I guess he did not resign till the end. He is a "natural – born socialist" but for the last few years of the Party's existence, he actually did nothing in there. As far as I know, all the journalists had an obligation to be members of PZPR. My father really believed in all those socialist ideas. At the beginning, when Jacek Kuroń was a member of the Party as well, they were strongly engaged in Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego (scouting movement in Poland) and he strongly believed – and still believes, that the social justice will create a fair world one day.

Her parents' activism put a strong mark on Marta's life. She had very good contact with them. They discussed many things together, and they have always told her that only personal engagement can create positive changes - both in society and personal life.

From the very beginning of her life, Marta's parents were eager to provide her with the best education – her mother searched for the best kindergarten and the best primary school, which could give Marta access to the best high school, and then the best university. That is why Marta, against the rules of the contemporary system, attended the best state primary school in Warszawa. She has rather positive memories of that period of her life. She met very good and engaged teachers, the level of education was high and the other children were very bright. Although she had some problems with being accepted in the group – in her

¹⁹ Marta's father also has a daughter from his first marriage. She is 20 years older than Marta, so they do not have very close relations. They met when Marta was already an adult and from that time they rarely contact each other.

²⁰ The Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP, Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza - PZPR) was the Communist party which governed the People's Republic of Poland from 1948 to 1989.

opinion she was too shy and not assertive enough - the first contact with the Polish educational system was quite successful. After finishing primary school Marta was expected to continue her education in the Batory High School - as it was known as the best high school in Warszawa and many pupils from her primary school chose it as a part of some kind of “tradition”. But Marta had a different plan – she chose another school which revealed her independence and non-conformism²¹. She went to the first public high school in Warszawa located on Bednarska Street, hence Bednarska High School.

Marta is convinced that *Bednarska High School* had a huge influence on shaping her character and social attitude. As she said: “It is evident that if it was not for *Bednarska*, we would have probably been in different points of our lives.” The school was well known as a place with very democratic structure, where pupils were treated as partners and creators of educational program. *Bednarska* was also strongly promoting civil activism.

This school from its definition educated future social activists, members of social movements. After graduating from Bednarska many people moved on to working in NGOs, e.g. Amnesty International or their own organizations (...). Krystyna Starczewska, director of Bednarska, took part in every civil action which happened at that time. All the time we had “days of something”: children of refugees, disabled children, exhibitions e.g. about the Balkan War. I remember I was a Snowflake Girl in the first class and gave shows for children from an orphanage. Every one of us was engaged in something all the time. We brought rice and flour for the Polish people in Kazakhstan etc. And it was completely natural – we thought just like that.

After passing the Matriculation exam, Marta decided to study at Warsaw University. She became a student of MISH – Interfaculty Individual Humanistic Studies. She said that MISH was not only the best faculty in the whole university, but also gave her the opportunity to choose between many disciplines such as psychology, history, sociology and other human sciences. It was a perfect solution for her, because at the age of 19 she was not convinced what exactly she would like to study. Marta enjoyed her university studies – in the end she poured most of her attention into psychology. However, being a polymath proved very useful

²¹ Her parents preferred Batory High School as well, but at the end they accepted Marta’s decision and let her choose Bednarska High School.

in the future, during her work in KPH as a coordinator of educational programs. On the other hand, she also admits that the atmosphere at the university was different and less free than at *Bednarska*. This brought her to the conclusion that the time spent in the high school was the most significant for her future career as an activist, even if at the beginning she was “only” a passive participant of actions organized by school staff and did not (yet) think about her own projects.

Private Struggle and Introduction to Social Activism

As a teenager Marta was quite shy and distant person. She did not like to be a part of larger groups and she was a fan of individualism. That is why she was not the most popular girl in her High School, but it was never a problem for her – she felt completely happy with her way of being. This situation changed when she fell in love with another girl for the first time in her life. She was still a pupil of *Bednarska* and from the first moment she was convinced that it's natural and everyone should accept her choice.

I was convinced that everybody should accept my love because love is love. But suddenly it appeared, as it was quite a famous story, that even though teachers did not pay much attention to it, the pupils did (...) I can say, that many people at that time, did not consider it as a full-fledged relationship. They thought this relationship was worth less than an alternative relationship with a man. Actually, both of us - me and Ewa, my partner - had had our boyfriends before, so maybe that was the reason why our relation was not considered as a full – fledged. And I did not like it at all. I saw the difference between acknowledging female-male and female-female relationship in society. And it did not suit my idea of social equality in which I have always believed, where love is love and only that counts.

That was the first most significant experience, which pushed Marta to her future LGBTQ movement commitment. She did not want to agree with this kind of inequality and decided to do something that could change this situation. She did it in the name of her ideas and beliefs²², but also because it was deeply connected with her personal life. Marta has never

²² Marta believes that she would have acted in the same way, if she were in the relationship with a man. In her opinion fighting for non-heterosexual people's rights is connected mostly with her political and moral views. It is also important to underline that Marta is not convinced to of self-identification of herself as a lesbian. For her categories of hetero - , homo - , bi-, etc.-sexuality are not important and she prefers not to put herself in one of

thought that her love choice made her a less worthy member of society. She was always convinced that her relationship is right and natural. That is why she decided to act and convince others that non-heterosexual relations, people etc. have exactly the same rights and should be treated like the rest of society. Marta views herself as a natural-born leader - mostly because of her strong character and that is why her commitment to social movement activity was in fact only a matter of time.

Her actual involvement in LGBTQ movement started when she was still a student of the Warsaw University. At the beginning she was looking for an existing LGBTQ organization in Poland, therefore she initially became involved in activism in Lambda and a few months later - ILGCN. Unfortunately, she was not happy with such course of events – the way ILGCN worked did not suit her and in Lambda she felt as if other activists did not really want to engage with her. She is convinced that Lambda was and still is a very hermetic group of people, who are not very interested in attracting new members. Few months after joining Lambda, Marta was invited by Florian Nowicki²³ for a first meeting dedicated to creating a new LGBTQ organization. The meeting took place in the office of Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny (Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning) and on the 11th of September 2001, Campaign Against Homophobia was founded²⁴. From the very beginning Marta has been one of the people, who have decided about the profile of the organization, even though she was not a part of the first management board (because she was not able to take part in the first KPH convention). From that moment the discussion on ways of acting and also the character (reformative or radical) of the organization began. Marta has always had a clear idea about it and she was very surprised that it could cause so many problems.

I remember discussions about the first promotional flier, with a picture of a half-naked, sixteen-year-old boy, who looked like a German porn-film star. I said, that if we want to bring society round to our ideals, we cannot give people such a flier. It created a huge discussion – I was attacked by other people (among others Jacek Kochanowski) and accused

them. But only for political reasons, she is willing to call herself a lesbian, even though in general she doesn't feel like that.

²³ Son of Wanda Nowicka, founder of Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny

²⁴ As Marta said: "The date of founding was very unlucky because unfortunately – but understandably - no one came for our opening conference that day.."

that I want to forbid gay and lesbian people kissing on the street. (...) That was the moment, when for the first time I saw something that was very shocking to me, but which is truth – I realized that not only do we have to convince the whole society, but first of all, we have to teach gay and lesbian people basic knowledge about social movement's work character. They knew nothing about PR which for me, a former journalist, was something evident. That was a significant moment of reflection for me – I was sure it would be much easier, because it is “only” society...in fact we had to deal with the “community” too – till now the biggest negative criticism of our work, has come from gay and lesbians people, and not from the heterosexual members of society...

At the beginning Marta treated her work at KPH as something that can be done after work, as kind of a hobby.

Of course at the beginning we all worked as volunteers. We paid for many things using our own private money. I treated it like a hobby and not as professional work – and in fact, it would be difficult to treat it differently at that time. Certainly both of us, Robert²⁵ and I, thought about a professionalization. We knew that we would need more money, employees and an office, but it was a matter for a distant future for us.

They had a lot of financial problems as many former sponsors moved their interests to different, Eastern countries and money from the European Union was very difficult to get. KPH members were working very hard to make ends meet and no one thought about being a “professional activist” – this was simply impossible.

Professional Career: Before and After KPH

Since her early childhood Marta wanted to be a journalist – just like her parents. As a young girl she was convinced that she would take the same direction and would work in *Polityka*²⁶. As a teenager she wrote articles to the school newspaper and always felt that writing in general should be her destiny. As a graduate of psychology (that was her ultimate choice

²⁵ Robert Biedroń – cofounder of KPH and kind of “public face” of LGBTQ movement in Poland.

²⁶ *Polityka* is one of the most significant and well-known weeklies in Poland.

during MISH studies) she also considered working as a therapist²⁷, but journalism was always the most natural type of career choice for her.

She started working as a freelancer while she studied at the university. She moved out from her parents' house quite quickly and needed money to support herself. Her articles were focusing mostly on pop-culture – she wrote about cinema, television, conducted interviews with celebrities, wrote reviews etc. Usually she worked for *Tele Świat* as a replacement worker and after a few years she was able to get a job at the news desk, including the chief editor. But her salary was still one of the lowest. No chance for being promoted and also the fact that the quality of *Tele Świat* started to fall dramatically - Marta could no longer promote and “smuggle” her political and moral ideas into the articles - made Marta quit her job in this newspaper. Just after that she became an editor in *Bella* – currently non-existing magazine for women where she spent 9 hard months. She did not like her new job either– she did not accept the practice of writing semi-fictional articles, she did not want to spend 12 hours per day in her office and she did not want to become “a slave of a corporation” in general. She did not feel very integrated with her team either and after a short consideration and a few discussions with her friends, she decided to quit her job in *Bella*.

I quit my job during the time when we had the highest level of unemployment in Poland – about 40 % in the younger age group. It was 2004. But I knew I could not work like that anymore. I had my savings and I knew that it was enough to live from for the next 6 months and I could work as a freelancer again and then we would see. I do not know how I made this decision but I did. At the same time I worked in KPH and even though we did not have any money, it was in fact a full time job.

Meanwhile Marta passed her exams and became a PhD student at Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities. She was planning to write a thesis in the field of psychology of politics, but after 2 years of working on it, because of inner policy of SWPS, she had to

²⁷ During the last two years of her studies Marta decided to be a therapist. She had a traineeship in a mental hospital, took part in many specialized trainings etc. It is worth underlining that during Marta's first period of activism in LGBTQ movement – in Lambda, ILGA and KPH, she wanted to use her psychological education and help people to deal with the problems connected with non-heterosexual orientation. But very soon it appeared that there is always too few people and too much work to do, and that was the reason why Marta became a part of the management board in quite a short time. She had a chance to use her psychological knowledge by creating a strategy of the first LGBTQ social campaign in Poland entitled “*Niech nas zobaczą*” (*Let them see us*).

completely change her conception and consequently she did not finish her studies. Her resignation was also connected to the lack of time – she not only had to work as a freelancer, had full-time but unpaid job in KPH, but also, as a PhD candidate, she had to conduct classes with the students, all of which demanded too much time of one person.

It was completely impossible to cope with all of this at the same time. And between all of this I was supposed to write the PhD thesis? No! - it was totally impossible for me, especially because it was the first time when I conducted classes, so I had to spend a lot of time for preparation. Simultaneously we started to get the first money in KPH and I knew I had to decide for something. And finally we got some money and we were able to pay a salary to people who worked with us – it was 2006 or 2005. And that was the moment, when I started to think about a paid job in KPH (...) As I was still interested in working as a psychologist and therapist, I was writing projects about psychological help and finally we got the money and were able to create an independent position with the smallest salary possible. I was working in this position for the next year.

Just after she started working as a paid employee in KPH, Marta realized that psychological division is not the only one that she had to cope with. As a Vice- president of organization (which she became in 2002) she has been involved – jointly with Robert Biedroń, president and co-founder of KPH, in almost all initiatives, projects and actions. She decided to hand over her psychological projects to someone else and focused on the coordination of the overall KPH structures. That was also the moment when she definitely left her job in SWPS - it was also connected with the fact, that the school started to lower teachers' salaries and at the same time, the cooperation with students deteriorated – some of them accused her on the SWPS internet forums, that because of her sexual orientation, she was favoring some of them. Marta did not feel comfortable with this unsatisfying job, she compared her work life with the period, when she felt like “a slave of corporation” in *Bauer Company* and finally she stopped to be professionally active anywhere but in KPH. She was convinced that only working in her organization could give her real satisfaction. She was also aware that one day she will have to leave KPH's board of management and find successors, vest her knowledge and prepare a ground for the future existence of organization. At that time KPH started to founding chapters in every voivodeship in Poland, coordinate many local groups – Marta was

fully involved in all of these initiatives. She has been responsible for almost all and everyone in relation to Campaign.

All of this has to be clipped, all the conflicts, which are normal with such a huge amount of people, have to be resolved...I feel like a mother of a huge family with numerous children, which is supposed to feed them all, because many people expect some profits from their work. And it all is so demanding!(...) But on the other hand, I am very happy that all of it has developed so much, because I have always wanted to create a big, strong organization, which will be able to make a significant social change.

She has never been a “media-person” – the promotion division was connected with Robert Biedroń and he became kind of a “face” of the LGBTQ movement in Poland. Marta has been doing the “dirty work” – organizational work, financial staff and lot of things which are in fact invisible, but which are essential to keep the organization going.

Ideas Behind the Movement

The most important goal for members of KPH is creating a strong, stable and powerful organization which is able to support local groups working around the Poland. Marta believes that the main task for them is to make changes in every part of a country – not only in Warszawa, where in her opinion, living as a gay or lesbian is much easier than anywhere else. For the last two years they have organized a “summer camp” for integrating activists from all cities. The idea of intensifying KPH as a strong organism and at the same time, extending local chapter and finally creating a huge national organization, is in Marta’s opinion, the idea fix for today. Simultaneously KPH is tending to realization of their main postulates such as: legal act of partnership, regulation in the succession law concessions for non-heterosexual couples, promotion of “rainbow families” rights (e.g. in adoption regulations), promotion of anti-homophobic sexual education – not only at schools but also between workers of many social services (like doctors, psychologists, police, etc.), lobbying for the creation of anti-discrimination legal acts.

We are appealing for putting the terms of “hate speech” and “hate crimes” into penal code. Without it we cannot talk about anything with the police - if they do not have any legal basis,

they will do nothing with this kind of crime. For two years we have spoken with the police about training, we are able to gain money for it, but it is so hard to put into practice.

Another strategic aim of KPH is the building of civil society in Poland and creating the type of social capital which will be helpful in fulfilling LGBTQ movement postulates. In Marta's opinion only strong civil society, with numerous powerful social organizations (not only connected with LGBTQ movement) is able to create positive social changes, especially in a country, where Catholic church has a significant position and is capable of deferring changes – particularly those, which are connected with post-material values (Inglehard, 1997).

With relation to her future in the movement, Marta declares, that she would like to be an active actress of it until the end of her life, but not necessarily only in KPH.

At the moment I am in the process of putting across my responsibilities in KPH – this is my last cadence as a member of managing board. I am already a bit tired of all of this – it will be 10 years since I have started doing that. That is why I am trying to find good people, who could replace me and fortunately, some of them I have already found(...) Personally, I would like to stay in KPH and work as a rank-and-file volunteer – I can take part in board managing' meetings as a guest, give some advice, work here on the specific projects etc. But I do not want to be responsible for the whole organization anymore.

She is planning to dedicate more time to her own projects, which are connected with LGBTQ movement ideas, but not related directly with KPH in an organizational way. Marta is a creator of an internet portal www.mutlikulti.org.pl. which is devoted to promoting ideas of diversity and tolerance and fighting against any forms of discrimination. The main goal of *mutlikulti* is collecting and submitting information about any initiatives connected with activity of Polish new social movements, which share ideas of tolerance for diversity. On the website one can find articles about gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, disability etc. Marta is a chief-editor, but as she mentioned, till now, because of the activity in KPH, she could not find enough time to fully engage in her new initiative. In connection with the portal, Marta would like to concentrate on promoting the idea of “rainbow families”. She is planning to translate or even write books about and for LGTBQ families, because in her opinion in

Poland this issue is unknown and many members of such families are still hiding their lifestyles and cannot be the full-fledged social subjects.

Another one of Marta's initiatives was founding her own organization *Dla Odmiany (For a Change)*, which started in 2009. Its main goal is to make educational programs not only focused on LGBTQ issues but also on diversity, idea of tolerance etc, which could then be conducted in schools and youth centers, where initiatives promoted by KPH would not have any chance for approval.

Marta has quite positive feelings regarding the future of the movement. She thinks that the amount of people who would like to act in the movement is increasing, new organizations, with the strong support of KPH, are founded (e.g. *Trans-Fuzja, Dla Odmiany, Instytut Podkarpacki*) and more people are becoming aware of the importance of building civil society. In her opinion KPH will transform in the future into a more radical form. It is connected with the fact that new, younger actors are much more radical than her and the founders of the organization. It will also change into kind of a community-organization, it will work in coalition with smaller and decentralized organizations, similar to those, which already exist abroad.

Private Life and Living Standard

As it was mentioned before, Marta does not have any problems with accepting her non-heterosexual love choices. When she started her first relationship with a woman, she was convinced that this is completely normal and after some time, her choice was also accepted by her friends and parents²⁸. Marta was involved in this first relationship for six years – for a long time she thought, that it would last forever. Therefore she did not make any effort to get to know Polish lesbian community – it was not important for her and she did not feel a part of it. And after breaking up, she felt a bit lost and started to look for her “new” identity.

²⁸ Her parents are very supportive and do not see any problems with her choices. Although she does not talk much about her love life with her father, he is very interested in her social activity – they discuss KPH and LGBTQ movement in general, and sometimes he even takes part in some of the initiatives such as equality marches and parades. On the contrary, Marta's mother at the beginning of her activity had a much more critical attitude. She was trying to convince her daughter that society cannot change and she should quit KPH and work in the normal company for good money. But later she has changed her mind and started to believe that Marta's activity has some sense indeed.

So I did not know any lesbian women and I started to get to know the community from scratch. I visited clubs, signed to the first mailing list, but I did not really know how it all works. I met lot of people, who were not very optimistic – many of them believed that being gay or lesbian brings mostly unhappiness and that is why I could not find deep contact with them.(...) I also thought that it is unacceptable that gay and lesbians can meet each other only in clubs. That is why I engaged in KPH initiatives even more actively, because I wanted to give homosexual people more space for meeting each other – not only in clubs but just like the rest of society, anywhere.

Currently, Marta is in a happy relationship with a woman and she is thinking about having children in the future. That is also one of the reasons why she would like to pay more attention into issues connected with “rainbow families”. She is strongly convinced that her future children deserve to live in the society where no one will have to hide their sexual orientation.

Her social life is also gratifying – she has a group of close friends from many backgrounds and her ex-partners play important role in it. She spends also a lot of her free time in KPH hence many of her friends are connected with the organization – according to her, she is trying to involve almost all of her old friends into activism in LGBTQ movement.

Marta describes herself as a member of Polish middle-class. She thinks that level of her education and also family background puts her into this specific category. The only thing which could deny it is her financial situation, which is not adequate for her work and education.

It is actually a problem – I am thinking about it very often. There is not enough money and the fact, that the situation of NGOs and in particular KPH is very unstable is very stressful. We are often discriminated by the people who decide about giving money for social projects, hence we have money problems all the time – for rent, for phone-calls, accountants, not to mention salaries.(...) You cannot think about any credits, holidays etc. because you actually do not know, if in 3 months you will get your salary or not. So it is a huge problem indeed.

At the moment Marta’s salary is enough for a modest livelihood, which is sometimes very problematic, because she is convinced that she could earn much more money, had she

worked as many of her friends in the private sector. Although she does not have high rank of consumption needs, she would like to be in a situation, where she does not need to worry about money for holidays.

According to her religious beliefs, she declares that in general she does not believe in god that is why philosophy of Buddhism would be closest to her. She does not identify with the Catholic Church at all, and she does not approve of the situation in Poland, where this institution has such a strong impact on political and social life.

Political Values and Cultural Consumption

Contrary to the common belief that LGBTQ movement's activists identify themselves mostly with the New Left, Marta holds very liberal political views.

I absolutely refuse paying money for free-riders! That is a reason of huge discussion here in KPH, because majority of members are socialists and I believe, that better solution would be part-time voluntary work for the nation, instead of paying taxes. I think it would be better a way of using my potential and my country's potential, than my money disappearing in some kind of "black hole".

She is a supporter of tax cuts and she is not a huge fan of a Polish version of "welfare state", where taxes are high and a taxpayer gets nothing in return. She used to vote for the now defunct liberal *Unia Wolności (Union of Freedom)* and now she has a big problem to identify herself with any of the political forces in Poland, although she prefers the left wing, because as she said: "It is much easier to cope with them. They at least want to talk with us."

In general, she dreams about the world where all people are happy and everyone – independently of e.g. sexual orientation, can live in a normal way, without any form of discrimination.

Marta is particularly fond of literature. One of her future plans is connected with writing books, because that is in fact her biggest dream. She is a huge fan of ibero-american literature and *One Hundred Years of Loneliness* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is her favorite book: "I am strongly convinced that it is a masterpiece. My definition of a masterpiece consists of believing, that I would not make any changes to the book, because it is perfect." At the moment Marta thinks, that it is not very easy to find good and valuable book. Another

piece of art which made huge impression on her was J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. She also likes *Ender's Game* - a science fiction novel written by American author Orson Scott Card, although in general she is not a fan of this type of literature. Among Polish authors she mentions Olga Tokarczuk. Marta underlines that she does not like books about the so called "women's bounds" such as Jeanette Winterson or Sarah Waters art.

As a natural-born traveler interested mostly in Asia and Far-East culture, she reads a lot of travel books – e.g. Tiziano Terzani and his *Fortune-Teller Told Me: Earthbound Travels in the Far East*. Her Asian fascination is connected with the fact, that among her favorite films are those directed by Akira Kurosawa. She is a fan of Woody Allen and Pedro Almodovar's movies as well. She adores *Everything about my mother* but also the last piece by him: *Vicky, Cristina, Barcelona*. She enjoys socially engaged cinema and movies like: *The Boxer, In the Name of the Father* and *Crying Game*.

In her free time she likes listening to music. She is a fan of *Dead Can Dance* and in general female vocalists with strong voices such as: Anna Terenheim, Tori Amos, Ewa Demarczyk and Marianne Faithfull. Sometimes, for a change, she also listens to Nick Cave, Leonard Cohen and Moby.