

The prison system that existed in Poland from 1944 to 1956, functioned as a place of post-war retribution, political and ideological repression, and mass-scale terror towards the population. These functions have already been researched. Instead, I would like to focus on the dimension of everyday life in the prisons: that is, the functioning of the individual in a closed prison microcosm.

A prison world requires analyses of the behaviour of an individual in a situation of extreme oppression and his/her ability to accommodate and create rules and strategies for survival. In the accounts which I have already collected from former prisoners, one can find important statements such as, 'prison is not life,' and, 'in order to survive, you should forget what is outside,' or, 'you cannot struggle all the time.' I am going to analyse the mutual influence of individuals and groups within their cells, their rituals, and also look at how connections and ties between inmates and their overseers were forged.

Such an approach would make this narrative more balanced and manifold. I would like to analyse the problems of prison life from the perspective of individual choices and attitudes, and I seek to answer to what extent the latter could interfere with the system and change the way it functions. This approach is possible when we look at concrete roles and situations. For instance, the case study of a prison doctor who took care of inmates, who of course, was restricted by existing rules; or, the example of a prison commandant who diligently fought against analphabetism in the prison.

The arrest and conviction of a relative was never a neutral fact for the prisoner's family members. The latter were ostracized and often lost their jobs. They perceived this situation in various ways, often as a stigma. It is worth researching to what extent, at what expense, and by which means the family members supported their prisoner relatives. An inmate in a cell who was in a remote prison turned out to be an important point of reference and attachment for people living in distant parts of Poland.

I hope this project will help us better understand this experience which shaped a considerable part of the post-war generation.