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## **Gender, Nation and Memory**

**- the Case of the Memory of the First World War among Polish Women on the Polish-Ukrainian Borderland, 1918–1939**

[...] The National Organization was gaining increasing influence and it started to be joined by all Poles regardless of their political affiliation and previously held views on the Polish question. In 1917, the Organization reached an agreement with all Polish associations and unions in the town and region, with the railmen's union from the Polish Military Organization, and became the regional exponent of Polish goals. [...] Its female section was engaged in humanitarian activity, bringing relief to war casualties, providing bedclothes for soldiers in hospitals and running field kitchens<sup>1</sup>.

These words of Andrzej Wondaś, one of the major local ideologists of the National Democracy (right-wing constant opposition to the ruling government since 1926) in Jarosław and influential historian who wrote extensively on regional

<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Wondaś, *Jarosław w czasie wielkiej wojny światowej. 1914–1918*, „Gazeta Jarosławska” Y. 5: 1936 no. 18 of 3 V, p. 2. Andrzej Wondaś (born Oct. 10, 1876 Bieżdziejka, died Aug. 28, 1939 Jarosław), was Jarosław High School teacher (since Feb. 2, 1910) and director, historian, journalist and local activist. He was co-founder of Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Dawnego Jarosławia (Association of Lovers of Ancient Jarosław) in 1935. published among others: *Stosunek Ottokara II, króla Czech, do książąt Śląska i Polski*, in: *Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji c.k. gimnazjum w Stanisławowie za rok szkolny 1903/1904*, Stanisławów, p. 2–32; *Szkice do dziejów Jarosławia*, vol. 1, 2, Jarosław 1934–1936; *Szkice do dziejów Jarosławia. Szkic uzupełniający*, Jarosław 1938.

history, illustrate a certain way of looking at modern history in the 1930s. Only several years after the Great War had ended, there were attempts to appropriate the memory of that event. That would happen on various levels, from the state to local ones. It was especially Piłsudski's adherents ruling Poland from 1926 that made various, often very successful attempts to instrumentalize the memory of recent history. In the process, certain groups were pushed into the background, others being highlighted during various state celebrations. That policy of the ruling party prompted natural objections from other groups, especially the influential opposition National Democracy which enjoyed strong support among Poles on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland.

Therefore, the analysis of Wondaś's words may be a very good prelude to a discussion on the place of men and women during the First World War in the collective memory of the inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. For it often happened that local activists, attempting to influence the identification/self-perception of the residents of a given region, emphasized the attitudes and actions of selected groups or organizations, deliberately ignoring or marginalizing others. What is more, the texts published in local newspapers also show another phenomenon – the order of the sexes desirable from the authors' point of view. The articles published in the provincial press – which I have adopted as a basis for my discussion – tell us more about the standards desirable, stipulated or preferable from the authors' perspective than about actual events that had really taken place. Still, looking – with the help of the local press – at the order of the sexes and the memory of the Poles living between the wars on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, allows us to consider several issues: 1) the reception of Warsaw models, oftentimes adapted artificially and forcibly to local circumstances; 2) showing the specific nature of the struggle for memory, e.g. through creating local heroes and heroines; 3) creating the opposition of “friends” and “foes” – fellow people and strangers – which was by no means limited to just one model,

i.e. the divided Poles and Ukrainians<sup>2</sup>. For the purposes of this article, I have deliberately ignored discussing the memory of local Ukrainian men and women and representatives of less numerous ethnic groups, as they require thorough studies which have not yet been undertaken for the residents of towns smaller than Lviv<sup>3</sup>.

### Some general remarks

Interwar Poland's memory of the First World War in various groups of Polish citizens was at least as diversified as the many national groups within Poland's borders. Southeastern Poland was not an exception. On the other hand, the territory of today's Southeastern Poland and western Ukraine is unique as the place of clashes between the Poles and Ukrainians. The war of 1918-1919 and the failure of the idea of a Ukrainian Independent State caused a lot of troubles and tensions – also in the field of memory.

I am aware of the fact that Polish women at that time did not speak in one voice. The state, the Roman Catholic Church, the ruling and opposition parties as well as the fact of being a ruling minority in the Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish-Armenian corner

<sup>2</sup> For more, see: B. Melman, *Gender, History and Memory: The Invention of Women's Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, „History and Memory. Studies in Representation of the Past” 1993 vol. 5 no. 1 p. 5–41.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g.: M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women In Ukrainian Community Life, 1884–1939*, Edmonton 1988; O. Маланчук-Рибак, *Жіночі організації Перемищини*, in: *Перемишль і Перемиська земля пртягом віків*, ч. 3 під ред. С. Заброварного, Перемишль–Львів 2003, с. 410–418; J. Hoff, *Mieszkańcy małych miast Galicji Wschodniej w okresie autonomicznym*, Rzeszów 2005; eadem, *Żydzi, Polacy i Rusini w małych miastach Galicji Wschodniej w drugiej połowie XIX w. Sąsiedzi, obcy, wrogowie?*, in: *Spółczesność w dobie przemian. Wiek XIX i XX. Księga jubileuszowa Profesor Anny Żarnowskiej*, ed. M. Nietyksza, DiG, Warszawa 2003. p. 337–344. М. Дядюк, *Український жіночий рух у міжвоєнній Галичині: між гендерною ідентичністю та національною заангажованістю*, Львів 2011. See also: Ch. Mick, *The Dead and the Living: War Veterans and Memorial Culture in Interwar Polish Galicia*, in: *Sacrifice and Rebirth. The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, ed. M. Cornwall and J. P. Newman, Beghahn, New York – Oxford 2016, p. 233–257.

– all those were important factors in shaping Polish women’s memory of the FWW. What is more, individuals were very often puzzled by the state’s official memory policy. Some heroes were installed, others were condemned to vanishing from the public scene. It is especially visible in the comparison of Polish and Ukrainian memory (memorial sites, what censorship allowed to be published, the areas of silence, etc.).

After the 1926 coup d’état, the official state policy focused on the centralization of public festivities. A new political movement was created – *Sanacja* (Sanation). It took its name from Józef Piłsudski’s watchword – the moral „sanation” (healing) of the Polish body politics. One of the most important areas of this public healing was creating the new state memory of the foundation of New Poland. The heroization of Piłsudski as the builder of the state as well as the legionary movement (his supporters and comrades-in-arms) was a crucial element of this policy. Many Polish FWW soldiers from the Prussian, Russian and Austro-Hungarian armies were excluded from the common glory. For their wives and daughters, it was a huge problem in interwar relations – being a legionary (as well as the family of the comrades of Piłsudski) gave a lot of privileges in the 1918-1939 Poland (job, money, position, prestige, etc.).

With the *Sanacja* movement also new women’s organizations were created. Their role was mainly to support men’s activity. It does not mean that *Sanacja* women did not have any say on the political scene. The most numerous and influential women’s movement was ZPOK (Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet – Women’s Citizens’ Work Union). Its branches consisted of wives, sisters, mothers of the leaders of local authorities. Membership helped the male members of the family to be noticed and get promotion – to larger centers as well as to better-paid and more prestigious posts. ZPOK was also a competitor for an older post-legionary, mostly pro-leftist women’s organization, Liga Kobiet (Women’s League) which was also quite popular, especially during and just after the FWW. On the other hand, still the most popular women’s organization among Polish women was

Narodowa Organizacja Kobiet (Women's National Organization), strictly connected with the National Democrats and the Catholic Church<sup>4</sup>. On the one hand, the Warsaw perspective shows the best example of fights in the field of memory between the activists of various parties (not only Sanacja and the National Democracy members). On the other hand, it must be considered that local branches of their organizations were not only mute representations of the ideas of the capital, but very often spoke their own voices. These voices were heard especially in the peripheries of the country where the Poles were not so numerous (Ukrainians outnumbered them), and this is why they wanted to be present in the public sphere even more. The discourse in Southeast Poland (the former Eastern Galicia) was even more specific due to the omnipresent memory of Polish-Ukrainian fights for the region (1918–1919), and the fact that the Ukrainians were not satisfied with the decision of the Conference of the Ambassadors giving the territory of Galicia to Poland. Mistrust and suspicion were not so rare in Polish-Ukrainian relations of that epoch though, even if the Poles were not unanimous in so many political cases. The same divisions are seen in the problem of interpreting women's role during the years of the Great War. Polish women activists during the interwar period were not united in this case. It is seen in Lviv (the capital of the region and the biggest center) as well as in small towns and cities. Because Lviv was the key place of Polish-Ukrainian fights of 1918–1919 and the symbol for both nations of their presence in the region<sup>5</sup>, I deliberately

<sup>4</sup> For more, see: J. Dufurat, *W służbie obozu marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego. Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet (1928–1939)*, Kraków–Wrocław 2013; *Działaczki społeczne, feministki, obywatelki...*, vol. 2 *Samoorganizowanie się kobiet na ziemiach polskich po 1918 roku (na tle porównawczym)*, eds. A. Janiak-Jasińska, K. Sierakowska, A. Szwarz, Warszawa 2009; U. Jakubowska, *Kobiety w świecie polityki Narodowej Demokracji*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki w niepodległej Polsce 1918–1939*, eds. A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarz, Warszawa 1996, p. 145–160, A. Chojnowski, *Kobiety i polityka w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Słowo wstępne*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki w niepodległej Polsce 1918–1939*, eds. A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarz, Warszawa 1996, p. 9–16.

<sup>5</sup> For more – see: A.V. Wendland, *Semper Fidelis. Lwów jako mit narodowy Polaków i Ukraińców, 1867–1939*, in: Lwów: Miasto-społeczeństwo-kultura,

ignored the case of that city and focused on minor places. I do believe that their inhabitants are better examples for my study as typical representatives of the region<sup>6</sup>.

### A small town perspective – the case of Jarosław

They took part, armed, in the defense of Lviv in November 1918 and later battles of the resurrected Poland. [...] A woman brings up future generations – it is on her that the shaping of the child's thoughts and soul depends – she also is the main dispenser of money for the needs of the household and the family<sup>7</sup>.

The anonymous author of the article *The Role of a Polish Woman* in the national "Głos Jarosławski" newspaper tried to bring his readers round to his opinion in a very conventional manner. In the period after the elections to the Parliament and to the local town council, when Jarosław newspapers called for fulfilling "women's roles and tasks", i.e. making use of their suffrage and voting for individual political parties, the journalist's suggestions were merely a repetition of what others had already written about<sup>8</sup>. What was new, though, was the reference to the glorious tradition of Polish women fighting for

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eds. K. Karolczak and H.W. Żaliński, vol. 4, Kraków 2002, p. 263-273; eadem, *Post-Austrian Lemberg: War Commemoration, Inter-Ethnic Relations, and Urban Identity 1918-1939*, "Austrian History Yearbook", vol. 34, p. 82-103; eadem, *Nachbarn als Verräter: Nationalisierungsprozesse, Erinnerungspolitik und städtische Öffentlichkeiten in Lemberg (1914-1939)*, in: *Stadt und Öffentlichkeit in Ostmitteleuropa 1900-1939. Beiträge zur Entstehung moderner Urbanität zwischen Berlin, Charkiv, Tallinn und Triest*, eds A.V. Wendland and A.R. Hofmann, Stuttgart 2002, p. 149-169.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware that probably the farmers' perspective would be even better to examine – they were the most numerous inhabitants of the region. Due to the chosen sources (newspapers), I decided to focus on people in small towns and cities as they were the first to be addressed by certain actions (theoretical and practical ones) of political parties and leaders.

<sup>7</sup> „Głos Jarosławski” Y. 2: 1928 no. 21 of 26 V, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> For more, see: A. Chojnowski, *Kobieta i polityka w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Słowo wstępne*, in: *Kobieta i świat polityki. W niepodległej Polsce 1918-1939*, eds. A. Żarnowska and A. Szwarz, Warszawa 1996, p. 2-16.

Lviv being Polish. It was clear that the Jarosław women hardly had anything to do with that fight; the point was to show an example to inspire local women to act. The past was then supposed to inspire, motivate and indicate the right way.

Interestingly, every time a reference to the memory of the Great War was made, it meant mainly the year 1918 and Poland regaining independence. On the 10th anniversary of that event, on 22 September, 1928, a special body was appointed – a local Committee for Presenting the Events of 1914-1918. The publishing of a memorial book showing the war history of Jarosław was planned. An appeal was published in the press for people to support the initiative by sending their own memories and documents. Among the 18 initiators of the action there were 4 women; however, the group invited for further collaboration was purely male. The initiative, focused around the Polish Gymnastic Society “Falcon” (Sokół) and the local division of the National Democracy, created a storm in local circles. The activists of the local Sanacja movement gathered around the “Wiadomości Jarosławskie” weekly and attacked their political opponents, their main accusation being that the initiative had been directed only at a narrow, selected group and could by no means be treated as representative of the local society. What is more, representatives of both groups went much further in their argument.

On 31 October and 1 November, 1928, on the initiative of the local division of the “Falcon”, a celebration was to take place, commemorating the 10 years of Jarosław being part of Poland. “But something incredible happened. A small group of well-known troublemakers threatened to provoke riots unless the Falcon gave up the celebrations, which were deemed anti-national”<sup>9</sup>. The Society building was occupied by the police and as a result many people withdrew, among them the head of the Private Teacher Training College, local historian and main participant of the underground movement in Jarosław between

<sup>9</sup> „Głos Jarosławski” Y. 2: 1928 no. 43 of 3 XI, p. 2.

1917 and 1918, Andrzej Wondaś. One day before the planned celebrations he justified his decision as follows:

The episode of liberating Jarosław from the Austrian rule is of such little significance compared to regaining independence by the whole of Poland that a special festivity to commemorate that local event at the time when the Government recommends ceremonial celebrations of the 10th anniversary of regaining independence may be regarded as an anti-government demonstration, diminishing the importance and gravity of the all-state celebrations<sup>10</sup>.

Besides the literal fights for the memory of November 1918 (which were not limited only to squabbles in local weeklies), also less controversial elements of local splinters of the Great War were recalled. While the memories and articles tended to emphasize the bravery of men, sometimes the attitudes of local women were also highlighted. Zbigniew Nowosad in his sketch titled *The Participation of the Jarosław Scouts in the Fight for the Independence of Poland* emphasized the role of Halina Łączkowska in organizing a local female scout troop. Under her supervision, the scouts were prepared for courier and charitable service and rendered considerable services equipping the male squad during the military mobilization at the beginning of August 1914<sup>11</sup>. Another author remembered the role of women focused around the Falcon, who at the same time equipped a Bartosz Squad and the Falcon youth, sewing underclothes, knapsacks and rucksacks for them<sup>12</sup>. Also in the following years the women of Jarosław worked for the local irredentists. In 1917 the Female Section of the Polish National Organization started supplying underclothes and food for the legionaries interned in

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, no. 45 of 17 XI, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, no. 46 of 24 XI, p. 2–3, no. 47 of 1 XII, p. 2–3. On female scout groups in Jarosław and the region at the same time see more in: I. Kozimala, *Lwowska Chorągiew Harcerek ZHP 1911–1939*, Przemyśl 2003; eadem, *Harcerstwo żeńskie w oczach społeczeństwa Galicji Wschodniej*, in: *Historia zwyczajnych kobiet i zwyczajnych mężczyzn. Dzieje społeczne w perspektywie gender*, eds. D. Kałwa and T. Pudłocki, Przemyśl 2007, p. 63–72.

<sup>12</sup> „Głos Jarosławski” Y. 2: 1928, no. 37 of 22 IX, p. 2–3.



the nearby Żurawica<sup>13</sup>. Some of them would even hide escapees from the camp, disguising them as household servants and enabling their escape<sup>14</sup>. Between October and November 1918, local Polish women organized a kitchen for the National Guard and cared for the soldiers of the former Austrian Army who returned from the Italian front<sup>15</sup>.

The case of Jarosław shows that in small Galician towns there were just a few female activists. What is more, their actions during World War I were rather inconsiderable and limited only to their local region. Even during the actions of November 1918, (the event always overshadowing the interwar memory of WWI) women were seen as extraordinary but not necessary “addition” and not the main players. That is why the memory of local women was constructed not only on what was local, but more on those aspects which were common for all Polish inhabitants of the state (such as the November fight for Lviv or other aspects of shaping the borders of interwar Poland).

### Shaping memory in the public space – the case of Przemyśl

[...] God appointed Mrs Tarnawska to achieve great goals, and most of all, to educate Polish women to fulfill their social duties in the free Independent Poland, to be for them a model of womanly virtues and ardent, selfless love for the already powerful homeland. It was her task to instill in the young generation reverence and love for those who had died for freedom defending Polish borders during the uprisings in 1831, 1863 and between 1914 and 1921. It is also she who, with a small group of the members of the Polish Women's Alliance, looks after the graves of the Przemyśl heroes, decorating them on All Souls' Day and on national anniversaries<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> For more, see: M. Staroń, *Likwidacja Polskiego Korpusu Posiłkowego w 1918 roku. Losy legionistów po traktacie brzeskim*, Warszawa 2013.

<sup>14</sup> A. Wondaś, *Szkice do dziejów Jarosławia*, vol. 2, Jarosław 1936, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kaflńska, *Cicha bohaterka*, „Wzloty”, Y. 5: 1938 no. 40 of 11 XI, p. 6.

Here is what Maria Kaflńska wrote in November 1938 about Wincenta Tarnawska, the Przemyśl suffragette and guardian of the memory of the Polish fight for independence. Although Tarnawska was already past her prime, in the eyes of Kaflńska – a former alumna and activist of the Polish Women’s Alliance – the eighty-year-old Tarnawska remained an educator of successive generations of Polish women, who advises, instructs and encourages them to follow her example. Years go by, generations of young girls change, and Tarnawska stands guard at her post<sup>17</sup>.

Jarosław is an example of a small place which did not play a major role during the FWW but was strongly divided as regards the memory of its events. The role of Przemyśl was very different, however. It was a medium-sized town in the interwar period, but as one of the most important European fortresses during the Great War, it was a major point of reference on the map of memory at that time. For the Hungarians, Przemyśl was “the Gate to Hungary” and a symbol of the fight for the idea of Great Hungary shattered by the Treaty of Trianon<sup>18</sup>. The town was visited by the English and the French attracted by various stories about the heroic defense of the Fortress against the Russian troops in the years 1914-1915<sup>19</sup>. Bernard Newman summarized his talks with the town’s inhabitants as follows:

They had rare tales to tell – of hunger, starvation and loot: of the comparative food value of dogs and rats: of the ethics even of cannibalism. No town of the East saw more of the horrors of war than this Przemyśl<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> For more on her, see: T. Pudłocki, *Będziemy działać... Wincenta Tarnawska w służbie niepodległości Polski*, Kraków 2013.

<sup>18</sup> See e.g.: B. Geócze, *A przemysli tragédia*, Budapest 1922; D. Nónay, *A volt szegedi m. kir. 5. honv. gy. ezd. a világháborúban*, Budapest 1931; J. Lévai, *Éhség, árulás, Przemyśl*, Budapest 1933.

<sup>19</sup> See: A. Bruce Boswell, *The Poland and the Poles*, London 1919, p. 24; H. Baerlein, *No longer Poles apart*, London 1936, p. 224; B. Newman, *Peddalling Poland*, London 1935, p. 151–153; R. Martial, *La Pologne jadis et de nos jours*, Paris 1928.

<sup>20</sup> B. Newman, *op. cit.*, 153.

Surprisingly, while for foreigners the point of reference in local history was the Russian siege, for the local Poles cultivating the memory of irredentism was much more important during the interwar period. That involved first the actions against the Austrians which gained momentum in 1917 after the so-called “oath crisis” and imprisonment of a large number of Polish legionaries. The second point, strongly emphasized in the memory of the FWW, were Polish-Ukrainian fights for the town in November 1918.

Owing to the many actions undertaken not only by men but also women, shaping a uniform memory of the Great War in Przemyśl was not possible. Polish women were members of the Association of Defenders of Przemyśl (Wincenta Tarnawska, Maria Dekañska, Maria Bielawska, Helena Stieberowa) which was supposed to be open to all Poles fighting against the Ukrainians in 1918; they also ran a lot of actions shaping modern memory. The organizations which led the way here were: the Polish Women’s Alliance, the Women’s League, the Women’s Citizens’ Work Union, and the Women’s National Organization. The problem is that the women’s movement in this region was not homogeneous, thus the actions taken up by individual women’s organizations often competed with each other<sup>21</sup>. The struggle for memory did not occur only along party divisions, however. A good example is the reaction to the popular historical writing of Helena Stieberowa, referring to different aspects of

<sup>21</sup> For more, see: T. Pudłocki, *„Za silna już do starego życia, a za słaba jeszcze do nowego” – przemyskie inteligentki wobec wyzwań nowoczesności w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, w: *Działaczki społeczne, feministki, obywatelki... Samoorganizowanie się kobiet na ziemiach polskich po 1918 roku (na tle porównawczym)*, vol. 2, eds. A. Janiak-Jasińska, K. Sierakowska and A. Szwarc, Warszawa 2009, p. 99–116; idem, *„Naród potrzebuje Twojego czynu!”. Kobiety z prawicy polskiej i ukraińskiej południowo-wschodnich ziem II Rzeczypospolitej w dyskursie publicznym*, w: *Aktywność publiczna kobiet na ziemiach polskich. Wybrane zagadnienia*, eds. T. Pudłocki, K. Sierakowska, Warszawa 2013, p. 203–225; idem, *Maria Bielawska – w poszukiwaniu tożsamości kobiety aktywnej na prowincji okresu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, in: *Historia zwyczajnych kobiet i zwyczajnych mężczyzn. Dzieje społeczne w perspektywie gender*, eds. D. Kałwa and T. Pudłocki, Przemyśl 2007, p. 43–62.

the FWW. Stieberowa emphasized her own role in fighting for the independence of Poland so much that she met with strong opposition not only from the female National Democrats but also the younger Sanacja activists. Strong individualization and self-promotion took on such proportions in Stieberowa that even the ruling party which supported her contributed to her dismissal from the Sanacja women's organizations after being afraid of becoming an object of ridicule<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, they acted in favor of social continuity through concrete practices and appealing to emotions, connections and meanings, which at least a certain group of Przemyśl residents found in their lives, thus interfering in communal memory in that town on the river San. Among them were memory meetings with time-witnesses, publishing articles referring to the FWW and the struggle against Austria-Hungary even before 1914, organizing special public events devoted to 1918 anniversaries, as well as historical and arts exhibitions expressing that all 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish uprisings concluded in the actions of Joseph Piłsudski and his legions. That measure was deliberate and in keeping with the definition of collective memory prevalent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which saw deliberate attempts to bring back concrete aspects of the past (Poles owe the independence, which was achieved through opposing Austria-Hungary, Russia and Prussia, the suffering of the nation, self-determination as well as bravery in fighting, to themselves)<sup>23</sup>. At the same time there were also attempts to create a certain set of beliefs and ideas referring to concrete events, people and processes from the past, along with evaluative elements which must have been shared by at least

<sup>22</sup> For more, see: T. Pudłocki, „*Nie tylko one to robily...*”. *Helena Stieberowa a dyskurs w międzywojennym Przemyślu o udziale Polek w walkach o niepodległość*, w: *Pamięć historyczna kobiet*, eds. M. Przeniosło and K. Sierakowska, Kielce 2009, p. 53–66; idem, „*W służbie Marszałka*”. *Działalność i pisanstwo Heleny z Hordyńskich Stieberowej*, in: *Jednostka Strzelecka 2009 im. gen. bryg. Andrzeja Galicy przy II Liceum Ogólnokształcącym w Przemyślu. Przeszłość i kształtowanie teraźniejszości*, ed. H. Humnicka, Rzeszów 2014, p. 102–123.

<sup>23</sup> For more, see: J. Nowak, *Společne reguły pamiętania. Antropologia pamięci zbiorowej*, Kraków 2011, p. 27–66.

a part of the inhabitants of the town and region, thus carrying important content for them. As Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec and Tomasz Pawelec argue: “Collective historical memory is one of the basic indicators of identity for the community which carries it, and also an important factor of integrating this community in the sphere of values and ideas”<sup>24</sup>. And even if the effects of those actions might have been different (as collective memory has a dynamic character and undergoes changes<sup>25</sup>) and have been addressed mainly to the middle class, *de facto* they had a common source. It was possible in bigger centers such as Przemyśl, Stanisławów, Tarnopol or even Kołomyja, because the inhabitants of these places had many institutions organizing the local celebration ceremonies connected with the Great War. Due to the meaning of these places, these “memory activities” were not only focused on the November 1918 Polish-Ukrainian fighting and the regaining of independence by the Poles, but were often much more complex (celebrations of various local actions during the War, connected with the great refuge from Galicia 1914–1915, the Russian occupation of the territory as well as the local resistance against the Austrians at that time)<sup>26</sup>.

### **Body and memorial site – the fight for Irena Benschówna**

A very interesting example of the fight for creating a local memorial site is Irena Benschówna. She became a legend of the Polish-Ukrainian fights in Przemyśl for, unlike the majority of local women, she did not limit herself to helping the wounded and sick soldiers. Like the female members of the Polish Military Organization and female scouts led by Professor

<sup>24</sup> D. Malczewska-Pawelec, T. Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej. Porównawcze studia nad praktykami manipulacji zbiorową pamięcią Polaków w czasach stalinowskich*, Kraków 2011, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15–16.

<sup>26</sup> T. Pudłocki, *Expérience of Mobility Outside Galicia Before and After World War I – War Refugees Example*, “Prace Historyczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego”, 2016, 143 (1), p. 107-125.

Izydora Kossowska, apart from the work in hospital, she took on the task of carrying arms and ammunition. She continued it until 13 December, 1918 when she was killed near Niżankowice. Helena Stieberowa<sup>27</sup> wrote about her:

Quite heroic deeds were done by the late Irena Benschówna from Poznań, a teacher's daughter, a legionary from the 6th Legions Infantry Regiment. Irena Benschówna often carried the wounded on her own back, tried to raise their spirits, eventually she took up arms herself, to defend Przemyśl with other young people against Ukrainian attacks near Niżankowice. But she was killed by a Ukrainian bullet<sup>28</sup>.

Benschówna, who was killed in the Polish-Ukrainian fights, became an icon of sacrifice of young Polish women in the fight for independence. She was remembered not only by Stieberowa but also many other memoirists<sup>29</sup>. Her memory was revived in January 1921 when Teofila Tęczar, one of the Przemyśl women most involved in social life, published an appeal to the residents of Przemyśl in "Ziemia Przemyska". There she quoted the letter of K. Benschowa, Irena's mother, who on 27 January asked for the body of her daughter to be sent back to Poznań. The mother asked to tell the inhabitants of Przemyśl that the Ministry of War had permitted her to have the body transported to the Wielkopolska region but she could not afford paying for the procedure. Therefore, Teofila Tęczar appealed to the people of

<sup>27</sup> She used double form of her surname: once Stieberowa, once Hordyńska-Stieberowa.

<sup>28</sup> H. Stieberowa, *P.O.W. a obrona Przemyśla*, „Wzloty” Y. 5: 1938 no. 40 of 11 XI p. 7. See also: eadem, *Obrona Przemyśla w roku 1918 (Z pamiętnika)*, in: *Oświata to potęga. Wydawnictwo pamiątkowe z okazji obchodu 15-lecia niepodległości państwa polskiego*, ed. J. Kopeć, part 2, Przemyśl 1933, p. 74–75.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. eadem, *Kobieta – obywatelka*, op. cit., p. 2; M. Dekańska-Bilińska, *Moje wspomnienia żołnierskie*, „Wzloty” Y. 5: 1938 no. 41 of 26 XI p. 5. See also: Z. Konieczny, *Walki polsko-ukraińskie w Przemyślu i okolicy, listopad – grudzień 1918*, Przemyśl 1993; G. Szopa, *Spór polsko-ukraiński i konflikt zbrojny 1918 r.*, in: *Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona Doktorowi Zdzisławowi Koniecznemu z okazji 70. rocznicy urodzin*, Przemyśl 2000, p. 117–127.

Przemyśl to support the cause “so that the good mother could get the body of her beloved daughter”<sup>30</sup>.

As it turned out, Tęczarówna’s appeal met with just the opposite response. In one of her texts, Helena Stieberowa, writing about Benschówna, stated that “the women from Przemyśl would not send the remains of the young heroine back to her family in Poznań but they left her in the Przemyśl cemetery to be a model for the posterity”<sup>31</sup>. One of the first to be against sending the body away was Wincenta Tarnawska. Why fight so fiercely for the girl’s remains? Why did the Polish women from Przemyśl emphasize in the public discourse the loss of life or health by women in battle? After all, it was generally believed it was a “male” variant of sacrifice for the home country. The point might have been to emphasize the fact for the public that the ones who fought and died in the defense of the Eastern Borderlands were not only men. Women also defied the Ukrainian attempts to occupy those territories in the same way. They were not only local women; they came from various regions of the renascent state<sup>32</sup>.

In the memoirs called *Wspomnienia o śp. Irenie Benschównie do wiadomości jej stroskanej matki*, published only two weeks after Tęczarówna’s appeal, Helena Stieberowa explained why Tarnawska treated the issues of Benschówna’s burial in Przemyśl and her appropriate commemoration so personally.

When in the military barracks in Zasanie Wincenta Tarnawska, president of the Polish Women’s Alliance put food in her mess tin, she noticed her feminine curves and said to her, “You’re a woman, I presume?” Irena nodded with a smile. [...]

<sup>30</sup> „Ziemia Przemyska” Y. 7: 1921 no. 8 of 20 II, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> H. Hordyńska-Stieberowa, *Obrona Przemyśla w roku 1918...*, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> An inspiring chapter for discussions on the significance of a dead body in the memory of generations can be found in *Archeontologia martwego ciała (Argentynscy desaparacidos)* in Ewa Domańska’s book, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Poznań 2006, p. 161–194.

When her dead body was brought along with others to the military hospital, the military chaplain Rev. Olejniczak wrote a letter to Mrs Tarnawska that they would like to bury her in women's clothes. Mrs Tarnawska washed the body of the heroine herself, dressed her in white, decorated her head with a white veil and myrtle, and put her in the coffin<sup>33</sup>.

Stieberowa wrote that Benschówna had been buried with full military honors, "and crowds of the Przemyśl people saw her off to her grave, where they listened to beautiful speeches about the deceased"<sup>34</sup>. Most probably Tarnawska also spoke during the funeral. A day later, on the initiative of the Polish Women's Alliance, a ceremonial service was held for the late Benschówna. Her grave was taken care of by the members of the Alliance; "it is kept in order and in the summer decorated with flowers"<sup>35</sup>. What is more, the members, starting from 1 November, 1919, organized themselves on All Souls' Day at Benschówna's grave, singing patriotic songs and making appropriate speeches.

Stieberowa's memories emphasize the unusual attitude of the ageing Tarnawska to the young girl from Poznań. In the military barracks, in difficult conditions, far away from her family, when her husband and son were engaged in patriotic activity elsewhere, Tarnawska was surrounded by much younger boys and girls. They made her youthful dreams come true. When the January Uprising broke out, she was too young to take part. When Poland regained independence, she was too old to participate actively in resurrecting Poland. Perhaps Benschówna reminded her of her young self? And maybe she accomplished all that Wincenta had not been able to accomplish? After all, Stieberowa writes about Benschówna: "All her work was a sacrifice for Poland". Was that not what Tarnawska's own life looked like? However, unlike the young girl, Tarnawska had never been on the front line; she was always in the shadow – giving ground to others, as a woman or as an

<sup>33</sup> H. Stieberowa, *Wspomnienia o śp. Irenie Benschównie do wiadomości jej stroskanej matki*, „Ziemia Przemyska” Y. 7: 1921 no. 11 of 13 III, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.



old person at the critical moment. And – as Stieberowa recalls – Benschówna “enlisted in the army [...] and followed the call of a great love for Poland. She distinguished herself with extremely tactful behavior, and she was surrounded with real respect of her comrades who spoke of her as a remarkable woman”<sup>36</sup>. The young girl must have impressed Tarnawska with her attitude, and their relations were reinforced during the successive weeks of their common work in the barracks. Even the fact that the girl from Poznań used to break the taboo of her sex, wearing men’s clothes and performing men’s tasks, must have had an effect on the elderly woman. After all, Tarnawska also had been struggling all her life with gender limitations imposed on her by the conventions of the era. It was only in her older age that she gained such respect that the many “eccentricities” of her youth were regarded as a sacrifice for the home country. The romantic vision which Tarnawska implemented all her life with a really positivist passion, lacked, however, some tragic ending. Neither Tarnawska nor any of her family or friends had sacrificed their lives for their country. There were years of work, incessant everyday struggle for strengthening the Polish spirit in her closest circles – but it was Benschówna who, through her death, had become a great 19th-century-like Polish heroine. Tarnawska was “merely” a positivist who was supposed to fulfill her mission in successive years. Or perhaps during those several years Benschówna was for Tarnawska the daughter she had never had? For Jadwiga did not show much understanding for her mother’s work. Presumably, they never worked together and despite close family ties mother and daughter did not understand each other well.

Notwithstanding Tarnawska’s reasons, she became the main supporter of the action in favor of a dignified burial of the young girl whose dead body she had prepared for the funeral ceremony herself. No wonder then that only two weeks after Tęczarówna’s text Stieberowa could write:

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

That body is so dear to us that Przemyśl wants to commemorate it forever, so that younger generations could follow the example of such daughters of Poland. Hence the idea to put up a monument to Irena or endow a scholarship of her name. May she rest in peace<sup>37</sup>.

Tarnawska wrote herself to Irena's mother who "agreed to the suggestion of the Honourable Missis Tarnawska that her dead daughter's body should remain in our cemetery"<sup>38</sup>. It turned out, however, that collecting the donations for an appropriate monument took Tarnawska many years. One of the first donations was given by the Women's Political Association led by Teofila Tęczar and Karolina Rawicka. Therefore, after Irena's mother had changed her decision, the associations must have reached an agreement as Tęczarówna, previously supporting the idea to send Benschówna's body back to Poznań, later collected money for her tomb in Przemyśl. In the first installment, 4960 Austrian Kronen<sup>39</sup> was transferred to Tarnawska. Eventually, Benschówna's tomb in the Main Cemetery in Przemyśl, funded mostly by the members of the Polish Women's Alliance, was consecrated only on 1 November, 1928<sup>40</sup>. "Ziemia Przemyska" provided an account of that event with a month's delay in the following way:

The unveiling and consecration of the monument took place on 1 November. A priest performed the consecration and then Mrs Tarnawska made a speech in which she thanked those who had contributed to the construction of the monument in any manner.

The construction of the monument cost 929,80 zlotys, and the decoration of the tomb and the posters informing about the ceremony – 42,81 zlotys, which was altogether 972,61 zlotys. We are glad that the people of Przemyśl have at least partly repaid their obligation to that heroic young woman<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> „Ziemia Przemyska” Y. 7: 1921 no. 27 of 3 VII, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem; no. 25 of 19 VI, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> „Tygodnik Przemyski” Y. 2: 1928 no. 51 of 15 XII, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> „Ziemia Przemyska” Y. 14: 1928 no. 53 of 15 XII, p. 5.

The promise was kept then, though no-one expected it would take so much time. To what extent the monument to Benschówna was Tarnawska's personal contribution, a result of her stubbornness, persistence and foresight, one cannot possibly establish today. Still, Benschówna must have really touched Tarnawska's heart, if the latter strived for so many years to honor the young woman from Poznań, at least symbolically. Her grave itself became a *sui generis* memorial site, to use Pierre Nora's phrase: "embodiment of memorial consciousness". Its construction and care taken of it by successive generations<sup>42</sup> was an expression of collective memory; Tarnawska, struggling for its construction, interfered in the present, referring to the past<sup>43</sup>. Thus Benschówna's grave was not only a burial place but due to its symbolic meaning, it appealed to people's emotions and influenced the sacralization of Benschówna's memory<sup>44</sup>. For the official discourse ignored the fact that her corpse had been defiled – it was found on the Niżankowice battle field, naked and, as medical examination demonstrated, artificially joined with the corpse of a Polish soldier. That was a quite telling gesture – Ukrainian nationalists tried to dehumanize the young woman (not only by profaning her body but thereby trying to ruin her memory). Her attitude, unusual for a woman, in the autumn of 1918 and the fact that she had come all the way from Poznań to fight for the Eastern Borderland to remain Polish must have been inconvenient for them. The Poles had suppressed – at least in the official discourse – the unpleasant context in which Benschówna's dead body had been found, as it did not suit their expectations. The problem seems to have been aptly expressed by Ewa Domańska, who examined the archontology of a dead body:

<sup>42</sup> NB, the monument is nowadays looked after by other groups dealing with transmission of certain elements of the past, like the scouts, the Association of the Friends of Przemysł and the Region and others.

<sup>43</sup> For more, see: J. Nowak, *op. cit.*, p. 34–38.

<sup>44</sup> Official works omitted the fact that Benschówna's body was found naked and, as medical examination showed, artificially joined with another.

The question of a dead body as such and the relation between the dead body and the dead person, is analyzed mostly from the point of view of the discourse of the living, but not the will of the dead themselves. Even the discrimination between the corpse as a thing and the corpse as a person and speaking about the personality of a corpse in the context of its inviolability (the law) and memory (reverence for the dead) is connected rather with the living feeling threatened and the desire to secure social order than with the rights of the dead<sup>45</sup>.

Therefore, Benschówna's dead body in a way became a point of reference in shaping collective memory. For some people (especially rightist Ukrainians) it was inconvenient, as it demonstrated that Przemyśl was not only important for the Poles living in the region, but was also treated by residents of other regions of Poland as an integral part of the renascent Polish state. For others, the fact of defiling the corpse was so embarrassing that it was held back so that the memory of the heroine (the deceased Irena was treated as one) was not violated in any way. Therefore – as Jacek Nowak writes – what was at work there was the mechanism of constructing collective memory and situating reminders of Benschówna in the sphere of *sacrum*<sup>46</sup>. And since the community of Polish women created a bastion guarding the identity of successive generations – a protected and cherished enclave of the memory of the past – those fragments of Benschówna's biography which did not suit the created myth needed to be removed. And since Irena's dead body became instrumentalized through interference, also her memory became instrumentalized. The Ukrainians attempted to make her look like a slut, the Poles – like a saint. The Poles' demonstrative visits to her grave and cultivating Benschówna's memory were gradually becoming a substitute for her immortality<sup>47</sup>. Cultural behavior of this kind has had a long-standing tradition and dates back to the 18th

<sup>45</sup> E. Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 161–162.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the techniques of constructing group memory, see J. Nowak, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> P. Ariès, *Rozważania o historii śmierci*, Warszawa 2007, p. 31.

century veneration of heroes' tombs, which extended from the private sphere to a public cult. That stemmed from the fact that a nationalist society needed – as Philippe Ariès suggested – “a state of the dead” whose live artifacts of existence, i.e. sepulchral monuments, were perceived as visible symptoms of its eternal duration<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, the struggle for the heroine's body and appropriate place of burial resulted from the 19th century process of reinforcing and handing down to subsequent generations the notion that the territorial shape of Poland is based on the belief that our country is where our graves are<sup>49</sup>.

## Summary

The case of the struggle for honoring Irena Benschówna's body is not the only one. In Lviv, an example of a heroic woman was Wanda Lechowicz. She was a sergeant major in the Voluntary Legion of Women. Caught by the Ukrainians, she had been tortured for three months and only miraculously escaped captivity. She died after the war in Kraków, though she wanted to be buried in the city she had fought for. Her former superior Wit Sulimirski got involved in moving her body to the Cemetery of “Eaglets” Defenders of Lviv<sup>50</sup>. His efforts were successful – in December 1928, Lechowicz was buried in Lviv and the obsequies were performed by the legendary chaplain of the Legions Rev. Józef Panaś in the presence of the assembled crowds<sup>51</sup>.

Although I deliberately omitted Lviv from my discussion – the former capital of Galicia and the then major city of Southeastern Poland – the city itself had become a symbol of Polish-Ukrainian fights. What is more, the Guard of the Graves of Polish Heroes

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 82–83.

<sup>49</sup> E. Grzęda, *Będziesz z chlubą wskazywał synów twoich groby... Mitologizacja mogił bohaterów w literaturze i kulturze polskiej lat 1795–1863*, Wrocław 2011, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> W. Sulimirski, *Kurierka Wanda*, „Słowo Polskie” Y. 22: 1928 no. 324 of 23 XI, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> „Słowo Polskie” Y. 22: 1928 no. 359 of 30 XII, p. 7.

was appointed to watch over appropriate burials of the Poles who were killed fighting for Lviv to be Polish. The very concept and scale on which the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv was founded show that the matters of honoring the dead and shaping the memory of the future generations were treated very seriously. The cemetery was supposed to be a tangible proof of not only Lviv but the whole territory being Polish – hence not only the memory of the November 1918 fights but also the attitude to that necropolis was one of the main bones of contention between the Poles and the Ukrainians<sup>52</sup>.

In the memory of the fights in Lviv, women were less objectified than in the case of minor towns. But then, both their direct involvement in the fights and their support for the fighting men were much larger<sup>53</sup>. Of course, there appeared also such memories as those of Michał Rolle who wrote: “[...] before my very eyes a Ukrainian soldier shot at a ten-year-old girl who was running to the shop to buy very expensive bread”<sup>54</sup>. However, they referred to specific examples and did not have to refer to the general conviction among the Poles about the bravery of Polish children and barbarity of the Ukrainians. While the people of Przemyśl honored the memory of the young men and one woman who were killed in the Polish-Ukrainian fights, on 2 November, 1928, during the celebrations in Lviv, 25 names were read out, of the Poles who were killed while fighting for Lviv to stay Polish. Among them four Polish women were distinguished: Antonina Biegánówna, Zofia Cholewa,

<sup>52</sup> It was not a new concept in the interwar period – for more, see: H. Binder, *Making and Defending a Polish Town: „Lwów” (Lemberg), 1848–1914*, „Austrian History Yearbook” 2003 vol. 34, p. 57–81; A. V. Wendland, *Post-Austrian Lemberg: War Commemoration, Interethnic Relations, and Urban Identity in Lviv 1918–1939*, „Austrian History Yearbook” 2003 vol. 34, p. 83–102; eadem, *Semper fidelis: Lwów jako narodowy mit Polaków i Ukraińców (1867–1939)*, in: *Lwów. Miasto, społeczeństwo, kultura. Studia z dziejów Lwowa*, ed. K. Karolczak, Kraków 2002, p. 263–271.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. many texts by women in the publication *Jednodniówka ku uczczeniu dziesięciolecia walk o Lwów 1–22 XI 1918 – 1–22 XI 1928 wydana przez Komitet Obywatelski obchodu 10. rocznicy obrony Lwowa*, eds. S. Kupczyński, S. Maykowski, J.S. Petry, Lwów 1928.

<sup>54</sup> „Gazeta Lwowska” Y. 118: 1928 no. 269 of 22 XI, p. 2.

Stanisława Jabłońska and Bronisława Stochówna<sup>55</sup>. And yet the list of men and women killed in battle on both sides (Polish and Ukrainian) was much longer. Perhaps that was why the members of the local Women's Citizen's Work Union led by MP Maria Jaworska, for a whole month gave talks in various places in the city on the participation of women in the fight for independence<sup>56</sup>.

Interestingly, in the reality of the interwar Poland the memory of the FWW was soon largely eclipsed by the fact of regaining independence. Any other aspects of the Polish irredentism from the years 1914-1918 were of much less significance or were shown as mere contributions leading directly to the events of November 1918. During the official celebrations the ones honored were mainly male heroes, which does not mean that the examples of Polish women's contribution to regaining independence were forgotten. It is worth remembering, however, that the memory of Polish women was largely supported by Polish women themselves, who thus wanted to assure society as it were that they had fully deserved to enjoy full rights in the independent Poland. Not always was the memory of women honored. The evidence may be the Lviv celebrations in November 1938 during which the role of women was clearly smaller than ten years before<sup>57</sup>. That illustrates one more thing: that the politics of memory was not homogeneous and that it would change depending on the circumstances. What is more, it should be emphasized that the "operations" on collective memory, carried out quite intensively especially by the Sanacja governments, were not unanimously accepted by all citizens of the Polish state<sup>58</sup>. It was not only the Ukrainians that boycotted them; also the opposition, especially the National Democrats, was against many forms implemented

<sup>55</sup> „Słowo Polskie” Y. 22: 1928 no. 304 of 3 XI, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, no. 305 of 5 XI, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> See: „Gazeta Lwowska” Y. 128: 1938 no. 245 of 27 X, p. 2, no. 259 of 15 XI, p. 2, no. 265 of 22 XI, p. 1-2, no. 267 of 24 XI, p. 2, no. 271 of 29 XI, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> For more, see: J. Żarnowski, *Spółczesność polskie*, in: W. Mędrzecki, S. Rudnicki, J. Żarnowski, *Spółczesność polskie w XX wieku*, Warszawa 2003, p. 18-30.

officially in the public space. It turns out then that it is hard to talk about full agreement towards the memory of the events of modern history – the Great War – for the many inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Depending on the nationality, political views and the sex, that memory was often so different that it was too often conflict-generating.