

Women's Movements in Galicia. Organization, Networks and Culture of Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish Women 1867-1918.

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Scientific works about the transnational links between women's movements are still insufficient or, from a comparative perspective, only partly investigated. This also holds true for Austrian Galicia, a region in the multiethnic Habsburg Empire. Previous research on female and national history focused neither on cultural contacts or cross-cultural relations between the national women's movements, nor on female hybrid identities within a historical region. Moreover, one can identify a two-fold marginalisation of Jewish women whose involvement within women's organisations has hardly been explored or who are presented only as marginal figures in a narrative recounted by male heroes.

Drawing on a comparative perspective, the project explores the differing cultures of the Women of the three largest ethnic groups in Galicia between the years 1867-1918. Both the development of the national women's movements as well as the formation of sub-movements in Galicia at the end of the 19th century coincided with the transformation of modernisation and accumulation of nationalism, that made ethnicity a criterion for exclusion. It furthermore contributed to the development of various national movements. The coexistence of the nations in multiethnic Galicia was therefore never without conflict. Even women were involved in the process of nationalisation and their demands for equality were connected with national interests. Presenting the women's movements only as national movements, however, would be inadequate and codify the national paradigm, without considering the goals of progressive feminist women (organisations).



Female writers, feminists, socialists, pragmatists or zionists and role models



Rosa Pomeranz (1880–1934): Founder of the Jewish association „Koło Kobiet Żydowskich“ (Circle of Jewish Women) in Lvov in 1908, author of “Die Bedeutung der zionistischen Idee im Leben der Jüdin” in 1905.



Natalija Kobryns'ka (1851–1920): Former of the association „Tovarystvo Russkich Ženščyn“ (Association of Ruthenian Women) in Stanisławów in 1884, editor of the women journal „Naša dolja“ (Our fate) in 1893-1896.



Maria Dułbianka (1861–1919): candidate in the regional elections in Lvov in 1908, editor of the supplement „Głos Kobiet“ (Voice of women) in the Kurjer Lwowski/ Lvov Courier in 1911-1913.

The national women's movements of the Polish, Ruthenian (Ukrainian) and Jewish women were constituted between 1867-1918 in Galicia-Lodomeria and moulded by a small circle of women belonging to the intelligentsia. The major protagonists of the first women's movements were Maria Dułbianka, Natalija Kobryns'ka and Rosa Pomeranz. Their journalistic and literary writings contributed to the formation of a specific women's movement. It was their involvement which, despite existing boundaries between the great powers Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary, worked towards a nation without existing national borders.

The women's culture was established in urban and regional centres in western and eastern Galicia: Tarnów, Rzeszów, Stryj, Tarnopol, Stanisławów, Kołomyja and in the cities of Kraków (Krakow) and Lvov (Lemberg/Lwów/L'viv) which were important places of female agitation and interactions in public space. In particular the women's movements in Lvov must be perceived as constructed through overlapping and parallel relations which coexisted, but also staged and influenced each other in space. Within the women's movement, there existed associations and organisations (from 1907) with different objectives and roles that were both conservative and liberal or socialist in orientation.

The demands of the progressive organisations were similar to Western European women. Among the main principal claims were the right to education and work as well as the right of assembly and suffrage for women. Mainly in the Ukrainian and Polish women's movements, there existed different versions of feminism, which are also complementary. The goals of the Jewish-Zionist women's organisations, however, were predominantly social and cultural work. The propagated image of women and the objectives of the women's movement appear contrary to the progressive Polish and Ukrainian Women's Organizations. This is best demonstrated through the example of the right to work, which Zionist women did not require, since it contradicted the Zionist (male) ideal. Although the equality of female Zionists within the Zionist movement has to be seen as progressive, it was at once a dilemma for women as the Zionist community became the only forum where they could claim equality.

The project presented here opens new ways in the field of research by means of analysing the discrepancy and consensus of women in the fight for equality and common actions in comparison. Beyond this, the hypothesis of the research is that solidarity and cultural contacts existed across national boundaries and that perceptions of the other varied greatly. The project thereby makes an important contribution to the history of the women's movement in Austria as well as to Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish historiography.

The research is a comparative study focusing on the Ukrainian and Polish women's press and, likewise, on Jewish print media published at the end of the 19th century in Austrian Galicia. Based on the selected print media, the discourses of education, suffrage and mobilisation are analysed. The question of how the other was perceived also remains to be addressed.

The theoretical frame of the research are postfeminist theories, the application of gender as an analytical category - which is an essential tool for solving social and political problems - as well as gender-specific postcolonial studies and spatial theories. An understanding of space for the application of spatial theory is crucial for placing transculturality in the focus of interest. By transferring the theoretical approach of Doreen Massey, a geographical scientist, to feminist public spaces of women in Galicia my research makes visible the relations of gender, power and (urban) areas as well as opposing strategies. Moreover, hybridity is a concept - following Homi Bhabha: a border area in which cultural differences affect without conflicts - that explores hybrid forms of cultural identities in new areas. In the theoretical discourse of cultural interspaces class, race, gender or nationality are important analytical categories. This theory is increasingly applied to the cultural identity of Jewish women within Polish and Ukrainian women's organisations.



Polish Women's Congress in Kraków in 1913

In summary, it can be concluded that the antagonism between the national women's movements could temporarily be overcome when a common goal united the differing women's movements in the fight for equality. This can best be seen in the case of solidary actions such as petitions for women's suffrage, especially in the largest cities. Also, journals used as mouthpieces by the movements were site of cultural contact that served as places of exchange, as showcases, as well as stereotyping others negatively. The research confirms the hypothesis of communication across national borders.

The project also suggests further research: investigating cultural contacts as well as intra-national contacts between the women's movements in Galicia and Bucovina. Possibly, further research could investigate other ethnic minorities of the region and local female relationships. Further regional studies on economic, cultural and linguistic contacts between women in the village milieu enhance research.

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