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Łódź Herstories as an Example of Research in the Women, War and Peace Project Supported by Europe for Citizens Programme

Human soul grows old during the war¹

Women, War and Peace is a transnational project involving four European partners² exploring women's experiences of World War II (WWII) and the role of the European Union today in promoting peace, gender equality, democracy and diversity. The project marks the 70th anniversary of the ending of WWII by using creative processes and on-line resources to promote remembrance of European history with a focus on women's experiences of WWII and their journeys within Europe from 1945 to today. Using theatre, film and political activism, this project raises awareness of the formation of the European Union, its history and diversity and its role today in promoting cultural diversity, equality and the well being of all its citizens.

¹ S. Alexievich, *Wojna nie ma w sobie nic z kobiety (War's Unwomanly Face)*, Wydawnictwo Czarne: Wołowiec 2011, <http://www.kulturalna.warszawa.pl/kapuscinski,6,735.html>. All quotations were translated from Polish for the purposes of this project.

² Smashing Times Theatre Company, Dublin, Ireland; Instituto de Formacion y Estudios Sociales (IFES), Madrid, Spain; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Universität Hannover, Hannover, Germany; and Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi, Poland.

The project aims to raise awareness of remembrance including the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in order to contribute to an understanding of the European Union, its history and diversity; to foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at the European Union level; to raise awareness of debate, reflection and development of networks and to encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at the Union level by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making-process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.

The key events of the project³ are rolled out in each partner country bringing citizens, artists and activists together to discuss how we remember the past in relation to World War II. Questions debated include what can ordinary citizens today do at the local, national and international levels to prevent the atrocities of World War II from happening again and what role do citizens want the European Union to play in promoting peace and equality for all?

The main aim is to know the past in order to move beyond it and to build a better future for all. This project meets the general objectives of Europe for Citizens as the on-line Research and Resource Pack and multiple public events all contribute to citizens' understanding of the European Union, its history and diversity by raising awareness of the effects of war in Europe. The foundation of today's EU is, among other things, the fear of a military conflict that could be prevented by integration, cooperation and appreciation of diversity, which are supported by international cooperation and exchange, including cultural exchange. This conviction results from an idealistic approach that unity and equality in diversity is possible, which, however, translates into specific actions like the ones taken up within the project *Women, War and Peace*. Sharing various national experiences, including those traumatic ones connected with war, stretches cultural imagination. This is due to education based on empathy and biographic experience (with the use of artistic and interactive means). Women's personalised stories about such a total event as World War II make it possible to show more vividly its influence on individual lives and to understand the importance of actions preventing conflicts. These actions can include learning to talk, to negotiate, to compromise and to reach a consensus. Such skills, in our opinion, are the founding principles of the EU idea without which it could not function.

Women's experience of World War II became better known in contemporary European political discourse thanks to the work of Belarusian reporter and writer Svetlana Alexievich who was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 2015. She is the author of the excerpt, the motto, quoted at the beginning of our text, which comes from her book *War's Unwomanly Face*. A reviewer of the book, Iwona Smolka, emphasized not only the factual importance of the testimony given by the Russian women soldiers that Alexievich

³ The project results in the creation of a Research and Resource Pack available on-line, a Remembrance through Drama Workshop; a performance (captured on video) called 'Herstory: Women, War, Peace' presented to the public and followed by public debates and Legislative Theatre Sessions; a webinar event linking all four partner countries; social media campaigns and an on-line questionnaire; and a final two-day Transnational European Conference in Dublin.

reached, but the process of looking for these women to have them speak, to register their voices and write down what they said:

she conducted over 500 interviews with ageing women who were crying while talking about the times of war, the times of their youth. These voices are registered on tapes, the voices present their truth, their feelings, their exclusive and unique picture of war. Here we have nurses and doctors, sharpshooters and telephone operators, cooks and washer-women talk. There is a girl – an aviation captain, the commander of a sapper platoon, an infantry private, a sniper and a scout. They were injured many times, contused, but they survived. They came back after four years of nightmare and they were still young girls who could no longer lead a normal life⁴.

Smolka quotes Alexievich: “I record souls”, “I listen to their pain... Pain that is a proof of their past life”⁵.

An emotional approach to the topic of war and this kind of testimony can be reconciled with the scientific approach that we represent. We can be part of a paradigm with particular focus on “the human factor”, which is unavoidable during research and the popularization of issues and experiences connected with war and women. We share the opinion of the participants of the seminar „Auschwitz and the Holocaust from the Perspective of Women”, who asked additional questions during their discussions:

What and how should I think and express myself? Can I let emotions speak? Am I allowed to include them in a scientific discussion? Do emotions negatively affect the seriousness of the subject? The processes resulting from the dynamics of these meetings allowed answers to these fully justified questions to be articulated. They made it possible to notice that scientific and rational processing of acquired information mainly in reaction to [...] a direct meeting with a witness to history are not enough. The seminar made it possible to experience that voicing emotions helps us to come closer to the incomprehensible history, it does not hinder the scientific approach but gives this experience another dimension, complementary in relation to conclusions drawn from the research⁶.

Subjective memory and the transfer of personal experience are social constructs and thus they “preserve and reinforce existing hierarchies and hegemonies”⁷. Traditional and formal (school) European education still pays little attention to the “forgotten victims”⁸ of war, including women, sexual minorities, some ethnic minorities (for example Romani people), and those categorized by the Nazi legal system as “asocial”. In academic communities, awareness of female war experiences exists, however in war studies the focus is on

⁴ I. Smolka, *Poraniona pamięć*, <http://www.kulturalna.warszawa.pl/kapuscinski,6,735.html> [access date: 20.03.2016].

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Distinction – I. B. K., E. P. K. Białousz, I. Łatwińska, *Historia znacznie później opowiedziana. Pamięć kobiet w badaniach narodowego socjalizmu i Holocaustu*, [in:] *Kobiety wobec Holocaustu. Historia znacznie później opowiedziana*, E. Kohlhaas (ed.), International Youth Meeting Centre in Oswiecim, Oświęcim 2011, p. 6.

⁷ T. Jurewicz, A-C Klotz, M. Kopeć, S. Mürbe, *W poszukiwaniu zrozumienia. Holocaust a gender studies*, [in:] *Kobiety wobec Holocaustu. Historia znacznie później opowiedziana*, E. Kohlhaas (ed.), International Youth Meeting Centre in Oswiecim, Oświęcim 2011, p. 19.

⁸ T. Jurewicz, A-C Klotz, M. Kopeć, S. Mürbe, op. cit, p. 22.

The preparation and warfare, recruitment and capacity of economy working for the needs of war. [Research] concentrates [...] to a small extent on the everyday life, thus we do not have many studies referring to the war fate of women and children⁹.

We try to fill in this gap with the Women, War and Peace project, particularly in reference to World War II *history* of Łódź. Below we present reconstructed lives of three female Łódź dwellers – although in places this reconstruction is incomplete and is, in part, based on informed speculation. It seems to us that they represent Łódź well because they are representatives of the three most important nationalities and religions that created pre-war and war-time Łódź (Polish, German and Jewish). We also present a fragment of the history of homeless female dwellers of our city from this period.

These five Łódź herstories are the first stage in the development of anti-exclusion and anti-war educational program. The program is based on the promotion and development of empathy. It seeks to modify the cultural memory of World War II to include the perspective of women who were the most numerous and anonymous war victims, and to consider the experience of the second generation.

A brief overview of the city of Łódź

Łódź was founded in the 15th century, however, in 1820 it still had only 767 inhabitants. Right before the First World War, the population increased to 600,000, and an agricultural town was transformed into a textile industry centre¹⁰. Emigrants from Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia, Brandenburg, Switzerland, France, and England came to it. The city became the “promised land” (it was easy to make a fortune there), a place where numerous cultures and religions coexisted and influences merged, and a cultural and ethnical borderland. It was inhabited by Catholics, Jews, members of the Orthodox church, and Protestants. Łódź developed not only in industrial and demographic terms, but also as a city. Buildings erected at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century still reflect its exceptional and multicultural character.

Most Germans living in the city were craftsmen and industrialists, Russians were employed in the administration and army, Poles coming from nearby villages became the workforce in factories, while Jews dealt with trade and finances. The coexistence of these groups was not idyllic. Although they tolerated and were kind to each other, the harmonious life of the minorities was disturbed by chauvinist tendencies as well as social and political conflicts. Despite all kinds of tensions, the multicultural atmosphere prevailed in Łódź until the outbreak of the Second World War.

In September 1939, the Łódź Germans welcomed the Nazi army entering the city by cheering in the streets. Łódź was incorporated into the Third Reich and renamed

⁹ T. Kulak, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Kobiety w wojnach i konfliktach polityczno-społecznych na ziemiach polskich w pierwszej połowie XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, T. Kulak, A. Chlebowska (ed.), Wydawnictwo Chromcon, Wrocław 2014, pp. 9–10.

¹⁰ See more: M. Rzańkowolska, *Tradycje w Łodzi wielokulturowej w repertuarze Wydawnictwa Łódzkiego*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej” Seria Organizacja i Zarządzanie 2013, vol. 65, pp. 360–374.

Litzmannstadt. The city was marked by the trauma of the Holocaust. From the ghetto established within its borders, about 145,000 Jews from all around Europe were killed or transported to concentration camps (there was also a special sub-camp for the Roma in the ghetto)¹¹.

The presented stories of women living in Łódź during the Second World War have been chosen so as to show the multicultural character of the city, and to draw attention to the fact that people fall victim to war regardless of their ethnic and religious background, particularly if they are women. The paper presents five different stories connected with the history of the city. There are stories of: Alina Szapocznikow, Maria Eugenia Jasińska, homeless women, Regina Milichtajch and Johanna Majewska.

Alina Szapocznikow

Alina came from an assimilated Jewish family belonging to the provincial intelligentsia. She was born in Kalisz on May 16, 1926. Her father, Jakub, was a dentist, and her mother, Rywka, was a paediatrician. After Alina was born, they moved to Pabianice, as this was Jakub's hometown. They lived in an elegant quarter, in 4 Narutowicza Street.

In 1938, her father died of tuberculosis. This death symbolically ended the happy period in the life of the family. In 1939 the war broke out, and in February 1940 a ghetto was established in Pabianice, where they had to move. On May 16, 1942, Germans started to liquidate the Pabianice ghetto and transport people to Łódź. Alina, together with her mother and brother, were transported there on May 18. The Łódź ghetto covered an area of about 4 square kilometres. 150,000 Jews lived there, suffering from hunger, diseases, and a shortage of medicines. The ghetto was located in the poorest quarters of the city, without a sewer system, and it was completely isolated. It could only be entered through official gates¹².

They were housed in 24/4 Hohensteiner Strasse (today's Zgierska Street). Alina was registered in the list of newcomers as a nurse, and her brother Mirosław was registered as an installation electrician, so that they could find a job. Everyone unfit for work, including children and the elderly, were sent to concentration camps. Alina's mother worked in a children's hospital and through her intercession, in June 1943, Alina was placed in a vocational school at the Leon Glazer underwear and dress factory in Dworska Street, where students were taught sewing and fed, and teachers secretly taught them a secondary school curriculum.

The ghetto's atmosphere was described by Maria Jarosz in the following way: "Everyone was afraid probably all the time. They were afraid of dying and the death of their relatives. They would welcome the end of each day with a relief: once again they managed to survive. But what would happen tomorrow or the day after? And what death awaited them? Even I, a small optimist, didn't know how to chase away bad thoughts. Would

¹¹ The Marek Edelman Dialogue Centre: <http://www.centrumdialogu.com>.

¹² See more: M. Beylin, Ferwor. *Życie Aliny Szapocznikow*, Wydawnictwo Krakauer: Kraków–Warszawa 2015.

I die? Of hunger, killed by a bullet, or in a gas chamber? And were people burnt in crematoria really dead? During the daytime it was easier not to think about it, but before falling asleep it was much more difficult (...) I knew – just like my small brother – that you had to deal with depression on your own, you didn't involve adults in it"¹³.

Alina was about 16-17 at that time and she would always have several boyfriends. Seducing them was her passion. People living in the ghetto enjoyed the moment in case there was no tomorrow, and Alina seized every opportunity to be happy and derive pleasure from life. Here is what she wrote in her yellow book: "Apple trees are in bloom. Oh! How beautiful I am. Oh! How unhappy I am, how happy, imprisoned, depressed, how I crave freedom! How I'd like to get away"¹⁴.

In August 1944, Alina and her mother were taken from the ghetto to Auschwitz, and then to Bergen-Belsen. She survived the war and became a sculptor¹⁵. She did not return to her wartime experiences. For many years she was battling against cancer, and she died on March 2, 1973, in Paris.

She was known for her expressive works reflecting transformations taking place in a human body. She was interested in sensuality and drama – she was looking for a proper form for them, using modern materials. Fascinated by what happens to people in extreme situations, she wrote: "A fleeting moment, a trifling moment – this is the only symbol of our earthly existence".

Maria Eugenia Jasińska

Maria Eugenia Jasińska¹⁶ was born on November 20, 1906, in Łódź. She lived in 10 Żytnia Street in the Bałuty District. She attended Romana Konopczyńska-Sobolewska Girls' Secondary School. Most probably, she came from a working-class family. In the third form of the secondary school she joined the 6th Klementyna Hoffmanowa Girl Scouts' Troop in Łódź and was soon elected by her peers as patrol leader. In the Scouts, she was never an instructor that would acquire instructor licences. She did not take up other functions in the organisation. In 1928, she graduated from secondary school and wanted to graduate in pharmacy and medicine in order to become a paediatrician. On June 8, 1932, she received a degree of an "assistant pharmacist" at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Warsaw. She graduated from extramural studies, while working in a pharmacy of the national insurance system as a trainee. On September 1, 1939, the Second World War broke out. Two months later the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association was officially dissolved, and the underground Grey Ranks and Wartime

¹³ M. Jarosz, *Obyś żył w ciekawych czasach*, Oficyna Naukowa: Warszawa 2009, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Kroję mi się piękne sprawy. Listy Aliny Szapocznikow i Ryszarda Stanisławskiego 1948–1971*, (eds.) A. Jakubowska, K. Szotkowska-Beylin, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie: Kraków–Warszawa 2012, p. 103.

¹⁵ The artist's works can be seen on the Culture.pl website: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/alina-szapocznikow>.

¹⁶ Educational materials of the Museum of Independence Traditions: *Okupacyjna noc 1942 roku w Litzmannstadt*, http://www.muzeumtradycji.pl/files/okupacyjna_noc_1942_roku_wlitzmannstadt.pdf [access date: 10.10.2015].

Rescue Services of Girl Scouts were established in its place. Jasińska became a member of the resistance and the underground movement in Łódź under the cover of her work in the pharmacy. After the ghetto for Jews was established in February 1940 in the Bałuty District, the Jasińskis had to leave their home because the ghetto area covered their address, and they moved to 80 Wrześnieńska Street, not far from their family home. Maria decided to live alone in 33 Płocka Street in the Chojny District, far from her previous quarter. Working in the pharmacy, she helped those in need. She sold them medicines that were difficult to obtain and organised medical care. She would help everyone in danger of death and those wanted by the Germans occupiers. At some point, having won the trust of the German manager of the pharmacy, called at that time *Pod Łabędziem/Under the Swan* (37 Wólczajska Street), she produced false documents for the soldiers of the Home Army and escapees in the pharmacy basement. Polish and foreign officers, soldiers, Jews, and priests came to the pharmacy. She sent food parcels to concentration camps, forced-labour camps, and the ghetto in Łódź. As part of the resistance, she was a liaison smuggling people abroad. For example, she took part in the *Dorszel/Codfish* operation, the aim of which was to smuggle three British officers who had escaped from a POW camp abroad. On April 19, 1942, at 11 am, she was arrested in the pharmacy in 6th Sierpnia Street, where she worked. Initially, she was kept in the prison in Gdańska Street, and then she was transported to Radogoszcz. In the prison she was subjected to prolonged torture, the aim of which was to obtain information about other participants of the operation and names of the Home Army soldiers, however, she did not give away anything. She was accused of helping English officers to illegally cross the border with the General Government.

The investigation lasted over a year. Jasińska did not plead guilty to the charges, skillfully refuting the Gestapo's arguments. During the investigation, the interrogators did not manage to get any specific information concerning her activity or the remaining prisoners out of her. On March 8, 1943, her case was heard in the district court by two generals and ten German officers. Jasińska was sentenced to death by hanging. Such a harsh sentence resulted from her determination, as she skillfully defended herself and others. Only the testimony of Bernard Drozd, a member of an underground organisation from Poznań, most probably obtained through torture, pointed Jasińska out as a resistance liaison. On April 20, 1943, Maria Eugenia Jasińska was executed, probably in the Łódź Jewish cemetery. On November 10, 1944, Col. Michał Stempkowski, the commanding officer of the Home Army Łódź District, awarded her posthumously the Silver Cross of the War Order of *Virtuti Militari*. In 1945, her family received a diploma from the Marshal of the air force of the British Commonwealth "as a token of gratitude and appreciation of the help she provided to sailors, soldiers, and pilots". On the thirtieth anniversary of the liberation of the country, Jasińska was decorated with the Cross of Valour "for her bravery and courage". Her body has not been found.

Homeless women

One of the shelters for homeless women in Łódź was run by Albertine Sisters. They were brought to the then Łódź Diocese in 1926. Their first task was taking care of the elderly and the disabled, for whom a home was established in Sulejów near Łódź. A similar institution was later allotted to Albertine Sisters in Wolborz (1927), and then in Łęczyca (1936) located near Łódź. In 1938 they came to Łódź and started work in a night shelter for homeless women located in 28-32 Pułku Strzelców Kaniowskich Street. It had 180 beds for the needy. Next to the home, the 7th National Police Station was established in order to break up fights taking place in the neighbourhood.

On September 1, 1939, the home was taken over by the Łódź Municipality. The shelter for women was open until February 24, 1940, when the Gestapo raided the place. Soldiers took the 140 women staying there to an unknown place, and two days later Albertine Sisters were ordered to vacate the home¹⁷.

The extermination of the homeless during the Second World War was a fact, however, not many people realize that. It was a result of the social eugenics practiced by the Third Reich. One's position in the Nazi racial and social hierarchy determined chances of survival. This depended on one's ethnic background (Jewish and Roma backgrounds were the worst, Polish background was not good), and one's position within the social structure, being a result of one's views, sexual identity, and social class. The social policy of the Third Reich distinguished the so-called social elements, which were rather broadly defined. They included beggars, homeless people, tramps, alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, petty criminals, and the poor. Research into asocial groups, today classified as socially excluded, was conducted in the Reich before the Second World War. At that time, researchers were dealing with projects as part of the activity of the German Committee for Scientific Research. Conclusions from this research delivered "evidence" justifying the killing of selected individuals deemed racially impure, as they had "bad" blood, while "bad" blood could also concern poor and other socially maladjusted people. Thus, the research covered tramps, people with all kinds of psychological and physical disorders as well as representatives of minorities. One of the key researchers from the already mentioned Institute – Robert Ritter – wrote that the low value of people of low social status was equal to the low value of the mentally ill whose disorders were hereditary. He described the then underclass of the city as "low-value elements". He believed that they came from "a combination of asocial elements and the mentally retarded, [which] gave birth to the population of idlers, prostitutes, camouflaged beggars, drunkards, and creeps." Ritter also worked on the project entitled *Reasons for insurmountable poverty*. This research was conducted on one of the German social estates. Here are the conclusions he drew after the end of the research: "poverty is not caused by economic factors but can be ultimately explained in terms of hereditary and biological principles"¹⁸.

¹⁷ P. Zwoliński, *Działalność społeczno-dobroczynna Kościoła łódzkiego w okresie międzywojennym. Studium historyczne*, Archidiecezjalne Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 2006.

¹⁸ See more: E. Klee, *Auschwitz. Medycyna III Rzeszy i jej ofiary*, Universitas, Kraków 2012.

During the Second World War people categorised as belonging to the asocial class were sent to concentration camps. “Asocial” individuals were marked in the camps with a black triangle.

Regina (Inka) Milichtajch

Regina was a Jew from Łódź. When the Second World War broke out, she was a woman in her twenties. Before the war she had worked as a sales assistant. She had a seven years younger brother and a nine years younger sister. She also had a fiancé but the war broke this bond. In 1940, when the ghetto in Litzmannstadt was established, she was moved there with her whole family, including her parents. She gave a false date of birth – she said she was five years younger in order to be in the same age group as her sister and get deported with her. As she emphasised in her memoirs¹⁹, in the ghetto she tried to take care of herself despite numerous diseases she contracted because of hunger and poverty (she even stopped menstruating then). However, she did not want to „frighten people” with the way she looked. She saw her friends go mad due to constant hunger they suffered.

She said that in the workplaces in the ghetto people had love affairs: “sex worked” she said, despite diseases, hunger, death, and uncertainty. People did not want to wait. She also decided to have a love affair with a man twenty years her senior, who was lonely, cultured, and clearly interested in her. For a long time, this relationship was platonic. It was broken after she visited him at his home, where he treated her to a feast of bread and tea. He was moved that she had turned out to be “a decent girl in the ghetto”, so he proposed to her. Inka turned down his proposal.

For some time, thanks to letters smuggled into and out of the ghetto, she would “arrange to meet” one of her schoolmates and her mother – Poles who lived outside the ghetto. These “meetings” were organised as follows: on the arranged day, her schoolmate and her mother got on a tram that ran through the ghetto in the Polish part of the city. They were standing on the tram platform, while Inka with her mother and sister were walking down the pavement, following the tram. They “met” without words, without any gesture; they could only look at each other.

The Litzmannstadt Ghetto was liquidated in 1944. Inka together with her father, brother, and sister were taken to the camp in Auschwitz. Her mother had died before that, and her father and brother died in the camp. Only Inka and her sister survived the war.

After prisoners got to Auschwitz, they had their heads shaved. However, Inka was not completely shaved (which she treated as a happy coincidence). She also managed to hide a small fine-toothed comb (which protected her against lice). Thanks to this, as she said, she “was a human being of a specific sex” because “the fact that I had hair often made contacts with other people easier, I didn’t frighten anybody”. After leaving Auschwitz, she and her sister went through the camp in Bergen-Belsen, and then they got to Magdeburg,

¹⁹ R. (Inka) Milichtajch, *Jak przeżyłam drugą wojnę światową. Relacja*, Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada, Montreal 2005.

where they were when the war ended. From Magdeburg they safely returned to Poland. On their way back to the country, they stayed on a German farm, where they joined a group of POWs and Polish forced labourers. Separated from their families, people were building new relationships. Inka caught the eye of one of the prisoners – a Serbian. In order to prove his serious intentions, he brought her a big loaf of bread and some chocolate. This was his Red Cross ration, which he had received as a prisoner of war. The bread was eaten by Inka's sister and her friend. Inka was terrified because she was afraid that the Serbian would treat it as her consent to their relationship, and Inka did not want this. Fortunately, he believed her explanation, and left her alone.

Johanna M.

Johanna²⁰: My whole family came from Zgierz. Since time immemorial. My great-grandmother's maiden name was Rej, just like this poet Mikołaj. And my grandfather came from Riga, Latvia. He was a great lord. He came to Poland with Mr Possent, a great factory owner from England. They had studied together. And he met my beautiful grandmother, returned to Latvia, said goodbye, fell in love, and stayed. So only my grandfather was from Latvia. But the rest of the family have lived in Zgierz since time immemorial. And, you know, we simply can't be Germans because we have Polish roots [she raises her voice]. (...) And then, hard times came because my grandfather's name was Johann Ernest Rosenberg, so Germans thought he was a Jew. And there were lots of trouble with the Germans, and it all started when my father was taken to Germany in 1942. He escaped. (...) Then searches started and they gave my grandfather a hard time. They kept him several times here in Łódź, in Anstadta Street. The Gestapo headquarters was located there. And they would summon him, it was Easter, and after Easter he was to decide (he was an evangelical) whether he would sign the Volksliste or whether he was a Jew. And on Easter Day he had a stroke and died, while we – my grandmother, my mother, and I – were left alone. My father never came back. (...) He met a woman from Grodno, she was a young girl. Fell in love and divorced my mum. So there were three of us: my grandma, my mum, and I. (...)

After 1945, things were bad. You could feel some kind of hatred among people²¹. Before the war, when my parents went somewhere, for example, on holiday, they wouldn't go

²⁰ An interview conducted on February 13, 2010, by Inga B. Kuźma and Agnieszka Iwaszkiewicz.

²¹ In 1943 in Sikawa near Łódź Germans established a penal camp of „educational work” (Arbeitserziehungslager). It has been running until January 1945. Immediately after the war, the communist authorities organized there a labour camp intended mainly for Germans and Volksdeutsche. Since autumn 1948 it worked as a camp for German prisoners of war and officers. Since December 1950 camp was intended exclusively for Poles. The number of deaths in Sikawa was approximately 1080 people. Under Polish law since 1945 announced a decree on criminal liability for deviation from Polish nationality in 1939-1945. The decree provided for the detention of Volksdeutsche in the camp until bring them to trial. The law referred only to the Poles, who signed volkslista, not the Germans, who were at that time deprived of their citizenship and deported from Poland. B. Kopka, *Łódź-Sikawa – Obóz karny*, <http://www.miejscapamieci.org/obozy/mpc/Memorial/mpa/show/mp-place/lodz-sikawa-oboz-karny/> [access date: 10.10.2015]; Volksdeutsche pozostaną w obozach jeszcze do 31 marca 1948 roku, „Express Ilustrowany”, 3.11.1947, No. 301, p. 3.

far, only to Łučníerz, or Rosanów. Rich Jews from Łódź rented rooms there. So everyone stayed together: Poles, Germans, Jews. Everyone were together, no one was alone. And then such hatred appeared. (...) Times were hard. There was hatred. I understand that during the occupation there was a great deal of injustice. But those responsible for it had already escaped. And those who stayed were innocent people. I went to school, there was a lot of snow, they wanted to go past me, they knocked me over, kicked me. The same happened at school: "Kraut, Heinie, she's stuffed herself with butter". While I hadn't even seen butter, you know, if someone had something, it was rape oil or something... During the occupation you would spread oil on bread (...).

Let me tell you a story: it was before Christmas. We lived in the attic. It was cold. There was only a pot-bellied stove there. (...) We were just sitting there and suddenly my grandma said to my mum: "What are we going to do now? There's nothing; there's no flour, sugar, or bread. There's literally nothing. What are we going to do?" And my mum said: "I could borrow it somewhere". She went to one of my aunts, and then to another. They were all so-called aunts. And one of them gave us some sugar, another gave us something else, and so we were sitting there. What was going to happen? Christmas Eve came and we had nothing! Not even a slice of bread. The window had frozen over. I only breathed on the window pane and wiped a circle in it. It's cold, we're sitting, waiting. Suddenly my mum says: "My God, if you're in heaven, help us. But don't help me, help this child." And my grandma says: "What are you doing? Praying? If God really loved us, he wouldn't hurt us so much." And my mum says: "Don't say such things! What if this God exists?" And we're still sitting, and it's got dark all at once. We didn't know those residents who lived there. We only knew the Landlord. The Landlady was also from Germany. And suddenly someone knocks on the door. My grandma says: "Jesus Christ!" We lived in fear all the time. And someone knocks on the door [the speaker is clearly moved], my grandma opens the door slightly, and a hand appears with a parcel wrapped up in paper, this hand gave us the parcel. My grandma wanted to look out, but the corridor was dark. She only said "Thank you" and closed the door. There was half a loaf of bread, an apple, some candies, and a piece of pork fat, a big piece. And it wasn't pork fat for melting, but for slicing. That pork fat was strange. There were a few nuts and a small piece of yeast cake. And my mum said: "You see?" And none of them were hungry all of a sudden. They gave me everything. They didn't want it. They weren't hungry, oh, no. We divided the bread. Those loaves were so big, and this was half a loaf. So we divided the bread. For the first and the second days of Christmas. And I also said that I wouldn't eat the cake if they didn't eat it. (...)

You see what it was like? On Christmas Eve it was already really tight. We had suffered great pain with my mum. And even today, when I see a dog that is looking for food, I go to the butcher's. The day before yesterday, I was going to Polo Market, you know, and I saw a poodle, a grey poodle. It was gnawing on ice. Someone had left something there, and the dog was trying to get it from under the ice. I said to myself: "My God!" I went to the butcher's and said: "Give me one sausage." Ania gave me a sausage, I paid for it, went out, divided it into several pieces, and gave it to the dog, it ate it immediately. (...) When you're hungry, your stomach really hurts, water gathers in your mouth, sour water,

and you feel really terrible. And I was growing then. When I got my first period, I was nearly seventeen. Because I was so thin, so skinny, I was undernourished, you know. But let bygones be bygones, now it's better. I've got my 840 zlotys. I pay everything, I have no debts. I pay my gas and electricity bills. A postman comes. When he leaves, I already have all bills prepared. The next day I go to the bank. And I pay everything. I also go to a pharmacy and pay 150 zlotys for my medicines, and then, you know, I divide what's left.

Conclusion

This project raises awareness of European remembrance, common history and values. It reflects on past and current events, stimulates debate and encourages interactions between different groups and communities. It also raises awareness of the role of the European Union in promoting peace and cultural diversity.

This project meets the key priority of reflecting on the causes of totalitarian regimes by bringing people together in each partner country to explore through creative processes the causes and effects of war and provides space for the remembrance of all those who died. A key priority is to connect the past history of conflict with developments in the European Union on the 70th anniversary of WWII with a view to bringing different communities together to actively support community integration and the role of the European Union in promoting peace and equality. The project keeps memories of the past alive in order to move beyond the past and to build the future. It carries out key activities that actively encourage tolerance, mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue and reconciliation as a means of moving beyond the past and building an inclusive, peaceful and equal future for all.

The project brings an understanding of what can lead to a rise of intolerance and totalitarianism and to raise awareness of how citizens can actively support integration and the role of the European Union today in promoting peace and equality. Equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union. However there is still more to be done and women's rights are under attack from extremists around the world. There is a need to re-affirm a commitment to gender equality as a key component for democracy and peace. Women's rights are rights that promote a position of legal and social equality of women with men. Women's rights are an essential component of universal human rights. Women are powerful drivers of change and this transnational project remembers the role of women in Europe and power of the European Union in promoting peace, democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech and gender equality for all.

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