

SUMMARY

Vicynians in Silesia. The memory of the lost village of Podolia

Key words: borderland cultural heritage, local community, repatriation, cultural memory

In numerous studies, the Eastern Borderlands are characterized in terms of a cultural melting pot, and their abandonment by Poles after 1945 resulted in a change in the entire life of expatriates. The main goal of my work in the field of the sciences of culture and religion was an attempt to analyze and elaborate selected cultural phenomena, to show the process of their transformations and to identify the factors influencing the post-war socio-cultural activity of the inhabitants of one borderland village - Wicynia. An equally important aim of the research was to view "carriers of cultural heritage" on the so-called recovered lands, which became the determinant of the identity of the local community. Moreover, the website developed by them has been included as an important example of a modern display of identity by visitors from the Eastern Borderlands and their descendants. While conducting interviews with the descendants of Vicinians, born in Silesia, I was particularly interested in memory (collective, individual) in the process of creating cultural identity and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge about the borderland origin and cultural heritage of their ancestors.

The numerous stories and recollections that I have collected during the empirical research are heterogeneous in nature, constitute an important treasury of knowledge about the local community and thus the basis for theoretical reflection. The field research in the years 2009-2019 covered a selected group of borderlands, namely the inhabitants of the village of Wicyń (Przemyśl region, Lviv region, Ukraine) who settled in Silesia after 1945. I used two basic methods of empirical research: qualitative and quantitative, I used various research techniques (interviews, observation, open and implicit participant observation, questionnaire). I analyzed the existing and evoked sources, I conducted a parallel archival and library query.

Mass displacements of Kresovians leaving their eastern patrimony and settling in the areas belonging to Germany before World War II had a huge impact on their psyche. It was a difficult process of cultural adaptation and integration, the Vicinians found themselves in a place alien to them ethnically and geographically, which they had to accept. The fact that they are able to contemplate these traumatic experiences proves the social overworking of the memory of the displacement, it is also a result of the easing of censorship, and the small

stabilization in Poland from the 1970s which led to the breaking of a certain taboo and made it possible to unblock borderland narratives. However, it was only after the political transformation in 1989 that it became possible to develop the identity of newcomers from the East in the perspective of their history and cultural heritage. At the center of my research interest was a set of diverse phenomena, concerning the intergenerational transmission about the history of the "extraordinary Podole village" and the pre-war social and moral life of the Kresovians, traumatic events related to expatriation, "wandering" to the West, and later the processes of taming the Silesian landscape and adaptation and social and cultural integration on the so-called recovered lands.

Worthy of attention for the researcher of culture are all the initiatives and post-war undertakings of the inhabitants of the village of Podole, in which they refer to the borderland heritage, and resulting from the desire to preserve the "image" of the lost patrimony and preserved relics of it. Leaving Wicynia meant that this local community was carefully cultivating a sense of attachment to its own cultural heritage and thus manifesting patriotism in the convention of historical memory. In the case of the Kresovians, we can speak of a cultural homeland, lost in the sense of geographic and social space, but still present in a symbolic dimension. It is thanks to the conviction of the uniqueness of the Vicino heritage and love of the lost fatherhood that the oldest, now outgoing generation of expatriates passes this legacy to the next generations. Their patriotic attitude is, after all, associated with putting Wicyń affairs above others, with expressing respect and devotion to the village of Podole, with the belief that they have an impact on shaping the historical awareness of subsequent generations. They describe their role as "missions" and believe that "there is no time to waste". The phenomenon of Vicinians is that they care about the cultural heritage very much, and pass on their fascination of the history and culture of the Borderlands to the next generations. Their descendants, born in the "new" Poland, willingly visit their ancestors' places of birth in Ukraine. The conducted empirical research clearly showed that sentimental trips to Wicyń (memorial site) appear to be forms of shaping the national consciousness of both expatriates and their and the next generations.

The oldest expatriates and their descendants have special esteem for items that testify to their origin and identity, namely: farm and household appliances, photographs, family documents, devotional articles, the pre-war banner of the Volunteer Fire Department, a bell and a painting of Our Lady of Wicyń. These are not always authentic items brought from the village of Podole after 1945, there are also contemporary reproductions of paintings among them. They evoke not only memories related to family life, but most of all, after more than 70

years of living on the so-called regained lands, they become a symbol of this social group and a sign of memory. With their diversified activities aimed at saving and cultivating the cultural heritage of the Borderlands and its popularization, the Vicynians prove that their "love" and attachment to the eastern patrimony is permanent. This cultural and social space, in which the oldest generation functioned before World War II, has been tamed and is still alive in the minds of younger generations.

In the light of the conducted empirical research, vicinians appear to be leaders who feel the need to cultivate their heritage, organize annual meetings in places where their ancestors visited after World War II, and founded the Vicynians Club and a website. This association plays a vital role in maintaining and creating the memory of the "extraordinary village of Podole", because thanks to the members of this organization, expatriates and their families can promote the subject of the Borderlands and meet in their own circle. In the "network showcase" they display both memoirs about pre-war life in the Borderlands, the tragic years of World War II, facts related to the necessity to leave their hometown and settle in Silesia, as well as present contemporary activities proving the activity of members of the Wicynian Club. The website is aimed mainly at a young audience: such openness to virtual space allows vicinians to share their knowledge in a different way - modern and more attractive to a new addressee than the traditional, direct and oral intergenerational transmission. It can also be seen as a peculiar courtesu to all those who, for various reasons, cannot personally attend the World Vicinian Meetings. This example of collective memory as a social relationship between people who share a similar vision of the past and build a common identity is very encouraging in the case of Vicinians.

In Vicinian, families there are continuously vivid stories and recollections about events that changed the fate of their members forever. Intergenerational family transmission became an inspiration for the descendants of expatriates to write down the history of their ancestors. Burdened with post-memory, acting as links between the memory of witnesses and the next generations, they themselves began to play the role of guardians of cultural memory, and their texts can be interpreted in terms of a manifesto - a Vicino program for the future.