

## АКЦІЯ “ВІСЛА” В МІЖПОКОЛІННЄВІЙ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

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Досліджено драматичні події Акції Вісла, що тривала з 1947 р. по 1959 р. і стосувалася 140 тисяч осіб, в описах деяких родин, безпосередніх учасників переселення. Проаналізовано коментарі та інтерпретацію вищеназваної події членами кількох родин – потерпілих від акції.

**Ключові слова:** *Акція “Вісла”, українська меншість, Вармя і Мазури.*

### ACTION “WISŁA” IN THE INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Teresa Astramowich-Leyk

The aim of the studies that were used to write this article was to show the influence of the “Wisła” campaign on the fate of Ukrainian families who experienced this tragedy. It was also important to show the presence of this trauma in intergenerational communication. The interview was applied as a research method that makes the article more emotional and fully shows all the sorrows of the deported families. Though these events took place in the last century, Polish and Ukrainian societies still feel the results of it. The article is not oriented on creating more misunderstandings, it emphasizes on the fact that both peoples should remember about this tragedy but without taking it to extremes. Both peoples should communicate and cooperate with taking into account this “dark” episode in their common history. And instead of digging up grudges against each other, we should focus on reaching the historical truth via interviews with representatives of deported families or historical documentation and facts and building mutual understanding between our peoples. Moreover, nowadays the two peoples need to move on and develop their bilateral relations in order to resist together against Russian propaganda.

**Key words:** *action “Wisła”, Ukrainian minority, camp in Jaworzno, Warmia and Masuria.*

The purpose of this article is to show the influence of the “Wisła” Action on intergenerational transmission in families affected by this event. The basic research problem is: Did the memory of the “Wisła” Action survive in the intergenerational transmission of Ukrainian families?; How do the “Wisła” actions relate to the generations of Ukrainian families who know these events only from the message?

The main method used in the study is the behavioral method, and the technique used is the free interview.

The decision of the “Vistula Action” was taken by the Politics Bureau of the KC PPR on March 29, 1947. It is assumed that the action lasted from 28 April to the end of July 1947, although the last displacement took place in 1950.

It involved mass displacement of civilians from areas of south-eastern Poland (areas east of Rzeszów and Lublin), mainly to the so-called Recovered Territories, which covered Ukrainians, Bojki, Dolinian and Lemkos and mixed Polish-Ukrainian families. The action was carried out by military and militarized units of state structures and civilian agencies (State Office of Repatriation).

About 140.000 people were displaced (86.000 from Rzeszów voivodeship, 45.000 from Lubelskie voivodeship and 10 thousand from Cracow voivodeship).

Often, the numbers of people we give approximate, and yet the fate of every person is important, because each of us and each of those hidden under the statistics are unique.

In the presented text the author referred to the fate of two families who were resettled within the Action “Wisła” to the former Olsztyn province. In total, 155 transports arrived in Olsztyn, which brought 13.372 families and 55.089 people (9.740 horses, 1.692 cows).

Under the rules in force, the displaced persons had only 2 hours to pack and leave their homes. All the belongings were to be stored on up to 2 horse carts. This did not allow for the loading of larger tools, furniture, potato and grain stores. They had to leave part of the farm animals.

One of the people affected by resettlement mentions that on the morning of June 8, 1947, early in the morning in the village where he lived with his family (he was a child), the Polish army appeared. The heads of families were seated at the square where the officer in the rank of major read out the list of families to be displaced.

When the name of his father, Elijah Orzechowski, was read, the major said that he had to stay because he had a Polish name and was a Pole. Then his father replied that he was a Ukrainian and that he would not stay here. The list included the names of families purely Ukrainian as well as mixed Polish-Ukrainian. Major ordered them to stand in the square with their property within 2 hours. Some people at this assembly point had 4 kilometers and had little time to take the most needed things. He recalls: "During those two hours, my father managed to turn his carriage two times, taking some grain, potatoes, flour, clothes and other household necessities, even to a primitive life. When my father came to his farm for the second time, his relatives had already carried out various things from our farm. We only lived through the fence" [Orzechowski n. d.: 15]. Another interlocutor Mikołaj Czerepaniak, who was 14 years old when he was deported, mentions that there were no promises to return to his land. Some wanted to return home, but it was banned. The house where his parents were living began to undress his neighbor, who was the mayor of the city, but the authorities forbid him to further demolish it and demanded to secure what was left because the house was a monument. On the other hand, the Brewka family built a Roman-Catholic church.

The Orzechowski family arrived at a gathering place in Radawa. Andrzej Orzechowski remembers that they were sleeping under the open sky, without tents or tarpaulins. It was raining and there was no place to hide. Among the population there were children, including infants (including his 9-month-old Roman brother). On June 9th, the WP ordered them to take things and go to the next assembly point. "The organizers of the resettlement campaign have not given us any transportation assistance. Those who had their own carts had to help those people who did not have them. There were two families in one carriage. Many families who did not have their own transport carried their belongings on their own backs or on wheelchairs if they had one" [ibid.: 15].

From Radawa they could take only one carriage of property. When the car was loading the baby cradle, the soldier ordered her to dump it and put the plow to the fallow land. Many families left their property in Radawa. To the next assembly point they walked in the rain and mud.

The organizers of the resettlement – the government side – gave no help. Orzechowski recalled: "Older, often infirm persons walked on foot, because there was no place for wagons, they could not keep up with the pace of the column given by the soldiers who were escorting us, and thus often lost the column. It caused crying, shouting and crying for the sought-after, close people. People were already fatigued, uneasy and often undernourished, the more that no one knew where they were hurrying and how long it would last" [ibid.: 16–17].

The pasture was lacking grass for animals. There was no drinking water for people. In Grodzisk Dolny (on

the fourth day of the trip), they were given several military soups, "(...) but dry food was not seen by anyone" [ibid.: 17]. There was no sanitary-medical service either. "There were not even any makeshift toilets for washing and disposing of physiological needs" [ibid.: 17]. During the trip Andrzej Orzechowski got sick of malaria, which also affected other people. Despite the fact of the disease, no one reacted. "With this disease he arrived at the place of resettlement and only after several weeks thanks to quinine received from the priests of the Verbands from Pieniężna he got rid of the disease. During their stay in Grodzisk Dolny (...) the servicemen carried out revision of the displaced persons and arrested the suspects and sent them to the Central Labor Camp (*created in April 1947 – the author's note*) in Jaworzno" [ibid.: 18]. There was also the father of the second of my interlocutors Nicholas Czerepaniak. He, as a 14-year-old, remembered that one day his father was taken from the transport and was placed in a camp in Jaworzno, because someone reported him. After three months, it was announced that the father was dead and to this day do not know what caused the death. Soldiers, who supervised the transport, guarded the displaced persons during the stops. The Ukrainian population did not receive food. They only eat what they were able to get from the house. When they were standing at the station nobody could approach them. During transport Ukrainian girls were beaten and raped by soldiers [Czerepaniak 2017].

Orzechowski mentions that after a week of being deported from their homes, they were only placed in rail cars. People were transported in the same wagons as cattle and horses. In the first and last car were armed soldiers. In several cars there was agricultural equipment. "Before we were loaded into the wagons, the executives of the action had thoroughly intermixed the families so that, from one town, often close to their families, they traveled to different parts of the Recovered Territories, a few hundred kilometers away. According to the authorities, the wagons were supposed to be closed at night (...)" [Orzechowski n. d.: 19]. A week spent in the cattle cars spent Czerepaniak. They departed in early May 1947, in Scandinavia were May 15 – the place of unloading transport was Ketrzyn. During the trip the soldiers stole the heifer [Czerepaniak 2017].

The station on which the Orzechowski family got out was Ornet, full of German inscriptions. They spent a few more nights at the Ornet station. "These two weeks of fatal journeys caused us to be physically and mentally exhausted, dirty, frail and undernourished. All the time we were traveling there was not even a question of sleeping in our tops, on the floor of the car and dressing up. There was no possibility of adhering to the elementary rules of personal hygiene, which favored the emergence of various diseases, (...) lice and scabies, which were not to be tackled because we did not receive

any chemicals from the organizers of the deportation. Many people were sick, mainly – older people and children” [Orzechowski n. d.: 20].

The Orzechowski family was relocated to Debowiec (then the Pieniężno municipality). The buildings of the farm to which they were allocated from the State Repatriation Office in Ornetka were severely destroyed: "The single-family house was without a facade and partly without a peak. There was not a roof tile on the roof. Where there was a facade, the roof hung almost to the ground. There were no windows in it, the kitchen stall was completely blown. (...) Fortunately, the barn built in 1939 was in a good condition. In the yard grew a thistle above two meters. To get into the yard it was necessary to lay it down. We brought our belongings in the corner of the surviving room on the north side. It was a kitchen measuring about 16 meters. Two rooms on the south side were without walls. Meals were still cooked on a tripod in the backyard, as was the whole trip to Prussia” [ibid.: 22]. The men slept in the barn, on the German-bred straw bitten by mice and rats. They had no beds. “The beds that were left after the Germans took settlers from behind Bug and central Poland, who came here earlier, and the rest took the plague of the looters. That’s why it was necessary to make bunks of boards removed from some barn” [ibid.: 22].

The Czerepaniak family had to settle in Czworaki in Piskorze. There were no windows or doors in the apartment. The houses in Piskorze were already inhabited by people from central Poland. There was also one family from Vilnius. Neighborhood relations were well organized, but it happened once that Mikolaj Czerepaniak met his neighbor, who was caught very confused and pretended, that he was only passing by.

Orzechowski family wants to provide conditions for the winter they made home remedies. They were using the boards; the cement was nowhere to be found. “It was too late for the spring sowing, especially since there were no seeds, and at that time there was drought, and the clay soil was not harvested. Simply plow did not want to cling to the ground. For the same reason, potatoes could not be planted. The father plagued and sowed millet, which did not rise for a long time because of the drought, so it is no wonder that the crops were not good. It was very hard for us to reconcile that there was so much grain in patrimony and potatoes and that he would not be gathering who should” [ibid.: 22–23]. Orzechowski mentioned that the folk authority bestowed on his family nearly 13 hectare field, covered by thistles. It was necessary to liquidate it. Fields could only be cultivated until autumn, and the harvest was in the spring of 1948. Hungry was a problem, as the UNRRAs received too little food (and only for a few months because at the end of 1947 UNRRA was dissolved). Not all people from the “W” action had their own horses. They had to work out the land they had to do with the hosts who had them. Repatriates from behind Bug and

settlers from Central Poland received them from UNRRA. They also received heifers. On the other hand, people from the “W” action did not receive any kind of help, “even though they left their property on the land owned by the Polish state” [ibid.: 23–24]. In order to survive the harvest in 1948, the men employed in the forest or went to the Polish settlers. Orzechowski mentions that the Ukrainians who had been working on casual activities, such as potato harvesters, were better treated by settlers from Vilnius than by those from central Poland. They also fed them during field work. The Czerepaniak family consisted of a mother, four children and a grandfather (the husband of a woman died in Jaworzno). Grandfather died a year after the resettlement.

Orzechowski mentions that “after being deported to the so-called Recovered Lands, all people, especially the elderly, longed for their homeland, their villages, homes, churches and cemeteries, where they were forever buried there” [ibid.: 37]. Andrzej Orzechowski’s grandmother did not want to leave her home in Cienkie. “She was crying all the way, she did not want to eat anything and she did not want to talk to anyone. Upon arriving in Prussia, the so-called Reclaimed Land, she always escaped in the same direction from which we arrived and still had to be watched over” [ibid.: 41]. She died on September 30, 1947. Roman Brewka mentions that his grandmother, Olechowa, was brought under the rule of war (13.12.1981) and was often terrified that she would “send us again” [Brewka 2017c]. Igor Brewka added that at night she was able to get up and say that the house was burning and that there was an army around [Brewka 2017b].

Orzechowski grandmother’s funeral celebrated Roman Catholic priest from the seminary priests Divine Word Missionaries in Pieniężno. Orzechowski emphasizes in his memoirs that the hunger for his work has been mastered, but his soul has not been satisfied for many years. There were no centers of Greek Catholic and Orthodox worship. Igor Brewka emphasizes, similarly to Andrzej Orzechowski, that it was the most difficult for the displaced people to lack the ability to cultivate religious rites. His grandfather drove up to the Orthodox Church to Chrzanow near Ełk [Brewka 2017b].

Bogumiła Brewka (1969, nee Czerepaniak) she mentions that her parents did not talk very long time in a house in the Ukrainian language. Sometimes they talked quietly in their native tongue. In the village well lived with everyone, but was afraid. He remembers from the message that in the transport of the girls were raped and beaten in the carriages. There was no talk of what the older generation had experienced. Only parents who spoke of the past used the terms “at home” and that meant life before resettlement. Greek-Catholic parents went to the Roman Catholic Church. In middle school, she suffered from being a Ukrainian. Because of that, her daughter advised her not to tell her at school that she was

Ukrainian [Brewka 2017a]. About the fate of Parents and Action “Wisła” learned when she was 15–16 years that is in the mid-80s of the twentieth century. Then the parents started talking about the “Wisła” Action. It was at family gatherings. Actually it was loose talk. More about the action learned from his father-in-law. Igor Brewka claims that the parents did not epitomize stories about traumatic experiences. His grandmother did not want to talk about it. Most often during the holidays in talks were referred to what was “at home”. It was said that for example with us in such a basket was going to celebrate, mushrooms grew, or “and here on the river”, “and over us on the San”. And most often, in these messages, what was good was referred to. Transportation was not mentioned [Brewka 2017b]. His wife Katarzyna Brewka (nee Bryl) was 17–18 years old when her grandmother since she learned about Action “Wisła”. He thinks that not everyone wants to talk about it. These are not the topics to which they go on holidays. Yes, ritual was conveyed, but the action itself did not last long. Grandma was told that one of her brothers had been shot during the transport [Brewka 2017a]. She also told her experiences when the German front was on their territory and as a German soldier pretended not to see her when she hid with a small child [Brewka 2017a]. Katarzyna Brewka’s grandparents were settled in the vicinity of Bartoszyce, where relationships with neighbors lay very well.

Igor Brewka recalled the reactions of parents, which indicated that they could not even sing at home in Ukrainian carols. They told you what they were listening under the windows. They lived in uncertainty. Igor emphasizes that his lands are here, but when his father spoke “my lands”, that was the case with those who lived before the resettlement. He remembers that when he went to school someone told him “you are Ukrainians”. Then he answered “you are Pole”. He quickly noticed that the Ukrainian has no rights. Stereotypes prevailed not only in school. His children do not provide information about the “Wisła” Action. He transmits rites, language. When the Orthodox Church spoke about the “Wisła” Action, the 7-year-old daughter thought that it was the Ukrainians who had made Russia (she is aware that in the eastern Ukraine there is a war with Russia). When her father told her that Poland did not do it, she said after a pause, “Dad, but you will forgive Poland?” Igor Brewka adds that there is no regret about what happened to his parents and grandparents generation and he is not expecting an apology. “I did not expect anyone to apologize to me” [Brewka 2017b].

The older brother of 19-year-old Igor Roman Brewka (1959) remembers that when he went to school in the 1960’s and 70’s, his parents did not speak Ukrainian. He does not know the Ukrainian well. The children from nearby state-owned farms called “Ти українець” (“You are Ukrainian” and threw stones. It was not said that Ukrainian is spoken, but that “in his own way” and “in his own way” was

spoken when he was going to the grandparents. Religion has been going on for some time. He emphasizes that “Any nationalism whether Polish or Ukrainian is dangerous” [Brewka 2017c].

In the presented text, the author presents the accounts written from the lives of four families of Ukrainian origin. It is clear from the intergenerational message that people resettled as a result of the “Wisła” Action experienced many sufferings. The memories of these 4 families are complementary. According to the research conducted, the Action “Wisła” survived in the intergenerational transmission of Ukrainian families. However, stories about the traumas associated with it were not intended for intergenerational communication, but were conducted on the occasion of loose conversations in the examined families. The younger generations, who know only the stories of events, related to the Action “Wisła”, remember the past of parents and grandparents, but like older generations they are reluctant to talk and rather try to live in the past than the past. However, we can observe reluctance and fear of nationalist attitudes, both among Poles and Ukrainians.

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