

# CALL ME ISZA

## FEMININITY

THE JEWISH-POLISH WOMEN'S HERITAGE



## The meaning of the word "żeńszczyzna"...

Lady, maiden, girl, woman - in one word: żeńszczyzna. Polish "żeńszczyzna", a rough equivalent to English "femininity", is one of the earliest terms for women common to all Slavic languages, a rough equivalent of the Hebrew "isha", which means woman.

Its meaning encompassed a wide range of "female issues": from gender and female characteristics, to family and social roles, to emotions, values or associations related to the sphere of femininity. Finding the stories hidden in it is like a journey one step at a time: from childhood legends about a great-grandmother, through anecdotes about a distant aunt, to the complete reconstruction of a forgotten story - the HERstory.

## ... and how does it relate to our project?

"Call me Isza. Femininity: The Jewish-Polish Women's Heritage" is an initiative we created to give voice to the heroines of everyday life. Our aim is to draw attention to female figures in history and culture: Jewish and Polish women living in the areas of Wiśniowa, Dobczyce and Myślenice - neighbouring towns in southern Poland during the Occupation (and beyond). Ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances and extraordinary women in ordinary situations inspired the series, which is set against the backdrop of monuments testifying to Poland's (Małopolska's) multiculturalism, including the wooden synagogue in Wiśniowa, unique in the country, listed as a Cultural Property in 1993, the ruins of the mikveh in Dobczyce and the Jewish cemetery in Myślenice.

Among the current inhabitants of the region and the descendants of those who have already emigrated from the region, we will look for the stories of their Jewish and Polish ancestors: activists, community workers, members of farmers' clubs, NGOs, committed citizens, creative and active women. We will write down the stories of our mothers, grandmothers and great, great, great... grandmothers.

We will collect stories of enterprising aunts, talented cousins and creative neighbours. We will showcase and celebrate the achievements of little known or completely forgotten activists, creators and even socially creative relatives.

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## What do we want to achieve?

Our aim is to show the empowerment of Polish and Jewish women in the local history of Wiśniowa, Dobczyce and Myślenice. Public space is dominated by men's stories, overshadowing tens, hundreds, thousands of women: grandmothers, mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts, cousins. And yet, in addition to being wives, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, etc...., they were also housewives, craftswomen (even if not officially recognised as such), merchants, artists, teachers, clerks, activists, governesses, administrators... These seemingly mundane achievements of women were and still are under-represented in the public discussion of the occupation, compared to the extent to which the merits of men are recognised. With our project we want to be part of the process of redressing this balance.

We want to create a space for Jewish-Polish dialogue by introducing the public to the illustrious but unknown Jewish-Polish heroines of the region. We believe that by starting with questions about family stories, it will be easier to encourage residents to explore the HERstories of their female ancestors, which are intertwined with the HERstories of Jewish and Ukrainian women. Following the common ground without prejudice, we will uncover the stories of marginalised groups in society. In doing so, we will spread knowledge about the local heritage of Jewish women from Wiśniowa, Dobczyce and Myślenice and create a modern culture of remembrance of their heritage. We will hold a series of meetings with local residents and the descendants of Jewish women from Wiśniowa and Dobczyce. We will organise workshops to write down memories, archive memorabilia and scan photographs. The work will result in a publicly accessible archive collection, stored in the Open Archiving System, and a mobile exhibition consisting of photographs and accompanying stories brought by the participants of the meetings.

## What action can you take?

Join us by sharing the female stories and memorabilia of your female ancestors. Co-create our archive and help us build a collection of unnamed female occupations and socio-cultural functions. Let's create a women's exhibition together, so that the legacy of our female ancestors has a chance to remain in the memory of future generations.



## Join the meetings!

The project is addressed to the descendants of Jewish women and Poles from Myślenice, Wiśniowa and Dobczyce, as well as to women leaders, members of rural women's associations (KGW), representatives of NGOs, local historians and researchers, and residents of the region. The meetings are also aimed at women and men from the community, leaders and enthusiasts working in local institutions, civil organisations, informal groups and also in business. The meetings are intended for all those who are interested in the Polish-Jewish heritage of the female part of society and wish to preserve it.

We invite you to meetings with local residents, living witnesses of the events that took place in the region, with descendants of the Jews of Wiśniowa and Dobczyce, including Rywka Alon, who lives in Israel - daughter of Zofia Pistol and Izak Kluger, granddaughter of Benjamin and Jochewed Kluger (née Jeret) and great-granddaughter of Anschel (Anzelm) Jeret and Hene Feder from Wiśniowa, and Tadeusz Jakubowicz - Jewish community activist, president and vice-president of the Jewish Religious Community in Kraków since 1997, who hid in the forests of Wiśniowa until the end of the war.

Please note: In order to participate in the workshop, it is necessary to bring your own materials, including archival photographs, films, newspaper clippings, documents, chronicles, notes, memoirs, diaries, family heirlooms and other artefacts, preparation of family HERstories or organisation HERstories, etc.

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