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WOMEN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN GALICIA: MOSCOPHILES AND NARODOVTSI

Abstract. The women's socio-political movement in Galicia in the 19th – 20th centuries was a distinctive phenomenon that combined the struggle for women's rights with the aspiration to preserve the Ukrainian language, traditions, and culture under conditions of statelessness. This topic is important because it demonstrates how women became active participants in public life and helped safeguard national identity amid the pressures of Polonization and Russification. The study compares the two opposing currents of the women's movement, the Moscovophile and the Narodovtsi, and their impact on the role of women in society. To achieve this, the historical-comparative method was employed, integrating an analysis of scholarly works as well as the activities of women's organizations, education, and women's economic engagement. The sources include the magazines "Lada", "Rusalka", and "Persnyi vinok", along with foundational studies by contemporary historians, in particular Marta Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Stepan Kost, and Liliia Sholohon. A notable feature of the work is that the Narodovtsi movement integrated education, active female participation in civic life, and national interests, whereas the Moscovophiles adhered to a conservative model in which women remained primarily at home, engaging only in charity and church activities without a broader national dimension. The research shows that the Narodovtsi trend ultimately prevailed and shaped the image of an educated, active, and nationally conscious woman. This contributed to the formation of Ukrainian women's organizations, the advancement of education and the economy, and laid the groundwork for future Ukrainian statehood. The women's movement in Galicia became a vital component of nation-building and social transformation, preparing the soil for the establishment of the "Soyuz Ukrainok" – the most powerful women's organization in interwar Europe.

Keywords: Women's socio-political movement, Galicia, Moscovophiles, Narodovtsi, pragmatic feminism, national identity, Russification, "Society of Russian Ladies", "Society of Ruthenian Women", "Persnyi vinok".

The women's socio-political movement in Galicia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was a unique and very important phenomenon. This movement was not simply a copy of European feminism. In fact, it marked the beginning of women's return to an active role in social life, a role they had once held but lost. At that time, Ukraine did not have its own state, and therefore the issue of women's rights was closely intertwined with the broader struggle to preserve the nation. Women played a crucial role, as they were the ones who safeguarded the language, traditions, and national consciousness. Through raising children and everyday life, they helped maintain Ukrainian identity despite strong pressures of Polonization and Russification. Thus, the women's movement was not only about women's rights but also about the survival of the entire nation.

An important feature of this process was that Ukrainian women viewed emancipation not as an individual right, but as a tool for serving society. This contributed to the formation of a specific concept of “self-help”, in which women acted independently, without expecting support from the state. They created their own educational and social initiatives, including childcare institutions and training courses, which enabled them to combine civic engagement with national educational work.

Modern scholars emphasize that this period requires thorough reinterpretation through the lens of gender history. The movement was not spontaneous; it was grounded in a solid intellectual foundation shaped by women intellectuals. Today, historians interpret these developments not only as a form of social struggle but also as part of the broader process of modernization of Ukrainian society, within which women became active participants in political life. At the same time, it is important to consider that the feminist movement developed under the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where patriarchal norms remained deeply entrenched.

During this period in Galicia, there was a division between two currents, Moscovophiles and Narodovtsi, who had different views on the role of women in society. The Moscovophiles adhered to more positions that are conservative and did not support women’s active participation in public life. In contrast, the Narodovtsi advocated for women’s education, their development, and involvement in social activities. This difference in views was part of a broader ideological conflict in Galician society, which had formed after the defeat of the 1848 revolution and the changes in the political system of Austria-Hungary in 1867.

The Moscovophile trend in the women’s movement of Galicia emerged in the second half of the 19th century and was connected with the orientation of part of society toward the Russian Empire. Its supporters believed that Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians were one “triune people”, and therefore supported the idea of cultural and linguistic closeness with the Russian Empire. This position appeared as a reaction to intensified Polonization after 1848, when many Ukrainians in Galicia began to lose their rights and sought protection from other powers (Sholohon, 2026: 3502).

This trend was quite conservative. Its representatives supported preserving a traditional way of life in which women had a limited role. Their activities were mainly confined to managing the household, raising children, participating in church life, and engaging in charity. Women could help others, but they were not expected to take an active part in political or public life. In addition, this movement paid little attention to ideas of national development or women’s equality (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

One of the first women’s organizations in Galicia was the “Society of Russian Ladies” (“Obshchestvo russkikh dam”), founded by Klavdiia Aleksovykh in 1878, or according to some sources, in 1879 in Lviv. It mainly included women who supported Moscovophile views. They had connections with Russian conservative circles and cooperated with Metropolitan Yosyf Sembratovych. The main activities of this society were quite limited. They organized balls and exhibitions, engaged in charity, and opened small sewing schools for girls. This helped women in everyday life, but did not go beyond local assistance and had little impact on the development of national consciousness or on broader participation of women in society (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

The main problem of the Moscovophile movement was its detachment from the real needs of Galician women, which was especially evident in the sphere of the press and literary activity. Publications by Severyn Shekhovych, such as the journals “Lada” (1853) and “Rusalka” (1868–

1870), were issued in a specific mixture of Ukrainian and Russian known as “yazychiie” (Kost, 2007: 124). Because of this, Galician women often preferred Polish magazines, as “yazychiie” was perceived as something artificial and difficult to understand for ordinary peasant women, who made up the majority of the region’s population (Sholohon, 2026: 3502). The content of Moscovophile periodicals was often simplistic and did not correspond to the social needs of the time, promoting purely patriarchal norms without taking into account the social changes occurring in Austria-Hungary. A vivid example is the “Marriage Rule” published in “Rusalka” in 1868: “Girls younger than 20 should marry men older than themselves; girls up to 30 should marry their peers, and forty-year-old women should take whoever they can get...” (Kost, 2007: 124). Such advice only emphasized the patriarchal limitations of the Moscovophiles, ignoring the need for women’s education and self-realization in a modern society.

This conservatism was also reflected in the fact that even women from educated Russophile families were primarily oriented toward the role of a wife and received only basic education in vocational schools. The use of “yazychiye” and the lack of a clearly defined national program reduced the quality and appeal of their publications, which made them less competitive, compared to the Narodovtsi periodicals.

They promoted the image of a “sincere Russian patriot”, which in the context of Galicia was perceived as something alien, since it distanced women from local traditions and language, orienting them toward cultural assimilation with Russia (Sholohon, 2026: 3502). Ultimately, the Moscovophile movement failed due to its inability to offer women a path to genuine development, its neglect of the national identity of Ukrainians in the region, and its restriction to church-charitable activities, which did not meet the growing demands of the national revival.

The Narodovtsi women’s movement in Galicia emerged in the late 19th century as an active response to social problems. Unlike the Moscovophiles, the Narodovtsi saw women not only as homemakers but also as important participants in the creation of the Ukrainian nation. The movement was based on so-called “pragmatic feminism”: the primary focus was not only on women’s personal rights but also on benefit for the nation (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

Education was one of the most important ideas of the Narodovtsi movement. They believed that without knowledge and literacy it was impossible to develop either an individual or the nation as a whole. Although, according to the Austrian law of 1872, girls were supposed to study for only three years, the Narodovtsi aimed for much more. They tried to convince peasants that education wasn’t just something formal, but had practical value, as it helped to manage a household more effectively, raise children and shape conscious, and responsible women – future patriotic mothers (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021). At the same time, education was seen not only as a woman’s personal right but also as her duty to society. It was believed that an educated woman should work for the benefit of her people, support its development, and preserve its culture. That is why ideas of women’s equality were combined with national interests – women were to become active participants in public life, but above all for the sake of the common cause (Kost, 2007: 124).

An important event took place on December 8, 1884, when Nataliya Kobrynska founded the “Society of Ruthenian Women” (“Tovarystvo ruskykh zhynok”) in Stanislaviv. This was the first secular, that is, non-church, women’s organization, and it had broader goals. It aimed to develop women through education, reading, and literature, as well as to unite them regardless of social background. Members of the society engaged in educational activities, organized cultural events, and spread knowledge among women (Kost, 2007: 124).

Natalia Kobrynska faced misunderstanding even among her like-minded associates. Some members of the society sought to turn it into a conventional charitable organization focused on providing material aid to the poor. However, Kobrynska remained consistent in her views. She regarded the organization as an intellectual center for the development of women's consciousness (Kost, 2007: 124). She believed that women's emancipation was not an end in itself, but a necessary condition for the overall socio-cultural development of the nation. Modern scholars characterize her approach as a manifestation of a modern type of self-awareness. In her view, women's reflection on reality had the potential to critically reassess patriarchal notions and contribute to the renewal of Ukrainian literature.

Nataliya Kobrynska was also one of the first to explain why women should have more rights and opportunities. She opposed the old patriarchal order, where a woman was limited to the family, and argued that her development was important for society as a whole. In her views, she drew on the ideas of European thinkers, particularly John Stuart Mill, as well as moderate socialist ideas (Sholohon, 2026: 3500).

An important step in the development of the Narodovtsi women's movement was the publication of the almanac "Persnyi vinok" ("The First Wreath") in 1887. Nataliya Kobrynska and Olena Pchilka (Sholohon, 2026: 3501) created it. This was a very significant event, as it was the first time women from different parts of Ukraine united for a common cause. The collection included contributions from 17 female authors from both Galicia and the Dnieper region, among them the very young Lesya Ukrainka and Hanna Barvinok. In the preface, Nataliya Kobrynska emphasized that this was the first instance of Ukrainian women coming together for a shared goal – national unity and addressing important women's issues (Kost, 2007: 125). The almanac was not just a collection of literary works. It also addressed important social topics, particularly issues of women's education, their rights, and their role in society. In other words, it served as a statement that women have the right to be active participants in public life. For this reason, it can be considered an example of so-called "pragmatic feminism", where the fight for women's rights was combined with the needs of the nation (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

In addition, the publication of "Persnyi Vinok" became a challenge to the traditional norms of the time, as it was produced entirely through the efforts of women. However, the public, including Galician women themselves, initially received it without particular enthusiasm, and it was only due to financial support from the Galician intelligentsia that the project could be realized.

This movement received strong support from Ivan Franko. He helped edit the almanac and actively supported women in their activities. In his publications, particularly in the newspaper "Dilo", Franko spoke positively about their work and urged society not to ridicule but to support the women's movement (Kost, 2007: 124).

From the 1890s, the Narodovtsi women's movement became more organized and widespread. In 1893, the "Club of Ruthenian Women" was established in Lviv under the leadership of Hermyna Shukhevych. Its members opened kindergartens, schools for girls, held lectures, and taught women useful skills. One of their major achievements was the creation of the Ukrainian Girls' School named after Shevchenko, where girls were educated in the national spirit (Kost, 2007: 125 – 126).

In the interwar period, women's press became a powerful instrument for shaping national consciousness. The magazine "Nova Khata" (1925–1939) popularized folk art, creating a fashion for embroidered shirts among the intelligentsia, which strengthened patriotic sentiments (Kost, 2007: 129). At the same time, "Zhynocha Dolia" in Kolomyia, under the leadership of Olena

Kysilevska, focused on rural women, explaining how to establish women's circles and participate in civic work (Kost, 2007: 130). Of particular note is the biweekly "Zhinka", which became a platform for Milena Rudnytska and the intellectual milieu, defending the rights of Ukrainian women before the Polish authorities (Kost, 2007: 134).

An interesting innovation in the press was the "American" section in the magazine "Zhinocha Dolia," edited by Dr. V. Simenovych. It enabled Galician women to feel connected to the global women's movement and to draw on the experience of the diaspora for developing their own initiatives (Kost, 2007: 125).

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new, even more active generation of women emerged. For example, the "Circle of Ukrainian Girls" (1901) encouraged women to be bolder and participate in public life. They even published their own magazine "Meta", where they wrote about women's rights and their role in society (Kost, 2007: 126).

In 1909, various women's organizations united to form the "Women's Community". This made the movement stronger and more organized, as it now had many branches throughout Galicia. Women engaged not only in cultural activities but also fought for the right to study in gymnasiums and universities (Kost, 2007: 127).

At the end of 1912, when male political leaders did not invite women to a meeting on supporting Austria in the war, leaders of the women's movement convened their own secret assembly. Olena Stepaniv, Kostyantyna Malyska, and other activists expressed their readiness to support the state only on the condition that Ukrainian national interests would be respected, and within a short time, they raised significant funds for organizing a Ukrainian army (Kost, 2007: 127). This demonstrated the political maturity of women, who proved to be better oriented in the historical situation than some male politicians were.

Economic activity was also important. Women created their own organizations and worked together to earn money. For example, they opened clothing workshops or participated in cooperatives, such as the "Maslosoyuz". This helped them become more independent, support their families and at the same time strengthen Ukrainian society (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

Today, the ideas of the historical women's movement are gaining new relevance through modern initiatives such as "Her Lecture Series" (Yiyi Lektorii) and the activities of the Museum of Women's and Gender History. An important initiative is the proposal to establish December 8 as the Day of the Ukrainian Women's Movement, as it was on this date in 1884 that the first general meeting of the "Society of Ruthenian Women" took place in Stanislaviv (Sholohon, 2026: 3503). This highlights that the struggle for gender equality and national identity remains relevant today.

It is worth noting that in 2025 an international conference titled "Natalia Kobrynska – The Path of Progress" was held, bringing together a significant number of scholars to explore new approaches to popularizing her legacy. In addition, recent collective monographs have been published, including "In the Name of Our National Unity", dedicated to the authors of the almanac "Persnyi Vinok". At the same time, according to the latest historiography (as of 2026), there is still a lack of a comprehensive study that would systematically analyze the historical preconditions and interconnections of the Ukrainian feminist movement within a global context (Sholohon, 2026: 3504).

Thus, the development of the women's movement in Galicia showed that the victory of the Narodovtsi over the Moscovophiles was entirely logical. The Moscovophiles encouraged women to remain within old boundaries: without an active role in society, oriented toward a foreign culture and language that were largely incomprehensible to the people. This did not correspond to the new

conditions of life, as changes were taking place in Austria-Hungary, and the national consciousness of Ukrainians was gradually growing. In contrast, the Narodovtsi proposed a completely different approach. They envisioned women as educated, conscious, and active. Such a woman not only took care of her family but also participated in public life, engaged in educational work, worked in cooperatives, and even joined the struggle for the rights of the nation. In other words, she combined her personal life with contributions to society. It was during this period that an understanding of the rights and role of Ukrainians in society began to form. The women's movement managed to unite ideas of women's equality with the national idea. Thanks to this, Ukrainians were able to better preserve their culture and identity, even without having their own state. In the future, this development led to the creation of the "Union of Ukrainian Women", a large and influential women's organization. It united thousands of women and had a real impact on education, the economy, and even political life. Thus, the women's movement in Galicia was not merely a struggle for women's rights. It became an important part of the broader struggle of Ukrainians for their existence and development, laying the foundation for a future independent state.



Female activists of the Ukrainian movement along with male public and culture figures celebrating the 100th anniversary of Kotlyarevsky's Eneyida, 1898.



Klavdiia Aleksovykh (1830 – 1916).



Natliia Kobrybska (1851 – 1920).



The cover of the almanac of Pershyi Vinok (the First Garland), 1887.



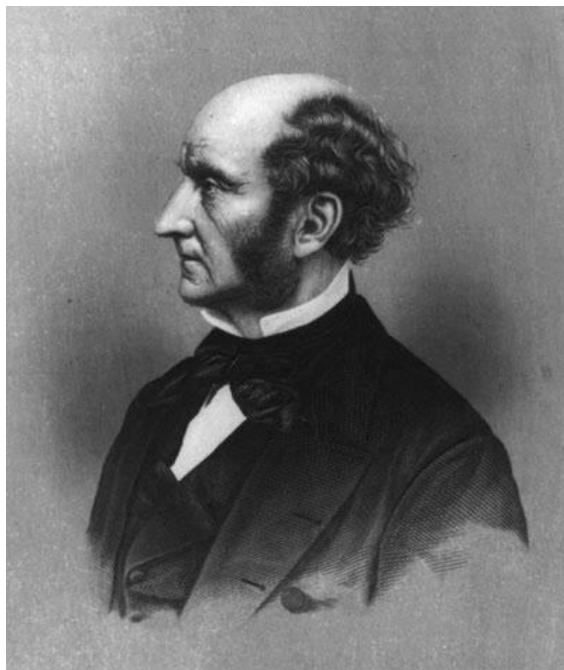
Olena Pchilka (Olha Kosach) (1848 – 1930).



Lesya Ukrainka (Larysa Kosach) (1871 – 1913).



Hanna Barvinok (Oleksandra Biloserska-Kulish) (1828 – 1911).



John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873).



Ivan Franko (1856 – 1916).



Hermina Shukhevyh (1852 – 1939).



Olena Stepaniv (1892 – 1963).



Konstantyna Malytska (1872 – 1947).



*Members of the Stryi branch of the Soyuz of Ukrainok
(Union of Ukrainian women), 1937.*

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