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## **Affects in Autobiographical Accounts and Poetic Statements about the Plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle in 1920**

### **Afekty w relacjach autobiograficznych i wypowiedziach poetyckich o plebiscycie na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu z 1920 roku**

**Słowa kluczowe:** afekt, wspomnienia, poezja ludowa, Warmia i Mazury, plebiscyt 1920

**Key words:** affect, memories, folk poetry, Warmia and Mazury, 1920 plebiscite

Literature can often be a source of knowledge about history, although – as it is known – literary fiction cannot replace factual reports. In spite of this, subsequent generations of readers often develop their own idea of history based on historical novels or reports preserved in diaries or memoirs. Historical events are also preserved in poetry, in particular when they take the form of an appeal, addressed to a specific recipient, or lyrical confessions.

Reporting the events witnessed by the narrator always involves his or her emotional approach towards the described situation. As Robert Traba writes, “Without emotions, there is no functional memory to develop a collective idea of oneself and others. Such a belief has been and still is obvious to such extent that actually we hardly ever meet an attempt of the sound analysis of this ‘obviousness’” (Traba 2014: 368). The validity of applying emotions, feelings and affects in research as the conceptual category in interpretation of literary text was examined by Michał P. Markowski. As he writes:

In view of a huge terminological confusion, it could be useful to apply the category of “affective condition” (*afficere* = cause changes, affect), involving all non-volitional and non-intellectual reactions towards events taking place in the world: emotions, feelings, moods, passions, desires. The affective condition describes “subjective

involvement in the world”, without which the human existence as such is impossible. [...] A groundbreaking approach in the philosophical treatment of affective condition was started by the 1920s Martin Heidegger treaties concerning the human “being-in-the-world”, possible only through moods (*Bestimmungen*), understood by the philosopher as the pre-intellectual access of the man to the world. [...] In consequence, emotions do not belong only to the subject, but also describe everything man may come into contact with (Markowski 2014: 350–352).

The plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle of 1920 became an event recorded both in memories and in poetical works by the participants in those events. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the method in which those authors interpreted the plebiscite and formulated subjective evaluations, based on their own emotions. The authors of the records are guided by their individual memory, which depends on multiple factors. Their approach towards the plebiscite events, i.e. the fact whether they originated from the areas affected by the plebiscite (Lengowski 1971; Małek 1968; Zientara-Malewska 1966; Leyk 1969; Boenigk 1957; Baczewski 1961), or came here from Poland (Łubieńska 1932; Uziembło 1939) is of high importance. An important factor is also their educational background, often related to social origins, determining the ability to interpret facts. The authors include graduates from higher educational institutions, but also simple peasants (Michał Lengowski, Franciszek Kwas, Karol Pentowski). Also, the time perspective is important, i.e. whether the reports were created just a few years after 1920 (Łubieńska 1932; Korybut 1938; Uziembło 1939), or were written down after several decades (Lengowski, Małek 1968; Zientara-Malewska 1966; Leyk 1969; Boenigk 1957; Baczewski 1961; Kolendo 1963).

This individual retrospective, present both in memoirs and in poetry (Michał Kajka, Michał Lengowski, Alojzy Śliwa, Maria Zientara-Malewska), is combined with the collective identity, i.e. a certain set of generalized stereotypes. Maurice Halbwachs (1969) proposes the notion of “social frameworks”, gathering these individual experiences and harmonizing with private emotions. In this way, as Robert Traba writes:

Collective memory ceases to be an intellectual fiction. It is a dynamic process of identification with selectively chosen historical phenomena. This process, through social events, such as political rituals, erecting monuments or school education, takes place in our heads and in the public space at the same time. By participating in public activities that create images of the past in the public space, we became, *nolens volens*, actors in the process of collective memory construction (Traba 2014: 367).

In order to be able to select from the research material the emotions that determine the affective condition of the authors of memoirs and poetry, it is important to closely examine the historical narration carried out around the plebiscite of 1920.

## Historical findings

The plebiscite events have been discussed in detail in historical studies. After World War II, Zygmunt Lietz was the first one to take up this subject in his book *Plebiscyt na Powiślu, Warmii i Mazurach w 1920 roku* [*The Plebiscite in Powiśle, Warmia and Mazury in 1920*] (1958). Valuable contributions of historians include studies by Bogusław Leśnodorski (1966), Tadeusz Grygier (1957), Janusz Gilas and Janusz Symonides (1966) and by Piotr Stawecki (1968; 1972). The issue of the plebiscite was most widely examined by Wojciech Wrześciński who, apart from the study *Plebiscyt na Warmii i Mazurach oraz na Powiślu w roku 1920* [*The Plebiscite in Warmia and Mazury and in Powiśle in 1920*] (1974), published in 1986, with Piotr Stawecki, a selection of sources concerning plebiscite activities under the same title (Stawecki, Wrześciński 1986). The publication of Wojciech Wrześciński was reprinted on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the plebiscite, bearing the title *Polska-Prusy Wschodnie. Plebiscyty na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu w 1920 roku* [*Poland – East Prussia. Plebiscites in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle in 1920*] (Wrześciński 2010). In the preface to the second issue, the researcher, pointed to the latest interpretation of the plebiscite results:

Moreover, formally, according to the description on the voting card, the plebiscite choice was between East Prussia and Poland, and not between Germany and Poland. And additionally, it was made in the period when the existence of the independent Polish state had not stabilized yet, and the threat of losing independence was still very significant. It is difficult to consider plebiscite voting at that time as the expression of the right of the nation to self-determination, although formally, such were the intentions of politicians. In the light of contemporary historical research, the privileged position of the German side, starting from the birth of the plebiscite idea, was observed. Both sides demonstrated their awareness of a probable loss by the Poles in the plebiscite (Wrześciński 2010: 15).

The celebrations of the plebiscite anniversary coincided with the research conference organized by the W. Kętrzyński Centre for Scientific Research in Olsztyn, the outcome of which was the book edited by Stanisław Achremczyk, *Plebiscyty jako metoda rozwiązywania konfliktów międzynarodowych* [*Plebiscites as a Method for Solving International Conflicts*] (2010). Consequently, the subject of the plebiscite still seems to be valid for the historians and inspires them to study this issue. In the above-mentioned publication, the researchers deal with the reporting of plebiscite events in historical sources and in the press, and the problem of demarcation of the Polish-German border in East Prussia after the plebiscite.

In one of the papers in this collection, Lech Wyszczelski reminds readers that political groups representing the views of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski demonstrated different approaches to future Polish borders, but “neither of them anticipated full independence from the beginning, but patronage of one of the parti-

tioning states” (Wyszczelski 2010: 7). With time, Piłsudski’s adherents formed the concept concerning the future shape of Polish borders based on forming a federation under Polish patronage, and they did not attach any greater importance to the issue of borders, in particular northern and western borders, leaving the initiative in this matter to western powers. A different approach was taken by Dmowski’s party, representing the vision in which Polish borders were incorporated. They treated Germany as the main enemy of the Polish case and tried to “exclude their influence from the Polish land, Germanized for ages” (Wyszczelski 2010: 8). Roman Dmowski as one of two Polish delegates referred several times before the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference in Paris the position of the government towards intensively Germanized territories. He did that for the first time on 29 January 1919, presenting a previously sent memorial on this case, in which he demanded that Silesia, the southern part of East Prussia, Warmia and Mazury should be included within Polish borders. He proved that these areas were still inhabited by the population of the Polish origin. He repeated the claims of the Polish government on 25 February 1919, slightly reducing them and demanding that in the south and in the north Polish parts of the Cieszyn Silesia, Spisz District, Upper Silesia, entire West Prussia and a sufficiently wide belt for securing Gdańsk, as well as the Olsztyn region from East Prussia, should be joined to Poland as a compensation for territorial losses suffered by the Poles in the East.

Finally, as a result of a deceitful political game, in particular of the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who tried to force through the interests of Germany and convinced the president of the USA, Thomas Woodrow Wilson to share this position, a decision was made to create the Free City of Gdańsk (modelled after Friume port in the Balkans). Additionally, it was agreed that the plebiscite should be held to determine the territorial affinity of the Kwidzyn District, doomed to failure in view of the dominance of the German population in this area, and it was decided that the state territory to which Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle would belong would be settled by plebiscites.

Poles expected that lands situated in areas of Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle would be joined to Poland without voting. This was justified by the rule adopted in Versailles concerning formation of national states, according to which the state affiliation was determined by the percentage of inhabitants using a specific language in a given area. According to estimates of the Polish side, 80% of the population spoke the Polish language in the area under discussion. A delegation of Mazurian population even arrived at the conference in Paris, with Zenobiusz Eugeniusz Lewandowski as the leader, demanding that Mazury should be joined to Poland, as it seemed that the issue of Warmia and Powiśle would be successfully settled.

Stanisław Achremczyk evaluates the decision of the Supreme Council of the Peace conference in Versailles as follows:

The decision of great powers on the plebiscite was not welcomed by both sides – the Polish and the German sides. The Poles believed that plebiscites are doomed

to failure, as a population deprived of Polish national consciousness, and related to the region and the German state, would vote for leaving East Prussia within German borders. In turn, the German side considered the plebiscite to undermine its rights to East Prussia, the province considered a part of greater Germany (Achremczyk 2010: 5).

The date of the plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle, determining the state affinity of those areas after World War I, was determined in 1919 by decisions of the peace treaty of Versailles to take place on 11 July 1920. Wojciech Wrzesiński presented detailed results of the plebiscite in Tables 1–2 (Wrzesiński 1974: 271).

Table 1. Results of the plebiscite in individual poviats of the Olsztyn District

| Poviat        | Number of votes  |            | Number of communes with votes |            | Percentage for Poland | Percentage of children with Polish as the mother tongue according to the census of 1.01.1911 |
|---------------|------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|--|
|               | for East Prussia | for Poland | for East Prussia              | for Poland |                       |  |
| Mrągowo       | 34,334           | 25         | 190                           | —          | 0.07                  | 78.3   |
| Gizycko       | 29,378           | 9          | 116                           | —          | 0.03                  | 70.2   |
| Nidzica       | 22,233           | 330        | 142                           | 1          | 1.46                  | 86.0   |
| Olecko        | 28,625           | 2          | 121                           | —          | 0.007                 |  |
| Pisz          | 34,036           | 14         | 198                           | —          | 0.04                  | 83.6   |
| Olsztyn       |                  |            |                               |            |                       |  |
| – town        | 16,742           | 342        | 1                             | —          | 2.00                  | 24.6   |
| Ostróda       | 46,385           | 1,043      | 244                           | 4          | 2.19                  | 64.4   |
| Reszel        | 35,252           | 758        | 117                           | 1          | 2.10                  | 22.1   |
| Olsztyn       |                  |            |                               |            |                       |  |
| – rural areas | 31,486           | 4,902      | 179                           | 3          | 13.47                 | 65.6   |
| Szczytno      | 48,204           | 511        | 197                           | —          | 1.49                  | 90.7   |
| Elk           | 36,534           | 44         | 189                           | —          | 0.12                  | 79.0   |
| Total         | 363,209          | 7,980      |                               |            | 2.09                  | 65.05  |

Source: Wrzesiński (1974: 271).

Table 2. Results of the plebiscite in individual poviats of the Kwidzyń District

| Poviat  | Number of votes  |            | Percentage of votes for Poland | Percentage of children with Polish as the mother tongue in school census in 1910. |
|---------|------------------|------------|--------------------------------|---|
|         | for East Prussia | for Poland |                                |   |
| Kwidzyń | 25,607           | 1,779      | 6.49                           | 9.0   |
| Susz    | 33,498           | 1,073      | 3.10                           | 8.0   |
| Sztum   | 19,984           | 4,904      | 19.07                          | 42.0  |
| Malbork | 17,805           | 191        | 1.06                           | 2.0   |
| Total   | 96,894           | 7,947      | 7.58                           | 15.0  |

Source: Wrzesiński (1974: 271).

As the data show, the defeat of Poles was devastating. In the Olsztyn District only 2% of people voted for Poland, and in Kwidzyń District slightly more – 7.58%. As a result of Poland's failure, almost the entire plebiscite area remained within German borders, while Poland was assigned only eight communes (five in Powiśle: Małe Pólko, Nowe Lignowy, Kramrowo, Bursztych and Janowo, and three in Mazury: villages of Lubstynek, Napromek and Groszki), and the border between Poland and Germany from that moment was formed along the eastern bank of the Vistula river.

Statistical data are very meaningful. Historians derived the causes of the overwhelming defeat of Poland from various factors. The majority of them included many ages of Germanization of the areas of Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle, the culminating point of which was withdrawing the Polish language from schools in 1873. They also mentioned the unfavourable for Poland atmosphere of the Versailles conference, and the lack of time to organize the plebiscite on the date resulting from the conference arrangements, making it impossible to properly prepare for voting. The Polish side also agreed that people born before 1900 in the plebiscite area were entitled to vote. This resulted in an inflow of 128,000 emigrants, who arrived in East Prussia for the plebiscite. Additionally, the Polish state was at that time at war with Russia and did not pay adequate attention to providing proper support for compatriots from East Prussia. The result was indirectly affected by procedural errors: inaccuracy of prepared lists, with missing surnames of many Poles, violating confidentiality in voting (two cards were prepared: for Poland and for Prussia, and therefore the members of the election committees could observe which card was inserted to urns by the voters) or failure to observe the regulations concerning the ban on campaigning on the plebiscite day.

### **Memoirs**

From the perspective of a historian, Wojciech Wrzesiński, memoirs of the plebiscite event participants cannot provide a reliable source of knowledge about those events. The authors of the reports were usually leading plebiscite activists, involved in their work and promoting Polishness in these areas. As the researcher writes:

Memoirs, being at the same time an important element of the then political games, contained subjective evaluations, towards which the historian must be highly critical (Wrzesiński 2010: 22).

He evaluates memoirs of German plebiscite leaders even more harshly:

The most important memoirs include those of Max Worgitzki and Wilhelm Gayl. Their task was to present the plebiscite as the scheming of Polish representatives at the peace conference and to exaggerate the contribution of German organiza-

tion in preparing the victory. In those memoirs, the activity of Polish organization is the result of operation by external forces, carried out with the objection of the local population (Wrzesiński 2010: 23).

However, despite those reservations, it is worth looking at the interpretation of plebiscite events presented in selected autobiographical reports, paying attention to individual opinions of those authors. Sometimes they provide small, and – as it might seem – insignificant facts, private opinions or evaluations, but these are the details that help to understand the context of activities taking place in the plebiscite area.

In 1970, Władysław Ogrodziński evaluated autobiographical texts and listed the authors who devoted fragments of their memoirs to this period (Ogrodziński 1970). The earliest, still in the interwar period, reports were published by Kazimierz Jaroszyk (1928), Stanisław Zieliński (1930), Hugon Barke and Kazimierz Jaroszyk (1931), Anna Łubieńska (1932, 1977), Henryk J. Korybut-Woroniecki (1938), Adam Uziembło (1939), Tadeusz Odrowski (1930), Paweł Prass and Alojzy Śliwa. After the war, after the 1950s, memories of activists of the pre-war Polish movement in the area of Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle began to be published, the fragments of which concerned plebiscite events. Their authors include: Jan Boenigk (1957), Franciszek Kwas (1957), Kazimierz Pentowski (1959), Michał Lengowski (1971), Jan Baczewski (1961), Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina (1965), Maria Zientara-Malewska (1966), Karol Małek (1968), Kazimierz Jaroszyk (1969), Paweł Sowa (1969) and Fryderyk Leyk (1969). This rich collection can be also increased by adding the memoirs of August Klemens Popławski (2018), published by his son, Jerzy.

The authors of memoirs include educated persons: journalists, teachers, officials, as well as simple peasants, Warmians and Mazurians, who because of their hearts' needs and the love of the mother tongue, and therefore, awakened national consciousness, were actively involved into the plebiscite activities. The issues related to various forms of reports were partially described by Władysław Ogrodziński (1971), who examined political, national and religious conditions.

Memoirs make it possible to perceive the above-mentioned affective condition. Without high emotional involvement of the authors and strong emotions related to the lost plebiscite, the reports would not be created, and the strength of their expression would be lower. It is this individual approach to various factors that allows us to see the plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle in a broader perspective, which, interestingly, is in some places too idealistic and sometimes very critical. It can be provisionally signalled that the feelings prevailing among emotional reactions with which the reporters met include hope for possible victory, a naive belief that the plebiscite action would bring success to the Polish site, surprise with unexpected, unforeseen situations and questioning success, as well as a great fear of being killed by the unscrupulous German hit squads.



The attitude of resignation and doubt with regard to the possible victory and perception of errors in preparing the plebiscite are prevalent in external authors. An extensive reminiscent article by Adam Uziembło, published for the first time in 1939 in the “*Niepodległość*” journal, and issued for the second time in the form of the book edited by Małgorzata Szostakowska as late as in 1981, provides fundamental knowledge concerning the activity of Polish plebiscite committees. The author was a Pole involved in the plebiscite, who came to Prussia from the motherland. His quite short, but panoramic story, reflects the pre-plebiscite atmosphere: clumsiness and misunderstandings between activists, uncoordinated actions, insufficient financial means, literal deficiency of paper for printing the press or leaflets, failure to provide proper printing machines on time.

Uziembło pays attention to the inappropriate methods of conducting training in Warsaw for campaigners originating from Mazury:

Dawano im skrócony kurs nauki o Polsce, informowano, jakie ciężary traktat wersalski narzuca Niemcom i jak ciężkie życie będzie w tym kraju. Polska za to długów nie ma, a posiada „nieprzebrane bogactwa naturalne”.

Jest rzeczą wysoce charakterystyczną, że pomijano zupełnie sprawę dumy narodowej, czynnika ofiary czy obowiązku. Po prostu usiłowano przekonać, że w Polsce będzie wygodniej, dostatniej. I najciekawsze, że tego rodzaju agitację podejmowali ludzie, którzy sami poświęcali i byli gotowi poświęcić naprawdę wszystko. Zdawali się nie rozumieć całkowicie, że w samym postawieniu sprawy w ten sposób tkwi niewiara w te czynniki psychiczne, które są bezwarunkowo niezbędne dla zwycięstwa.

[They were given a short course about Poland, they were informed what burdens were imposed by the Versailles treaty on Germany and how difficult it would be to live in this country, while Poland did not have any debts, but held “countless natural resources”.

It is highly characteristic that the issues of national pride, the factor of victim or obligation were completely omitted. Attempts were made to simply convince people that life in Poland would be more comfortable and affluent. And most interestingly, this type of agitation was undertaken by people who themselves sacrificed and were ready to sacrifice everything. They completely did not seem to understand that such an approach showed the lack of faith in these mental factors that are unconditionally necessary for the victory.] (Uziembło 1981: 37–38)

A similar critical approach and additionally, slight naivety in the judgement is presented in the diary of Anna Łubieńska, a young girl originating from a landowner family from Greater Poland, who came to Olsztyn answering the call of Helena Sierakowska, a co-organizer of the Polish school and pre-school education in Warmia and the Malbork area, to support the teaching work in the areas covered by the plebiscite. Łubieńska renders the atmosphere of tense relations between



Germans, and those who felt German, and Poles. She travels a lot in the area, and in Gietrzwałd starts a conversation with a local curate, who declares that “he is a German subject and wants to remain as such”:

– Złą przysługę oddajecie Warmii, chcąc ją przyłączyć do Polski – mówi do mnie prosto z mostu. – Warmiakom dobrze jest pod panowaniem niemieckim. Żadna krzywda im się tu nie dzieje. Gdy natomiast w Polsce macie takie niepewne stosunki...

[– You are doing a disservice to Warmia, wanting to join it to Poland – he came straight out with it. – Warmians feel good under German rule. None harm is done to them here. While you in Poland have such uncertain relations...] (Łubieńska 1977: 46)

This is a very important testimony, as several historians claim (e.g. Obłąk 1963) it was Gietrzwałd that was regarded as the cradle of Polishness after the apparitions of Our Lady in 1877, who talked to the local population in the Polish language. It is here that a Polish bookstore operated, established by Andrzej Samulowski in 1878. However, it turns out that it was a priest from Gietrzwałd who promoted ideas that did not encourage Polish population to vote for Poland. Based on this, Łubieńska formulates the following judgement:

Lecz biedni księża warmińscy wychowani w niemieckich szkołach i niemieckich seminariach przeszłości swego narodu nie znają. Polska kultura jest im obca. A więc może dziwić się raczej należy, że pomimo to niektórzy warmińscy księża są jednak nadzwyczaj gorliwymi Polakami.

[But poor Warmian priests, educated in German schools and German seminars, do not know the history of their nation. Polish culture is alien to them. So perhaps it should be surprising that despite of that, some Warmian priests are nevertheless highly ardent Poles.] (Łubieńska 1977: 47)

It is worth remembering that the involvement of Polish priests into persuading people to vote for Poland could, in many villages, determine the results of voting. Such work was performed by Rev. Walenty Barczewski or Rev. Wacław Osiński. But as it results, for instance, from the report by Michał Lengowski, the fear for restrictions of the German government do not permit the priest from Klebark Wielki, Robert Bilitewski, to involve (Lengowski 1972: 164–165), while the parish priest in Orzechowo, Rev. Kiszporski, officially took the opposite side (Lengowski 1972: 148–149).

Highly interesting are reports of apparently insignificant confrontations, and actually serious conflicts, between Anna Łubieńska with Germans whom she meets e.g. in the “Deutsches Haus” hotel in Olsztyn. Depending on whether she is alone or in the company of Englishmen (members of the plebiscite coalition committee), the attitude of Germans towards her changes:

Właściciel hotelu czyha tylko na sposobność, aby się na mnie rzucić. Zastaje mnie kiedyś samą w hallu [...] z niepohamowaną złością zwraca się do mnie w te słowa.

– Raz już przez portiera, powiedziałem, że ma się pani wyprowadzić. Żądanie moje powtarzam.

– Żądanie pana jest niesłuszne. Wyprowadzić się obecnie nie mam zamiaru [...]. Twarz jego robi się straszna. Zdławionym głosem wykrzykuje jakieś niezrozumiałe obelgi. Z sali restauracyjnej wypadają Niemcy. Obstępują mnie wkoło, śmieją się, cieszą, widząc mnie tak bezbronną.

Właśnie w tej chwili, nie spodziewany przez nikogo, wchodzi do hotelu Garner (angielski koalicyjant – przyp. J. Ch. Z.). W mgnieniu oka rozprasza otaczających mnie Niemców, a hotelarza błyskawicznym ruchem chwyta za gardło [...] Niemcy cofają się na widok Anglika; niektórzy nawet udają, że w tym zatargu moją brali stronę.

[The owner of the hotel only waits for an opportunity to go at me. Once he sees me alone in the hall [...] and with unrestrained anger talks to me like this:

“I have already, through the porter, told you to move out. I am repeating my demand.”

“Your demand is unjustified. I do not intend to move out now [...].”

His face becomes horrible. With a choked voice, he is shouting incomprehensible insults. Germans burst out from the restaurant. They are surrounding me, laughing and are happy to see me so defenceless.

And just at this moment, unexpectedly, Garner enters the hotel (an English coalition member – note by J. Ch. Z.) In next to no time, he disperses the Germans surrounding me, and quickly grabs the hotel owner by the throat (...) Germans step back seeing the Englishmen; some of them even pretend to take my side in this conflict.] (Łubieńska 1977: 63–64)

Karol Małłek presents in his memoirs, published in 1968, plebiscite events from the perspective of a Mazurian and an Evangelical, who wants to join the social work, but learns in the Polish Plebiscite Committee that “campaigning work for Poland is entrusted first of all to Catholics” (Małłek 1968: 35).

We learn from his records, among others, that Germans spared no funds for plebiscite propaganda. A “German Warmian”, equipped with sharp tools for fighting and ready to terrorize “Polish Warmians”, accidentally encountered by Małłek in Olsztyn, was not only going to vote for Germans, but also believed that the voting would bring a result of 100% for Germany. Małłek provides information heard from his acquaintance, which is not only empty propaganda.

Niemcy rzucili na teren plebiscytowy około 6,5 miliona gazet, a do końca kampanii plebiscytowej chcą tę ilość podwoić, co wyniesie 65 gazet na jeden lebek głosujący. Dowiedziałem się także, że Niemcy suto odpłacają swoich agentów. Stawki kształtują się od tysiąca do czterech tysięcy marek miesięcznie zależnie

od wykonywanej funkcji. Są też plany sprowadzenia na sam plebiscyt z zachodu, zwłaszcza z Westfalii, około 200 tysięcy ludzi, którzy się tutaj urodzili, aby też głosowali za Niemcami.

[Germans threw on the plebiscite area about 6.5 million newspapers, and they want to double this amount by the end of the plebiscite campaign, which will mean 65 newspapers per one voting head. I also learned that Germans pay their agents well. Rates range from one thousand to four thousand marks a month, depending on the function performed. There are also plans to bring, just for the plebiscite, from the west, in particular from Westphalia, about 200 thousand people who were born here, to vote for Germany.] (Małłek 1968: 40).

The report from the conversation with the acquaintance is carried out with a high degree of objectivity. Małłek presents the facts succinctly, but cannot refrain from subjective commentaries: „Taki był wynik owej perfidnie wyreżyserowanej komedii historycznej, jak to określali polscy patrioci, którzy całe swe siły oddawali dla Polski” [This was the effect of this deceitfully directed historical comedy, as described by Polish patriots, who dedicated all their efforts for Poland] (Małłek 1968: 52).

Memoirs of simple peasants, Michał Lengowski, Franciszek Kwas or Karol Pentowski, are different. Their reports echo the simple faith in the possibility of winning, against logic and facts, accompanied by a description of difficulties they have to struggle with every day, e.g. deficiency of transport means, which make the activists walk sometimes several dozen kilometres from one locality to another.

The memoirs of Michał Lengowski, *Na Warmii i w Westfalii* [*In Warmia and in Westphalia*], published for the first time in 1971, therefore 50 years after the plebiscite, render the naive faith in the victory of the plebiscite. Lengowski, a Westphalian worker himself, originating from Zielonowo, after his return from economic emigration during which he formed Polish associations, became in 1919 a leading activist and speaker in rallies organized for the campaign for joining a part of Warmia with the motherland, in the area of even several villages of the Olsztyn District: Zielonowo, Pluski, Bartąg, Jaroty, Klebark Mały and Klebark Wielki, Gryźliny, Wójtowo, Kaplityny and Kalborno. Although the inhabitants of those localities used the Polish language every day, they felt no connection to Poland. Lengowski honestly admits that:

Znaleźli się tu pospółu rolnicy, robotnicy i rzemieślnicy, wszystkich łączyła jedna polska mowa, której stale w życiu codziennym używali [...], bo przywiązanie do mowy przodków było wśród ludu wiejskiego głęboko zakorzenione. Inna rzecz co do rozeznania narodowości, bo szkoła uczyła przez 8 lat szkolnych, że są Niemcami, a historii narodu polskiego większość nie znała. Zaś historii niemieckiej uczono w szkole przeważnie tylko za czasów Bismarcka, a pomijano dzieje ziem staropruskich, na których obecnie żyjemy, żeby się nie wykazało, że na

tych ziemiach już od 13 wieku żyli nasi polscy przodkowie i że te ziemie jeszcze w 17 wieku były pod zwierzchnictwem polskim.

[There were gathered here together farmers, workers and crafters, all united by the same Polish language they used constantly every day [...], as the attachment to the mother tongue of the ancestors among rural population was deeply rooted. Another thing is the insight into nationality, as the school taught them for eight school years that they were Germans, and most of them did not know the history of the Polish nation. The German history at school was taught mostly in Bismarck times, and the history of old Prussian land, where we currently live, was omitted, so as not to reveal that here, our ancestors lived since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and that this land still in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was under Polish control.] (Lengowski 1971: 149–150)

Nevertheless, he trusts that his arguments will reach the heart of the population:

Natomiast do wszystkich mieszkańców kolonii Zielonowo (wchodzącej w skład obwodu Stawiguda – przyp. J. Ch. Z.), gdzie już dwanaście lat od powrotu mojego z Westfalii mieszkałem, miałem pełne zaufanie i wierzyłem, że wszyscy bez wyjątku są po mojej myśli, gdyż wszyscy okazywali mi dotąd swoją przyjaźń.

[On the other hand, as regards all inhabitants of the Zielonowo settlement (a part of the Stawiguda powiat – note by J. Ch. Z.), where I have been leaving already for twelve years from my return from Westphalia, I believed that everyone, without exception, were following my ideas, as everybody has been showing me their friendship so far.] (Lengowski 1971: 167)

However, against Lengowski's expectations, 26 votes in Zielonowo were cast for Poland and 26 votes for East Prussia. This result reflected in the miniature how wrong were the forecasts of activists involved in campaigning.

Jan Boenigk wrote about emotions accompanying voting on the very day of election:

Niedziela 11 lipca w zasadzie nie różniła się niczym od swych 51 sióstr. Dzień był pogodny i bezchmurny. Mimo uśmiechu nieba ludzie chodzili jacyś ociężali i zamyśleni; nikt się nie wybierał do kościoła, bo były ważniejsze sprawy. Wszyscy byli przejęci historyczną chwilą. Propaganda przycichła. Już nikt nie roznosił ulotek i nie naklejał plakatów. [...] Przebieg głosowania w naszej wsi (w Tomaszowie – przyp. J. Ch. Z.) był spokojny, bez incydentów. Wielu mieszkańców nie skorzystało z uprawnień do głosowania. Zachowali się całkiem biernie, podkreślając tym swoją bezstronność. Ogarnęło nas głębokie przygnębienie, gdy wieczorem rozeszła się wiadomość, że za Prusami Wschodnimi padło 276 głosów, a za Polską tylko 72.

[Sunday 11 July did not generally differ in anything from its 51 sisters. The day was sunny and cloudless. Despite smiling heaven, people appeared to be some-

how sluggish and pensive; nobody went to church, as there were more important things. Everybody was excited with the historical moment. Propaganda quieted down. Nobody distributed leaflets or pasted up posters. (...) Voting in our village (in Tomaszkowo – note by J. Ch. Z.) was peaceful, with no incidents. Many inhabitants did not exercise their voting rights. They behave quite passively, thus emphasizing their neutrality. We were deeply depressed when in the evening the news spread that 276 votes were cast for East Prussia and only 72 for Poland.] (Boenigk 1971)

In turn, Jerzy Kolendo illustrated what methods, against the voting rules, were applied by German members of the Committees in some districts:

Zdarzało się, że kontrolerzy niemieccy chowali kartki do głosowania z napisem *Polen* podsuwając w zamian swoje. Wobec pełnych nienawiści spojrzeń i niedwuznacznych gróźb wielu Polaków załamywało się psychicznie i głosowało za Niemcami. Groźne spojrzenia wówczas tajały, rozjaśniały się i niedawni buntownicy poklepywani byli kordialnie po ramieniu w dowód łaski. [...] W Ryjewie [...] znaczna liczba Niemców głosowała dwu, a nawet trzykrotnie, podczas gdy Polaków wskutek często błędnej pisowni nazwiska lub celowo zmienionego imienia nie dopuszczano do urn. Na listach głosowania znaleźli się nawet umarli.

[It happened that German controllers hid the voting cards with the word *Polen*, slipping instead their own cards. In view of hateful looks and clear threats, many Poles broke down and voted for Germany. Then, menacing looks melted down, cleared up and former rebels were cordially given a pat on the shoulder as a proof of favour. [...] In Ryjewe [...] a significant number of Germans voted twice or even three times, while Poles, as a result of misspelt surnames or intentionally changed first names, were not admitted to ballot boxes. The list of voters even included the dead.] (Kolendo 1963: 161)

### Occasional poetry

As it has been previously mentioned, plebiscite events were also recorded in other literary sources, i.e. the works of folk poets, promoting the so-called Polish persistence in this land: Michał Kajka, Michał Lengowski, Alojzy Śliwa and Maria Zientara-Malewska. A thesis can be put forward already at the beginning that presentation of individual phases of the plebiscite in poems was very emotional; it concealed real conditions, and was more of a wishful thinking nature.

Maria Zientara-Malewska in her poem *Plebiscyt* [*Plebiscite*] described hope and joy growing in the hearts of Poles hearing the news about the plebiscite, joy, and then the bitterness of defeat:

To słowo pełne było nadziei  
Jak lipcowego miodu dzban!

A lipiec chodził w zieleni i słońcu,  
 Grał na sercowych listkach pobudkę,  
 Zniczami maków rozgorzał łan  
 I słał swe wici od wioski do wioski,  
 Pęczniał nadzieją i burzą, i wichrem,  
 Goryczą i smakiem krwi!...

[This word was full of hope  
 As the jug of July honey!  
 And July was walking in green and sun,  
 Playing the reveille with leaves,  
 The cornfield burst into flame with poppy candles,  
 And sent its summons from village to village.  
 It swelled with hope and storm and gale,  
 Bitterness and the taste of blood!...]

(Zientara-Malewska 2004: 270)

However, it should be remembered that – as Wojciech Wrzesiński writes – local population was made, on the one hand, of Polish people, lagging behind in development of national consciousness, fused for many generations with Prussian statehood, and on the other, of – although less numerous, but enjoying a privileged position – the German population, “who, among others, due to deliberate policy of German authorities, were living in conditions favouring the emergence and spread of modern Prussian nationalism” (Wrzesiński 2010: 18). The local Polish population was poorly educated in politics, and was not able to recognize the nationalistic conflicts taking place around them.

Also untrue, although sounding credible, is the phrase praising the overall patriotic attitude of Poles, described by Alojzy Śliwa in the poem *Jak to było w plebiscycie* [*What it was like at the plebiscite*]:

Oświadczam tu sercem szczerem,  
 Że każdy był bohaterem,  
 Kto za Polską agitował  
 I w końcu za nią głosował.  
 Na Warmii – stwierdzić miło –  
 Niemało tam wiosek było,  
 Które w ogromnej większości,  
 Głosowały dla polskości,  
 Takie to mieliśmy życie  
 W tym minionym plebiscycie.

[I declare here with my true heart,  
 That everybody was a hero,  
 Campaigning for Poland,

And finally voting for it.  
 In Warmia – I'm pleased to say –  
 There were a lot of villages  
 Which in great majority  
 Voted for Polishness,  
 This was our life  
 In this past plebiscite.]

(*Poezje Warmii i Mazur* 1953: 165)

Voting for Poland was actually an expression of great courage. As there were two cards prepared for voting and a choice between them meant at the same time a vote either for Poland or for East Prussia. German members of the Committees, observing the voters, could have a psychological effect on the voters. However, the results of the plebiscite, presented in the tables above contradict the phrase used by the poet: „Niem mało tam wioszek było, / Które w ogromnej większości, / Głosowały dla polskości” [There were a lot of villages / Which in the great majority / Voted for Polishness].

Michał Kajka created a poetic dialogue expressing the moods of Mazurians before the plebiscite and the situation after its completion. Poems were created several years after the event and published in “Mazurski Przyjaciel Ludu” in 1923 – the first one, titled *Zdania ludu mazurskiego przed plebiscytem* [*Opinions of the Mazurian People before the Plebiscite*] in number 38<sup>1</sup>, and the second one, *Zdania ludu mazurskiego po plebiscycie* [*Opinions of the Mazurian People after the Plebiscite*] in the next one – 39. The first of them scornfully reveals the programme of German plebiscite policy, consisting in presenting Poland in a bad light, as an underdeveloped, poor country that “extends its hands” for new acquisitions, to exploit and destroy them.

Nawet wiarę nam zabiorą, gdyż u nich rabunek gorą.  
 Bowiem w Polsce pełno biady i nie mogą dać już rady [...]  
 Że tam w Polsce nieład srogi, ani szosy, ani drogi,  
 Tylko błota co bez miary i wszów pełno nie do wiary.

[They will take even our faith, since they favour robbery.  
 As Poland is full of poverty and they cannot get along any more [...]  
 With a total mess in Poland, no highways or roads,  
 With mud instead, without measure, and lice unbelievably abundant.]  
 (Kajka 1982: 61)

<sup>1</sup> The title of the poem printed in „Mazurski Przyjaciel Ludu” was slightly different: *Zdania Mazurów przed plebiscytem* [*Opinion of Mazurians before the Plebiscite*]. Its later editions involved the change of the title into: *Zdania ludu mazurskiego przed plebiscytem* [*Opinions of the Mazurian People before the Plebiscite*].



At the same time, Kajka shows that Mazurians had been persuaded to vote for Prussia, by bribing them with promises related to material values.

In the second poem, *Zdania Mazurów po plebiscycie*, Kajka presents the effects of the Prussian victory. Simple peasants and town inhabitants began to suffer increasing poverty. As the poet claims, it was only then, when they understood they had made a mistake and should have voted for Poland. The poem includes the repeating lines of the refrain:

By te Polacy przybyli  
Nas z tej biedy wyzwolili.

[So those Poles should come,  
To free us from this poverty.]

The lyrical subject adds to the poem instructive and moralizing *Uwagi* [Notes], slightly resembling the phrase from the song by Jan Kochanowski “a Pole is wise after the event”:

Na cóż ludzi narzekacie  
Czego prawie wy żądacie?  
Czegoście sobie życzyli,  
Toście teraz dostąpili.  
Toć wszyscy po plebiscycie  
Mielіście mieć hojne życie.  
Teraz znoście wasze losy,  
Co zsyłają wam niebiosy.

[What are you people complaining about  
What are you almost demanding?  
This is what you wanted,  
And this is what you received.  
After all, everybody after the plebiscite,  
Was to have generous life.  
Now you have to suffer your fate,  
Sent for you from heaven.]

(Kajka 1982: 65)

Maria Zientara-Malewska encourages Poles to stay in the Warmia and Mazury region in her poem *Wytrwaj aż do końca* [Stay to the End], which was printed in „Gazeta Olsztyńska” (1921, No. 50):

Lecz nie odchodź stąd Polaku!  
Nie, nie odchodź mój Warmiaku!  
Nie opuszczaj krętej Łyny –

Czy ci nie żal tej doliny?  
 [.....]  
 O nie sprzedaj twojej roli!  
 Prawda, że cię serce boli,  
 Gdy cię Niemcy wyzywają  
 I ci polskość wyrzucają

Niech cię myśl ta nie zamaça  
 Odejść – wytrwaj aż do końca!  
 A nagroda cię nie minie,  
 Bo tu Polska nie zaginie.

[But, do not leave this land, you Pole!  
 Don't go, my Warmian!  
 Do not leave behind this meandering Łyna –  
 Wouldn't you regret this valley?  
 [.....]  
 Oh, do not sell your farmland!  
 Right, your heart breaks,  
 When the Germans call you names  
 and reproach you for your Polish nature.

But let this thought not lead you into  
 Leaving – stay until the end!  
 And you will not go unrewarded,  
 As Poland will not be lost here.]

(Zientara-Malewska 2004: 19)

The poet still believes that it is important to fight for Polishness. However, after winning the plebiscite, Germans started to retaliate. Karol Małek writes:

Mnożyły się napady na polskie rodziny. Zwłaszcza zatruwano życie przywódcom polskim. Toteż nastąpił wielki ruch emigracyjny ludności. Najwięcej ludzi uciekało do Działdowa, gdzie było najbliżej, i tu mścili się na spokojnych mieszkańcach tego terenu. Uciekinierzy żądali rekompensaty za utracone, względnie porzucone mienie, a tymczasem starosta działdowski nie mógł od razu spraw tych rozstrzygnąć. Szukali więc szczęścia w sąsiednich powiatach pomorskich, ale też bezskutecznie.

[Attacks on Polish families became more and more frequent. In particular, the life of Polish leaders was made difficult. Therefore, a great emigration movement of the population took place. Most people escaped to nearby Działdowo, where they took vengeance on peaceful inhabitants of this area. The refugees demanded compensation for their lost or abandoned property, while the Działdowo starost was not able to immediately settle those issues. So, they were trying their luck in neighbouring Pomerania poviats, but also with no success.] (Małek 1968: 52)

The appeal by Michał Lengowski in his poem *Mój życiorys* [*My biography*]:

Lecz kiedy plebiscyt wypadł dla nas marnie,  
 Wielu z mych rodaków do Polski się garnie.  
 Wtenczas myśl stanowcza w głowie mi się rodzi:  
 Nie trza ziemi rzucać, skąd nasz ród pochodzi,  
 Bo tu trzeba bronić, na tej ziemi naszej.  
 Przez Związek Polaków wszędzie docieramy,  
 Rolniczą spółdzielnię sobie zakładamy,  
 Towarzystwo szkolne i szkoły powstają,  
 Tam polskiej nauki dzieciom udzielają.

[But when the results of the plebiscite turned unfortunate,  
 Many of my compatriots want to leave for Poland.  
 At that time, this resolute thought comes to my head:  
 We should not abandon this land, the home of our families,  
 As we should defend it, this land of ours.  
 Reaching everywhere with Polish Associations,  
 Establishing agricultural co-operatives,  
 Emerging education societies and schools,  
 Providing Polish learning to children.]

(*Poezje Warmii i Mazur* 1953: 59)

The presented examples of selected fragments of memoirs and occasional poems clearly prove the affective approach adopted by the authors. It completes emotionless, fact-based image of events related to the plebiscite expressed in historical studies. Although in the opinion of historians, the decision made at the conference in Versailles on carrying out the plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle doomed Poland to failure from the start, the reports of Polish activists show a lot of optimistic faith in the victory of campaigning efforts at the beginning. Autobiographical testimonies bring the knowledge on high involvement of a small group of people, with little or feigned support from Poland (Łubieńska 1932; Uziembło 1939). Emotions contribute to creating an exceptionally acute image of a loss, which might not have happened if the pre-voting campaign had involved proper financial means and the welfare of the entire nation had been taken into account.

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*national Conflicts. On the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Plebiscites in Warmia and Mazury*], Stanisław Achremczyk (ed), Olsztyn: 7–34.

### Summary

The aim of this article is to illustrate the manner in which the circumstances of the plebiscite in Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle, held in 1920, were interpreted in both memoirs and poetic works written by authors who participated in those events, and to refer to their subjective assessments based on their own emotions. The memoirs of Jan Boenigk, Jerzy Kolendo, Michał Lengowski, Anna Lubieńska, Karol Małek and Adam Uziembło, as well as the poems by Michał Kajka, Michał Lengowski, Alojzy Śliwa and Maria Zientara-Malewska are examined. This article uses relevant historical sources. The presented examples clearly testify to the affective attitude adopted by the authors.

