

Abstract

The aim of this doctoral dissertation, entitled *Literary, social and educational activities of Polish women in East Prussia and their contribution to the cultural heritage of Warmia and Mazury in the 20th century*, is to present the multifaceted efforts of the Polish women's movement in the 20th century, with special emphasis on the interwar period and the first two decades after the end of World War II. Polish women's selfless dedication to their motherland, often at the expense of their personal lives, was analyzed based on memoirs and other published sources, including the biographical works of Polish female activists Otylia Teszner-Grotowa, Władysława Knosałowa, Anna Łubieńska, Maria Zientara-Malewska, Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina and Maria Donimirska.

In the dissertation, the activities of Polish women are reconstructed chronologically. The first chapter entitled *Polish women's movement at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries* discusses the beginnings of the women's suffrage movement on the Polish territories. Polish female writers who made the greatest contribution to women's literature are presented. The first chapter describes the general situation of women during World War I (1914–1918) and the development of women's literature in the interwar period. The situation of Polish women in East Prussia at the beginning of the 20th century was compared against this backdrop.

The second chapter entitled *Women's contribution in East Prussia after 1918* characterizes the Polish independence movement in East Prussia where women were strongly represented. Women's involvement in the East Prussian plebiscite and their involvement in the promotion of culture and education after 1920 were investigated. The chapter ends with a summary of the situation in East Prussia on the eve of World War II.

The third chapter entitled *The role and activity of Polish women in Warmia and Mazury in 1918–1939 as depicted in women's memoirs* offers a critical perspective on autobiographical writing based on personal accounts describing the cultural and educational activities of Polish women working for the national independence movement: Maria Zientara-Malewska, Władysława Knosałowa, Otylia Teszner-Grotowa, Maria Donimirska, Wanda Donimirska, Helena Sierakowska, Anna Łubieńska, Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina, Joanna Pieniężna, Wanda Pieniężna and Pelagia Pieniężna.

The fourth chapter entitled *The legacy of the Polish women's movement in Warmia and Mazury after World War II* explores the war experiences of Polish female activists in the context

of their memoirs. The post-war activity of the former female members of the Polish independence movement was described. Efforts were also made to track the fate of other Polish female activists. The cultural and educational activities undertaken by women after 1945 were discussed. The educational, cultural, artistic, social and literary movements involving women in Warmia and Mazury after the war were characterized.

The final chapter sets directions for further research into the accomplishments of contemporary female writers and activists in Warmia and Mazury and proposes methods for evaluating women's contribution to literature and the Polish independence movement in the 20th century.

The fact that the regional independence movement in East Prussia had emerged already in the 19th century can be largely attributed to the efforts made by Polish women and their dedication to cultivating national traditions. This dissertation fills in the gap in knowledge about the historic accomplishments of Polish women in East Prussia by portraying (based on the available literary sources) strong and independent female activists in the region.