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## **ETHNOGRAPHY OF PAST HAPPINESS. WORK IN THE YEAST FACTORY IN MASZEWO LĘBORSKIE**

### **Etnografia minionego szczęścia. Praca w drożdźowni w Maszewie Lęborskim**

**Abstract:** For inhabitants of Maszewo Lęborskie, the memory of work in the yeast factory is an important point on which their local community is based. It is a memory of a strong integrating feature that unites the people of Maszewo. The workers' lifestyle, shaped by the yeast factory after its collapse, was transformed into a community of memories. I present an outline of the history of the yeast factory in Maszewo and created examples of the discourse of memory around it.

**Keywords:** work, memory, privatisation, village, Recovered Territories

**Streszczenie:** Pamięć o pracy w drożdźowni to dla mieszkańców ważny punkt, na którym opiera się ich wspólnota lokalna. Jest to pamięć o silnym rysie integrującym, łączącym maszewian. Robotniczy styl życia ukształtowany przez drożdźownię po jej upadku został przekształcony we wspólnotę wspomnień. W artykule pokazuję zarys historii maszewskiej drożdźowni oraz stworzony wokół niej przykłady dyskursu pamięci.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca, pamięć, prywatyzacja, wieś, Ziemie Odzyskane

## Introduction, or the Road to the Field

Maszewo Lęborskie (German: *Gross Massow*) is a medium-sized village of 773 inhabitants<sup>1</sup> in the commune of Cewice. In addition to the now defunct yeast factory (yeast plant), there are, among others, a filial church, two shops, a bakery, a sawmill, a community centre, and a library. Maszewo<sup>2</sup>, like most of the commune of Cewice, is located in the historic Lębork area and, thus, in the western part of Kashubia. At the same time, these are post-migration, ‘post-German’ areas, part of the ‘Recovered Territories.’<sup>3</sup>

A watershed event in the history of Maszewo Lęborskie was the acquisition of the town by Robert Sinner<sup>4</sup>, a commercial counsellor from Karlsruhe. This acquisition also included the neighbouring towns of Cewice and Lębunia. The councillor managed a substantial production and trading company bequeathed to him by his father, rapidly developing it and establishing a factory for pressed yeast in Maszewo, which he supplied to the region of Eastern Pomerania and Prussia. Subsequently, he constructed a wine and liqueur factory and initiated the development of a horticulture business with heated greenhouses. A substantial cattle enclosure was constructed in close proximity to the distillery, where young cattle were fattened on the marc derived from the alcohol production process. The Maszewo factory, owned by Sinner, consistently employed approximately 160 individuals, the majority of whom resided in Maszewo. [...] The construction of the factory resulted in a period of accelerated growth and

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<sup>1</sup>According to information from the 2021 census, [https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/wies\\_Maszewo\\_Leborskie](https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/wies_Maszewo_Leborskie) [https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/wies\\_Maszewo\\_Leborskie](https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/wies_Maszewo_Leborskie) [access: 10 April 2024]

<sup>2</sup> I primarily used the name Maszewo instead of the full Maszewo Lęborskie. My interviewees only use the first term when talking about their locality. In the immediate vicinity, which I know from my experience as a resident of the area, the locality is recognisable and also presented as Maszewo. The name Maszewo Lęborskie serves primarily to distinguish it from Maszewo, which is a town in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.

<sup>3</sup> I am aware of the entanglements and problematic nature of this concept (cf. Praczyk 2018: 19-23; Jasinski 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Various names of Sinner, who was to have established a food industry enterprise in Maszewo, appear in studies. Apart from the above-mentioned Robert, one can also find Rudolf (Świetlicka, Wisławska 1998: 134) or Karol (Frącek 1998: 20).

development for the village. A residential complex was constructed for the workforce (today's ul. Drewniana) and the managerial personnel (today's ul. Murowana ). The buildings situated on both thoroughfares, located in closer proximity to the forest, were occupied by those engaged in less skilled occupations. [...] A cable car was constructed and operational between the Maszewo railway station and Sinner's factory, with suspended trolleys delivering coal directly to the boiler house. [...] The streets were paved, as were the factory yards. Additionally, a canteen and school were constructed. The village possessed a well-stocked shop. [...] Sinner sought to process vegetables and fruit from local gardens, in particular from the horticulture established in Maszewo. (Broda 2015: 48-50).<sup>5</sup>

My ethnographic research in Maszewo Lęborskie commenced in February 2022. It was at this time that I made my inaugural visit to the local library, which, as I swiftly ascertained, proved to be a pivotal location for my research and a highly significant space for the residents of Maszewo. During my initial visit, I established contact with the librarian on duty, Beata Czaja, who extended an unanticipated proposition:

*I've just had a great idea. I have a group of senior citizens from Maszewo who belong to the senior citizens' club in Cewice. There are ten of them. I could invite two more people and set up a meeting with the residents for you.*<sup>6</sup>

The meeting with the seniors did indeed occur.<sup>7</sup> It provided me with initial insights into the historical and contemporary experiences of life in Maszewo, as well as my first impressions of the region. It marked the inception of my ethnographic engagement with the residents of Maszewo, which, to varying degrees, continues to the present day. Currently, it is one of the villages in the Cewice commune where I am conducting

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<sup>5</sup> The author of the study is a passionate local historian. He is not a native of Maszewo.

<sup>6</sup> The statements of the interviewees are presented in italics. Due to the challenges associated with anonymising their statements, Beata's recorded words were authorised by her.

<sup>7</sup> This and other subsequent visits to the library in Maszewo were recorded in real time on the library's Facebook profile at the initiative of the librarian in charge. Thus, from the outset of the research, Facebook, and in particular the aforementioned library profile, became an important channel for contact with residents of Maszewo.

ethnographic research for my Master's thesis. As part of this research, I am interested in how locality manifests itself in narratives and actions and what motivates local communities to produce and practice locality in the post-migrant rural space in the 'Recovered Territories.'

In developing the field of my research, I engaged in a comprehensive process of self-reflection. I needed to become attuned to the ways in which I positioned myself within the field of study, as well as the ways in which the individuals I interviewed positioned me. It is unlikely that they will be aware of my status as a student at a university in Warsaw; instead, they will primarily perceive me as a resident of the nearby village of Cewice, situated just outside of Maszewo. Cewice is a considerably larger settlement, with a population of approximately 2,000. Here is where the seats of the commune office, the parish, and the forestry inspectorate are situated. It is also where a health centre, pharmacies, shops, and a post office are located. Cewice is undergoing constant growth and expansion due to the influx of new residents, which is vesting it with a somewhat urbanising character.

As I unexpectedly discovered at the outset of the research, my status as a native of Cewice was a highly salient factor for my interviewees. I began to perceive that this constituted a significant barrier between us. This perception was further reinforced when some individuals informed me that the commune and parish authorities based in Cewice ignored the needs of the Maszewo population, clearly discriminating against them. It thus appeared that the inhabitants of Maszewo perceived Cewice (and, to a certain extent, me as a representative of this village) as a 'dominating' village, 'oppressing' Maszewo. As a result, I felt (and feel) that, as a researcher there, I am constantly perceived as a distinct outsider, embodying a village that is perceived as oppressive to their own. Certainly, the fact that most of the Maszewo residents operate within close-knit networks and that the local community is, in my assessment, relatively tightly consolidated also had an additional impact. It was all the more striking as interviewees frequently made statements indicating my lack of familiarity with their village, the families residing there, and its history. Some residents even posited that, due to my status as an 'alien,' there was little likelihood of anyone being willing to engage in conversation with me. This further compounded my pre-existing confusion and the challenges

associated with gaining an understanding of the Maszewo microcosm. As an ethnographer and an outsider within the community, I am engaged in an ongoing process of negotiating roles between myself and my interlocutors. Consequently, my position in the field is not static. It is subject to constant redefinition dictated by those with whom I interact (Hryciuk 2008).

The accompanying cognitive process is by no means one-sided. I cognise, but I am also being cognised. I seek answers to my questions, but I also have to give something of myself (Rakowski 2021). Being open to the other required me to be empathetic, sensitive, and aware of my own self, and thus, in the course of the ethnographic encounter, my duality as anthropologist-researcher and anthropologist-being-cognised-human was revealed (*ibid.*: 259). However, I cannot escape the problem of power relations. Diane L. Wolf has formulated this issue in three interrelated ways (Wolf 1996: 2): the differences resulting from the different positioning of the researcher and the respondents (e.g. by gender, ethnicity, social background, etc.); the power present in the process of designing and conducting the research; and the power exercised after the research when it comes to writing and creating representations. I am, therefore, aware of the responsibility that comes with establishing 'ethnographic authority' (Clifford 2000). My respondents are not passive 'objects'. The relationships between us are not given but dynamic and subject to constant renegotiation, during which I have to listen to what my interlocutors communicate to me and pay attention to how they shape the space of contact between us (*cf.* Hryciuk 2008). Ethnographic research in Maszewo, therefore, required my immersion in experience and openness to personal transformation (Behar 1996: 1-33).

As a resident of Cewice, long before the beginning of the research and study, I encountered negative opinions about Maszewo and its inhabitants in my village, at the middle school<sup>8</sup> or among friends ('not from Maszewo').

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<sup>8</sup> I attended secondary school in Cewice. It was an institution for the education of young people from Cewice and surrounding villages, including Maszewo, Siemirowice, Unieszyno, and Łebunia. I remember stereotypes and prejudices against people from Maszewo (in which I was personally involved). However, I must point out that not all people who graduated from this school at a similar time to me (2016), and not from Maszewo either, are able to recall situations of ridicule when I ask them about it.

Such narratives were characterised by the reproduction of more or less open stereotypes and prejudices.<sup>9</sup> With the beginning of my research in Maszewo and the progressive contact with the inhabitants of this village, I had to subject my previous convictions to a self-reflexive critique and thus notice my own involvement in the production and reproduction of offensive stereotypes. Today, I consider such opinions about the people of Maszewo to be very unfair, but at the same time, they are situated in a specific local situation. When analysing this phenomenon, I noticed how such opinions were formed in a specific temporal reality (after the collapse of the Maszewo yeast factory) and socio-economic reality (the economic degradation of the working class in Maszewo, seen through the eyes of the inhabitants of the prosperous administrative and commercial village of Cewice).

Another context that significantly influenced my research was the publication by my institute of a recording of a lecture I gave at the conference *'Homo faber: jak pracujemy, jak pracowaliśmy'* [*Homo Faber: How We Work, How We Worked*]<sup>10</sup> on work in the Maszewo yeast factory. Shortly afterwards, the recording was made available by the local news service *e-Lębork. Miasto w sieci* [*e-Lębork. Town on the Web*].<sup>11</sup> As a result, the contents of the paper reached the residents of Maszewo, both those I had already spoken to and those I did not know. The backlash was overwhelming. I faced criticism and claims that I was not presenting the truth, and one resident of Maszewo even described my speech as drivel (while showing me that he had saved the recording on his computer). However, some people came

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<sup>9</sup> These were mostly taunts directed at the alleged 'stupidity' of students from Maszewo. There was also content that stigmatised the awkwardness, the oddness of people from Maszewo. This kind of alienation can be seen through the prism of two opposing categories: 'better' own group and 'worse' foreign group (Bystron 1980). In my opinion, this type of discourse perpetuated symbolic relations of local hierarchy (dominance and subordination) between the inhabitants of Cewice and Maszewo.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNirQNDd7c8&t=311s> [access: 10 April 2024]. Of the recordings published after the conference, mine received the most views – 170, while the others oscillated around 30. I suspect that the publication of my recording influenced this difference. I should add that I agreed to share it, but I did not expect it to be so popular and to cause such complications in the field.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=845855894214899&set=a.44372558109-4601> [access: 10 April 2024].

to my defence and responded positively to the fact that I had highlighted in the paper that many Maszewo residents had been wronged by privatisation and subsequent stereotyping. This situation made me realise several things at once. Firstly, how important the memory of the yeast factory is to the people of Maszewo in the form of a legacy with very specific content. Secondly, my local relations at the time played an important role, as I received the most negative and nervous reactions from those who did not know me at the time. The people I have already met and spoken to reacted much more gently and understandingly. Indeed, I must admit that, in light of my current knowledge, I am much more aware of the phenomena surrounding Maszewo, the yeast factory that used to operate there, and the history of its inhabitants than I was when I presented my paper, which was a simplified, pilot presentation of a topic that I intended to study in more depth as part of my Master's degree (I was in my third year of undergraduate course at the time). Now, I am much more aware of the mistakes I made and the simplifications I used. After a year, I also gained more knowledge in the field.<sup>12</sup> Although this situation was stressful and caused me anxiety about the future of my research, as well as fear of a reputation tarnished among the people of Maszewo, I tried to make the best of it ethnographically. The subject of my presentation came up in discussions with interviewees. I also contacted and met with the Maszewo resident who was most critical of my presentation (it was the interviewee mentioned above who called it 'drivel' in conversation with me), and I consider this a very valuable experience. I agree that the inhabitants of Maszewo have every right to revise what I, a double outsider (as a resident of Cewice and a researcher from Warsaw), present about their village and thus about the history recorded in their biographical memory. The same is true of this article. I am aware that my interlocutors might pick it up, read it, and criticise me again. In this context, I feel that I am in a liminal position – between the fact that I want to have a good relationship with my interviewees as a result of the

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<sup>12</sup> Having said that, I must state from the outset that my knowledge will never be 'complete.' I am trying to know and understand the stories of the people of Maszewo, but these will always be my interpretations. I will never have the same knowledge as they do. The people of Maszewo, by virtue of their residence, their rootedness, their biographical experiences and their functioning in specific networks of local connections, are the greatest experts, the repositories of knowledge about their village.

ongoing research and my presence in the field as a resident of the immediate area, and the academic form of presenting the research and the awareness that my actions may be interpreted contrary to my intentions.

It must be stated unequivocally that I am not a historian of Maszewo, and I do not aim to produce an official, standardised, authoritarian form of knowledge about this village. My research focuses on the testimonies of my interlocutors, which occasionally appear to be connected but at times are found to be in contradiction with one another. The experience of working in the yeast plant is of great biographical and communal significance for the inhabitants of Maszewo, and it constitutes a significant aspect of their emotional and collective identity. It is not my intention to cause any harm to this community. Conversely, starting from the assumptions of engaged anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1995), I believe that this is a marginalised, stereotyped community, where my role as an anthropologist is precisely to recognise this fact, to take the side of this group and to give them, in a sense, a voice in the form of an academic text. Furthermore, I am aware that, as I do not have familial ties to Maszewo and did not grow up there nor work at the yeast plant, I will never have access to certain experiences related to it. Consequently, I recognise that certain narratives may be closed to me. Considering this, I acknowledge that I am engaged in the production of ethnographic (un)knowledge (Rakowski, 2006).

In conducting research on the memory of work in the yeast plant, I employ strategies for exploring the locality that I have developed in the field. Firstly, I have noticed that the boundaries of my field of study are fluid (Gupta, Ferguson 2006) due to the fact that the subjects of the research are also active on the Internet or migrate, moving to other localities, which dynamises and expands my research field to new places. An illustrative example of the phenomenon mentioned above is the active engagement of the Maszewo library on Facebook.<sup>13</sup> Its Facebook page presents a diverse range of content, including updates on the library's operations, cultural events, meetings of the local Senior Citizens Club, regional educational

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo> [accessed 10/04/2024]



initiatives, the history of Maszewo, and even my visits to the library.<sup>14</sup> In the field, I conduct ethnographic interviews incorporating elements of life history (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000). The interviews are recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analysed. I use them to focus on the narratives. I consider participant observation (Clifford 2006) based on dense participation (Samudra 2008) and deep immersion in the field to be of great importance, even crucial, in the research process. This approach provides insights into the actions played out in the field.

### **There Was a Factory, There Is No Factory**

I would propose that the persona of the industrialist Sinner can be interpreted as the cultural hero of Maszewo (cf. Zowczak 1991). The memory of Sinner as an influential figure who played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of the village is consistently upheld and celebrated there.<sup>15</sup> The inhabitants refer to Sinner on a number of particular occasions, i.e. when discussing the establishment of the yeast plant, when elucidating the distinctive buildings characteristic of the village, or when mentioning individuals of note in the history of Maszewo. In this regard, Anna Malewska-Szałygin's assertion that '*actions, attitudes, and events are only carriers of values. Collective memory selected only those facts that were important for the expression of this message*' (Malewska-Szałygin 1990: 173) is indeed accurate.

It would be erroneous, however, to assume that the knowledge of my interlocutors ends with Sinner. Dariusz Olewniczak, a local history enthusiast from Maszewo,<sup>16</sup> informed me that the Maszewo plant was not severely af-

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<sup>14</sup> They primarily indicated that I was engaged in ethnographic research. One recent example of this type of post is provided below for reference: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=766536312179144&set=pb.100064683459560.-2207520000&type=3> [accessed 10/04/2024].

<sup>15</sup> An illustrative example of this collective memory, addressed at the younger generation, was a field game incorporating elements of Maszewo's history. The objective for the younger participants was to locate the hidden 'Sinner's treasure'. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=671990644967045&set=pb.100064683459560.-2207520000&type=3> [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>16</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to my interviewee for his support and providing me with such a comprehensive account of the history of Maszewo. I have provided

fectured by the Second World War despite the damage or removal of some machinery. Operations at the facility resumed with relative expediency when the war ended. The designation ‘Sinner AG Gross Massow in Pommern’ was then replaced by ‘Pomorskie Zakłady Przemysłu Drożdżowego w Maszewie’ [Pomeranian Yeast Industry Plant in Maszewo].<sup>17</sup> The communist period thus brought about changes in the way of life of the inhabitants of Maszewo. One of the interviewees recalled it in the following terms:

R1: The state farm was here, the factory, the kindergarten, the doctor, the hairdresser, the dentist, there was life here...

R2: [interjection – author’s note] Post office, railway!<sup>18</sup>

The memories of the Maszewo of the past recalled by my interlocutors from their experiences of biographical memory give rise to animated discussions among them. However, this is not the end of the benefits which they ascribe to the presence of the yeast plant.

R1: And another interesting thing. There was a bathhouse for the whole of Maszewo on the plant premises. And on Saturday, everyone queued up because they were going to bathe.

R2: The whole village was bathing.

R3: We had half a hectare of field each from the factory.

R1: Everyone got a field from the yeast factory.

R3: There were lunches. The factory funded the lunches. They cost pennies. Twenty zloty, I think.

R1: And there were trips to the zoo. With children, there were trips to Łeba. There was a bus to Łeba you could sign up for. Children had summer camps. There was everything and abroad.

R4: I even went on a trip to Hungary organised by the yeast plant.

R5: There were even cars to the church to Łebunia. The factory provided a car, and it drove [there].

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his name with his permission.

<sup>17</sup> The name was later changed to Kaszubska Wytwórnia Drożdży (KWD) [Kashubian Yeast Factory] Maszewo.

<sup>18</sup> R1 – respondent 1, R2 – respondent 2, etc.

The statements quoted here were made by members of the senior citizen community of Maszewo during one of our meetings. What emerged was a sentimental picture of the good life, prosperity and the nurturing role of the yeast plant. It prompts me to recall Elizabeth Dunn's findings from her study of work at Alima-Gerber in Rzeszów, where, among other observations, the social and bond-forming role of socialist workplaces became evident (Dunn, 2017). The gender issue also attracted my attention. The provision of lunches, excursions for children, and access to regular baths may have represented a significant advantage for mothers in particular. However, this does not indicate a reduction in the overall workload. In addition to their work at the yeast plant, many residents of Maszewo were also engaged in domestic farming. It entailed agricultural labour in the fields, care of livestock, and the tending of gardens. It can also be interpreted metaphorically as being on the professional frontier, simultaneously drawing on an agricultural, peasant lifestyle and enjoying the benefits of working in a food industry shaped by socialist thought. In both cases, work was the primary determinant of the good life (Redfield 1982), as evidenced by the recollections of my interviewees. Working 'on one's own' provided the basic foodstuffs that today are spoken of fondly as 'one's own', 'home-made', and 'healthy' food. In turn, working in the yeast plant made it possible to enjoy the accompanying benefits. Therefore, messages as one below, made by respondents from Cewice, come as no surprise:

I remember that they were very prosperous. Very. I think the yeast factory was at one time [the first – author's note] or the second in the country! But I think they made a rod for their own back a bit themselves there [...], so everything went under the hammer. I remember people really earned good money there. Maszewo, we always said, uhuh, these are wealthy people because they were well-paid there.

It seems plausible to suggest that in an area where state farms were the dominant employer, and the local population derived the majority of their income from agriculture, the worker character of Maszewo and the prosperous plant could have evoked feelings of envy or a sense of distance. Indeed, several interlocutors have more than once indicated the enduring rivalry between

Cewice and Maszewo, which has persisted since the post-war era. It can be posited that the 'worker otherness' or 'factory-ness' of Maszewo may have constituted one of the factors that shaped the Maszewo local community.

R1: But it was fun, really.

R2: It was fun. And in the yeast factory, it was one big family. You couldn't gossip about anyone because this was a brother-in-law, that one a sister, that one a brother, this one that, and that one this. It was one big family.

R3: Their affairs were handled outside the gate.

R4: Outside the gate.

R1: I don't know, maybe these people, maybe because they knew each other from the yeast factory where they worked. That's how conciliatory it was. It was so cool. That's how they got together. Now, there are a lot of newcomers in Maszewo. There are not many true residents of Maszewo. Somehow, they don't know each other. Everyone just goes home and runs quickly. And so everyone just sits in their cottage.

The role of the yeast plant in social integration processes is particularly evident in this example. On one hand, it can be posited that the yeast plant workers constituted a 'branching' community. Nevertheless, I am cautious in my assessment of this claim. It is not my intention to deny that this may have been the case or that my interviewees feel this way today. However, this may be a self-presentation of the group addressed to me. I am inclined to concur with this hypothesis, particularly given my observation of 'conflicts of memory' in the field that appear to arise from disputes within the local community regarding the possession of 'real' knowledge about the yeast plant. It was made evident during one conversation when I was advised not to approach certain individuals, as they would relay an inaccurate account of events.

As a former employee of the yeast plant informed me, the decline of the yeast plant was gradual. In 1994, the process of privatisation was initiated. In 2004, the French company Lesaffre Bio-Corporation terminated operations at the yeast factory. *'The announcement of the factory's closure came as a shock to the residents of Maszewo. They are terrified. Approximately one in five of Maszewo's 400 residents derive their livelihood from their work on the yeast, some of them for many years, having been initially employed at the former*

*Kashubian Yeast Factory. It is not uncommon for entire families to be employed at the facility from generation to generation. [...] Another source of stress for the inhabitants of Maszewo is the heating of the blocks of flats of their housing cooperative, as they draw heat from the factory's boiler room.*'<sup>19</sup>

In one of his articles, Kacper Konopinski delineated the tale of the yeast factory's decline. 'In accordance with the new economic regulations, the factory was compelled to compete more vigorously for its position in the market. The yeast factory did very well in this regard. The facility was frequently modernised and adapted to market conditions. In 2004, the proprietor of the French company that produces Lesaffre yeast commenced the purchase of shares from the employees. He proffered a premium of three times the value of a single share. The majority of employees subsequently sold their shares. [...] Nevertheless, the workers were convinced that the plant would not be closed down. The factory was, after all, well-known in the majority of Poland. Meanwhile, Lesaffre had other plans. The French company became the owner of the entire yeast production sector in Poland. It determined that maintaining numerous smaller facilities was an unprofitable strategy. Thus, the decision was made to consolidate the yeast industry around the Wólczyn plant, situated in the vicinity of Opole. The Maszewo plant was subsequently closed. The employees were duly compensated for their termination of employment. However, this was not the end of the history of the site. In the following year, the company Madra sp. z.o.o. was established in lieu of KWD Maszewo. The factory produced confectionery, which is reflected in its name, Maszewo i Draże. [...] The new plant employed mainly former yeast factory workers. They had not relinquished their aspiration to work with yeast. Consequently, the decision was taken to resume yeast production on a reduced scale. It was feasible due to the fact that all the requisite infrastructure and equipment for the resumption of operations was already in place. However, Lesaffre already dominated the market, and a number of issues began to emerge at Madra. These included problems with sewage that resulted in contamination of a nearby river and litigation from the previous French proprietor. Consequently, Madra ceased operations in 2017. The

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<sup>19</sup> <https://lebor.k.naszemiasto.pl/maszewo-leborskie-prace-straci-110-osob/ar/c3-60-14565> [access: 10 April 2024].

facility was subsequently acquired by a French investor again. This time, however, he left nothing but the former plant's buildings. Subsequently, the plant was divided into individual units and sold to local entrepreneurs. The site currently houses a sawmill, a car service, and numerous other smaller businesses. Thus, the history of KWD Maszewo came to a definitive close, and the village itself has undergone a notable transformation in character.<sup>20</sup>

R1: They liquidated everything. They liquidated the plant. There's just nothing. All is quiet, and all is dark [...]. The commune doesn't care about us at all, either.

R2: Whatever happened in Maszewo, it was all thanks to the yeast factory [...]. In 2004, they closed it down and...

R1: When they closed the plant, that was the end of it.

R3: Everything collapsed one by one.

One might attempt to read the Maszewo residents' recollections of the demise of the yeast plant as an expression of trauma resulting from the denial of the entire hitherto reality and economic degradation (Sztompka 2000) and, according to the category of nostalgia (Davis 1979; Kubiak 2004), a longing for a bygone era of happiness. It is also inscribed in a much broader phenomenon, namely the 'oral history of transformation' (Leyk, Wawrzyniak 2020), which is based on the biographical memory of specific individuals whose world has been shaken by top-down decisions. As a consequence, my respondents from Maszewo continue to provide testimonies of their grievance in connection with the closure of the yeast plant and their sense of abandonment. An illustrative example of the living memory of the yeast factory is a feature published last year under the title *KWD Maszewo. Niemiec zbudował, Polak pracował, Francuz zrujnował* [*KWD Maszewo. The German Built, the Pole Worked, the French Ruined*].<sup>21</sup> The film was directed by Kacper Konopinski, a young

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.lebork24.info/2023/08/27/drozdze-z-maszewa-znano-w-calym-kraju/> [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>21</sup> The film was produced as part of an undergraduate thesis, with the Maszewo library serving as the setting for the recording sessions. Additionally, historical memorabilia amassed within the library were incorporated into the documentary. For a significant number of the individuals profiled in the reportage, this constituted their first opportunity to recount their biographical experiences of the yeast plant in front of the camera.

journalist from Maszewo. The documentary features residents of Maszewo and former yeast factory workers recounting the history of the KWD and the associated feelings, memories, and judgments. It serves as an exemplar of grassroots activity focused on local memory work.

### **Library – a Place of Meeting, a Place of Remembrance**

My research in Maszewo commenced with a visit to the local library. Subsequently, it became the space through which I attempted to become immersed in the area. I sought to achieve this both by attending meetings of the Senior Citizens' Club and by visiting the library on a regular basis to engage in discussions with the librarian on duty, Beata Czaja<sup>22</sup>, who became my guide and liaison with the residents, as well as by observing the library's activities on Facebook or browsing the memorabilia collected there. In the course of these activities, I became aware of the social importance of the Maszewo library for many residents of the village. The person who consolidates and promotes this state of affairs is the charismatic figure of the local librarian. What, then, underpins her activity?

Three years ago, I started working in the library in Maszewo Łęborskie. The beginnings were difficult. I didn't know the place or the people. The library was associated only with lending books, so I decided to change this stereotypical thinking of Maszewo residents. I wanted to show them that the library is a place that is friendly to everyone and that it is possible to do all sorts of things here.

In the ensuing conversation, I learned from her about the role of the modern library as a cultural institution.

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Moreover, it is the sole project of its kind within the Cewice commune. Furthermore, the film was screened in other localities, including Cewice. <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo/posts/pfbid02ug7MyyDL15t7RCqsHNMagWaxPXAMF4wEWnLF-noRWV5HspEEgAC1fKmiGu6EbL9Pml> [access: 10 April 2024]. [https://youtu.be/-SN-b0ardpoE?si=oc-uDTM12RDy6oQ\\_](https://youtu.be/-SN-b0ardpoE?si=oc-uDTM12RDy6oQ_) [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>22</sup> At this point, I must thank my interlocutor for her great cordiality, her assistance, and her permission to attend the meetings of the Senior Citizens' Club. I would also like to thank the Seniors who agreed to talk to me at the time.

Our core activity is collecting, processing, and making collections available. Added to this are cultural and educational activities. For me, personally, regional education is important, as local history has long been a passion of mine. That is why I am creating a Photo Chronicle of the Cewice Commune and, in cooperation with the Stowarzyszenie na 102 from Lębork, I am co-creating the Social Archive of the Lębork Region. Apart from that, I run regional education classes for seniors, young people, and children.

Indeed, the fact that the Maszewo library combines several different functions cannot be overlooked. Firstly, and most obviously, it fulfils the role of a local library, from where mainly children and older people borrow books. Secondly, it is a place where cyclical meetings of the Senior Citizens' Club and ladies from the Library Friends' Club, as well as various workshops for children, take place. Most importantly, it is also a space of remembrance – the library houses various collected objects and visual artefacts whose purpose is to recall and preserve the memory of Maszewo Lęborskie's past. These include bottles from the pre-war Sinner's factory, an engraving with a representation of the factory, and photographs of the village. The library also contains one of the two chronicles of the yeast factory<sup>23</sup> (the other one is lost) covering the period from 1945 to 1970 and written memoirs of one of the post-war directors of the plant.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the library indeed fulfils the role of an archive or even a chamber of memory in Maszewo. The activities of the space of commemoration, which this library undoubtedly is, also include popularisation. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the participation in the project *Social Archive of the Lębork Region*,<sup>25</sup> where historical photographs documenting Maszewo and the life of

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<sup>23</sup> Historia Drożdżowni w Maszewie, 1945-1970.

<sup>24</sup> Krzyżaniak D., Autobiografia z pracy zawodowej i z działalności w Stowarzyszeniu, Warszawa 1981, manuscript.

<sup>25</sup> <https://archiwumlebork.pl/nasze-zbiory-1/gminy/cewice> [access: 10 April 2024]. The folder of photographs from the area of the commune of Cewice predominantly features images of Maszewo. The photographs are divided into several categories, including images of the yeast factory, streets, the church and celebrations, the Volunteer Firefighter Brigade, 'school and kindergarten', 'school', and a 'collection of Grażyna Bonkowska.'



its inhabitants are posted, as well as regional education, mentioned by Ms Beata, addressed both to pupils of the local primary school<sup>26</sup> and to senior citizens,<sup>27</sup> which is largely devoted to the past of Maszewo itself (pre-war ‘German’ and post-war ‘Polish’). The Maszewo library was even recognised in the local media, thanks to which the website *Lębork24.info* published Kacper Konopiński’s interview with Beata Czaja.<sup>28</sup> However, it is worth emphasising, as Ms Beata herself mentions, that she is an outsider, i.e. someone who did not grow up in Maszewo and does not live in the commune of Cewice. Therefore, in the initial period of her work in the library in Maszewo, she had to go through a process of getting to know the local community, learning its rules and principles, and familiarising the people of Maszewo with her ideas for cultural or commemorative activities. Thanks to the interviewee’s commitment and work, the socially important profile of the library has been consolidated. It is a place with a strong integrating function for the inhabitants of Maszewo, with a bond-forming, activating and communal character. It has an important influence on the shaping of the memory of the yeast plant in two dimensions – that which is (mainly) produced by Maszewo residents for Maszewo

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<sup>26</sup> Sometimes stories alone are not enough. Children need to be shown to ‘touch’ and feel the history of their small homeland. As part of this ‘lesson,’ the guide who led the children on their tour of Maszewo was one of the older residents, a member of the Senior Citizens’ Club. It is noteworthy that the itinerary included a visit to the derelict Evangelical cemetery, where candles were lit. This is an example of a situation where activities are being conducted with the aim of integrating elements of a connection to the pre-war era into the scope of Maszewo’s ‘remembering identity.’ <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo/posts/pfbid026RhdGRecRfXCokVk6MsNXbMpWPyPjX-DJJoMRZrnygsjz5dwqMtbM5CVBNFJDvZifl> [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>27</sup> [...] Today we introduced them to the regional book collection and discussed publications about the Commune of Cewice, <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo/posts/pfbid0NRswC83L53QmmWK1nzXprfr51XcrftTENFMXPnmvGixwaLtrG-k1XMzAxxEgCdCWal> [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>28</sup> Działalność tej bibliotekarki doceniają mieszkańcy [Residents Appreciate This Librarian’s Work] (interview), 29 October 2023, *Lębork24.info* <https://www.lebork24.info/2023/10/29/dzialalnosc-tej-bibliotekarki-doceniaja-mieszkanicy-wywiad/> [access: 10 April 2024].

residents<sup>29</sup> and that which is presented in conversations and time spent with me.<sup>30</sup>

The Maszewo Library (as an institution and a concrete space) fulfils the role of a carrier of memory. It is a materialised expression of local history (Kula 2002: 101), constructed through specific networks of meaning given by the citizens of Maszewo themselves, as evidenced by the words of an elderly Maszewo resident who uttered them during my meeting with senior citizens. Her words were received with approval by the others.

The only thing we still saved [after the yeast factory was privatised and closed down – author’s note] was the library. It belonged to the plant; we borrowed books from the plant. Later, when the plant was liquidated, as one of the villages that had its own library, we did not give it away.

The library thus rises to the status of a local heritage of pride, based on the causal determination of the inhabitants of Maszewo. Its continued existence (it now functions as a branch of the Cewice Public Library) is a ‘living’ reminder of the institution in which this heritage is constantly and actively ‘at work’ under the direction of a dynamic leader (cf. Malanicz-Przybylska 2021). Consequently, through the creation of commemorative narratives, the library supports the construction of a Maszewo’s ‘remembering identity’. It can be seen, for example, in the reproduction of certain ideas, such as *regional education*, which is disseminated mainly among older people, schoolchildren, and young people. This process unfolds

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<sup>29</sup> This was evident in the production of the reportage KWD Maszewo – *Niemiec zbudował, Polak pracował, Francuz zrujnował* [The German Built, the Pole Worked, the French Ruined]. Another interesting example of active remembrance promoted by the Maszewo Library was the celebration of its 75th anniversary, combined with a special lesson for fourth graders. This type of activity promotes the cohesion of the local community, thanks to the anchoring in a shared knowledge (the past of Maszewo) and in specific places perceived as important (the library). <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo/posts/pfbid02rdByqeYS3YKpc5AvozdseurWxLATPHoSUneThMbqJzYfCusXkXq829a18aHD4g1kl> [access: 10 April 2024].

<sup>30</sup> For example, during a meeting at the Senior Citizens’ Club, where I talked to senior citizens about life in Maszewo, <https://www.facebook.com/biblioteka.maszewo/posts/pfbid0AXtYdfEdYs3wPUB9NHVkmboAAz2c69i7YHmYxQzmLD5JBxer-fAmpHMKpgLqt6iql> [access: 10 April 2024].

according to the principle that *'remembering is a social activity that allows important experiences to be recorded and stored'* (Nowak 2011: 33). Important historical experiences, that is, experiences that have been selected and processed through selection and accumulation.

## Conclusion

The people of Maszewo actively remember the history of their village. Their grassroots commemorative activities are manifested in various initiatives and narratives. These extend beyond everyday life into local institutional forms. These include the exhibition *'Maszewo wczoraj i jeszcze dawniej...'* [*Maszewo Yesterday And Even Before...*], presented in the Maszewo Community Centre in 2012, the design of the Maszewo coat of arms with elements symbolising its long history and the yeast factory, or the seventeen information boards placed at historical sites in the village (from the abandoned Evangelical cemetery to the Sinner factory). The information on the page describing the first of these projects is striking. The exhibition shows the history of Maszewo from the 7th century BC, i.e. the early Iron Age, to the present day, until 2004, when the Lassafre Bio Corporation closed the Yeast Works, thus ending the 'golden era' of the settlement.<sup>31</sup> Various forms of narrative about *'the hundred golden years of Maszewo, when the yeast factory was in operation, and the village was booming,'* keep appearing in the statements of the interviewees and their activities. I am therefore inclined to conclude that the Maszewo yeast factory still exists in the memory of the people of Maszewo. For them, it is an important place that stands out in the space of the village, in family history, and in personal experience. It is a nostalgic memory. It is linked to a sense of loss of former prosperity, marked by the trauma of marginalisation and impoverishment. It does not mean that the people of Maszewo are without agency. On the contrary, they actively remember, popularise, and commemorate the stories that matter to them.

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<sup>31</sup> [https://gck.cewice.pl/pliki/cewice-gck/archiwum/GCK\\_CEW/AKTUALNOSCI/POKAZ/146\\_WYSTAWA\\_MASZEWO\\_WCZORAJ\\_I\\_J.HTM](https://gck.cewice.pl/pliki/cewice-gck/archiwum/GCK_CEW/AKTUALNOSCI/POKAZ/146_WYSTAWA_MASZEWO_WCZORAJ_I_J.HTM) [access: 10 April 2024].

## Photos



Photo 1. Example of an information board in Maszewo. The author of the text is Dariusz Olewniczak (photo by Jakub Busz).



Photo 2. The building of the Kashubian Yeast Factory (photo by Jakub Busz).



Photo 3. Entrance to the village, a high chimney visible on the factory premises (photo by Jakub Busz).

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