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‘The Year 1920 in Poland and Europe’ – an international conference of the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin (Berlin, 7–9 October 2020)

On 7–9 October 2020, the conference ‘The Year 1920 in Poland and Europe/ Das Jahr 1920 in Polen und in Europa’ took place. The event was organised by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin, with Iwona Dadej responsible for both the concept and for hosting the organisation of the event. Due to the limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference sessions were held via the Zoom platform.

The principal aim of the conference was to commemorate both the centenary of Poland after regained independence and to present the broader context of the centenary of the Polish-Bolshevik war. However, as Dadej noted, the conference was also about reflecting on the past, provoking further questions, and looking to move beyond the traditional political and military divisions by which the events of 1920 are perceived; as well taking into account biographical perspectives. The program of the three-day conference was divided into panels devoted to the following themes: the Polish-Bolshevik war, the events of 1920 in Europe, the participation of ‘minorities’ in the war of 1920, the Piłsudski family, and social issues during the war. Researchers from Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Finland, and Italy were invited to participate in the conference to present the broadest possible frames of reference and viewpoints. In the welcoming speech, Dadej emphasised the commemorative character of the gathering and referred to the extensive research on memory and commemoration. She also pointed to researchers who have unanimously spoken of the specific ‘magic of zeros’ or the magic of equal numbers in organising anniversary celebrations of important historical events; and the specific research resulting from the attendant occasions. At the same time, Dadej emphasised the need to include the events of the Polish-Ukrainian-Soviet war in the transnational dimension of the history of this region after the First World War.

The keynote lecture, delivered by Natali Stegmann (Regensburg) and titled ‘Hero and Cripple. Interpretative Patterns of Participation in War: Between a Civil and a Military Story’ was not devoted to the events of the war, but to its consequences. In her talk, Stegman focused on the issues of war veterans and invalids on national and international planes, accompanying the figure

of the soldier-winner. The first day of the conference ended with a talk by Karina Pryt (Frankfurt am Main), who discussed two silent films related to the subject of the Polish-Soviet war: 'Dla ciebie Polsko' [For you Poland] – (1920) and 'Cud nad Wisłą' [Miracle on the Vistula] – (1921), drawing attention to the topography of these two films on Warsaw's cinematic landscape of the early 1920s.

On the second day, the first panel presented papers that looked at the Polish-Soviet war as a forgotten event, i.e., a lost victory. The panel was opened by Jan Jacek Bruski (Cracow), who, in his talk on the alliance of Józef Piłsudski with Symen Petlura and Ukrainian involvement in the Polish-Bolshevik war, drew attention to the political calculations of both sides, and the international context of the treaty. Bruski also discussed how Polish-Ukrainian enmity influenced the course of the conflict. The next speaker was Stephan Lehnstaedt (Berlin), who presented an analysis of the reception of the conflict in Germany and the Soviet Union. Varying interpretations in terms of historians' perspectives regarding the conflict were presented by Andrzej Chwalba (Cracow).

The second panel, which was directly related to 1920 in Europe, was commenced by Ruth Nattermann (Rome), who looked at the dynamic changes in the position of the Italian women's movement in the face of the fascist regime consolidating in Italy. The perception of 1920 from the northern climes of Europe was presented by Tiina Kinnunen (Oulu), who also took an in-depth look at paramilitary women's organisations. Gennadii Korolyov (Kiev) presented historiographic interpretations of the myths about 'Polish imperialism' and the 'Bolshevism of the Ukrainian elites', and discussed the social situation in Ukraine in April–June 1920. In turn, the talk by Andrei Zamoiski (Wolfsburg) drew attention to the situation of Belarus during the war, including the plight of Belarusian peasants and the pogroms of the Jewish population.

The third panel was devoted to the roles played by ethnic minorities in the war of 1920, although the notion of 'minorities' was understood here in the broadest sense. Jakub Beneš (London) drew attention to the participation of peasant soldiers and Austro-Hungarian subjects in the war and revolutions of 1917–21. Anna Nowakowska-Wierzchoś (Warsaw) elaborated on the women's involvement in the hostilities, their experience of frontline service and life in military camps, and the issue of the formative and emancipatory nature of female military units. Christhardt Henschel (Warsaw) analysed the attitude of the Jewish community to the war, as well as the participation of Jewish soldiers in the fighting.

The fourth panel was devoted to the biographical perspective of the fate of the Piłsudski family. Heidi Hein-Kircher (Marburg) discussed the development of the cult of Józef Piłsudski in the Second Polish Republic. Adulation for 'the leader', 'the Chief', 'the Marshal of Poland', had its roots in 1917, mainly

among the ranks of legionnaires, but his victory in the Polish-Bolshevik war acted as a catalyst and would prove to be an important element in establishing the cult of leader that took place after the May coup of 1926. Joanna Dufurat (Wrocław) introduced the figure of Aleksandra Szczerbińska-Piłsudska and took a closer look at the contemporary interest in her legacy. According to Dufurat, she is constantly assessed in popular culture through the prism of Piłsudski's own activities, regardless of the fact that after 1920 Szczerbińska-Piłsudska did not perform any political functions. Dufurat also drew attention to the fact that we are still awaiting a critical biography of Piłsudski's wife, and that she remains best known through her memoirs, written in retrospect while in exile in London. Veronika Belyaeva-Saczuk (St Petersburg) recalled and discussed the figure of Bronisław Piłsudski - brother of Józef, who remained in the shadow of his elder brother, but whose contributions in field of ethnography concerning the peoples of Sakhalin and the Hokkaido islands paved the way for a reinvigoration of their threatened culture and way of life.

Panel five combined in its ruminations social, cultural and public health issues. Scarlet fever, dysentery, tuberculosis and typhus are usually lesser-known 'actors' of conflicts. Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen (Vienna) spoke about the epidemics that decimated post-war Europe and how typhus contributed to the building of the foundations of Polish statehood. In her opinion, infections that quickly turned into an epidemic were perceived as a threat to the Polish state. This influenced the quality of epidemiological control, which became a central task of the Second Polish Republic. Kreuder-Sonnen also draws attention to the fact that the registers, kept separately for the Jewish population, were a part of the broader discourse of the 'other' in the Second Polish Republic. The consequences of the war, such as death, deportation and hunger, were discussed by Katarzyna Sierakowska (Warsaw), who put forward the thesis that the First World War, together with the Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Bolshevik Wars and the Silesian Uprisings, ultimately influenced the condition and situation of Polish society. Maciej Górny (Warsaw) looked at the photographic materials documenting the atrocities committed by parties to the conflicts. The most often presented victims in the photos are women: humiliated, naked victims whose bodies, in almost pornographic detail, are exposed. However, as the researcher claims, these photographs were often linked to propaganda activities and deliberate manipulation, as well as containing hidden or subliminal messages. On the one hand, we have a presentation of the conflict, and on the other hand, we are presented with sexualised or even pornographic images.

The sixth panel dealt with topics related to the myths, places of commemoration and historical reconstructions of the war. The presentations began with a paper by Dietlind Hüchtker (Vienna) on the discourse surrounding the heroism and citizenship of women. In popular opinion, women carrying weapons are considered to be figures of fascination: they break accepted

social norms, and stand out from among their peers. The reference points in Poland are female legionnaire formations and their military counterparts. The researcher pointed out that women's contributions and sacrifices in no way translated into the achievement of equality in terms of women's access to military careers and the elimination of patriarchal models in this sector. In turn, comparative studies on the figure of the Unknown Soldier in the Poland and Czechoslovakia of the interwar period were presented by Iza Mrzygłód (Warsaw) and Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska (Warsaw). The figure and cult of the Unknown Soldier were a tradition imported to both countries from Western Europe. However, this tradition perfectly matched the moods and political needs of Poland in the interwar period. As the researchers argued, although the idea of the tomb is related to the cult of masculinity, with the use of textual materials, it can be seen that there is also a place for a woman's experience: a mother mourning for her son. However, despite transformational shifts such as the right to vote for women, the Polish state solidified and perpetuated the existing gender order. The next talk in this panel was devoted to the mythologisation of the figure of the 'Jewish Bolshevik' as an image of the enemy. Jan Claas Behrends (Potsdam) addressed in his talk the question of why the political figure of the 'Jewish Bolshevik' was deemed appropriate in 1920 and beyond, and when (and if at all) it began to be no longer applicable. Artur Wodzyński (Gdańsk) dealt with the historical re-enactments of 1920 in his talk, seen as an internal perspective, encompassing people from the environment of reenactors and the re-enactment movement, which was focused mainly on military history.

The proceedings were closed with a discussion, which included reflections on national and local forms of commemorating the centenary of the Battle of Warsaw. Anna Łazar (Wołomin) presented the Polish commemorations of this jubilee – both state commemorations and those related to the educational work of local associations, while Gennadii Korolyov (Kiev) pointed to the asymmetries in remembering and commemorating this war in the Ukrainian context.

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