Cult of Heroes in Central Europe

Veranstalter: Departments of History and Gender Studies at Central European University, Pasts Inc. Center for Historical Studies, French Institute, Budapest; Centre of Interdisciplinary Research on Central Europe,Paris-Sorbonne University; Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw.
Datum, Ort: 12.12.2010-13.12.2010, Budapest
Bericht von: Emily Gioielli, History Department, Central European University

The conference „Cult of Heroes in Central Europe" was held at Central European University on November 12-13, 2010. The conference, the first of two to be held on this theme, was a joint effort between several institutions including the Departments of History and Gender Studies at Central European University, Pasts Inc. Center for Historical Studies, the French Institute in Budapest, the Centre of Interdisciplinary Research on Central Europe of Paris-Sorbonne University, the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw. The conference organizers, Clara Royer of Paris-Sorbonne University, and Eszter Bálazs of János Kodolányi University College Department of Media and Communication in Budapest opened the conference with general remarks on the conference theme, allowing conference presenters to interpret and approach the topic creatively and through a variety of disciplinary frames. The conference broadly dealt with the creation and transformation of heroic cults in Central Europe throughout the late imperial and early (multi)national periods (1880-1945). Contributions focused largely on the sources through which hero cults were created or maintained, honing in on the ways visual, literary, and historical images were used to buoy the national project, and in many cases, the dominant gender regimes.

In the first panel, „Canonizing Heroes," ADELA KOBELSKA (Warsaw) analyzed the transformation of the great Romantic bards Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasiński through monographic studies of their lives and literature. Kobelska showed how earlier Romantic models of heroism, also influenced by the tradition of Catholic hagiography, slowly began to fade from scientific inquiry, as interest shifted from the person of the poet as a national hero removed from political concerns, to inquiries into the actual content and literary practices of the writers after 1915. ESZTER BÁLAZS (Budapest) presented a paper on the practice of dueling that became popular within Hungarian modernist literary circles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bálazs positioned the duel firmly within the broader Central European historiography, but argued that beyond displaying/defending masculine and social identity, the duel between literary rivals was a form of debate that moved outside the pages of the journal. Bálazs pointed out the irony that it was modernizing authors who engaged in the outdated practice to solve professional issues. Although this practice seems oddly out of place within a group of people attempting to promote modern values, using a practice outlawed by the state was somehow consistent with the modernist critique of state intervention in the life of the individual. Further, Balázs argued that dueling was a way for writers, often accused of being effete, to prove manhood and their arrival into the intellectual elite of the country.

Continuing the theme of „Canonizing Heroes," MICHEL MASŁOWSKI (Paris) explored the formation of the cult around Józef Piłsudski in the interwar period. Describing Piłsudski as national hero *par excellence*, Masłowski showed the confluence of the cult of Piłsudski with both the Romantic heroic tradition and the Marionist cult in Catholic Poland. He described the use of the „heroic pattern" such as the call to adventure, and exile, in the presentation of Pilsudski's life and career, but also shows how Piłsudski used the formation of the heroic cult around him to legitimize and culturally embed the structures of the newly re-established Polish state. ÉTIENNE BOISSERIE's (Paris) presentation entitled „Celebrating the Liberators: the creation of a Czech and Slovak Philatelic Pantheon, 1918-1945" discussed the creation of the Czechoslovak heroic pantheon through the issuance of stamps. Not only did these stamps of persons such as Tomáš Masaryk help to create a new pantheon of heroes in the

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early national hero, but also served to create visual links between the heroic past and the state institutions of Czechoslovakia.

The panel entitled „When Heroes Became Tools" included four contributions bringing together various disciplines including gender studies, literary studies, Jewish studies, and history. TÍMEA JABLONCZKY (Budapest) analyzed the interwar construction of female heroism through the image of Ilona Zrínyi, a baroque heroine and mother of Ferenc Rákóczi II, an important male Hungarian national hero. Using feminist theory, Jablonczy argued that the image of Zrinyi was stripped of political connotations and used mostly to promote the conservative image of women as mothers to the nation. The contribution of MICHAL KŠIŇAN (Bratislava) explored the death of Slovak national hero Milan Ratislav Štefánik as important to the creation of a common *Czechoslovak* heroic pantheon in the interwar period. Kšiňan argued that the tragic circumstances of his death offered both challenges and opportunities to uniting the images of Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik together in a national heroic cult. GERBEN ZAAGSMA (London) analyzed the transformation of Naftali Botwin from a Polish communist hero in the interwar period to a primarily Jewish hero by the 1960s. Zaagsma's paper showed how political changes and shifting attitudes towards the Jewish minority in Poland affected Botwin's place in the heroic pantheon first as Polish hero, then as Polish-Jewish hero, and finally as Jewish hero, despite Botwin's personal preference of being identified a nationally as a communist. The final presentation of the first day was ANDREA PETŐ's (Budapest) analysis of women in the extreme-Right-wing Arrow Cross movement in Hungary during the 1930s. Her presentation described the conflicts between the party's discursive practices regarding the ideal roles of women in society, and their actual membership of which approximately 30 percent was female. The Arrow Cross had a rather ironic position of promoting women's roles in the private sphere while welcoming women into the (public) political movement. Pető attributes the attraction of women to the Arrow Cross to the general „charisma hunger" of women who were looking for heroic models. Pető also highlighted the rather unfortunate fact that while many women were attracted to the movement with the hope of carving out new opportunities in the public sphere, the Arrow Cross movement shared or „was caged" within the same gendered heroic framework as the conservative movement, *both* of which valorized women's roles as mothers and the female duty of (national) sacrifice.

The first of a two-part panel entitled „Subversive or Subverted?" included contributions mainly on different elements of the Czech cult of heroes. The contribution by PETRA JAMES (Paris) focused on the transformation of heroic cults surrounding the Czech Hussite legacy throughout the Baroque era up until the early 20th century. Her paper explored how images and ideas of heroism were being constantly re-worked by different political/national motivations and artistic conventions. While this transformation of heroic patterns meant to draw on group identity, instead it laid the groundwork for the image of the individualistic heroic and ultimately modern „outsider." WERONIKA PARFIANOWICZ (Warsaw) also drew on Czech and Polish literary traditions, to explore the interplay of gender and modernism to create a particular type of anti-hero that found a home in the early twentieth century literary canon in such works as Jaroslav Hašek's *Good Soldier Švejk*. These images drew on grotesqueness and bodily deformity to represent sexually immature literary „heroes." Rather than being imbued with „traditional" heroic qualities such as virility and strength, the authors highlighted the resourcefulness of their (anti)heroes and drew on the general pessimism in society to parody and transform the national heroic paradigm. XAVIER GALMICHE (Paris) also grappled with changing images of masculinity and heroism in particular reference to the dissemination of homo-erotic/homosexual images in the Czech national heroic cult. Galmiche used the *fin-de-siècle* scandal of Oscar Wilde as a frame to discuss the ways in which homosexuality fit into the ever-changing national and cultural heroic traditions, particularly since the trial of such a prominent homosexual could be used to emphasize the suffer-

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ing/persecution aspects of the heroic model. He used a particularly poignant example of a Czech opera to show that there were possibilities for homosexuality/homoeroticism within the national heroic canon.

Part two of the panel „Subversive or Subverted" featured a stirring presentation by JOANNA TEGNEROWICZ (Wrocław) on the dilemma of constructing a hero. Regarding the case of a Jakub Szela, the leader of a 19th century peasant rebellion in Poland, she questioned why Szela is only remembered as a horrible villain who cruelly attacked wealthy landowners? This lack of nuance in Szela's characterization is even more curious given the political backlash against the upper classes in post-1945 Polish politics. She concluded that the struggle to create ideological unity within politics led to the marginalization of anything that might create or exacerbate internal conflicts within the broader nationalist struggle. Tegnerowicz also questioned the conceptualization of violence during the period, arguing that while landowners, and particularly those whom Szela attacked, were quite cruel to the peasants, this violence might have been more embedded in everyday practices and thus not „worthy" of emphasizing as a motivating factor for the rebellion. MATEUSZ CHMURSKI (Paris) again took up the theme of modernism and heroism to discuss the ways the fragmentation of self and modernity influenced heroic strategies in the works of Czech writer Ladislav Klíma and Polish writer Karol Irzykowski. Particularly focusing on the realist writing of the two, Chmurski discussed the ways realist literary strategies broke down existing heroic paradigms and explored the (literary and artistic) tensions between the anti-heroicization and self-heroicization of the modernist author himself. By pointing out the innovations of these two literary figures, Chmurski showed that the literary strategies employed by both writers produced a multinarrative structure that challenged the border between fiction and autobiography and created a model of „self rhetorical self-therapy".

The final panel of the conference, „Questioning Heroes," consisted of three contributions that each dealt with the interplay of gender and nation-building on the cult of heroes/heroines. KATARZYNA PABIJANEK (Warsaw) focused on the strategies involved in adding a Jewish military leader and a young woman to the Polish heroic pantheon. She explored the ways in which stereotypes about ethnicity/religion and gender made their way into the idealizations of both Emilia Plater and Berek Joselewicz, but also described the ways particular (and stereotypical) markers of identity were stripped away or emphasized in order to fit both Plater and Joselewicz within the boundaries of Polish Romantic heroic models. BALÁZS SIPOS (Budapest) discussed the tension between national heroic models in Hungary and the encroaching specter of modernization and Americanization in relation to the interwar imagery of the „New Woman" in Hungary. He argued that the emphasis of the conservative government on woman and wife and mother created a problematic situation defined by a lack of true heroic female imagery usable for single „modern" working women. This led to an emphasis on the „everyday heroes" and „everyday martyrs" that uncomfortably encompassed both traditional images of the wife and mother, as well as more modern images of working (and single) women as martyrs to modern life. In the final presentation, PAWEŁ RODAK (Warsaw) examined the heroic attitudes of the Polish interwar literary generation (born after the end of WWI). Rodak argued that the generation struggled with fears of death and worked to create alternative heroic patterns that did not rely only on military prowess but on the power to overcome attacks on the humanist tradition within Poland. By reconfiguring the content of traditional heroic models, this generation came to see its fight not as a struggle for Poland against an outside enemy, but as a struggle within Poland against what they saw as outmoded cultural traditions.

All of the contributions demonstrated the fragility of the national heroic pantheon in Central Europe during a period of political and social transformation. Several scholars pointed to the continuity, but also instability of both the Christian hagiographic and Romantic heroic traditions, often pointing to the impact of Modernism in the dethroning of Romantic heroic models. While most contri-

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butions largely focused on a single national context, some employed a comparative perspective, particularly between the case of the Czechoslovakian and Polish heroic traditions. A second conference on the Central European cult of heroes as a transnational phenomenon will be held at Paris-Sorbonne University next year.

Conference Overview:

Welcome notes by: Katalin Farkas (Provost, Central European University);
François Laquièze (Director of the French Institute of Budapest).

Panel 1: „CANONIZING HEROES 1"
Chair: Andrea Pető (Department of Gender Studies, Central European University)

Adela Kobelska (Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw): Romantic Poet as a Hero in Modern Polish Literary Studies.

Peter Macho (History Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava): Matúš Čák/Csák Máté From Trenčin As a Slovak National Hero.

Eszter Balázs (János Kodolányi University College, Department of Media and Communication, Budapest): Dual, Manhood and Heroism: the Case of Hungarian Writers (1890[U+2010]1914).

Panel 2: „CANONIZING HEROES 2"
Chair: Contantin Iordachi (Department of History, Central European University; Pasts Inc. Center for Historical Studies)

Michel Masłowski (Centre of Interdisciplinary Research on Central Europe ,Paris[U+2010]Sorbonne University): Józef Piłsudski, a Hero of Poland.

Étienne Boisserie (Le Centre de Recherches Europes-Eurasie, Paris): Celebrating the Liberators: the Creation of a Czech and Slovak Philatelic Pantheon 1918[U+2010]1945.

Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič (Department of History, Central European University, Budapest & Centre of Advanced Studies – Centre of Advanced Study, Sofia): Martyrs and Heroes among Slovenes and Italians in the Northern Adriatic Borderlands: Two National Projects between Mutual Opposition and Mimetic Competition.

Panel 3: „WHEN HEROES BECAME TOOLS"
Chair: Catherine Horel (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris; Identités, Relations Internationales, Civilisations de l'Europe, Paris I University).

Tímea Jablonczay (King Sigismund University College, Department of Media and Communication, Budapest): Ilona Zrínyi, the "Mother of the Nation". A specific Conservative Female Identity Construction in the Hungarian Interwar Period.

Michal Kšiňan (History Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava & CEFRES, USR 3138 CNRS[U+2010]MAEE, Prague): Štefánik´s Death and (Czecho)Slovak Identity.

Gerben Zaagsma (Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College London): Naftali Botwin – a Jewish Communist Hero in Interwar Poland.

Andrea Pető (Department of Gender Studies, CEU, Budapest): Unlikely Heroines of the Extreme Right Movements: Gender and Movement.

Panel 4: „SUBVERSIVE OR SUBVERTED?"
Chair: Gábor Klaniczay (Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University; Collegium Budapest)

Petra James (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris[U+2010]Sorbonne University): The Character of an Outsider: A Hero of the Turn of the 20th Century Czech Literature?

Weronika Parfianowicz (Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw): Heroes and Antiheroes of the Central[U+2010]European Modern Novel (Musil, Schulz, Kafka, Hašek).

Xavier Galmiche (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris[U+2010]Sorbonne University): Martyrs or rebels? Homo[U+2010]Heroism / Homo[U+2010]Erotism in Central Europe. The Czech Case.

Panel 5: „SUBVERSIVE OR SUBVERTED?"
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Paris [U+2010] Sorbonne University)

Joanna Tegnerowicz (Department of Urban and Rural Sociology, Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław): The Blood [U+2010] Soaked Spectre or the Avenger-Hero: On Popular and Literary Images of Jakub Szela.

Mateusz Chmurski (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris [U+2010] Sorbonne University, Paris & Department of Modern Literature, University of Warsaw): Antihero / Self [U+2010] Heroicization: Karol Irzykowski and Ladislav Klíma's „Crusades Against the Principle of Identity".

Panel 6: „QUESTIONNING HEROES"
Chair: Balázs Trencsényi (Department of History, Central European University)

Katarzyna Pabijanek (Warsaw School for Social Science and Humanities , Warsaw): Making of a Hero. Problematic Heroism of Emilia Plater and Berek Joselewicz.

Balázs Sipos (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest): Heroes or Victims? New Woman and Modernity in Hungary in the Interwar Period.

Paweł Rodak (Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw): „What and How to Fight for?" Figures of Hero and the Problem of Heroic Attitudes of the Polish War Generation

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