

**Ends of War. Interdisciplinary
Perspectives on Past and New Polish
Regions after 1944**

Veranstalter: German Historical Institute,
Warsaw

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It has become a commonplace to accept that we live in the „post-war“ world. Behind this term is the assumption that the war ended (presumably in May 1945 for Europeans), and that there was thus a new order that arose from the ashes of destruction and genocide. However, few historians today would declare without reservations that the European war ended in 1945. Depending on perspective and geography, the conflict ended at very different points, and the mentalities and uprooting wrought by the war are visible into the present.

To address these issues the Aleksander Brückner Center (Halle/ Jena), and the German Historical Institute in Warsaw hosted a highly interdisciplinary conference at the latter's beautiful space in the Karnicki Palace with additional support from the Foundation „Remembrance, Responsibility and Future“ (EVZ). Aptly titled „Ends of War—Powojnie“, the organizers brought together experts from linguistics, sociology, media studies, history, and literature to explore the termination and continuation of the Second World War in Poland.

The well-known author STEFAN CHWIN (Gdańsk) led off the event with a keynote entitled „The real end of the Second War—ruptures and continuity in history“. Chwin pointed out that wartime politics and policies continued beyond the official end of hostilities in 1945. If we accept war in Clausewitzian terms as politics of other means, then surely we must see the war continuing into our own lifetimes. Even today, we perceive the geopolitical world in terms defined by the Second World War and its conclusion, as evinced by the calculation of NATO to see Crimea and the Donbass region as the price for peace with Russia, just as the Sudetenland was thought to be in 1938. On a more personal level Chwin shared his

own family's feeling of temporariness (*tymczasowość*) in their adopted home in Gdańsk. In the postwar period many Europeans lived with the feeling that their place was not permanent; that at any moment they could be forced to flee (again) and thus one needed to be prepared to run off at a moment's notice. Several presenters returned to this theme throughout the conference highlighting the idea that the postwar world appears to have especially held on to the painful experience of forced resettlement.

The first panel focused on demographic upheaval with three case studies from different perspectives. ANNA ZIELIŃSKA (Warsaw) presented her anthropological linguistic work in the Lubuskie region of northwestern Poland. After the vast majority of the area's German residents fled or were forcibly removed, migrants and refugees came from diverse areas to the east, creating a linguistic and cultural patchwork in the early years of communist Poland. Interestingly, many of those who authorities had identified as ethnically Polish did not speak Polish, but rather resided in an Slavic grey zone. As could be expected, through schooling and generational change, Ukrainian, Belarusian or Roma have become much more rare in public settings. However, Zielińska went in search of this linguistic diversity, asking if the current residents still spoke one of the many languages present 40 or more years ago. Some families in the Lubuskie region have continued to speak the languages of their ancestors, but now mostly restricted to the home. EWELINA WANAT (Chemnitz) contributed a similar report, but for an area of Poland which has a much more complex history of incorporating newcomers. Wanat has conducted research in areas around Zgorzelec and Lubań in southwestern Poland, which became the home of refugees from Greece, Yugoslavia, and of course the eastern lands of prewar Poland (*kresy*). The Communist authorities attempted to de-Germanize the region, but were met with complications because it could not simply Polishize the area owing to its diverse population. BOHDAN SHUMYLOVYCH (L'viv) closed out the panel with a multimedia presentation of newsreels in Soviet L'viv, which exemplify the ways in

which the regime used language and images to both tiptoe around the complicated history of the region and justify the new political order.

RACHEL KERR (London) led off the second panel, „Past Injustice—Imaginations and concepts of Law and Justice“, asking whether the study of transitional justice has something to offer the Polish context in particular. How the crimes of German occupation were recorded and punished were based upon the way the war ended, as PAULINA GULIŃSKA-JURGIEL (Halle) showed in her paper. Gulińska-Jurgiel’s research at the Polish Institute for National Memory (IPN) has shed more light on Poles who made attempts to examine and punish war crimes, even without a legal mandate, thus providing a way for them to reckon with the past outside the one the Big Three provided them. JACEK CHROBACZYŃSKI (Kraków) provided a fine counterpoint with a more theoretical outline challenging a dominant Polish narrative which pits the foundation of the Polish communist government—with the Polish Commission for National Liberation (PWKN)—against the Warsaw Uprising. The former is often seen as a national tragedy, and the latter a great moment of heroism. Chrobaczyński argues that they are symptoms of the same social processes the war wrought, and that they both represent attempts by rather large sections of the population to join an anti-occupation force. EWA MALINOWSKA (Opole) contributed a paper continuing her earlier work on constitutions as a genre of literature, analyzing the contents of the constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL). Though based upon the hermetic language of the Soviet constitution, Malinowska shows how Polish communists couched their foundational document in nationalist language. JOANNA LUSEK (Bytom) presented two projects in which she had taken part, memorializing two Nazi prison camps of Upper Silesia that passed through a period of use in the postwar Stalinist years. In spite of strong papers, particularly from Malinowska and Chrobaczyński, the discussion of this panel fell flat because both of those scholars did not physically attend the conference.

STEPHAN STACH (Warsaw) introduced

the third panel, „Material and Mental Breakdown—Efforts of Reconstruction“, focusing on the wartime atomization of society and the lack of uniting moral forces in the postwar. MAŁGORZATA KRUCIECKA (Warsaw), presenting on the Catholic Church, perhaps provided an answer to Stach’s point about the absence of moral guidance as she recounted the devastation and disarray of the Church in the postwar years. Personnel, hierarchies, and physical spaces had all been hurt badly, and she argued that the absence of the church in society led to further moral breakdown, beyond that which the war caused. ANNA WYLEGAŁA (Warsaw) provided a broad explanation of the destruction of social ties during the war, and how they continued afterwards. Societal and class structures, however oppressive, can still be understood as a source of order, and these had been eliminated during the war. Furthermore, previously unthinkable activity for most people, such as theft and murder, had become commonplace. Wylegała claims that these social ties could not be rebuilt as easily under communism as they could be in a „democratic“ system, however it would be difficult to justify this with a comparative case.

GRAŻYNA EWA HERBER (Bamberg) then presented a critical overview of the reconstruction of Warsaw, with special attention to the agency of Soviet authorities in the decision to rebuild sections of the city according to the demands of the new regime. Herber argued that socialist law, which transferred private property into the hands of the state, constituted theft. However, without this mass accumulation of property the (re)construction of Warsaw could certainly not have proceeded at the pace it did.

DANIEL WEISS (Zurich) shared his research on an entirely different level of reconstruction, that of language. Weiss and his team have conducted analysis on the language of early Polish communist propaganda speeches and articles, in an attempt to assess Polish „newspeak“ (*nowomowa*) and compare it with its Russian equivalent, *novojaz*. His findings are striking, showing that certain words and phrases were continuously used in similar sentence constructions which clearly delineated the dichotomous universe author-

ities wished to fabricate: us / *swoi* (good), them / *oni* (bad). IRYNA HORBAN (L'viv) continued this thread nicely with a report on the decisions Soviet authorities made when repurposing the museums of L'viv in the postwar years. Converting certain collections and spaces to serve the purposes of Sovietizing the city go beyond language for their ability to provide new visual narratives, and the usual signposts of every Soviet space, such as a Lenin museum.

JOANNA HYTREK-HRYCIUK (Wrocław) introduced the final panel „War is Dead, Long live the War—Emotions and Uncontrollable Actions“ pointed to the lack of any great moment of happiness or relief for central and east Europeans at the end of the war since, as many see it today, the occupation merely continued at the hands of the Soviets. Thus there is a temptation to see the „real“ end of the war with the fall of the Warsaw Pact peoples' republics. However, that legacy has extended beyond the end of the Soviet Union in the region where Bandera and his UPA can be celebrated or Waffen-SS troops revered as national heroes such as in the Baltic states. To illustrate the strangeness and ephemerality of the immediate postwar years, JOANNA SULIKOWSKA-FAJFER (Halle) presented the responses of Polish poets to their wartime experience and new political realities. Sulikowska-Fajfer argued that poetry was the best vehicle to process these complex emotions and help people find a language with which to discuss the postwar environment. Moreover, poets and their works played a key role in the formation of memory of the war and collective consciousness of the incidents they had survived. MONIKA TALARCZYK-GUBAŁA (Łódź) described another form of coming to terms with the past in her paper on the reception of one of the first Holocaust films *The Last Stage* (*Ostatni etap*), which was released in 1948. Due to many disputes, especially over how much the audience could stomach, Wanda Jakubka went through four drafts of the script before receiving approval. Ultimately, it was decided to soften the blow, which was then met with mixed reactions from within Poland. There were those who were upset with it did not do justice to their

suffering, but others still were pleased that the portrayal was lighter than reality. Interestingly, the film still appeared shocking enough to be used in the DDR as de-nazification propaganda. Finally, MARCIN ZAREMBA (Warsaw) closed out the conference with an exposition on the ways in which the memory and trauma of the Second World War continued through mass panics of another war beginning. As Zaremba argued, each flashpoint in international politics—the Suez Crisis, Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War, or Afghanistan War—highlighted the possibility of renewed conflict, and thus compelled people to stock up on necessary goods, such as salt, sugar, and matches. In harmony with what Chwin mentioned in his keynote address, Zaremba showed how the postwar status quo was held to be temporary. Zaremba brought this thought a step further, psychoanalyzing a bit, as he implied that Poles held on to the hope that those geopolitical divisions were temporary, and therefore both desired and feared the next global conflict.

Thematically, the *Ends of War* conference brought together a wide range of perspectives on long standing issues. However, the sum of its parts is difficult to grasp. There were many avenues for direct dialogue between say those scholars interested in the power of popular memory and two presenters coming from museums, who are actively creating and shaping that memory. An opportunity also presented itself for linguists and historians to arrive at a different level of understanding of the ways that the Second World War continued well beyond its official end. Unfortunately, little was accomplished during the gathering. Many of the papers presented were weak, and certain scholars resisted when attempts were made at discussion that challenged dichotomous and simple narratives about communism in Poland. Ironically, this in and of itself is a manifestation of the „postwar“ phenomenon. Certainly, there is much work to be done in this field.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Lecture

Stefan Chwin (Gdańsk) „Real end of the Second War—ruptures and continuity in history“

Panel I *Demographic Upheaval—The re-*

invention of regional societies

Miloš Řezník (Warsaw), Introduction

Anna Zielińska (Warsaw), „Linguistic research in lands ceded to Poland in 1945, arguments against language integration“

Ewelina Wanat (Chemnitz), „Identity cultural politics: The foundation of central authority and its realization in the Polish upper Lusatian Nysa valley.“

Bohdan Shumylovych (Lviv) „Soviet Lviv in Newsreels during the First Decade after the Second World War“

Panel II Past Injustice—Imaginizations and Concepts of Law and Justice

Chair: Yvonne Kleinmann (Halle)

Rachel Kerr, „Introduction“ (London)

Jacek Chrobaczyński (Kraków), „Polish Committee for the National Liberation (PKWN) versus the Warsaw Uprising: The balance of the process of legitimatization of the Communist powers in Poland, 1944“

Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel (Halle), „Semantic legal aspects of accounts of the past in Poland in 1945“

Ewa Malinowska (Opole), „Constitutional discourse in Poland after 1945“

Joanna Lusek (Bytom), „Deportation, work camps and forced resettlement: Places of memory, museum exhibits and centers of documentation in Upper Silesia“

Panel III: Material and Mental Break-down—Efforts of Re-construction

Chair: Dorothea Warneck (Halle)

Helena Datner (Warsaw), Introduction

Małgorzata Krupecka (Warsaw), „Catholic Church in Poland in the face of new challenges after the (un)finished war in 1945“

Anna Wylegała (Warsaw), „The Landscape after the War: Reconstruction of social ties in postwar Poland and Ukraine“

Grażyna Ewa Herber (Bamberg), „Rebuilding of the Old City in Warsaw after the Second World War: legal, social, and political aspects“

Daniel Weiss (Zurich), „The Newborn Polish nowomowa (new speech) after 1945 and its Relation to the Soviet Original“

Iryna Horban (Lviv) „Rearranging the past: Museums in Lviv after 1945“

Panel IV: War is Dead, Long Live the War!—Emotions and Uncontrollable Actions“

Chair: Jens Boysen (Warsaw)

Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk (Wrocław), Introduction

Joanna Sulikowska-Fajfer (Halle), „The voice(s) of Polish poets in the first postwar years: An attempt to understand the spirit of the times“

Monika Talarczyk-Gubała (Łódź), „Reception of the Film The Last Stage (1948) in Poland and abroad“

Marcin Zaremba (Warsaw), „Unconscious reproduction of war? Mass panics in Poland in the postwar period“

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