

Introduction

The history of Poland in the years 1914–1918, especially in recent decades, belongs to one of the most eagerly mined fields of research by Polish historians. This is mainly due to the fact that one of the effects of the historic storm that began in the summer of 1914 was the return of the Polish state to the map of Europe. Hence a number of significant Polish histories, such as: the political activity of Polish politicians and groups, the armed struggle for independence, the international circumstances of the Polish cause, the creation of Poland's political foundations, as well as the territorial shape and international position of Poland – are described with great precision and readily discussed in the pages of books, magazines and during numerous academic conferences.

However, not all aspects of the history of Polish lands in that important period enjoy a lively interest. Subjects that are taken up decidedly less frequently (and only recently, if at all) are those from the field of social history; both when it comes to the history of mentality and social structures. This observation was the starting point for numerous discussions among employees and associates of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, IH PAN). They bore fruit in the development of a project to establish an international research team, which would focus on the in-depth analysis of as yet rarely researched, and therefore little-known, issues of the mental and social history of Poland in 1914–1918. Prepared under the general title “The First World War on Polish lands. Expectations – Experiences – Consequences”, the proposal received funding through the National Programme for the Development of Humanities (Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki, NPRH).

One of the fundamental objectives of the project was to create an organizational and intellectual space for cooperation and scholarly discussion for both employees of IH PAN and the national and international milieu of researchers on the history of the Great War. The second aim formulated in the funding

proposal, was the striving to unite analytical and interpretative work with the compilation of historical sources heretofore un-circulated in the academic environment – in a way important not only from the perspective of a social historian. The third goal that guided the project team was to incorporate PhD students and young researchers who were finishing, or had just finished their doctorates, into the group. The variety of intended objectives led to a complex project structure. It was divided into several tasks carried out independently, the results of which have been published successively since the end of 2016.

It is worth mentioning that, thanks to significant support from IH PAN, work on the implementation of the project began simultaneously with the submission of the grant application (practically one year before funding from the NPRH was granted). Hence, the first results of the research team – and more precisely, the group working under the direction of Andrzej Nowak – were published at the turn of 2016–2017.¹

1. The goal of the team headed by Andrzej Nowak was to develop a dozen or so studies devoted to analyzing the state of social imaginings, political plans, cultural identities and their transformations in East-Central Europe. They focus on the situation at the threshold of the Great War and experiences and changes tied to the First World War “on Polish soil”. It seems that two metaphors best reflect the thematic scope and the uniqueness of the perspective presented by the team. Namely, the two concepts of “experience space” and “horizon of expectations”² proposed by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck. In the subsequent studies constituting the second volume edited by Andrzej Nowak, the authors reflect on how, in different groups, or communities (linguistic, professional, generational, ethnic, political), pre-war experiences are overlapped by new experiences and are connected with a war of a previously unknown scale and intensity, and how their horizons of expectations are changed with it, along with their visions of the expected future, both desired and undesirable.³

¹ See *Imperia, narody i społeczeństwa Europy Wschodniej i Środkowej na progu pierwszej wojny światowej*, ed. by A. Nowak, coop. M. Banaszkiwicz, Warszawa, 2016 [2017].

² See: R. Koselleck, “‘Przestrzeń doświadczenia’ i ‘horyzont oczekiwań’ – dwie kategorie historyczne”, in: id., *Semantyka historyczna*, ed. by H. Orłowski, Poznań, 2001, pp. 359–388; cf. id., “Przepusty pamięci i warstwy doświadczenia. Wpływ dwóch wojen światowych na świadomość społeczną”, in: id., *Warstwy czasu. Studia z metahistorii*, Warszawa, 2012, pp. 241–262.

³ See *Perspektywy przegranych i zwycięzców Wielkiej Wojny: zbiorowe tożsamości i indywidualne doświadczenia w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej (1914–1921)*, ed. by A. Nowak, Warszawa, 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 19).

2. As part of the second task, Katarzyna Sierakowska invited a wide circle of historians, as well as demographers and literature researchers from Poland, Ukraine and Great Britain, to discuss the needs and possibilities of new research within the broad range of the social history of Polish lands during the Great War. The result of the work and discussions is the publication of a volume containing the works of 14 authors who focused upon various themes of the social history of Polish lands during the Great War. As the editor states in the introduction:

it should be emphasized that the volume delivered into the readers' hands is intended rather to open new perspectives for further research than to attempt to synthesize this complex set of phenomena. It is definitely too early for that now. Our ambition is to at least touch on some of the lesser-known, rarely discussed aspects of the First World War on Polish lands. Thanks to our research, we managed to introduce new topics into academic circulation, e.g. issues related to crime or the role of women in the realities of war, to a greater extent than before. Generally, the texts from this volume seek to appreciate what happened on the 'home front'. Until now, relatively little space has been devoted to daily life in wartime. Of course, our volume does not systematically examine these phenomena, but the majority of texts are devoted to reflection on some aspects of it. Most of the new material concerns the eastern territories, which is associated with greater opportunities of gaining access to materials found in Ukrainian and Lithuanian archives. Cooperation with historians from these countries undoubtedly contributed not only to strengthening of the eastern themes, but also thanks to it, we managed to introduce a new perspective on, above all, issues of ethnicity and national identity. Our research indicates that the war strengthened nationality movements and the sense of national identity and sharpened competition between nations. [...] On the basis of the texts presented to readers, a significant acceleration of social integration processes can also be seen at the local level. The thesis of the explosion of organizational initiatives, especially regarding help and self-help, can be confirmed. Because in most texts, this topic of the frankly extraordinary direct aid activity is present. The presented texts also confirm the previously formulated thesis of the wartime period as a test of the social responsibility of the inhabitants of Polish lands. The range of initiatives that were undertaken in 1914–1918 also begs the question about wealth, especially of urban centers, such as Warsaw, which managed, despite the difficult military situation, and in some cases because of occupation, coupled with the collapse of industry and trade, to find the means to organize assistance. Thus, the conviction that the effects of the partitions were only negative, merits further research.⁴

3. The third task was to work on preparing a proposal for a preliminary outline of the social history of Polish lands in 1914–1918. The team, coordinated by Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, summarized the state of current knowledge and

⁴ K. Sierakowska, *Wstęp*, in: *Studia i materiały do dziejów społecznych Polski 1914–1918*, ed. by ead., Warszawa, 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 20), pp. 11–12.

pointed out the most important problems in the field of Polish social history of the period.⁵ The most important conclusions from the work of the authors' team can be summarized as follows:

a. Polish society entered the First World War as an object/field of control of foreign powers and the initial attempts of an independent initiative were very limited. However, from the first weeks of the conflict, more and more new environments and social groups developed their activity, and continuously, until autumn 1918, they tried to use every opportunity to expand the field of activity and the scope of independence. From 1916, Polish society became an increasingly conscious participant of events, capable of articulating and effectively defending its own interests. Changes in the scope of the self-awareness of Polish society during the First World War should be considered as one of the important factors enabling later success in shaping the foundations of the reborn statehood.

b. The war encroached on and modified all fundamental social structures. It tremendously weakened the heretofore ruling and leadership classes, with the landed gentry at the forefront. It had entered the war as a social force with undoubted national leadership, though it was questioned by the intelligentsia and modern political movements. At least due to the monarchic character of all the partitioning powers, landowners enjoyed prestige and a privileged social position. Together with the Catholic Church, it was a pillar of the social order. What is more, due to its significant participation in financing Polish culture and numerous national institutions, this standing also had solid foundations within the Polish national community itself. The economic base of the landed gentry on the eve of the war was more than land, but also banks, real estate and infrastructure investments, as well as commercial and industrial enterprises. A significant part of this economic activity served Polish national interests during the war. The landed gentry played a dominant role in aid committees, social organizations as well as state structures under the patronage of the partitioning and occupying powers, and in the Polish emigration. At the same time, however, the development of new social forces meant that at the end of the war, the position of this social group was completely different than in 1914. Polish landowners entered the reborn state as an important, but only one of some relatively equivalent interest groups; while in politics they were practically decimated. In order to stay in the game, they had to quickly look

⁵ See *Studia nad historią społeczną ziem polskich 1914–1918*, ed. by W. Mędrzecki, Warszawa, 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 12).

for a stronger partner – for example in the form of the National Democrats or the chief of state. In order to maintain social prestige and, at least partly, economic position, they agreed to an agricultural reform that was ultimately lethal to them.

c. A new sovereign of Polish society emerged from the turmoil of the war – in the form of the intelligentsia and the class of white-collar workers composing its immediate base. Even before 1914, the intelligentsia formulated a radical independence program, then offered the greatest sacrifice in blood to armed volunteer groups, led almost all political movements during the Great War, created and propagated a language describing the surrounding reality in the nation. This opened the door for the success of mass independence propaganda, and finally capitalized on the potential to build an infrastructure capable of building state institutions, including a large and patriotic army, social and political capital, plus the ability to shape public opinion and represent the interests of various environments and social groups (including peasants).

d. Although there is no doubt that, as a result of the wartime changes, the position of Poland's peasant classes significantly increased; although there was no emancipation breakthrough. A closer look at the world of workers shows that during the war it was heavily weakened, and in a considerable measure workers were dispersed or resettled/evacuated to the east. The importance of the workers' movement at the turn of 1918–1919, and especially its successes, was the result of the action of the intellectual proletariat and the workers subordinated to them, rather than the working class itself. The successes of the peasants (as well as Polish women) were rather given than won – this is clearly evident when women were granted the right to vote – they received it before they decidedly asked for it. The strength of the workers' and people's movement of the first weeks of independence resulted primarily from the mobilization of their intellectual elite leadership rather than from real aspirations of workers and peasants. In the perspective of a few years, the potential of people's and workers' movement from autumn and winter of 1918 turned out to be illusory. This explains the rapid recovery of the political initiative and the subsequent domination of right-wing and conservative currents and nationalists.

e. Extremely important social changes in the war years were connected with the incredible acceleration of the processes of social integration of Poles, both territorially between the partitions and socially (narrowing the divide between the most important social groups). The basic integrating factor was the idea of building a sovereign, Polish nation state, which in 1917–1918 was widely regarded as a panacea for all the great and small problems of Poles as a national

community and various Polish social environments. The conscious opening up of the enlightened classes towards the popular milieus also played a key role – as part of the educational movement and the building of local administrative and judicial authorities. The positions held by Russian officials were increasingly occupied by Poles.

f. This process was accompanied by another change in the national geography in the history of Poland. Under the influence of the development of the political situation, but also as a result of shaping a new economic and social order, in the war years there was a significant increase in the role of central Poland, with Warsaw, Łódź and Lublin, as the most important centers of the reviving Polish state. This was at the expense of Galicia, whose significance and role as a Polish Piedmont after the fall of the January Uprising cannot be overestimated.

g. An important feature of the social history of Polish lands from 1914–1918 was the role of Warsaw as a center of Polish national life, growing from year to year. After being occupied by the Germans, it became the place of activity of the most important Polish national social organizations and political initiatives. This trend gained additional strength after the announcement of the Act of 5th November. What is more, the opening of the University of Warsaw contributed to the rapid development of intellectual, academic and student life. Significant, as for the conditions of war, the scope of creative freedom and a large public contributed to the settlement of Warsaw's increasingly numerous artists (from writers to actors and musicians) and to the development of artistic and cultural institutions. Here, more newspapers and magazines were published than anywhere else, with ambitions of influence across partitions. A factor significantly facilitating Warsaw's rise to preeminence was the temporary occupation of Lwów and the progressive weakening of Austria relative to Germany.

h. The period of the war was another stage of the great national shifting of Poles to the West. Above all, under the influence of social and national revolutions that took place in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, and as a result of the political development after the February Revolution of 1917, there was an exodus of hundreds of thousands of Poles who were forced to leave their families, places of residence and work – usually leaving almost all the material and cultural achievements accumulated for generations. To the east of the border established by the Treaty of Riga, a significant number of Polish peasants, minor nobility and intelligentsia remained. However, the importance of these elements in social life, politics, economy and culture was much smaller than before 1914. At the same time, however, the process of increasing the

role of the western territories in the life of the Polish national community continued. The result of national revival in the Prussian partition and Silesia were the Greater Poland and then Silesian uprisings, but also the development of the national movement in the Warmia region.

i. During the war, there was a very strong nationalization of social awareness and attitudes as well as the public space. The systematic propaganda of Polish, German and Russian national ideologies, but also Ukrainian, Lithuanian or Belarusian (and at least the same nationalization of the policies of states participating in the war) brought effects in 1917–1918 in the form of rapidly progressing nationalization of the masses and their easier mobilization under national slogans. In central and western Poland, these processes acted in favor of Polish national interests and were conducive to the implementation of ambitious political plans. However, in the East, beginning in the area of Białystok, Chełm and Przemyśl, the Poles were faced with the national movements of Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus on a daily basis.

j. The war had a significant impact on the level of alienation of the Jewish population – in both the local and global dimension. It turned out that the Jews stood out significantly from the rest of the population. There were sharp cultural clashes, for example against the backdrop of social welfare, or food supply, as the Jews received foreign aid from American organizations. They enjoyed political and administrative autonomy, and the partitioning powers and occupiers played easily on differences and separateness. It is very possible (which requires further research) that the development of the war situation significantly contributed to the sharp exacerbation of conflicts and anti-Jewish manifestations immediately after the war.

Most of the opinions formulated above are just hypotheses. However, if they inspire the reader to discussions, and in particular research that allows them to be verified, the authors will consider their task successfully completed.

4. The fourth task had an individual character. It resulted from the fact that the study proposed by Maciej Górny went far beyond the scope of an academic article and required editing as an independent scholarly publication. The results of his work are contained in a book published as the eleventh volume of the *Metamorfozy Społeczne (Social Metamorphoses)* series. The publication, entitled “Draftsmen of Homelands: Geographers and Boundaries of Interwar Europe”,⁶

⁶ M. Górny, *Kreślarze ojczyzn. Geografowie i granice międzywojennej Europy*, Warszawa, 2017 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 11).

discusses the subject of the relationship between geography and the process of changing borders in East-Central Europe and South-Eastern Europe during and immediately after the First World War.

The analysis covers the parameters taken into account in justifying the territorial programs of states and national movements, and the argumentation strategies that appear, among others, during the proceedings of the peace conference in Paris. Important parts of the book are fragments of maps, treated not as illustrations, but as part of the narrative. On the basis of analyzed testimonies, both published and archived, the author presented the course of negotiations in a new light, enhancing the role of academic experts which has often been marginalized in research to this point. An additional dimension of the work is a collective biography of a group of academics from East-Central and South-Eastern Europe involved in the debates described in the book. In addition to Eugeniusz Romer, this group included among others: Jovan Cvijić, Stepan Rudnyčyj, Erwin Hanslik, Jerzy Smoleński, Niko Županić, Stanisław Pawłowski, Ludomir Sawicki and also a French geographer, Emmanuel de Martonne, tied to Romania through friendships and research interests.

In addition to their academic field, they shared the pre-war experience of participating in the seminar of Albrecht Penck. During the Great War (and in some cases a bit earlier), the paths of the German master and his students diverged. In the interwar period, Penck became one of the leaders of the German revisionist movement, while his former students often held high academic positions in countries that benefited from the defeat of the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. A summary of the analysis of academic and political statements about the borders with the biographies of these scholars allows to emphasize the impact of the First World War on the history of geographic sciences.

5. The fifth task concerned the editing of a collection of source materials constituting the documentation of the work of the Austrian military censorship agencies from the First World War period, and stored in the *Kriegsarchiv* (War Archive) in Vienna.⁷ The initiator and coordinator of these activities was Jan Molenda. The inclusion in this volume of extensive information about the contents of this publication along with elements of the substantive analysis of

⁷ *Wielka Wojna w korespondencji zatrzymanej przez cenzurę austro-węgierską. Materiały polskich grupy cenzury z lat 1914–1918*, vol. 1–4 ed. by P. Brudek, J. Molenda, J.Z. Pająk, vol. 5: indices – J.Z. Pająk, M. Sala, Warszawa, 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 13–17).

the source material prepared and released,⁸ exempts one from a more detailed discussion of this achievement here.

6. The sixth task: Another extremely important historical source introduced into wider academic circulation is the journal of Vilnius local and cooperative activist and polyglot, Aleksander Szklennik (1864–1921), written in Vilnius throughout the entire *Ober Ost* period, prepared and submitted for publication by Joanna Gierowska-Kałamur.⁹ This is the only such extensive and precise record of everyday life in the city on the Neris during the German occupation. The worldly author settled in Vilnius after the revolution of 1905. His account covers various aspects of city life, starting with the conditions of everyday life of residents, a description of the German authorities' actions and reactions to them by the local communities (local government, social and national groups); then through the chronicle of local events, to a range of information on political life, both in the local dimension as well as commentaries on all-Polish, and even pan-European and worldwide issues. An important decision by the editor was including various external materials – press clippings, appeals, announcements etc., collected and pasted by Szklennik between his handwritten notes, into the publication. They not only enrich the message about the reality reported by the author, but are also a major asset in the reconstruction of the information resources (also rumors and gossip functioning in public circulation), which the participants of the events at that time had at their disposal.

The extensive journal is physically divided into 9 notebooks, but in terms of its content, it should be divided into three parts: part I – from the Russian evacuation of 1915 to the February Revolution; part II – from the February Revolution to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; and part III – from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the defeat of Germany at the end of the war.

Biographical identifiers in footnotes are drawn up on the basis of Vilnius archives that have not yet been published. An attempt was made to verify Aleksander Szklennik's information, or, if possible, to supplement the author's narrative with information about facts about which he himself did not know, or considered it inappropriate to write about directly. The characterization of the city of Vilnius in the era of the events described in the comprehensive

⁸ See in the present volume: P. Brudek, J. Molenda, J.Z. Pająk, *The Great War in Polish Correspondence Intercepted by Austro-Hungarian Censorship: Materials of Polish Censorship Groups from 1914–1918*, pp. 199–224.

⁹ *Diariusz Aleksandra Szklennika*, pt. 1, ed. by J. Gierowska-Kałamur, Warszawa, 2018 (Metamorfozy Społeczne, 18).

introduction prepared by the editor, based on information from the archives of the Polish Committee in Vilnius, is thus extremely valuable.

Regardless of what outcomes and impacts the grant team has managed to achieve, there is no doubt that our state of knowledge about the social history of the Polish territories, both mentally and structurally, remains extremely modest. There are many subjects still waiting for researchers. There remains a lack of systematic, modern analysis of structural changes, especially from a tri-partition perspective. There is not even a preliminary proposal to show the course of integration processes within the Polish national community of the three partitions and lands under foreign rule before 1772. Recently, several works have been published devoted to the period of war in Upper Silesia, but this is still only a drop in the ocean.

In particular, children remain almost outside historical reflection, although researchers perceive them as the group most affected by the war. Subjects related to childhood have already found themselves in books devoted to refugees, but only marginally. Their authors, however, concentrate primarily on aid organizations and the types of help they directed to the youngest. The latest monograph on childcare in Łódź during the war focuses on institutions and the scope and forms of care. However, it would be good to recreate the experience of war from the perspective of children. The issue of war orphans, both its scale and the impact of this phenomenon on the change of social relations, remains unresearched. In the course of further research, it would also be necessary to raise the still unexplored issues of the impact of war on the family, to consider how it affected its durability, the relationship between spouses, parents and offspring. Finally, it would be useful to examine how the families torn apart by the war managed to cope. It would also be important to recreate the experience of workers, and especially the impact of unemployment resulting from the war on the further functioning of this social class. It is necessary, at the conclusion of several years of work by a team of several dozen researchers, to state that their work contributed to the lengthening of the list of research topics needed to be undertaken, rather than to giving answers to the questions nagging social historians of this era.

This publication has two goals. The first is the dissemination of information about the entirety of our project to researchers of social history of the twentieth century, especially to those interested in the fate of Central and Eastern Europe. The second goal is to facilitate the access to some of the most interesting texts that are the result of the work of the team, and published in

English here as another volume of the *Social Metamorphoses* series. Reading them will also allow the formation of an opinion on the nature of our work and highlight the most important issues discussed during our academic sessions and workshops.

Włodzimierz Mędrzecki