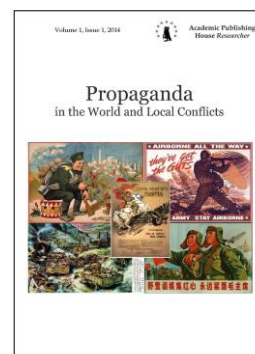


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“The Image of the Enemy” in the Russian Empire during the Great War

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Abstract

The article analyzes the formation of “the image of the enemy” in the Russian society in 1914–1916 on the basis of periodical and non-periodical publications. The author focuses on the relationship of information policy and its part in the military-political events in the world. It displays the impact of media on mass consciousness. It is also noted that the formation of the image of the enemy was productive in the army and among the population, but only during the early years of the war.

In addition to newspapers and illustrated periodicals (“Lyetopis’ voyny”, “Velikaya voyna v obrazakh i kartinkhakh”, “Ogonyok”, “Iskry”, “Neva”), brochures and books, published for “propagandizing” the reader during the Great War were also used as materials for the article.

Keywords: propaganda, periodicals, “the image of the enemy”, prisoners of war, occupation, the Great War, public opinion.

1. Introduction

The Great War (1914–1918) became the symbol of a new total warfare, massive ideological confrontation, violation of international humanitarian law. All this required the governments of the warring states to have a total influence on the mass consciousness of the population, to form patriotic sentiments, and to create a negative image of the enemy, to mobilize all material and spiritual efforts to continue the protracted war. Consideration of these phenomena became the goal of this publication.

2. Materials and methods

During the war, a significant amount of propaganda literature was published, with a purpose to form an image of a cruel, inhuman enemy that should be defeated without any doubts. It is noteworthy that in the pre-war period the Russian society traditionally highly valued the cultural heritage of Germany. Now, German culture was viewed as barbaric propaganda, which threatened the whole European civilization.

In addition to newspapers and illustrated periodicals (“Lyetopis’ voyny”, “Velikaya voyna v obrazakh i kartinkhakh”, “Ogonyok”, “Iskry”, “Neva”), brochures and books, published for “propagandizing” the reader during the Great War were also used as a source base for the article.

In this article the author used a number of general historical research methods. Thus, when analyzing the mood in Russian society during the war years and the influence of propaganda on it, the retrospective method was of great importance. It allowed to show how military events in the world resonated with the propaganda campaign.

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The comparative historical method was used to study the propaganda literature directly; it allowed the author to trace the general trends and peculiarities in the information policy of the state during 1914-1916.

The sociological method of sampling material was used during the database processing. Given the significant number of both periodical and non-periodical publications, the author, in his subjective view, chose the most popular illustrated magazines, as well as brochures and books reflecting the formation of “the image of the enemy” during World War I.

3. Discussion and results

The outbreak of hostilities triggered a massive propaganda campaign in the warring countries. Thus, in the first days of the war, thousands of Russians located in Germany found themselves interned. Some of them could soon return back home. Their unfortunate experiences were promptly reported in 1915 by the publications of: E. Mogilensky “The hostage diary: 7 months of captivity in Carlsbad” ([Mogilenskiy, 1915](#)), N. Sergievsky “Notes of a captive: Two and a half months in captivity by the Germans” ([Sergievskiy, 1915](#)), M. Yakubovskiy “In the Devil's Tower: Impressions of the experiences of the captured Russian official in Vienna” ([Yakubovskiy, 1915](#)).

In 1914-1917 numerous publications appeared and spread in the army, telling about the abuse of Austro-German troops towards the prisoners of war in order to raise morale among the troops and prevent mass surrenders. For example, individual booklets: I. Kurmoyarov “A terrible story: (Stories of the Russian soldiers who fled from the German captivity)” ([Kurmoyarov, 1915](#)), V. Markozov “Heavy recent past” ([Markozov, 1915](#)), B. Radonich “Diary of a sister of mercy, who lived in German captivity for nearly 4 months” ([Radonich, 1915](#)), V. Fomin “Among cultural barbarians: 14 months in German captivity” ([Fomin V. 1915](#)).

The book “War of the fourteenth year. According to the stories of participants and eyewitnesses” was published in 1915 in Kiev. Its author, priest and publicist S. Broyakovskiy, summarized the periodicals in addition to the “nationwide patriotic upsurge and monarchical moods” in the country and spoke about the atrocities of the German-Austrian troops during the first months of the war in the occupied territories of the Russian Empire ([Broyakovskiy, 1915](#)).

In 1915-1916 three volumes of the official history of the war were released, in which the authors tried to convince readers of the misanthropic theory of Pan-Germanism, the need to endure all hardships for the sake of victory over the cruel enemy. “Witnesses of the wars that have been so far do not believe their eyes, seeing the unprecedented atrocities practiced by the Teutons on the battlefields and at sea ... It seems that the “ humane ” twentieth century will require satisfaction and response for the entire robbery practiced nowadays by Wilhelm”. ([Velikaya vojna v obrazah i kartinah, 1915: 4](#)). Thus, Professor A. Pylenko pointed out the widespread brutality of German troops and tried to give an explanation. He stressed that over the past century, German propaganda prepared the population to accept the ideas of militarism and Pan-Germanism, the main slogan of which was “Germany is above all” ([Pilenko, 1915: 274](#)).

The authors of books and articles tried to present Russia as a Christian, civilized country, a defender of truth and justice, opposed to the barbaric “Teutons”. “In this war there are two worlds: the world of modern culture and the world of the distant past, from the legends of the Tevtoburg forests” ([Kiev, 1914](#)).

It is noteworthy that the Russian pacifist organizations declared the need to wage war until the complete defeat of Prussian militarism. For example, the Moscow Peace Society, pointing to the cruelty of the enemy, noted: “There may be an exaggeration in some messages, but there is already enough factual evidence... Russia with its allies must finally defeat the enemy, unclench its armored fist and crush the hydra of militarism” ([Semenov, 1915: 146](#)). The Petrograd branch of the Society of Peace, justifying the war that had begun, emphasized that “the slogan “for the right, culture and civilization united our beliefs and our reason” ([Semenov, 1915: 146](#)). Some authors argued that the post-war, defeated Germany should represent fragmented principalities, as it was before the beginning of the Chancery of O. Bismarck. ([Velikaya vojna v obrazah i kartinah, 1915: 8](#)).

With the beginning of the war, the press actively forms the image of Germany and Austria-Hungary as a cruel enemy. “The system of Bismarck and Wilhelm II gave its fruits, and the ideals of the fist became the soul of a German” ([Denisyuk, 1914: 652](#)). The Russian magazine “Niva” began publishing material on German atrocities during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, drawing an analogy with the actions of Wilhelm’s troops in the occupied areas of Poland, Belgium and France.

In the first weeks of the war, in the newspapers, the German emperor was portrayed in a rather caricature form: a small Belgian boy in wooden shoes was blocking his path, or he ran away in panic from the Cossacks. At first he was funny and not scary. A month after the German invasion of Belgium, France and Poland, the image of the Kaiser is being shaped by the press in demonic, ominous tones. Famous psychiatrist, academician V. Bekhterev prepared an essay “Wilhelm is a degenerate of the Neron type” in which, describing the German emperor, he pointed to his “messianism” (the Kaiser often emphasized that God himself spoke through his mouth), cruelty and signs of mental disorder. The scientist came to the conclusion that the Kaiser, with his delusional ideas, a penchant for abnormal psychological manifestations, was a “typical degenerate” on the throne (Behterevev, 1915: 252-253).

“Letopis voyny” promptly acquainted the readers with Wilhelm's war plans: “I will take Brussels on August the 3rd, I will have dinner on the 11th in Paris, on the 19th I will land near St. Petersburg” (Letopis voynyi, 1914: 29).

The population was warned of a possible invasion of the enemy in the European provinces of Russia. Thus, the propaganda prepared the society for the need to conduct a partisan war to assist the army. For example, “Niva” published a report “Captured by women”: on the forced landing of a German aircraft and the capture of its 2 pilots by the peasant women working in the fields (Niva, 1914. № 37: 722).

The opinion that the subjects of the Empire of all nationalities, social groups and religions were united around the idea of protecting “the throne and the Motherland” was actively formed in the minds of the public

The outstanding philosopher F.A. Stepun, who served as an ensign in the 12th Siberian Infantry and Artillery Brigade, in September 1914, assessing the propaganda campaign that had begun in the warring countries, wrote: “All the most evil, sinful and foul, forbidden by the elementary conscience in relation to one person to another, is now truth and heroism” (Stepun, 2000: 5).

The devastated city Louvain is considered to be a symbol of cruelty of the German army in Belgium. The entire world press wrote about it in August 1914. Polish provincial town of Kalisz, located four miles from the border became a place of bloody events in the Russian-German front from the first days of the war. The press, covering the enemy's presence, published a photograph of the “first victim of German atrocities” – the provincial treasurer, P. I. Sokolov, shot by the Germans for refusing to give money. Reporters published evidence of B. Bukovinsky (the mayor of Kalisz) on the atrocities of the German troops (Breshko-Breshkovskiy, 1914: 776). According to press reports, before leaving, the Germans fired artillery on Kalisz, resulting in death of dozens of civilians. A total of 420 houses were burned down during the occupation, according to incomplete data, losses amounted to 50 million rubles. It is noteworthy that German citizens who lived in Kalisz also reported losses of 2 million rubles. (Niva, 1914. № 38: 3).

Polish Częstochowa, where the Catholic Yasnogorsk monastery was plundered and desecrated, was subjected to the same fate, the population was subject to indemnification and 18 inhabitants were shot (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 101). According to eyewitnesses, Austrians executed 17 people in Kielce (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 121). This information, presented in the collection and borrowed from newspapers, was written for propaganda purposes in order to expose the policies of the enemy in the occupied territories, and, accordingly, requires further study and comparison with other sources.

The information about the presence of the enemy directly on the Ukrainian territory, then owned by the Russian Empire, is also interesting. In the first weeks of the war, Austro-Hungarian troops invaded Volyn and Podolsk provinces. For example, on August 3, 1914, the Austrian cavalry began advancing towards Vladimir-Volynsky (Volyn Province). However, six attacks of enemy cavalry were successfully repelled on the outskirts of the city, which suffered from enemy shelling. On August 7, the remnants of the Austrian troops withdrew to the border. According to eyewitnesses, the presence of the enemy in the Vladimir-Volyn district was remembered by the robbery of the population. But the Austrians did not hurt the civilians, declaring that they were then Austrian nationals; that Kovel and Warsaw had already been taken, and that Kiev would soon fall (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 135).

On August 4, Austrian troops approached the town of Gorodok (Podolsk Province), located 30 versts from the border, and shelled it with shrapnel. The city led a fierce battle for 8 hours.

The press later claimed that the Austrians finished off the wounded on the battlefield. The battle ended with the victory of the Russian troops: more than a hundred soldiers and 4 guns were captured. For several days, the Austrians occupied Satanov. The population was robbed, 5 people were killed; 80 inhabitants (among which was a priest) were taken as hostages by the Austrians (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 147).

Kamenetz-Podolsk was also subjected to the enemy invasion. On August 4, on their approaching the city, the Austrians shelled it: three citizens were killed on Pochtovaya Street. The local tailor M. Gorbman, who did not stop at the request of the Austrian patrol was shot. The city's population was lined up with a 200-thousand contribution, in addition, 800 poods of baked bread and 200 horse carriages were demanded from it. The townspeople managed to collect only 25 thousand rubles" (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 149). However, during the retreat from the city the money was returned. The commander of the 8th Russian army, General A. Brusilov, mentioned this in his memoirs: "The Austrians ... hastily left Kamenetz-Podolsk and completely returned the indemnity, which they collected from the residents of the city. It was completely natural, because they understood that if they took money from the residents of Kamenetz-Podolsk, then I would not spare Tarnopol, Trembovl and Chertkov" (Brusilov, 2003: 97).

However, due to the power of prayers, as pointed out by S. Broyakovsky, the Pochaev monastery was saved from desecration. On July 26, 1914, the first patrols of the Austrian cavalry appeared at Pochaev. "The Austrians robbed all around them and were going to move to Pochaev". For 11 days, the monastery was expecting to be captured by the enemy, who stopped only 3 miles from them. The monks were able to observe the Austrian cavalymen. But on August 6, as the Russian troops approached, the Austrians hurried back to the border (Broyakovskiy, 1915: 127).

According to the publications of 1914-1916, the enemy treated the wounded and prisoners of war the same as the civilian population in the occupied lands. From the first weeks of the outbreak of hostilities, it was reported that the Germans slaughtered the wounded, shelled ambulance trains and infirmaries. In August 1914, A. I. Guchkov (a member of the Main Directorate of the Russian Red Cross Society) informed the International Red Cross organization in Geneva about the systematic violation of international conventions by Austro-German troops against the wounded and prisoners of war. According to the military historian N.N. Golovin, about 2 million 417 thousand Russian soldiers and officers fell into enemy captivity. More than 200 thousand people died from epidemics, forced labor, hunger and bullying in captivity. (Golovin, 2001: 135).

Since the beginning of 1915, newspapers and magazines increasingly began to receive information from those who had been in captivity about the cruelties of the enemy towards the prisoners. As a result, on January 29, 1915, the State Duma decided to set up a commission to investigate violations of international conventions of warfare by Germany and Austria-Hungary. (Letopis voynyi, 1915. № 26: 421).

In April, the Emergency Investigation Commission was established under the chairmanship of Senator A. N. Krivtsov, and a year later documentary evidence of the atrocities of the Austro-German troops was published. The "first martyrs" were considered to be non-commissioned officer P. Panasyuk, corporal V. Water and telephone operator A. Makukha. With the description of their sufferings in captivity (during interrogations their noses, ears and tongues were cut, they were beaten), the press began to widely report on the enemy's abuse over the prisoners.

Thus, according to the testimony of the non-commissioned officer of the 1st Siberian Rifle Regiment N. Mishchenko, the prisoners refused to fulfill defense orders at a plant in Budapest. For this they were hanged by their hands to the post for 18 days. Then twenty people stabbed with bayonets, eight of them died. (Chrezvyichaynaya sledstvennaya komissiya, 1917: 14). A private soldier of the 18th Siberian Regiment N. Bokovets told about the situation of prisoners at the Witten factory in Germany. For refusing to make shells, people were forced to stand at the factory furnaces until the iron pads they were wearing turned red by the heat. The most stubborn prisoners were blindfolded and were intimidated by the execution. "The prisoners were waiting for the inevitable death and were crossing themselves while listening to the command, but there was no shooting, and morally exhausted people returned to the barracks until the next test" (Chrezvyichaynaya sledstvennaya komissiya, 1917: 17). On June 1, 1915, four prisoners were shot after refusing to build fortifications on the Italian front after being tortured by Austrians in the Brennerbad camp (Chrezvyichaynaya sledstvennaya komissiya, 1917: 48).

The local press called for assistance to those who were languishing in captivity, collecting food, clothing, and medicines for them. The Nikolaev committee of the Russian city union published the letter of prisoners with “a prayer to send them something edible, at least some crackers”. The letter was signed by I. Grundewald, J. Panchenko and Veremenko, privates of the 254th Nikolaev Infantry Regiment who were prisoners in the camp of Zerbst ([Nikolaevskaya gazeta, 1916](#)).

The beginning of the 1915 campaign made it possible for the Russian propaganda to accuse Germany of new crimes against humanity. In the spring, the Germans first used chemical weapons. Soon the press was full of photos of victims of German gas asphyxiation and the various gas masks that soon became widespread.

In 1915, after being defeated, the Russian troops left Poland, Lithuania, part of Latvia, western Belarus and Volyn. Columns of refugees were moving to the east, were shelled by the German artillery and airplanes at Brest, Kobrin, Slonim (Grodno Province). The press regularly reported on German air raids on peaceful cities. For example, it was noted that the cathedral of the city of Lomza was the object of constant enemy bombardment in March-April 1915 ([Iskryi, 1915. №20: 158](#)). The weekly newspaper “Zarya”, noting the goals of the war for the Entente, prophetically wrote: “Prussian militarism must not only be crushed. It is necessary to prevent its revival, to make this revival impossible” ([Zarya, 1915. № 21: 16](#)).

4. Conclusion

Thus, the key task of propaganda in 1914-1916 was the formation of a negative image of hostile states, support of the official ideology, dissemination of patriotic ideas to enhance morale, both in the army and among the civilian population. This was facilitated by the violation of international conventions of warfare by the troops of Germany and Austria-Hungary. It was proved by numerous facts (although some of them were created or exaggerated by propaganda): repressions against the civilian population, taking hostages, harassment of the wounded and prisoners of war – these methods were really used by the enemy on the Eastern Front. Throughout the war, the warring powers understood perfectly the role and significance of the propaganda factor in influencing compatriots and neutral countries. But the formation of the image of a cruel, inhuman enemy, who was actively created by the propaganda apparatus of the Russian Empire during 1914-1916, did not achieve the expected results: stories about real and imaginary atrocities of the enemy could no longer inspire the army tired of sitting in the trenches. This was vividly illustrated by the revolutionary events of 1917: “fraternization” with the enemy and the spread of anti-war sentiment among the broad masses of soldiers.

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