

What Do Ideas Do?

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The theme of this year's Junior Fellows' Conference, held in December of 2013, was "Reflections on the Role of Ideas and Agency in Europe." This is an important time to bring to the fore the interplay between human thought and human action, given the inadequacy of the great ideological systems which have remade (and continue to remake) Central and Eastern Europe over the past century. As the latest events in Ukraine testify, simple prescriptions for or dismissals of the centrality of ideas to historical action caricature the aspirations for which people both live and die. In this issue of the *Proceedings of the Junior Fellows' Conference*, the fellows of the IWM propose fruitful ways of approaching the question of the relationships between our mental constructs and our worlds—and what we choose to do about them.

Meditating on the "global language of revolution," **Agata Lisiak** eloquently describes the ways that women have been portrayed, since the 18th century, as the embodiments of both revolutionary aspirations and failures. Lisiak shows how images can contain and move multiple ideas—although in contested ways which are always open to reappropriation. By tracing the transforming landscape of revolutionary iconography, Lisiak shows that women are increasingly central to the shaping of revolutionary language although they have not yet entirely moved beyond the conditions of their social marginalization.

In her paper on the history of the Bulgarian women's movement, **Mariya Ivancheva** demonstrates the danger of building a movement without ideas by showing how the elite-driven women's movement in effect limited itself to the language of power with each major regime change (first in 1944, then in 1989). For this reason, Bulgaria has been the home to a robust women's movement but an anemic feminist one—indeed, a women's movement without feminism. The dangers of this, as Ivancheva argues, include both the marginalization of women and men who don't have the formal and social credentials to insinuate themselves within the institutions of the state, as well as limiting the political imaginations of both privileged and subaltern political actors.

Yet political imagination itself can also pose problems, as **Natalie Smolenski** shows in her paper about John Paul II's theology of history. By attaching himself to hybrid divine-human ideal objects—the Church, the nation, Europe—John Paul collapsed the distinction between God (and Christ, and Mary) and human historical actors, creating a vision of history in which a Catholic elect, particularly the Polish nation, plays the leading role in a global teleology of salvation through culture politics. Although the impetus behind this move was the desire to heal a nation, a continent, and ultimately a world ravaged by war and economic inequality, it produced a form of religious thought which idealizes specific lifeworlds as expressions of a transcendent, universal, and unchanging Divine will.

Kinga Marulewska, in turn, elucidates Carl Schmitt's political theology to show how important it is for social scientists and historians to take into consideration the links between the cultural formations of a lifeworld and the juridical and political concepts which underpin its state institutions. After outlining Schmitt's theories and responses to them, she calls for a broad application of Schmitt's method of "sociology of concepts" to many fields, particularly those investigating the links between religion and political life.

Volodymyr Sklokin shows how the concepts of "the intelligentsia" and "public intellectuals" have changed in a Ukraine that has been itself transforming since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. He argues that public intellectuals—idea-makers—have been on the rise and posits a distinction between those cleaving to a dogmatic view of history, in which the final truth to be historically demonstrated has been pre-decided, and "non-dogmatic historians," whose chief *modus operandi* is a critical appraisal of axiomatically posited historical dogmas. Finally, he shows how a small group of historian public intellectuals are moving beyond this thesis/antitheses polarity to comment openly and productively on the historical genealogies of ongoing political debates in the Ukraine.

Krisztina Rác demonstrates the problems with attempting to use a single idea—in her case, the analytic of "multiculturalism"—to describe and explain the relationships between people of different language and culture groups living in close proximity to one another. Taking a small town in the Serbian province of Vojvodina as her field site, Racz shows how theories of multiculturalism fall short of explaining situations in which people coexist peacefully and amicably but in which ethnic boundaries are still greatly salient. Positing more questions than answers, Racz paves the way for future investigations which will bring more conceptual rigor to making sense of difference in contemporary nation-states.

Similarly, **Christina Plank** argues that focusing on a single frame of reference hinders a thorough analysis of complex political and social phenomena. In her paper on the Ukrainian state as a social relation, Plank shows that many political analyses of contemporary Ukraine presume the superiority of an idealized Western state model without taking into account its historical origins. Distinguishing between the "good" West (the EU and the USA) and the "bad" East (Russia) unnecessarily obscures socio-economic problems in Ukraine. Instead, Plank proposes a Poulatzian approach that enables us to see the Ukrainian state in the context of international political economy.

Matthew Maguire demonstrates the importance of the idea of transparency in the shaping of international business relations. Increasingly many companies in Europe disclose information related to their social and environmental performance. While some critics of the so-called corporate non-financial reporting claim that these disclosures amount to little more than public relations “greenwash,” others argue that transparency of this kind has improved significantly over the past decade, helping companies to better understand their own impact on society and the environment and improving their long-term financial (as well as non-financial) performance. Maguire shows that public policy builds on the strengths of private regulation and notices a growing coalescence of support behind newly established rules and frameworks that is likely to influence the behavior of companies, governments, and other organizations far beyond the confines of Europe.

Gregory Winger brings our attention to defense diplomacy: the nonviolent use of military forces through activities like officer exchanges and ship visits to further a country’s international agenda. Despite existing in various forms for centuries, strikingly little scholarly attention has been paid to this practice or its use as a tool of statecraft. Breaking with existing approaches to defense diplomacy, Winger identifies the concept as a variant of soft power which is used to co-opt the strategic thinking of another state. By linking defense diplomacy to the concept of soft power, Winger’s paper not only encapsulates the practice as it is currently used by governments, but also illustrates the underlying mechanism that makes defense diplomacy an effective geopolitical tool.

The last two papers in the volume discuss how certain ideas and practices evolved over centuries and how they continue to resurface, in altered forms, in the contemporary world. **Oskar Mulej** provides a historical sketch of the developments of national liberal party traditions among Czechs, Germans, and Slovenes in the Cisleithanian half of the Habsburg Empire at the turn of the 20th century. He focuses specifically on the changing relationship between the national and liberal components within national liberalism and the ensuing process of fragmentation of national liberal political parties. Mulej discusses the ideological diffusion, continuous loss of liberal identity, and adoption of new labels that characterized national liberalism in the early 20th century and proposes to call national liberals of that time “heirs of liberalism” rather than simply “liberals.”

Assaf Ashkenazi inquires into the specifics of the 16th century Hebrew translation of a Spanish book of chivalry, *Amadís de Gaula*. The unique function of transliteration in the Hebrew *Amadís* – specifically, its rare employment in the text – indicates a translational tension: violation of the norms of the target (Jewish) culture on the one hand and preservation of its contemporary literary and linguistic restraints on the other hand. A close analysis of this phenomenon, Ashkenazi argues, sheds a light on our understanding of the developments of the Hebrew language in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the transition of Hebrew literary centers from Europe to Israel after World War II. Importantly, however, his work shows how stories function as the repositories of ideas and values which are shared among communities (early modern Spanish Christians and Jews) which otherwise are characterized by profound differences. Indeed, the very possibility of translation shows that the expression of difference may be made even more meaningful by articulating languages.

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