

THE SHIFT IN THE LITHUANIAN APPROACH TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN ARMY, 1914–1915

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ABSTRACT

During the Great War, the period 1914 to 1915 was one of the most intense stages of interaction by Lithuanian society with daily life of the war, and at the same time the most active stage in military action in the future Lithuania. While many men were called up into the ranks of the Imperial Russian army, most of the remaining population ended up under the military authorities, experienced the requisition of their personal property, and observed (at first in the rear) intense military movements to and fro. This article looks at how the change in the front line, and the successes and failures of the armies of the Romanov Empire, contributed to the change in the image of the Russian army in the Lithuanian discourse. Features of the change are revealed in the article by analysing both the line taken by the official press during the initial period of the Great War, and the assessments of the Russian army that appeared in individual reflections (diaries and memoirs). It asks how the image of the Russian army changed during this period, and why. KEY WORDS: First World War, Imperial Russian army, army image, discourse, war propaganda, war representation, war reception.

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ANOTACIJA

Didžiojo karo metais 1914–1915 metų laikotarpis buvo vienas intensyviausių lietuvių visuomenės sąveikos su karo kasdienybe etapų ir kartu aktyviausias karo veiksmų būsimosios Lietuvos teritorijoje tarpsnis. Tuo metu, kai daug krašto vyrų buvo mobilizuota į Rusijos imperijos kariuomenės gretas, dauguma likusių gyventojų atsidūrė karinės valdžios dispozicijoje, patyrė asmeninio turto rekvizicijas ir stebėjo (pirma užnugaryje) intensyvių kariuomenės judėjimą pirmyn ir atgal. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip fronto linijos kaita, Rusijos armijų sėkmės ir nesėkmės prisidėjo prie Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdžio lietuvių diskurse kaitos. Šios kaitos bruožai atskleidžiami analizuojant tiek pradiniu Didžiojo karo periodu oficialioje spaudoje palaikytas nuostatas, tiek ir individualiose refleksijose (dienoraščiuose, atsiminimuose) pasireiškusių Rusijos kariuomenės vertinimus. Keliamas klausimas, kaip kito Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdis minėtu laikotarpiu, kuriuos ir kodėl šio kismo momentus galima išskirti kaip esminius.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, Rusijos imperijos kariuomenė, kariuomenės įvaizdis, diskursas, karo propaganda, karo reprezentavimas, karo recepcija.

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When writing about the Russian army, authors both in Russia and in other European countries have often stated that before the Great War, the image of the army was determined by a previous legacy. In the early 20th century, the Russian army was still seen as 'behind', an idea that was influenced by the Crimean (1853–1856), Ottoman (1877–1878), and especially Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) wars. For example, Vladimir Serebriannikov, a former Soviet officer and sociologist, maintained that in the early 20th century, the image of its own army in the society of the Russian Empire was deteriorating inexorably,¹ so that by the eve of the Great War it would have already hit an unprecedented low. Although in Russia itself the assessment of its military capability and readiness for war remained cautious and sceptical, other participants in the 'European concert' at the time were not so sure about Russia's capabilities. The assessment of Russia as weak and totally unprepared for war, which spread abroad immediately after its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, tended to change. The main reason for this change was the military reforms of 1905–1912, which formed preconditions for West European political and military circles to see the growing capabilities of the Russian army. If Britain and France overestimated it, the Austrians and especially the Germans clearly underrated Russia's potential.² At least the change from Yuri Danilov's defensive plan of 1910 to Mikhail Alekseev's offensive plan of 1912³ shows that post-Japanese-war reforms also influenced the attitudes of various strata of society in the Russian Empire. Thus, the image of the Imperial Russian army was indeed far from being coherent and indisputable.

The image of the Russian army in Lithuanian society, and the issue of how it changed due to the experience of the Great War, have so far hardly been explored. Historical research exists about the course of the Great War in the future Lithuania, the mass displacement of the population, the phenomenon of Ober Ost, the experience of the German occupation, the attitude of German soldiers towards Ober Ost, etc. Christopher Barthel's recent dissertation showed how the former Russian rule was contested in German newspapers published in Ober Ost from late 1915,⁴ but the lo-

¹ СЕРЕБРЯННИКОВ, Владимир. Армия в общественно-политических взаимодействиях. Социологические исследования, 1996, № 4, с. 67.

² See ROPPONEN, Risto. *Die Kraft Russlands. Wie beurteilte die politische und militärische Führung der europäischen Grossmächte in der Zeit von 1905 bis 1914 die Kraft Russlands?* Helsinki, 1968; ROPPONEN, Risto. *Die russische Gefahr. Das Verhalten der öffentlichen Meinung Deutschlands und Österreich-Ungarns gegenüber der Aussenpolitik Russlands in der Zeit zwischen dem Frieden von Portsmouth und dem Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs.* Helsinki, 1976; WOHLFORTH, William C. The Perception of Power: Russia in the Pre-1914 Balance. *World Politics*, 1987, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 355–368.

³ Cf. SNYDER, Jack. *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914.* Ithaca, NY and London, 1984, pp. 165–198.

⁴ BARTHEL, Christopher A. *Contesting the Russian Borderlands: the German Military Administration of Occupied Lithuania, 1915–1918.* PhD dissertation. Providence, RI, 2011, pp. 145–154; see also BARTHEL, Christopher A. The Cultivation of *Deutschtum* in Occupied Lithuania during the First World War. In *World War I and Propaganda* (History of Warfare, vol. 94). Ed. by Troy R. E. PADDOCK. Leiden, Boston, MA, 2014, pp. 222–246.

cal Lithuanian-speaking population was outside their audience. Besides, historians often look at the experiences of the Lithuanian population during the war with an emphasis on the influence of the German occupation, which began in the summer and autumn of 1915. In turn, with the exception of Andrea Griffante's research,⁵ the period 1914 to 1915 has not enjoyed much attention in this respect. This is rather surprising, as the period 1914 to 1915 in particular was one of the most intense stages of interaction by Lithuanian society with the daily life of the war, and at the same time the most active stage in military action in the future Lithuania. I would like to put the hypothesis that this stage was also the most important in the change of image of the Russian army: the way Lithuanians saw the Russian army for at least the next few decades might have been formed by the experiences of 1914 and 1915.

The article examines this hypothesis by revealing the image of the Russian army in Lithuanian society in the context of the changing situation on the German-Russian front. The question is asked how this image was changed in the initial phase of the Great War (1914–1915) by the successful, at least that is how it seemed at first, campaign to East Prussia, and the catastrophic retreat from the German army, which eventually occupied the territory of the future Lithuania. Which moments in this change can be distinguished as essential, and why? Answers to these questions will be offered here by examining both the provisions maintained in the official press and the reflections on the Russian army revealed in individual assessments. This is done on the assumption that individuals judged the Russian army in different ways, because the assessment depended on changes in military action, the political, economic and social circumstances of a particular war situation, and ultimately on personal emotions, expectations and beliefs. Thus, the article analyses both the official discourse, which encouraged people to see the army both as an instrument of the Romanov monarchy's power and as an institution binding society, and individual assessments, which showed the image of commanders, officers and ordinary soldiers in the Imperial Russian army. This coverage by the research also determined the relevant sources used in the work. The answer was searched for both in published and in unpublished ego-documents of witnesses of the war in Lithuania in 1914–1915: diaries and memoirs. But the Lithuanian periodicals of that time (*Šaltinis*, *Rygos garšas*, *Lietuvos žinios*) were also seen as a significant source. They were analysed in accordance with the principle that the military censorship that determined the content of newspapers contributed fundamentally to the image of the Russian army, and inevitably affected attitudes and evaluations circulating in Lithuanian society.

⁵ One of them is directly related to the object of the current article: GRIFFANTE, Andrea. Gemeinschaft und Mythos. Zwei litauische Narrative über den Ersten Weltkrieg (1914/1915). In *Der Große Krieg beginnt: Sommer und Herbst 1914 = The Great War begins: Summer and Autumn 1914* (Nordost-Archiv, 2015, 24. Jhg.). Hrsg. von Joachim TAUBER. Lüneburg, 2016, S. 97–113.

The 'mobilisation' of the image at the beginning of the Great War

In the initial period of the Russian-German military clash, the Russian army was portrayed in the Lithuanian press and ego-documents as morally and materially (physically) ready for war. This image was reinforced by various details that conveyed the discipline⁶ of the army and the deportment of officers, and reported on kit, weaponry, equipment (e.g. binoculars), food, and behaviour towards civilians.

During the first month of the war, when the Russian army invaded East Prussia, the Lithuanian press emphasised the 'unification of the Russian people against a strong enemy' and the 'defensive character of the Russian actions'. These were ideologemes used at the beginning of the war throughout the empire.⁷ The Russian army was perceived as a 'defender', and a 'rescuer' 'from the Germans',⁸ and in order to strengthen this image, the negative image of the Teutonic Order was often used (the Lithuanians at that time referred to the Order as 'Crusaders' or 'cross bearers'). A resolution adopted on 4 (17) August 1914 by the Lithuanian intelligentsia of Vilnius states: 'There came the hour of enlightenment [...] The day of battle will break the Teutonic sword. The day of peace will bring a living pool of nations, through which the wave of Germanism will no longer spread.' The resolution claimed: 'Again, Lithuanian warriors came together with Slavic warriors to fight the legacy of the Teutons, the all-embracing Germanism. We believe that this is the last link in the

⁶ For details, see: VIRELIŪNAS, A. Atsiminimai iš Didžio karo. *Karo archyvas*, 1925, t. I, p. 107–120. As noted by Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, 'Many of the privates in the infantry of the Russian army were people from the most diverse Russian provinces, and we must admit that we have not yet seen terrible beastly types. On the contrary, we have seen numerous times the deep soul of a thinking and suffering human, and clever people in general; we could even say that most of them had clear and healthy minds, even though they were not educated. It is difficult to tell if they had always been like that, or if the cruelty of war made them such' (PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, Gabrielė. *Karo meto dienoraštis*. T. I. Panevėžys, 2008, p. 150–151).

⁷ For more on the depiction of the Great War and anti-German propaganda in Russia, see JAHN, Hubertus F. *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I*. Ithaca, NY and London, 1998; БОРЩУКОВА, Елена. *Патриотические настроения россиян в годы Первой Мировой войны*. Диссертация. Санкт-Петербург, 2002, с. 66–85, 135–148; KOROWINA, Larissa. Munition ohne Patronen: Antideutsche Stimmungen und Propaganda in der russischen Armee während des Ersten Weltkriegs. In *Verführungen der Gewalt. Russen und Deutsche im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (West-östliche Spiegelungen, Neue Folge. Wuppertal-/Bochumer Projekt über Russen und Deutsche im 20. Jahrhundert, Bd. 1). Hrsg. von Karl EIMERMACHER und Astrid VOLPERT unter Mitarbeit von Gennadij BORDJUGOW. München, 2005, S. 243–266; JAHN, Hubertus F. Die Germanen. Perzeptionen des Kriegsgegners in Russland zwischen Selbst- und Feindbild. In *Die vergessene Front. Der Osten 1914/15. Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung* (Zeitalter der Weltkriege, Bd. 1). Hrsg. von Gerhard P. GROß. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich, 2006, S. 165–177; АСТАШОВ, Александр. *Пропаганда на Русском фронте в годы Первой мировой войны*. Москва, 2012; STOCKDALE, Melissa K. Mobilizing the Nation: Patriotic Culture in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914–20. In *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22. Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*. Ed. by Murray FRAME, Boris KOLONITSKII, Steven G. MARKS, and Melissa K. STOCKDALE. Bloomington, IN, 2014, pp. 3–26; СЕНЯВСКАЯ, Елена. Память о Первой мировой войне в России и на Западе: исторические условия и особенности формирования. In *Великая война: сто лет*. Ред. Михаил МЯГКОВ, Константин ПАХАЛЮК. Москва, Санкт-Петербург, 2014, с. 251–270.

⁸ J. Ar Vokietijos armija įsiverž Rusijon? *Rygos garsas*, 1914-08-02 (16), nr. 61 (393), p. 1.

sequence of victories that started near Žalgiris [the Battle of Grunwald of 1410]. As we believe that [...] Russia's historic mission is to be the Liberator of nations.⁹ This testifies to the fact that at least part of the Lithuanian intelligentsia perceived the Russian army marching to East Prussia as a military power capable of implementing the political aspirations of the Lithuanians.¹⁰ In this context, the assessment of the army did not lack manifestations of emotions. As Adolfas Nezabitauskis wrote, '*Germantsev shapkami zakidaem* [We'll beat up the Germans with hats]. This fierce, supposedly patriotic expression spread throughout Russia, and found a certain response in our country as well.'¹¹

While the Russian troops did not suffer major setbacks in East Prussia, the Lithuanian press was full of favourable attitudes towards them. When the Germans defeated the Second Russian Army under the leadership of General Alexander Samsonov in a triangle near Tannenberg, the news had not yet reached the Riga-based Lithuanian newspaper. So the paper enthusiastically reported: 'In Prussia, the Russian army is doing well. A number of larger and smaller towns have been taken from the Germans: Stalupėnai [Stallupönen], Gumbinė [Gumbinnen], Darkiemiai [Darkehmen], Johannsburg, Ortelsburg, Wilenberg, Soldau,'¹² without forgetting to mention the many trophies and depict the noble treatment of the population in the occupied territories by the Russian army.¹³ It should be noted that the names of towns of Lithuanian origin were conveyed in the Lithuanian style, thus clearly implying which part of the occupied space in East Prussia was 'ours'.

At the beginning of the war, Lithuanian society had little reason to perceive the Russian army as weak and unprepared. The fact that the armed forces of the empire were not perceived as backward in terms of technical and tactical readiness was due not only to ideological provisions but also to factual circumstances. In 1905–1912, the Russian army had undergone rapid reforms in many areas: a) in 1906, actual military service in the army was reduced from five to three or four years (depending on the type of troops), while the lowest ranks in the reserve were divided into two categories; these measures aimed at the quicker recovery of the reserve exhausted by the Russo-Japanese war; b) the army was equipped with new field and heavy artillery guns, modified machine guns, rifles, revolvers and pistols, and in 1911 the formation of the first military aviation units began; c) in 1909–1912, they introduced new military service statutes and instructions that made the training of the lowest military units

⁹ Lietuvių deklaracija. *Rygos garsas*, 1914-08-27 (09-09), nr. 68 (400), p. 1.

¹⁰ For more on these aspirations, see SAFRONOVAS, Vasilijus. *The Creation of National Spaces in a Pluricultural Region: The Case of Prussian Lithuania*. Boston, MA, 2016, pp. 20–21, 193–201.

¹¹ See: NEZABITAUSKIS, Adolfas. Karas mūsų žmonių nepalaužė. Žemaičiuose prieš pat audrą. In *Lietuva Didžiąjame kare*. Surinko ir red. Petras RUSECKAS. Vilnius, 1939, p. 42.

¹² R. Europos karo apžvalga. *Rygos garsas*, 1914-08-15 (28), nr. 65 (397), p. 1.

¹³ J. Karo vaizdai Prūsų Lietuvoje. *Rygos garsas*, 1914-08-23 (09-05), nr. 67 (399), p. 1–2.

effective; new programmes were introduced at military schools.¹⁴ Some Lithuanian speakers from the Suwałki, Kaunas and Vilnius provinces carried out military service under these reforms. The introduction of innovations in the army soon became confirmation of the huge potential of the 'Russian weapon' in the eyes of members of the peasant society who served in the army. In addition, the image of the power of the Imperial Russian army was constantly supported by the central newspapers. The effect of this policy was also noticeable in Lithuanian-speaking provinces. For example, this is how the competencies of the commander were described: 'Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich [...] was appointed chief of the whole Russian army; he was the heart of all the manoeuvres made in the last years. Under his leadership, the Russian cavalry has grown so much and is so well trained that it has no rivals in Europe. The supreme leader is well versed in how warfare is conducted by foreign troops, which may help him win the war with Germany and Austria [...] Warsaw General-Governor [Iakov] Zhilinskii [the commander of the Northwestern Front] is characterised by an excellent knowledge of foreign armies [because] he participated as a colonel in the [1898] war between Spain and America, and wrote a very significant book about the war [...] General and Vilnius General-Governor [*sic*; should be the commander of the Vilnius Military District (from 7 January 1913)] Rennenkampf is highly favoured by the soldiers for his extraordinary courage. He is a follower of the famous Russian military leader Skobelev, who did not spare the soldiers, but was always in the first ranks during a battle.'¹⁵ Thus, at the beginning of the Great War, Lithuanian society was unlikely not to perceive the Russian army as an 'unbeatable force'.

The fact that Russia's involvement in the war was presented to the public as a defensive reaction to the German ultimatum submitted on the night of 18/19 July (31 July/1 August) 1914 facilitated the understanding of the response by the Romanov empire as a 'war enforced upon Russia', and thus 'only the defensive nature of Russian actions'. Historical reminiscences initially allowed the outcome of this conflict to be imagined similar to that of 1812. 'There is nothing to fear for our own soldier,' said the Lithuanian Christian Democrat weekly *Šaltinis*, noting: 'after all, we have heard from our grandparents that a century ago the Frenchman went to Russia [...] and then, beaten up and frozen, only a few of them dragged their feet back to their homeland.'¹⁶ The publication argued that 'After the Japanese war, Russia has already fully recovered its old forces – strengthened, and introduced various improvements

¹⁴ КЕРСНОВСКИЙ, Антон. *История русской армии: в четырех томах. Т. III: 1881–1915 гг.* Москва, 1994, с. 130–155. Cf. also ЗАЙОНЧОВСКИЙ, Андрей. *Подготовка России к империалистической войне.* Москва, 1926, с. 83–97; БЕСКРОВНЫЙ, Любомир. *Армия и флот России в начале XX в. Очерки военно-экономического потенциала.* Москва, 1986; САКОНОВ, Олег. *Военные реформы 1905–1912 годов в России и их влияние на военное искусство.* Диссертация. Москва, 2002.

¹⁵ Rusijos armijos vadai. *Šaltinis*, 1914-08-02 (15), nr. 33, p. 495–496.

¹⁶ D., J. Rūgpjūčio mėn. 2 (liepos 20) d. Vokietija apskelbė Rusijai karą apie 1 val. nakties ir prasidėjo mūšiai Prūsų pasieniais. *Šaltinis*, 1914-07-22 (08-04), nr. 31, p. 461.

in the army and its weaponry. Russia has a total capacity of eight to ten million soldiers. It is a powerful enemy.¹⁷ Meanwhile, 'At the Russian border [...] the Germans will have only about one million soldiers, who, we know, will in no way be able to hold back the Russian army.'¹⁸ It was not difficult to describe the situation during the first month of the war as follows: 'Although Germany declared war on Russia, it was afraid of the attack and was waiting to see what happened [...] Russia occupies the largest areas of land. Despite the fact that it took a long time to mobilise and bring its soldiers into the theatre of war [...] in the coming days, one may expect great clashes that should end with Russia's complete victory. The morale of the Russian army is the best. It is more than ready for battle with the Germans.'¹⁹ The intrusion of the Imperial Russian army deep into East Prussia even made it possible to think: 'Not only will Lithuania avoid destruction, but it may even not hear many shots by enemies. The troops of France and England, Russia's allies, are coming to Germany. If the Russian army, stepping over the German border, goes deep into Prussia, then Lithuania will be completely protected from the all-destroying horrors of war.'²⁰ Therefore, the public was urged to respond enthusiastically to the general military mobilisation which started on 17 (30) July:²¹ 'to give up your chosen sons to fight against the enemy and to carry out the honourable duties of citizenship during mobilisation, by presenting horses, transport, livestock and [...]going back to quiet day-to-day work.'²²

There is little doubt that many of these images appeared in the Lithuanian press from the central publications of St Petersburg (Petrograd²³) and Moscow. For example, during the initial period of the war, the image of the Russian army as a perfectly prepared armed force was opposed to the image of the German army as the main opponent. The basis for this provision was the image supported by the official discourse of the 'high morale of the Russian army that overwhelms the technical advantages of the German army.'²⁴ On 24 September (7 October) 1914, the *Russkoe Slovo* newspaper wrote: 'The German army is a faceless, spiritless mass, consisting of automatons, as if with wires and switches: each of them operates under the direction of others. The Kaiser puts pressure on the military commanders, they put pressure on the next subordinates, and so on, down to the last private. This is how the automatic army works, its automatic strategy and tactics, even the automat-

¹⁷ Kaip eina karas. *Šaltinis*, 1914-07-25 (08-07), nr. 32, p. 479.

¹⁸ Su kuomi Vokiečiai mano pirmiausiai muštis? *Šaltinis*, 1914-07-25 (08-07), nr. 32, p. 480–481.

¹⁹ Kaip eina karas? *Šaltinis*, 1914-08-02 (08-15), nr. 33, p. 486.

²⁰ Stokime į kasdieninį darbą. *Šaltinis*, 1914-08-02 (08-15), nr. 33, p. 486.

²¹ In Congress Poland, and the Suwałki, Kaunas, Vilnius, Grodno and other provinces, martial law was imposed by the government on 20 July (2 August) 1914. See the corresponding decree of Emperor Nicholas II, 20 July 1914. *The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Manuscript Division (Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių bibliotekos Retų spaudinių skyrius)*, Sm-sp-1306, I. 3.

²² Stokime į kasdieninį darbą. *Šaltinis*, 1914-08-02 (08-15), nr. 33, p. 486.

²³ St Petersburg, the allegedly 'German' name of the Russian capital city, was changed on 18 (31) August 1914.

²⁴ Rytų karo lauke. *Lietuvos žinios*, 1914-09-08 (21), nr. 163, p. 1.

ic discipline and courage.²⁵ In turn, the image of the Russian army was shaped by emphasising its 'human dimension': apparently, the technically well-equipped and 'automatically trained' German army could be defeated by the 'Russian soldier-human' with all his inherent strengths, weaknesses and shortcomings.²⁶ Readers of the newspaper were persuaded that the 'simple Russian soldier' perceived his responsibility to the Russian people, and therefore his fighting spirit was much stronger than the German soldier, 'who was better armed, but obeying the whims of commanders'.²⁷ These narratives became especially pronounced in the Lithuanian press in the winter of 1914–1915, when the 10th Russian Army managed to stop the German military offensive in the Suwałki province. During this period we find statements in the Lithuanian press about the 'superiority of the Russian soldier's ingenuity and courage against the technically stronger Germans', and the 'moral strength of the Russian soldier', which 'led to the German offensive being stopped'.²⁸

Another example is how the image of the use of modern tactics in the Russian armed forces was taken over. The central press noted that Russian soldiers were taught to attack in wide ranks and short charges, exploiting the features of the terrain, and shooting from different positions and distances, thus avoiding greater losses of live power during the attack. Meanwhile, 'The German advance guard attacked in close ranks and dense lines, just like the Teutonic Knights'.²⁹ Similar opinions are found in the Lithuanian press. One issue of *Šaltinis* in 1914 said: 'The Germans attack the opponent in dense teams, so many of them fall dead or wounded'.³⁰ The publication emphasised that the success of the offensive battle tactics used by the Russian army 'strongly raise the morale of its soldiers', while the 'German tactic of assaulting in dense ranks' weakens soldiers' morale due to the heavy losses.³¹

However, all this was written by Lithuanian authors and placed in the censored press. Individual assessments were somewhat more cautious. Even considering that the memoirs below were written after the war, there are many commonalities in their assessments. For example, in describing the mobilisation, Antanas Vireliūnas stated in his memoirs: 'There was no militant attitude, even among Russian officials who were conscripted, although they pretended to be militant, but lamely; they were clearly dressed for clerical work, rather than for combat'.³² Pranas Eidukaitis, a resident of the village of Bambiniai in the Suwałki province, noted: 'Officers, such proud

²⁵ Автоматы. *Русское слово*, 1914-09-11 (24), № 208, с. 4.

²⁶ Ibid., с. 4.

²⁷ Телеграмма. *Новое время*, 1914-08-02 (15), № 13789, с. 2.

²⁸ ŽILINSKIS, B. Karo ugnyje... *Lietuvos žinios*, 1914-12-07 (20), nr. 189, p. 2–3.

²⁹ Автоматы. *Русское слово*, 1914-09-11 (24), № 208, с. 4.

³⁰ „Šaltinio“ telegramos apie karą. *Šaltinis*, 1914-08-02 (15), nr. 33, p. 488–489.

³¹ Ibid, p. 488. See also: J. Karo vaizdai Prūsų Lietuvoje. *Rygos garsas*, 1914-08-23 (09-05), nr. 67 (399), p. 1–2.

³² VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., p. 108.

men until now, seemed overwhelmed with terror. It looked as if half their blood was drained away.³³ Another example is worth mentioning, too. Summing up the experience of getting into the Russian army, Stasys Miliauskas described the conscription procedure in Raseiniai, a town in the Kaunas province: 'A semi-crazy *voinskii nachal'nik* [military commander], about 70 years old; the recruits' slum full of lice was the end point of all the tricks of the Russian authorities.'³⁴

The memoirs of witnesses questioned the level of preparedness of the Russian army as well. For example, at the time of the first mobilisation in the Lithuanian-speaking provinces and the 1st Army passing them, they quickly noted that the largest part of the army consisted of infantry, pushed 'on foot' into combat positions, armed with old weapons and poorly fed.³⁵ Many of the soldiers were allegedly not sure 'why they are going into war against the German', so they were mostly guided by the saying 'orders are orders.'³⁶ Witnesses who observed Russian military logistics at the border also expressed doubts. The press informed people that not only men suitable for service, but also machinery was called up, 'taking cars, as well as buses, lorries with carriages attached, free hauls and motorcycles for the army's needs'.³⁷ However, witnesses noted at the same time in diaries that all of the equipment was used by commanders (and was apparently used not only for the purposes of service). Meanwhile, local military logistics were supposed to be secured by 'mobilised carriers and carriages requisitioned from farmers of the Suwałki, Kaunas and Vilnius provinces'.³⁸

It is true that the Lithuanian public undoubtedly positively accepted some of the decisions of the Russian military leadership. For example, the abolition of the monopoly on vodka in the border provinces during the call-up period was treated in memoirs as a positive factor, not only for the army but also for the 'people of Lithuania'.³⁹ In the opinion of some witnesses, the restrictions that the military authorities placed on the sale of colonial goods, and mediation in the purchase of horses and livestock, also had more benefits than drawbacks. This was a 'blow' to Jewish businesses.⁴⁰ Andrius Martus reflected during the war: 'Not only villagers, but also priests,

³³ EIDUKAITIS, P. *Visą laiką vilkome karo jungą*. In *Lietuva Didžiąjame kare...*, p. 26.

³⁴ MILIAUSKAS, S. *Vakarykščiai atsiminimai. Karo archyvas*, 1925, t. I, p. 89.

³⁵ BACEVIČIUS, Vladas. „*Pergyventos dienos. Atsiminimai iš Lietuvos karų. Kiek teko pergyventi karo baisumą*“. *Kalinio atsiminimai. 1938 m.* [manuscript]. Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division (*Lietuvos nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos Retų knygų ir rankraščių skyrius*, hereafter *LNNMB*), F. 130–523, I. 15–16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 15–16; ŽADEIKIS, Pranciškus. *Didžiojo karo užrašai*. Vilnius, 2013, p. 22. For more on the attitude of Russian soldiers towards the war, see: ПОРШНЕВА, Ольга. *Менталитет и социальное поведение рабочих, крестьян и солдат России в период Первой мировой войны (1914–1918)*. Диссертация. Екатеринбург, 2000, especially с. 209–254; КУЛТЫШЕВ, Павел. *Русская армия в Первой мировой войне. Историко-антропологический аспект*. Диссертация. Ростов-на-Дону, 2010.

³⁷ *Automobiliai – karo reikalams*. *Šaltinis*, 1914-07-25 (08-07), nr. 32, p. 483.

³⁸ ŽADEIKIS, P. *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁹ PIKČILINGIS, Jonas. *Pergyventos valandos. Karo archyvas*, 1926, t. III, p. 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92–93.

were happy about it; everyone I met was saying, "It's very good that they will clean Lithuania."⁴¹ The memoirs of Jonas Pikčilingis sound similar: 'It cannot be said that the closure of Jewish shops was very difficult for the rest of the population. They were rather pleased with the non-Jewish shops.'⁴²

However, not only were the decisions by the military leadership that directly affected civilian life positively viewed. The opinion of the Russian army, despite the above-mentioned reservations, remained positive in ego-documents. For example, Vladas Bacevičius later recalled that the public expressed its sympathy clearly: 'I started to understand the outcome of the war when I saw the Russian soldiers marching [...] Their gigantic armies were marching along the River Nemunas towards Germany, and it was pure pleasure, but also sadness, to watch them. Men in the best years of their life, between the ages of 21 and 30: what did they get out of it? They were taking their youth to the jaws of hell, to the theatre of war, where perpetual misery was waiting for them. They would leave their bodies in distant places in the German countryside, which they had never expected. Their sad passing was a source of sadness for the people watching them, and when they started a war song, or even when the band began to play a march, tears soon started appearing in your eyes.'⁴³

Bacevičius summarised his impression: 'I saw their cavalry marching, they were called the Queen's [presumably, the Empress' or Grand Duchess'] Regiment. Oh, what beauty. Man to man [...] thousands of them.'⁴⁴ Bernardas Žukauskas said something similar. According to him, the 'most beautiful [best prepared] Imperial Guard was brought up for the attack on East Prussia,' and soon it 'flooded the whole Prussian border'.⁴⁵ Such attitudes most likely expressed the opinions of the wider Lithuanian public, and that opinion was based on the conviction that the Romanov Empire possessed such human military capabilities that they would guarantee its success, and allow it to establish itself in East Prussia.

An image crisis in 1914–1915

Jack Snyder states that in the wake of the Great War, many European societies measured the effectiveness of military forces by their potential resources and tactical abilities to carry out offensive operations, i.e. it was dominated by the 'cult of the

⁴¹ MARTUS, Andrius M. *Lietuvoje Europos Karės metu*. Worcester, MA, [1915], p. 26.

⁴² PIKČILINGIS, J. Op. cit., p. 96.

⁴³ BACEVIČIUS, V. Op. cit., I. 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid., I. 15.

⁴⁵ Pasauliniam karui suliepsnojus. In GINTNERIS, Antanas. *Lietuva caro ir kaizerio naguose. Atsiminimai iš I Pasaulinio karo laikų 1914–1918 m.* Čikaga, 1970, p. 59.

offensive'.⁴⁶ The defeat at Tannenberg had an impact on the Lithuanians in assessing the Russian Empire's troops, primarily because its march to East Prussia was regarded as a necessary precautionary measure to protect the Lithuanian-speaking Russian borderlands from invasion by the German army. Andrius Martus wrote: 'When the war broke out on 3 August 1914 [...] the Germans began to attack the Russian soldiers in the vicinity of Naumiestis, Virbalis, and other border areas of the Suwałki province. The danger was clear to the whole of Lithuania. Everyone was expecting the Germans to invade further and destroy villages and cities, to occupy the entire country. So the fate of Lithuania was on the scales. How much it would remain unharmed, and whoever would take it, nobody knew.'⁴⁷ We find a similar assessment in Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė's diary: 'Thank you Almighty God: we probably won't see the Germans here! The Russians, with Samsonov and Rennenkampf (I just don't like the way they force Germans to fight against Germans) broke into Prussia. The famous German strength is seemingly not such iron... They cannot hold the Western front properly either: the French have already invaded Germany in the south... The German is fearsome only for his barbarism. The poor Belgians!!'⁴⁸ These considerations seem to indicate that the invasion by the Russian army in East Prussia was perceived as a necessary tactical action to prevent German forces from invading the western provinces of the Russian Empire.

Along with the official discourse, the Russian army was often described as a 'defender of Christians' (from wrong believers), and as a 'rescuer from the descendants of the Crusaders'. The perception of the Russian army as a 'force against the new Crusaders' is also recorded in the memoirs of Mykolas Biržiška: 'I doubted myself what should I do: whether to beat the "Crusaders", encouraged by the whole history of Lithuania and the feelings instilled from infancy, or to flee to Galicia and set up Lithuanian legions on the Polish model.'⁴⁹ The motif of the fight against 'Crusaders' is clearly underlined in the evaluation of the Battle of Tannenberg as well. Paraphrasing the reaction of her teacher neighbour Konstancija Brazytė, Petkevičaitė-Bitė stated in her diary: 'It is a deliberate intention today by the Crusaders to choose the place and the time for the Battle of Tannenberg [...] That, of course, is revenge. Five hundred years ago, you, the Slavs, together with the Lithuanians, defeated our authority here, and now we revenge you a hundred times over! Here, have Žalgiris [Grunwald]! Be aware! The Crusaders are immortal! They are capable of carrying the snake's revenge in their hearts for ever. The bones of the Jagiellos and Witolds have come to naught, but our vengeance is alive and powerful! The throats of our can-

⁴⁶ SNYDER, Jack. Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984. *International Security*, 1984, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 108–146.

⁴⁷ MARTUS, A. M. Op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁸ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 46.

⁴⁹ BIRŽIŠKA, Mykolas. *Dėl mūsų sostinės. (Iš Vilniaus atsiminimų)*. D. I: *Ligi 1919 m. liepos 1 d.* London, 1960, p. 17–18.

nons are wide! The Masurian lakes are deep... Samsonov, whose Polish and Lithuanian regiments lost their lives here, took his own life too. The laurels are growing for crowns of honour for Hindenburg and Willie for this... Yes, this is what the Germans are thinking today, but remember, if there's truth in the world, the Willies and Hindenburgs, and the power of the Crusaders together with them, must be crushed!"⁵⁰

The Battle of Tannenberg at the end of August (new style) 1914 began to change all previous assessments featuring exaggerated enthusiasm, although the positive treatment of the Russian army was maintained for some time out of inertia. 'It cannot be that such a large number of troops can get lost somewhere,' Jonas Balys wrote.⁵¹ According to Petkevičaitė-Bitė, after being defeated at Tannenberg in Russia, and in the same way in Lithuanian society, 'all the speculation about the outcome of the war has ended; they were repeating only military jokes, which you could hear occasionally, especially about the Russian invasion of Prussia. About how the German population fled, and deliberately left only prostitutes and old men, who were watching every step taken by the Russian army, and reporting everything with telephones that were usually kept in beehives. In addition to livestock, as if in a hurry, they left all kinds of alcohol in the cellars, which, of course, the Russian army, and especially its officers, tasted and did not spit out...' ⁵² Some contemporaries were convinced that the failure of the Russian army in East Prussia was due to the fact that it had allegedly begun to plunder the farms; that forced German officers, many of whom had estates in the province, 'to push Kaiser Wilhelm to defend their property'.⁵³ In any case, it was quite clear that, especially as regards the long-term distancing of the assessment, in the words of Martynas Yčas, 'the Battle of Tannenberg was a great moral and material blow to the Russians, from which they did not recover throughout the Great War'.⁵⁴

The rumours and testimonies about the conduct of the Russian army in East Prussia contributed to the assessment of the changing attitudes to it in Lithuanian society during this period. Petkevičaitė-Bitė was shocked by tales of 'blustering and plundering [...] by ordinary soldiers and officers' which 'was seen as a normal thing [...] And this is what our guardians look like in the hour of greatest danger! True, neither asked nor invited guardians...' ⁵⁵ Apparently, there were some attempts to understand the behaviour of the Russian army logically, and to explain it with 'war trophy' logic. Moreover, there is evidence that the robberies by soldiers in East Prussia were seen as an opportunity to the economic advantage of the inhabitants of

⁵⁰ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 49.

⁵¹ BALYS, Jonas. *Atsiminimai iš Didžiojo karo (1915 m.)*. Panevėžys, 1927. *LNMMB*, F. 168–18, I. 1–1ap.

⁵² PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 52.

⁵³ For example, Vladas Bacevičius considered that it was precisely for this reason that the German General Staff organised the defence of East Prussia, by bringing additional forces from the Western front (see: BACEVIČIUS, V. Op. cit., I. 17).

⁵⁴ YČAS, Martynas. *Atsiminimai. Nepriklausomybės kelias*. T. II. Kaunas, 1935, p. 7–8.

⁵⁵ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 53.

the border provinces.⁵⁶ ‘Muscovites are sweeping the Prussians as with a broom: they take cows, horses, birds, literally everything they can get their hands on, and transport it from Germany to Russia. A good cow can be bought from them for five roubles, a horse for ten roubles,’ Kazimieras Pakalniškis, a priest at Žvingiai, wrote in his diary. According to him, ‘People go to Prussia to plunder, not only on foot, but they also drive, and bring home all kinds of goods in carts.’⁵⁷ Here we recognise the image of ‘cooperation’ between Russian soldiers and civilians plundering farms in East Prussia. Such images were repeated when describing the subsequent robberies in the towns and cities of Lithuania in 1915 when the Russian army was retreating.⁵⁸ Despite all this, the robberies on East Prussian farms and the forced eviction of the population from the easternmost German province to the depths of Russia were already reflected as a sign of ‘major disaster for Lithuania’.⁵⁹

However, the most significant change in the image of the Russian army was due to the withdrawal of the remains of the 1st Army through Lithuanian-inhabited areas. Petkevičaitė-Bitė described it as the ‘most terrible spectacle’. ‘Fields or not fields, meadows or not meadows, woods or not woods, everything is full [of troops], not to mention the roads, almost flooded with cannons and cars. And everyone is scared, chased by shots from behind. Among the officers, you could see some wearing women’s jackets, maybe in a hurry, or wrapped in patterned women’s shawls.’⁶⁰ Finally, the writer commented in her diary: ‘How can you think about Russia’s power if its first steps are so terrible?!’⁶¹

In the retreat of the 1st Army from East Prussia, images of the inadequate tactics of the army, poor organisation, and in particular, bad leadership, began to prevail in the opinions of contemporaries. Describing the state of the Imperial Russian army in the autumn of 1914, Fr Pakalniškis presented the following episode in his diary: ‘About 120 Russian soldiers came from Sartininkai down the road through the village of Bykavėnai; all tattered, without arms, one barefoot, another wearing Samogitian wooden shoes, and another also wearing Samogitian clothing. The whole crowd of men looked like an exhausted gang of beggars. From what they were saying, it turned out that they were ‘refugees’ from the Tilsit garrison, that they had had a difficult time in Tilsit: the Germans had conspired and attacked the Russians [...] The soldiers

⁵⁶ VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., p. 109; PAKALNIŠKIS, Kazimieras. *Rusų vokiečių karo užrašai. Karo archyvas*, 1939, t. XI, p. 119.

⁵⁷ PAKALNIŠKIS, K. Op. cit., p. 118, 119.

⁵⁸ Pikčilingis describes the plundering of Kaunas as follows: ‘The first in the centre to be robbed was the Kaplan wine and delicatessen shop. I saw the first scenes of looting. Soldiers and civilians, women, and sometimes ladies with stylish hats were rushing, ploughing, drinking, and carrying with full hands! [...] First of all, the people looted alcohol shops, then watches and gold, later shoes, and then manufactories, haberdashery, etc.’ (see: PIKČILINGIS, J. Op. cit., p. 98).

⁵⁹ PAKALNIŠKIS, K. Op. cit., p. 119.

⁶⁰ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52–53.

said a mishap happened to them because of the carelessness of Colonel or General Bogdanov. When the Russian army occupied Tilsit, he abandoned his soldiers and the defence of the city, and was drinking and playing cards with Germans day and night, etc. It is difficult to say how true it is.⁶² According to Petkevičaitė-Bitė, 'Although the attitudes of the soldiers [...] are very diverse, most of them admit that they are not successful in this war. And all, without exception, blame their leadership for this failure. Although there are good people among the leaders, who treat soldiers well, and consider them as equals, these good officers are in a minority. It is hard for soldiers to realise that most leaders are either unable to fight or are too nervous, and do not know what they are doing, infecting soldiers with their nervousness. The German commanders are supposed to be much better, there is nothing to be surprised about. The Kaiser has six sons, and they are all army commanders, sincerely watching over the affairs of their father, while our father the Tsar has to be satisfied with hired strangers. Consequently, some officers in the Russian army treat the soldiers very badly all the time, however they like, and there is no one you can complain to. Things would be different if the Tsar knew everything... Good for the Kaiser...'⁶³

During this period, many testimonies emerge about heavy-handed officers, regardless of their social origin or cultural level, who allegedly commanded the Russian army. Such officers purportedly sent hundreds and thousands of ordinary soldiers to die, without qualms, in pursuit of strategically and tactically insignificant goals.⁶⁴ They usually did so only to curry favour with their seniors, or to explain that 'only big losses' without sparing human resources 'testify to the great activity of the unit'.⁶⁵ In all the individual assessments, we see an emerging basic provision, the leadership of the Russian army was understood to use 'primitive tactics' leading to retreat.⁶⁶ It was claimed that, due to these tactics, the Imperial Russian army was unable to keep even well-equipped and consolidated positions for long, and then it was forced to retreat.⁶⁷

The fact that after Tannenberg the Russian army was seen as an army of 'heavy losses' was also significant, because the 1st Army was formed on the basis of the troops stationed in the Vilnius military district. Thus, it was perceived that it had a large Lithuanian contingent, and now, because of poor leadership, the 'Lithuanian men' would die or disappear.⁶⁸ As was noted by the artist Antanas Žmuidzinavičius in his memoirs, everyone called up to the Russian army had the same destiny, 'to go and die'.⁶⁹ The emerging reservation of the Lithuanians regarding the Imperial Russian

⁶² PAKALNIŠKIS, K. Op. cit., p. 116.

⁶³ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 149–150.

⁶⁴ IŠEIVIS. *Karės aukos. Vaizdelis iš lietuvių gyvenimo*. Chicago, 1915, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 7–8.

⁶⁶ RADUS-ZENKAVIČIUS, Leonas. *Trumpas Didžiojo karo eskizas*. Kaunas, 1924, p. 45–47.

⁶⁷ RIMKUS, J. Karo vėtroje (Onos Vaitkevičienės pasakojimas). *Karo archyvas*, 1938, t. X, p. 106–108.

⁶⁸ BALYS, Jonas. Op. cit., l. 1–1ap.; BACEVIČIUS, Vladas. Op. cit., l. 15–16.

⁶⁹ ŽMUIDZINAVIČIUS, Antanas. *Paletė ir gyvenimas*. Vilnius, 1961, p. 202.

army was further fuelled by the conviction that the army's leadership was allegedly using troops 'called up from non-Russians' for the most difficult parts of the front.⁷⁰ This created preconditions for the belief that a large part of the casualties in the battles in East Prussia, especially in the late autumn of 1914 near the Masurian Lakes, were Lithuanians in Imperial Russian soldiers' uniforms.⁷¹ Petkevičaitė-Bitė noted: 'The Russian authorities and officers do not care about the lives of their soldiers, especially the non-Russians,' in this way attempting 'to bleed' the national minorities.⁷² The difficult situation of Lithuanians serving in the Russian army was explained not only by objective circumstances (disruptions to supplies, poor organisation), but also by the view among commanding officers of non-Russian soldiers as unreliable subordinates.⁷³ In some cases, the great social differences and the disjuncture between officers and soldiers in the Russian army were particularly emphasised. The reserved attitudes of officers to ordinary soldiers could also be perceived as a demonstration of arrogance towards individuals of lower social status, in line with the rendering of nationalist (pro-Russian) sentiment. But there were exceptions in this case: at least some witnesses depicted Russian officers as simply ignorant of the 'national issue'. For example, Stasys Miliauskas testified that officers gladly trusted Lithuanian soldiers, despite the fact that the latter did not really show any great aspiration to fight on the side of the Russian Empire.⁷⁴ Perhaps these testimonies merely convey the intention to consider the leadership of the Russian army as 'not understanding the situation', 'unable to perceive the military mood' and 'politically short-sighted'.⁷⁵

Thus, during the clashes between Russia and Germany near the former border (in the autumn of 1914 and winter of 1914/1915), completely different images started to prevail in Lithuanian society. This could apparently also have been caused by the fact that the German army crossed the former Russian-German border for the first time in the autumn of 1914, occupying the border zones of the Suwałki and Kaunas provinces, which were inhabited mostly by Lithuanian speakers. The fact that the Russian army did not stop this invasion was shocking to Lithuanian society. 'How can it be that such a power and such a big empire, with so many people, cannot stop the German army?' Kazimieras Jokantas asked rhetorically in his memoirs.⁷⁶ The attitude that Imperial Russian troops were unable to carry out large operations, were demor-

⁷⁰ BACEVIČIUS, Vladas. Op. cit., I. 15–16.

⁷¹ On 14 (27) October 1914, Petkevičaitė-Bitė wrote in her diary: 'The news about the lost lives of our people near the Masurian Lakes is circulating among the people; every time I'm asked more and more often' (PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 104).

⁷² PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 104.

⁷³ Ibid., t. II. Panevėžys, 2010, p. 29.

⁷⁴ MILIAUSKAS, St. Op. cit., p. 89.

⁷⁵ TUMAVIČIUS, A. Visuomeninis gyvenimas Kupiškyje vokiečių okupacijos metais (Jurgio Bukėno atsiminimai). *Karo archyvas*, 1938, t. X, p. 96–97; MILIAUSKAS, S. Op. cit., p. 89.

⁷⁶ JOKANTAS, K[azimieras]. Suv. Kalvarijoje vokiečių okupacijos metu (1914–1918 m.). *Karo archyvas*, 1937, t. VIII, p. 131.

alised, and mistreated 'civilian prisoners' pushed out of East Prussia, was becoming increasingly dominant.

All this was reinforced by reflections on the forced displacement⁷⁷ of the civilian population from the border areas of the Russian Empire (for example, the Suwałki province). Officially targeting Jews and 'Germans', the displacement also affected Lithuanian-speaking Lutherans who had lived in the border areas for several centuries. The Catholic majority in Lithuanian society reacted ambiguously to this. Some witnesses perceived it as 'deserved retaliation'. That was because, in the Suwałki province, the Imperial Russian authorities treated Lithuanian-speaking Lutherans 'much better than real Lithuanians [...] no German went against the Tsar's rule. On the contrary, to the Russian government, they were spies and squealers,' and when the war began, 'things became different, the Russians trusted Lithuanians much more, and sent many German men away from the front, to the Vilnius province or elsewhere.'⁷⁸ However, other witnesses did not avoid noticeable criticism. 'When the Germans seized their positions in the Suwałki province, the Russians, unable to get them out, accused Lithuanian Lutherans and Jews of conspiring with the Germans, reporting to them on the movements or positions of the Russians. Catholic Lithuanians who saw the Protestants as their greatest enemies were very glad about it,'⁷⁹ wrote Andrius Martus. The persecution of Jews and Lutherans, as 'unreliable subjects of the Romanov Empire', was treated as a consequence of the paranoid 'spymania' of the Russian military government. According to Martus, this caused 'many painful misunderstandings: a woman put out white laundry on a pole that "looked like a flag signal", and was arrested [...] The sails of a mill revolve, and this is also a "sign", the millers' women were hanged.'⁸⁰ Some witnesses plainly called the activities of the Russian army (especially in the Suwałki province) 'spymania', the persecution of wrongly accused people, which, among other things, also created conditions for 'malicious abuse' (denunciations, acts of revenge).⁸¹ In general, it was claimed that the 'issue of spies' became a concern for the Russian army only when it began to fail in East Prussia and its leadership became concerned about actions against the 'enemy in the rear' along the border. These actions only strengthened the conviction that

⁷⁷ For details, see: GATRELL, Peter. *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Indiana-Michigan series in Russian and East European studies). Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1999, pp. 21–26; LOHR, Eric. The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages and Violence during World War I. *The Russian Review*, 2001, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 404–419; LOHR, Eric. *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Russian Research Center Studies, 94). Cambridge, MA, London, 2003, pp. 121–145; SANBORN, Joshua A. Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I. *The Journal of Modern History*, 2005, vol. 77, no. 2, pp. 302–309.

⁷⁸ EIDUKAITIS, P. Visą laiką vilkome karo jungą. In *Lietuva Didžiąjame kare...*, p. 28; BASANAČIUS, Jonas. *Iš lietuvių gyvenimo 1915–1917 m. po vokiečių jungu*. Vilnius, 1919, p. 4.

⁷⁹ MARTUS, A. M. Op. cit., p. 25–26.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 33–34.

⁸¹ PAKALNIŠKIS, K. Op. cit., p. 119.

the Russian army was 'completely ignorant of the lives of its own people and those of others'.⁸² There was an intention to see 'spymania' as the outcome of mistrust of the central government, with Imperial Russian subjects testifying to the 'weakening of Russia itself'.⁸³

The image of the Russian army was finally basically undermined by the retreat that started in the spring of 1915. Lasting until the end of September, the retreat in separate stages was filled with images in ego-documents of the straggling army. Although there were exceptions,⁸⁴ it was usually stated that the troops retreated 'full front', and did not want to fight, and there were mass desertions, while officers avoided direct battles, and attempted to escape from the front line as quickly as possible (often using cars 'mobilised' in 1914).⁸⁵ It was claimed that the Germans 'captured hundreds of Russian soldiers',⁸⁶ thus fuelling the image that the German army allegedly 'gathers prisoners' without any great loss. Amid the straggling army, the Cossacks were regarded as the only part of the Russian troops that remained combat ready: the authors of memoirs present them as 'brave warriors', who often took initiatives, and in this way protected the retreating units from total destruction.⁸⁷

The retreat was so widespread that it eventually led to a questioning of the image of the Imperial Russian army as a 'powerful and morally unified force'. Already at the beginning of 1915, we see the first doubts about the Russian army's size as a factor that would automatically determine the outcome of the war. Petkevičaitė-Bitė, comparing the military capabilities of Russia and Germany, explained in her diary that Russia was able to 'turn the border zone of Germany into an empty field. Not only by burning houses and food, which cannot be taken away, but also by burning trees and fields, cutting down gardens, and poisoning wells'.⁸⁸ Despite the use of the most

⁸² ŽUKAUSKAS, Bernardas. *Pirmojo pasaulinio karo tremty. Atsiminimų pluoštas*. Chicago, IL, 1961, p. 18–22.

⁸³ ŽADEIKIS, P. Op. cit., p. 48–49.

⁸⁴ Juozas Breiva, who served as a priest in the village of Daugai in the Trakai district in the Vilnius province during the war, later wrote: 'I remember the Russian army's last afternoon in Daugai. Although it was already clear that it was the Russians' last day, the army was still struggling to keep up its courage and vigilance. The choir, which sang several charming songs, was especially beautiful and noteworthy.' (BREIVA, Juozas. *Atsiminimai iš vokiečių okupacijos laikų Dauguose. Karo archyvas*, 1938, t. IX, p. 193).

⁸⁵ POVICKAITĖ-OKULIČIENĖ, J. Karo dienyas. In *Lietuva Didžiąjame kare...*, p. 174.

⁸⁶ VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., p. 113–114.

⁸⁷ 'The legendary and indiscriminate courage of the Cossacks, such as Kriuchkov, who became famous after the first clash with German spies: one against ten Germans!' noted Aleksandr Uspenskii (see УСПЕНСКИЙ, Александр. *На войнѣ. Восточная Пруссія – Литва. Воспоминанія*. Каунасъ, 1932, с. 65. See also the Lithuanian edition: USPENSKIS, Aleksandras. *Didžiąjame kare: Lietuva – Rytų Prūsija 1914–1915 m. Karininko atsiminimai*. Kaunas, 1935, p. 65). 'Right or wrong, the Cossacks are considered to be extraordinarily courageous men. At least it's clear that they are not cowards. After all, you don't need much courage for an ambush, even against a much more numerous enemy. The five Cossacks instantly decided that about 30 Germans would not be too much for them, and the first unexpected shots allowed this number to be drastically shrunk' (see [NORBUTAS, Juozas] Išeivis. *Karės aukos. Vaizdelis iš lietuvių gyvenimo*. Bellshill, 1915, p. 9).

⁸⁸ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 38–39.

fierce fighting techniques, it would be difficult to defeat Germany, because it is like a 'hundred-headed hydra, only hungrier, crueller, twisting and turning with the devil's cunning. How many of them are there in comparison with their enemies? True Germans, Austrians, a few Turks, a handful of Romanians, and that's it. And where don't you find them? Look at the Pacific Ocean, look at the Atlantic Ocean, Persia, China, Mesopotamia, Suez, not to mention the Mediterranean Sea, the Balkans, now the Italian front, and both vast fronts in the East and the West.⁸⁹ Petkevičaitė-Bitė states: 'You will find Germans in the air, and under the water, they are everywhere...'⁹⁰ The 'scorched earth' tactics applied by the retreating Russian troops, in some cases were perceived as proof that 'the Russians will not return.'⁹¹

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Undoubtedly, in this context, doubts about the tactical readiness of the Russian troops only tended to grow stronger. As Virelūnas pointed out, the artillery often shot without even aiming, 'just pretending to fight, trying to impress the leadership by their good performance.'⁹² Meanwhile, the German artillery 'hits very accurately', and 'wipes out' the Russian army's batteries, even in well-established positions and hard areas for artillery to reach.⁹³

According to the testimonies, the morale of the retreating Russian army reached its lowest point. The behaviour of officers and soldiers was regarded as endangering both the Russian army and the civilian population of Lithuania. According to Martus, the situation of girls and women was particularly dangerous: '1) refusing to have "relations", they were accused of being "spies"; 2) "contacts" were established through the factor.'⁹⁴ This is especially true for refugees [...] because refugees did not have food. As a result, soldiers "patronised" families with girls and women who were suitable for them [...] Immediately after entering a town or a city, Russian soldiers first look for innocent girls for officers.'⁹⁵ Martus is particularly stern: 'This is how they, all the bastards of Russia in a variety of ways, plundered the dearest asset of Lithuania, its innocence. They slaughtered animals, burned houses, cut down forests, mixed fertile land with spoiled land, but everything can be repaired. However, the plunder of innocence is the most painful and irreversible loss for Lithuania.'⁹⁶

Attempts to explain the behaviour of the Russian soldiers towards the civilian population in Lithuania not only emphasised their weak discipline, but also appealed to human fallibility. For example, Petkevičaitė-Bitė discussed in her diary that Russian

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 174–178.

⁹² VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., p. 112.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁴ In this case, the author of the diary apparently named prostitution as a factor.

⁹⁵ MARTUS, A.M. Op. cit., p. 34, 35–36.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

soldiers who had already doubted 'the justice of this war', and were tired of the cruelties of war and the cruel behaviour of officers, were simply looking for close contact with people who had not yet been damaged by the war. The writer stated that humane behaviour, even with soldiers who had lost their dignity because of the war, awakened the humanity in their hearts, and reduced the 'bad intentions' against the 'calm population'.⁹⁷ This note by Petkevičaitė, inter alia, is a clear reference to the attempts to avoid and prevent distressing behaviour by soldiers (based on the condemnation of civilians as a 'non-participating' party 'which does not understand anything') that affected the civil population in any violent way.

In some cases, attempts were made to explain the extreme conduct of soldiers towards civilians by their insensitivity under the circumstances and conditions of war. 'As far as I could see,' Juozas Kudirka wrote, 'Russian soldiers in the battlefield are very cold-blooded and calm, as if they are simply doing some routine task at home. They go into battle joking, often they fight with jokes, and they laugh after the battle is over. A bullet would fly past his ear: a soldier would curse, spit on the ground, and continue shooting at his enemy. They do not pay much attention to their killed friends. They would shake their head, look at the corpse, curse the German, and walk away.'⁹⁸ This assessment of soldiers' insensitivity to the horrors of war contributed to the premise that this was the root cause of their roughness with civilians.

In addition, when considering factors that led to the demoralisation of the Imperial Russian army, and such considerations in Lithuanian society arose primarily as a result of the experience of 1915, the fact that the army was made up of a poorly educated and 'culturally limited' contingent was explained as one of the causes of its weakness.⁹⁹ Allegedly, the aspirations and moral compass of soldiers, in the light of the horrors of war, could fundamentally vary, and in practice were hardly controlled.¹⁰⁰ Second, as has already been mentioned, the social and cultural disparities between the leadership and the ordinary soldiers was noted in the army. Quite often, the reserved attitude of officers towards soldiers was blamed by the 'archaic' way of thinking of the former, based on the pre-modern social hierarchy. It followed that soldiers could be abusive, assuming that that was the nature of the ordinary soldier originating from the 'non-enlightened peasantry', and you could not change the nature.¹⁰¹ Third, explanations were sought in the social differences that arose due to the different levels of development of different parts of the Russian

⁹⁷ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 149–151.

⁹⁸ KUDIRKA, Juozas. *Karės baisenybės Lietuvoje. Pragyventų valandų atsiminimai*. Chicago, IL, 1916, p. 20–21.

⁹⁹ For criticism on the stereotype of the Russian soldiers' 'backwardness', see NARSKII, Igor V. The Frontline Experience of Russian Soldiers in 1914–16. *Russian Studies in History*, 2013, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 36–39.

¹⁰⁰ VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., p. 11–113.

¹⁰¹ PETKEVIČAITĖ-BITĖ, G. Op. cit., t. I, p. 65. The diary of Petkevičaitė-Bitė represents some individual reflections with plenty of sympathy for Russian soldiers who originated from 'hard labourer peasants', who lacked an education and a broader cultural outlook, but were not as 'refined' as their officers.

Empire. Allegedly, soldiers from the interior of the empire, because of the 'different customs' they had, or the 'different rules' they were accustomed to, could not desist from abuse, not only in unfriendly East Prussia, but also in their 'own' provinces of Suwałki, Kaunas and Vilnius.¹⁰² Fourth, the deviational conduct of Russian soldiers was explained as an element of the ordinary and 'oriental' lifestyle characteristic of the whole Russian army, an entertainment, or simply an expression of despotism.¹⁰³

Of course, all these attitudes were supported by specific elements of military experience. I am referring to the fact that the 1st and 10th Russian armies that moved through the length and breadth of the Lithuanian-speaking provinces in 1914 and 1915 had highly mixed units, with a large number of soldiers from Siberia, Central Asia and the Caucasus. This ensured the contact of the Lithuanian people with soldiers whose appearance and behaviour they perceived based on already-existing 'oriental' stereotypes.

All of this, plus the fact that in February 1915 the Winter Battle of the Masurian Lakes ended in a massive defeat of the 20th Corps of the Russian army (with a large number of Lithuanians killed or captured), eventually made it possible for the Russian army to be perceived as 'an alien force'.

In November 1915, Matas Šalčius, who was expelled from Russia for his public speeches in 1914 before the war, made a speech in Chicago, in celebration of the decade of the Society of Home Country Lovers of Lithuanian Americans. In his speech, he noted: 'At the beginning of the war, the Russian army trampled underfoot and deported the queen and pride of the Lithuanian land, the blossoming Lithuania Minor, or Prussian Lithuania, and the most beautiful part of it, with the Prussian Lithuanians, our true brothers who have not converted into Germans yet and are still talking in Lithuanian; now the occupying Germans and the retreating Russians are about to smash Lithuania Major as well. It seems that our great neighbours from the East and the West not only want to achieve their economic and political goals in this war, but also completely wipe the remaining living Lithuanians off the face of our land, who have so bravely preserved their lives in the last five or six hundred years, after so many wars and repressions, and oppression, hardship and humiliation from all sides.'¹⁰⁴ J. Mažuika wrote similarly in his diary: 'The Russian army [...] while retreating, destroyed the remaining property of the population without mercy,

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 149. For a critical evaluation of the atrocities of Russian soldiers in East Prussia, see WATSON, Alexander. 'Unheard-of Brutality': Russian Atrocities against Civilians in East Prussia, 1914–1915. *The Journal of Modern History*, 2014, vol. 86, no. 4, pp. 780–825.

¹⁰³ BARTUŠKA, V[incas]. *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės kryžiaus keliais. Kritiškas 1914–1919 metų įvykių ir asmenų vertinimas*. Klaipėda, 1937, p. 44.

¹⁰⁴ ŠALČIUS, M[atas]. Lietuvių likimas Didžiosios karės metu: Amerikoniškos prakalbos (Kalbos sakytos Tėvynės mylėtojų draugijos kuopai Čikagoje, ir draugijos 10-mečiui). 1915 m. lapkritis. *LNMMB*, F. 189–248, l. 1.

and did not take into consideration the population at all.' Mažuika noticed that 'The Russian army regarded Lithuania as a suddenly occupied [the 'strangeness' idiom] country, which did not previously belong to Russian territory.'¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it seems it will not be inaccurate to say that the war experience, especially that of 1915, promoted the attitude among Lithuanian society of 'turning away' from Russia.

Conclusions

In assessing the change in the image of the Russian army in Lithuanian society during the early stages of the Great War, it is first of all important to realise that this image was severely affected by the conditions of war. This is illustrated by at least some of the arguments discussed in the article. First, amid conditions of military action, the military authorities and the rear facilitated the prevalence of images of the invincibility of the Imperial Russian army in Lithuanian society. During the period when mobilisation took place, during the movement of the Russian army in provinces inhabited by Lithuanian speakers and its invasion of East Prussia, the army was perceived as a factor of great power, both in terms of material characteristics and according to moral (psychological) criteria. This increased the apparent need for a major part of the Lithuanian public to consider the Russian army as its 'own', capable of rescuing Lithuanians from the invasion by the 'Teutons'. Secondly, in the conditions of war, there was something called negative adjustment by psychologists: the actions of the Imperial Russian army and some of the deviant behaviour were perceived as 'normal', justified by the conditions of war.

However, even accepting that this image of the Russian army depended on the specific war situation, we have to state that the change in the view of the army reveals wider modifications, which manifested in Lithuanian society in just one year. Ego-documents reveal that during the first months of the war, the prevailing approach was to support the Russian troops, to help its soldiers, and not to be worried about the losses they caused. In this solidarity, Lithuanian society expressed not only the need to protect itself from the German invasion, but also the political expectations that were associated with the invasion by the Imperial Russian army of East Prussia at the beginning of the war.

However, in the winter of 1914/1915, an image emerged of the resigned and re-treating army, unfriendly towards the local population. It is understandable that the army was perceived as a representation of Russia itself, and therefore the change in military expectations also expressed changes in the view of the Empire. The retreat

¹⁰⁵ MAŽUIKA, J. Didžiojo karo atsiminimai. *Karo archyvas*, 1935, t. VI, p. 293.

and the actions against the civilian population were seen as signs of emerging Imperial Russian weakness. An unquestionable power and 'protector' gradually began to be associated with the 'uncontrollable element' and danger. This change was apparently primarily affected by the emotional tension that grew stronger in Lithuanian society in the face of the perceived catastrophe. But at the same time, that change formed the preconditions for the perception of the Russian army as an 'alien' or even 'undesirable' force. Therefore, it seems reasonable to ask whether and how the potential of this perception was used in Lithuanian society later. An analysis of this issue could be the subject of future research.

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RUSIJOS KARIUOMENĖS ĮVAIZDŽIŲ KAITA LIETUVOJE 1914–1915 METAIS

Hektoras Vitkus

Santrauka

Klausimai, koks buvo Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdis lietuvių visuomenėje ir kaip jis keitėsi dėl Didžiojo karo patirties, tyrinėti nedaug. Straipsnyje keliama hipotezė, kad pradinis (1914–1915 m.) Pirmojo pasaulinio karo etapas buvo svarbiausias Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdžio kaitai. Ši hipotezė tikrinama atskleidžiant Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdį lietuvių visuomenėje Vokietijos ir Rusijos fronte besikeičiančios situacijos kontekste. Analizė plė-

tojama nagrinėjant tiek oficialioje spaudoje („Šaltinis“, „Rygos balsas“, „Lietuvos žinios“) palaikytas nuostatas, tiek ir individualiuose vertinimuose atsiskleidusias refleksijas.

Pirmajame skyriuje nagrinėjamas klausimas, kaip Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdį keitė pradinėje Didžiojo karo fazėje (1914–1915 m.) sėkmingas – bent jau taip atrodė iš pradžių – žygis į Rytų Prūsiją. Disponuojamų šaltinių analizė leidžia teigti, kad Rusijos ir Vokietijos karinio susidūrimo pradiniu laikotarpiu Rusijos kariuomenė lietuvių spaudoje ir egodokumentuose buvo vaizduojama kaip morališkai ir materialiai (fiziškai) pasiruošusi karui. Šį įvaizdį stiprino įvairios detalės, pabrėžusios Rusijos kariuomenės discipliną, aukščiausiosios vadovybės bei karininkų pa(s)irengimą, modernią ginkluotę ir taktines naujoves. Pirmąjį karo mėnesį, kai Rusijos kariuomenė buvo įsiveržusi į Rytų Prūsiją, lietuvių spaudoje buvo pabrėžiamas „gynybinis Rusijos veiksmų pobūdis“ bei Rusijos kaip „gelbėtojos“ nuo „germanų“ (šiuo tikslu remtasi ir negatyviu Vokiečių ordino įvaizdžiu) vaizdinys. Tokios buvo oficialaus diskurso nuostatos, kurios didele dalimi buvo perimtos iš centrinių Sankt Peterburgo (1914 m. rugpjūčio 18 (31) d. pervadinto Petrogradu) ir Maskvos leidinių.

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Individualūs vertinimai buvo kiek atsargesni. Liudininkų atsiminimuose ir dienoraščiuose Rusijos kariuomenės pasirengimo karui lygiu abejota. Dalis liudininkų pastebėjo Rusijos kariuomenės mobilizacinės sistemos trūkumus, eilinių karių gretose tvyruojusias abejones, „kodėl reikia eiti kariauti prieš Vokietiją“, kariuomenės logistikos ir aprūpinimo nesklandumus. Kita vertus, daugelis liudininkų neabejojo Rusijos kariuomenės galimybėmis užimti ir įsitvirtinti Rytų Prūsijoje: per lietuviakalbių apgyvendintas Rusijos teritorijas į Rytprūsius žygiavusios I armijos gausumas darė didžiulį įspūdį ir palaikė įsitikinimą, kad Romanovų imperija disponuoja neišsenkančiais žmogiškaisiais kariniais ištekiais. Verta atkreipti dėmesį, kad tam tikra lietuvių visuomenės dalis pozityviai vertino ir Rusijos karinės vadovybės priimtus sprendimus dėl laisvos prekybos apribojimo bei degtinės monopolio panaikinimo mobilizacijos laikotarpiu. Tikėtasi, kad įvesti smulkiosios prekybos apribojimai „suduos smūgį“ žydų verslams ir viltasi, kad degtinės monopolio panaikinimas bus teigiamas veiksnys ne tik kariuomenei, bet ir „Lietuvos žmonėms“.

Antrajame straipsnio skyriuje analizuojami lietuvių visuomenėje įvykę Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdžio pokyčiai jos katastrofiško atsitraukimo nuo Vokietijos kariuomenės, galiausiai užėmusios būsimosios Lietuvos teritoriją, periodu. Didžiausią poveikį turėjo Rusijos II armijos pralaimėjimas prie Tanenbergo ir jos likučių bei I armijos atsitraukimas. Pralaimėjimas prie Tanenbergo turėjo poveikį lietuviams vertinant Rusijos imperijos kariuomenę pirmiausia todėl, kad jos žygis į Rytų Prūsiją amžininkų buvo vertinamas kaip būtina prevencinė priemonė, apsaugosianti lietuviakalbių gyvenamas Rusijos pasienio sritis nuo Vokietijos kariuomenės invazijos. Šį poveikį stiprino faktas, kad Vokietijos kariuomenė jau 1914 m. rudenį pirmą kartą peržengė buvusią Rusijos–Vokietijos sieną, užimdama Suvalkų ir Kauno gubernijų pasienio sritis, apgyvendintas daugiausia lietuviakalbių. Tai, kad Rusijos kariuomenė šio įsiveržimo nesustabdė, sukrėtė lietuvių visuomenę. Prie kintančio Rusijos kariuomenės vertinimo lietuvių visuomenėje prisidėjo ir gandai bei liudijimai apie jos elgesį (plėšikavimai, priverstinis dalies gyventojų išvaymas) Rytų Prūsijoje, nors tai buvo bandoma paaiškinti vadovaujantis „karo grobio“ logika. Neliko nepastebėtas Rusijos kareivių ir dalies pasienio sričių gyventojų „kooperavimasis“ plėšiant ūkius Rytų Prūsijoje – tokie vaizdiniai kartojosi ir apibūdinant vėliau vykusius plėšimus Lietuvos miestuose ir miesteliuose, 1915 m. traukiantis Rusijos kariuomenei.

1914 m. rudenį ir 1914–1915 m. žiemą atsiranda ne vienas liudijimas esą Rusijos kariuomenei vadovauja nerangūs (mokantys organizuoti tik atsitraukimo operacijas) karininkai, kurie be jokios vidinės graužaties siunčia į mirtį šimtus ir tūkstančius eilinių karių, siekdami strategiškai ir taktiškai nereikšmingų uždavinių. Stiprėjo požiūris, kad ši kariuomenė yra demoralizuota. Negatyvų Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdį sustiprino aplinkybė, kad I armija buvo suformuota iš Vilniaus karo apygardoje dislokuotų dalinių, į kuriuos pateko daug lietuviakalbių pašauktinių. Tai sudarė prielaidas atsirasti įsitikinimui, kad Rusijos kariuomenės vadovybė į sudėtingiausius fronto ruožus mesdavo „ne iš rusų mobilizuotus“ dalinius, taip bandydama „nukrauti“ tautines mažumas. Tokia nuostata pasikartojo vaizdinyje, kad kovose Rytų Prūsijoje, ypač 1914 m. vėlyvą rudenį prie Mozūrijos ežerų, didelę dalį žuvusiųjų sudarė lietuviai imperijos karių uniformomis (taip pat ir 1915 m. vasarį Mozūrijos žiemos kautynės baigėsi sutriuškinus Rusijos kariuomenės XX korpusą, kuriame esą tarnavo daugybė lietuvių – daugelis jų žuvo arba buvo paimti į nelaisvę). Tačiau būta ir liudijimų esą Rusijos karininkai pasitikėjo kariais lietuviais, nepaisydami to, kad pastarieji didesnio užsidegimo kariauti Romanovų imperijos pusėje išties nerodė. Galiausiai Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdį pablogino Rusijos kariuomenės vadovybės sankcionuotas Romanovų imperijos „nepatikimų pavaldinių“ persekiojimas („šnipomanijos“ kampanija), oficialiai nukreiptas prieš žydus ir „vokiečius“, tačiau faktiškai palietęs ir pasienio srityse nuo seno gyvenusius lietuviakalbius evangelikus liuteronus. Šie veiksmai tik stiprino įsitikinimą, kad Rusijos kariuomenė „visiškai nevertina nei svetimų, nei savo žmonių gyvybių“.

Vertinant Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdžio kaitą lietuvių visuomenėje Didžiojo karo pradžioje, svarbu suvokti, kad tas įvaizdis buvo smarkiai paveiktas karo sąlygų. Tą rodo bent keli straipsnyje aptarti argumentai. Pirma, atsidūrimas karo veiksmų, karinės valdžios ir fronto užnugaryje palengvino lietuvių visuomenėje įsigalėti vaizdiniais apie imperijos kariuomenės nenugalimumą. Kol vyko mobilizacija, Rusijos kariuomenės judėjimas lietuviakalbių apgyventose gubernijose ir jos įsiveržimas į Rytų Prūsiją, kariuomenė buvo suvokiama kaip didelės galios veiksnys tiek pagal materialius požymius, tiek ir pagal moralinius (psichologinius) kriterijus. Tai didino pastebimos lietuvių visuomenės dalies poreikį laikyti Rusijos kariuomenę „sava“, galinčia išgelbėti lietuvius nuo „teutonų“ įsiveržimo. Antra, karo sąlygomis pasireiškė ir tai, ką psichologai vadina negatyviąja adaptacija: imperijos kariuomenės veiksmai ir kai kurios deviacinės elgsenos suvoktos kaip karo padėties sąlygų pateisinamas „normalumas“.

Tačiau netgi suvokiant šį Rusijos kariuomenės įvaizdžio priklausomumą nuo karo padėties situacijos, tenka konstatuoti, kad kariuomenės vertinimo kaita atskleidžia platesnes permainas, pasireiškusias lietuvių visuomenėje viso labo per vienerius metus. Egodokumentai atskleidžia, kad pirmaisiais karo mėnesiais vyravo nuostata remti Rusijos kariuomenę, padėti jos kareiviams, per daug nesisieloti dėl jų sukeltų nuostolių. Lietuvių visuomenė šiuo solidarumu išreiškė ne tik poreikį apsisaugoti nuo Vokietijos invazijos, bet ir politinius lūkesčius, kurie karo pradžioje buvo siejami su imperijos kariuomenės įsiveržimu į Rytų Prūsiją. Tačiau 1914–1915 m. žiemą formuojasi atsitraukiančios, resignuojančios, vietiniams gyventojams nedraugiška tampančios imperijos kariuomenės vaizdiny.

Suprantama, kad kariuomenė buvo suvokiama kaip pačios Rusijos reprezentacija, todėl kariuomenės vertinimų kaita išreiškė ir pokyčius vertinant imperiją. Atsitraukimas, veiksmai prieš civilius gyventojus buvo vertinami kaip ryškėjančio imperijos silpnumo

požymiai. Nekvestionuojama galia ir „gynėja“ pamažu ėmė asocijuotis su „stichija“ ir pavojumi. Šią kaitą pirmiausia, matyt, veikė nujaučiamos katastrofos akivaizdoje lietuvių visuomenėje stiprėjusi emocinė įtampa. Bet toji kaita kartu sudarė prielaidas klostytis Rusijos kariuomenės, kaip „svetimos“ ar net „nepageidautinos“ jėgos, sampratai. Todėl, atrodo, pagrįsta kelti klausimą, ar ir kaip tokios sampratos galimybėmis lietuvių visuomenėje buvo naudojamosi vėlesniu laikotarpiu. Šių klausimų analizė galėtų tapti būsimų tyrimų objektu.