

Introduction: A Kaleidoscope of Revolutions

Aaron B. Retish, Liudmila G. Novikova, and Sarah Badcock

This volume presents a series of essays that expand our understanding of the Russian Revolution through the detailed study of specific localities. Like the image in a kaleidoscope, Russia's revolution was complex and multifaceted, an intricate juxtaposition of patterns and relationships that shifted and changed. While recognizing the importance of events in the centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg/Petrograd, we seek to reconceptualize developments in Russia between 1914 and 1922 as a kaleidoscopic process whose dynamic was not solely determined in the capitals.¹ This regional perspective helps to illuminate the complexities of relationships between people and politics and to understand the immediate contexts within which the struggles between the military powers, be they Reds, Whites, Socialist Revolutionary armies, peasant partisans, nationalist movements, or local rebels developed.² To a significant extent, in the time of war and revolutionary crisis, tsarist, Provisional Government, and then Soviet or anti-Soviet power were all defined by these local political, economic, and cultural factors. Thus, the Russian Revolution appears not as a single process but as a complex pattern of overlapping revolutions. Reviewing the nature of these revolutions is the purpose of the present volume.

The power struggles that erupted in 1917 in Petrograd, the cradle and emblematic city of the Russian Revolution, reverberated through the complex, multilayered political and social fabric of the Russian Empire. They provoked local conflicts and movements that developed distinctive dynamics of their own. In each region, particular configurations of social, political, and ethnic groups shaped the local revolution, as did discrete regional aspects of gender, generation, and confessional attachment. The meaning of the Russian Revolution was therefore very different for a land-hungry peasant in Saratov,

¹ Christopher Read describes the revolution as kaleidoscopic in *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917–21* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 283.

² We use *regional* and *provincial* interchangeably in this introduction.

a handicraft producer in Viatka, or an unemployed worker in Odessa. The course and meanings of the revolution could vary not only from province to province, but from district to district or from village to village. Contributors to this volume reveal how local political, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as the particular interplay between social identities and policies, helped to define the nature of state power throughout the revolutionary period and the Civil War. Furthermore, this volume illuminates how the decisions of individual political actors in the countryside and provincial towns facilitated the eventual Bolshevik victory and how they contributed to the complexities of the revolution.

The 13 essays in this volume incorporate a range of different approaches and perspectives in order to reveal how the local political, social, and cultural environment and the decisions of local political leaders shaped the revolution. Seven of the essays present case studies from European Russian provinces, while six essays focus on the revolution in non-Russian regions of the empire. These essays provide regional snapshots from across Russia that highlight important themes of the revolution in its regional context.³ Some chapters cover the entire temporal frame from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Civil War in 1921, while others focus on a narrower window of time. Five of the essays discuss the structures of power or general course of revolution in a specific locale, and seven focus on particular social groups within a region. These locally grounded studies, taken together, do not present a single narrative line. In this sense, they provide a vivid reflection of the messiness of historical reality that does not fit into any overarching master narrative. While bringing to light the results of empirical research on particular provinces, these essays also contribute to the larger historiographic debates on the social and political meaning of the Russian Revolution as well as the nature of the Russian state, from a range of different perspectives.

The chapters are organized into three sections. The essays in part 1, "Grassroots Politics in Regional Revolutions," discuss the general course of revolution in a specific locale, or structures of power within a specific space. Part 2, "A Myriad of National Revolutions," is composed of five essays that highlight how various nationality communities responded to the revolutionary crisis and how their collective experiences shaped the course of the revolution in specific locales. The three essays of part 3, "Social Revolutions in the Peripheries," connect the organization of state power to important public organizations that were backed by distinct social groups.

³ We did not include chapters on the Far East, Caucasus, and Central Asia because they will appear in future volumes of the Russia's Great War and Revolution project.

The Backdrop

For Russia the First World War began in the midst of a dramatic and destabilizing period of political and social modernization, which altered the relationship between state and people and affected the everyday life and dreams of its citizens. Modernization of the Russian state was enabled by the reforms of Alexander II in the 1860s, which emancipated Russia's serfs, created local administration that attempted to draw the population into the polity, modernized the military, and encouraged industrialization. These reforms increased social mobility in Russia and facilitated the development of both a civic sphere and a nascent working class. The autocratic state did not adapt quickly enough to the challenges of governing a modernizing state. The revolution in 1905–06 forced the autocracy to concede an elected parliamentary body (the State Duma), but this concession was reluctant, and the autocracy consistently resisted challenges to its monopoly on power. Many of the political reforms were half-hearted, and the government tried to curb them soon after they had been introduced. The modernizing economy, with accompanying social mobility and societal transformation, contrasted sharply with an ossifying autocratic structure of rule, which ultimately resisted society's attempts to introduce significant political reform.

These political and social tensions undermined Russia's stability in the prewar years and were exacerbated dramatically soon after the opening of military hostilities of the First World War in August 1914. This conflict placed an unprecedented strain on Russia's economy and society. The first total war demanded the total mobilization of men, of industry, and of agriculture. Russia's military enlisted millions of citizens, many of whom continued to fight throughout the war and even after it was over, in the multiple battles of Russia's Civil War. Altogether, the First World War displaced around 12 percent of Russia's population, or 17.5 million people.⁴ The flow of prisoners of war and refugees from war-stricken regions added to confusion and unrest and placed further pressure on transportation, provisioning, and state infrastructure. On the home front, the loss of male workers to conscription placed pressure on agriculture and on the families who depended on their labor. Military defeats and growing economic dislocations fed rising criticism of the handling of the war by the tsarist government, and the tsar himself.⁵

⁴ Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 222. Gatrell comes to this figure by estimating numbers of mobilized soldiers, prisoners of war, and refugees.

⁵ See Joshua Sanborn's penetrating analysis of the social impact of war in Russia, "Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I," *Journal of Modern History* 77, 2 (2005): 290–324.

Mounting political and social tensions erupted in the February Revolution in 1917, when workers and soldiers' wives demonstrations and a mutiny in the garrison in Petrograd pushed the tsarist government to collapse.⁶ The establishment of the Petrograd Soviet, which to some extent challenged the Provisional Government's authority in the capital, provided the basis for what came to be known as dual power. While it was quite pronounced in Petrograd, divisions between Soviet and Provisional Government organizations in the provinces were more blurred or even nonexistent through 1917.

The revolution had a profound effect on Russia's economy, which collapsed in 1917. The government covered four-fifths of its expenses with deficit spending by 1915–16, and this proportion actually worsened in 1917.⁷ As the revolutionary government printed more and more money to cover the deficit, inflation surged out of control. A basket of household goods in the second half of 1917 cost about five times what it had in 1913.⁸ People in the towns and countryside found it increasingly difficult or even impossible to obtain life's daily necessities.

Material realities contrasted sharply with popular expectations of the revolution. Long-held political dreams and wartime mobilization had politicized ordinary Russians, and the February Revolution empowered and filled them with hope to build a new, just regime. They participated in mass political festivals that sacralized the new political freedoms and got involved in multiple grassroots committees and soviets that had sprung up across the country.⁹

The deteriorating economic climate together with rising popular expectations made it increasingly difficult for the Provisional Government to consolidate its power. The country's continuing participation in the First

⁶ See Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd 1917* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980); and A. B. Nikolaev, *Revoliutsiia i vlast': IV Gosudarstvennaia дума, 27 fevralia–3 marta 1917 goda* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta imeni A. I. Gertsena, 2005). For a discussion of agency in the February Revolution, see Michael Melancon, *Rethinking Russia's February Revolution: Anonymous Spontaneity or Socialist Agency?* Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2000).

⁷ Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 134.

⁸ M. P. Kokhn, *Russkie indeksy tsen* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1926), 18.

⁹ On the spring 1917 political rituals and emotions, see Mark D. Steinberg, ed., *Voices of Revolution, 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Boris Kolonitskii and Orlando Figes, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

World War aggravated the situation. The government experienced a series of setbacks that limited its ability to control the situation. A crisis over war aims in April led to the formation of the first coalition government, whereby socialists and Petrograd Soviet members participated in government. Political tensions intensified in June as a result of an abortive offensive on the front and the attempts of Alexander Kerensky (as minister of war and then head of the government) to galvanize the army. This crisis culminated in the July Days, a series of demonstrations and disturbances on the streets of Petrograd between 3 and 5 July that were characterized by their forceful demands for "All power to the Soviet." The later attempts to restore discipline in the army and stability at the rear ended in the Kornilov affair of August, when the army's supreme commander was implicated in a plot to take over the government. Kerensky's own credibility was severely damaged by his own involvement in the affair. The Democratic Conference in September made a final attempt to unite so-called democratic forces, but it in fact only served to illustrate the gulf in approaches and policies among participants. The progressive disintegration of the political center provided an opportunity to the Bolsheviks, who secured a majority in the Petrograd Soviet and seized power in the name of the soviets on 25 October. They then set out to spread soviet power across the empire.

The Bolshevik takeover of power in Petrograd started a wave of attempts to re-form and consolidate centers of power. In many provincial centers, the Bolsheviks' advance signaled the final collapse of central authority and the drive for regional and local autonomy. Along the perimeters of the empire, numerous national governments emerged, and the larger anti-Bolshevik movement gained momentum in response to Bolshevik central policies. In January 1918 the Bolsheviks forcefully disbanded the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, a democratically elected representative organ, and in March the Soviet Government signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany. Russia's exit from the war and the premature demise of the Constituent Assembly galvanized anti-Bolshevik forces, which regrouped on the imperial periphery where Bolshevik control was not particularly strong and where they could expect to get external help from Russia's Allies in the First World War. The forces that arrayed against the Bolsheviks in 1918 were extremely diverse both in their backgrounds and in their visions for Russia's future. They included not only conservatives and former tsarist elites but also a wide array of socialists and liberals who were appalled by Bolshevik attacks on democratic institutions and by the "treacherous" peace with Germany.

The next three years witnessed a brutal civil war accompanied by extensive mobilizations of men and requisition of resources by the Soviet Red

Army, White armies, and local partisan groups.¹⁰ The Bolshevik government eventually repelled the White forces, most importantly the Siberian armies of Admiral Alexander Kolchak and General Anton Denikin's forces in South Russia. It also suppressed massive peasant and worker disturbances and uprisings that developed as a reaction to brutal grain requisitioning policies. By the end of 1920 the Soviet government was in firm control of most of the former Russian Empire and suppressed the last pockets of resistance to the Soviet state with an iron fist over the next few years.

This general narrative of the Russian Revolution and Civil War is well known from history textbooks. Historians still struggle, however, to encapsulate the diversity of the Russian population's experiences, of how specific theaters of conflict developed, and of how these multiple local revolutions and counterrevolutions shaped the larger path of events. When the Red Army and various anti-Bolshevik formations swept across provincial Russia, popular support for the conflicting parties varied significantly, and depended on grassroots struggles and social tensions. All the pretenders for political power tried to establish local administrations in order to gain manpower and resources for their armies. They had to interact with local populations in this process. Behind the frontlines of the Civil War, deserters, local armed bands and self-defense units fought their own battles that sometimes ran parallel but more often intersected with the bigger conflict between Reds and Whites. These local battles not only fueled violence at the grassroots level but also brought tactical advantages to one side or another at various times. In these ways, regional contexts entered the bigger scene of the revolution and the Civil War, and to a significant degree defined their outcome. The authors of the present volume analyze the war and Civil War both as national movements and as localized experiences. Looking deeper into the local struggles and regional environments, they seek to comprehend how provincial contexts and the actions of local political leaders contributed to and altered the bigger narrative of the Russian Revolution.

Historiography: The Regional Turn

This book brings together many strands in Russian and Western scholarship on provincial Russia. The two most important are the tradition of Russian and Soviet regional studies, rooted in *kraevedenie*, local histories that produced regional studies and built local self-awareness, and Western research in Russian and Soviet social history that developed a particular regional turn. The

¹⁰ For an outline of military campaigns, see Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000); and N. E. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' revoliutsiia*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990).

intersection of these two historiographical trends provides a basis for the present volume.

In Russia, *kraevedenie* dated back to the 19th century. From at least the 1830s, local experts, including self-proclaimed scholars and, after 1864, zemstvo employees, examined regional fauna, languages, peoples, and histories.¹¹ These studies continued into the 1920s with vibrant ethnographic projects. They diminished under Stalin with the attack on neopopulist scholars, but the success of later regional studies on the peasantry and nationalities owed a lot to the detailed information they presented on specific locales, including cuisine, regional dialects, local markets and products, fauna, and migratory patterns.

Histories of the revolution in the regions began immediately, in 1917, as the infant Soviet state tried to articulate a revolutionary narrative and then create a historical memory of the revolutionary events.¹² In the 1920s, individuals across the regions participated in creating Soviet history through the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Russian Communist Party (Istpart). Scores of local Soviet works later focused on specific social groups in the region, such as workers and peasants. Scholars in the provinces might not have enjoyed the popularity of historians in Moscow or Leningrad, but throughout the Soviet period they produced significant, creative works on local revolutions. This was true in particular during “the Thaw” (1956–62) under Nikita Khrushchev that allowed more critical publications of Soviet history, but even in the more restrictive Leonid Brezhnev era (1964–82). While apparently trumpeting Soviet victories with the heroic support of the toiling population, when read more closely many of these studies hint at some of the problems that the early Soviet regime faced, such as local resistance to unpopular Soviet grain policies, even if Soviet authors defined them as led by kulaks or as unconscious acts.¹³ Work during *glasnost* and the immediate post-Soviet era at first pushed the boundaries

¹¹ For an analysis of *kraevedenie*, see Emily Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); and Susan Smith-Peter, “How to Write a Region: Local and Regional Historiography,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, 3 (Summer 2004): 527–42. On the study of Russian provinces, see Catherine Evtuhov on Nizhnii Novgorod, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); V. A. Berdinskikh, *Uezdnye istoriki: Russkaia provintsial’naia istoriografiia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

¹² Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), especially 1–11.

¹³ This is especially true of collections of primary documents, often published to mark anniversaries of the revolution, such as the 50th anniversary in 1967.

of the Soviet narrative. Historians championed Viktor P. Danilov's work, for example, drawing on the early Soviet publications of agrarian economist Aleksandr V. Chaianov and questioning Lenin's conclusions that peasants were becoming proletarians in the early 20th century.¹⁴ Many local historians continued to describe events during the revolution through Soviet categories, while some questioned or went against Soviet motifs around the popularity of the Bolsheviks.

Since the mid-1980s, three crucial events have spurred the regional turn in Russian history. The *glasnost'* of the mid-1980s allowed Russian and Western scholars alike to undertake a full research agenda on the history of the revolution in the regions. The end of Cold War restrictions opened up access to regional state and party archives, while soon thereafter historians began to ask different questions in their research about the revolution than scholars did at the height of the Cold War. Just as Russia's regions were opening up in the 1990s, technological changes made the regions more inviting. The Internet brought Western and local Russian scholars and archivists in closer contact, allowing them to share material and work. Many regional archives, even though hard-pressed for funds, also began to publish new guides (*putevoditeli*), allowing scholars to identify and even see materials previously unavailable to them.¹⁵ Finally, new methodological approaches inside and outside of Russia have influenced scholars.

In the West, the changing political climate and new paradigms of historical research defined the emergence of regional studies of the Russian Revolution. For many years scholars who focused largely on the ideology, personalities, and state and party politics in the center dominated Soviet studies in the West. As part of the Cold War mission, especially in the 1950s–60s, they tried to understand how the Bolsheviks came to power in October so quickly and established one-party rule. Scholars debated whether or not the Bolshevik seizure of power (and by extension the Soviet Union as a whole) was an illegitimate coup d'état or a popular revolution in support of soviet power.¹⁶ With

¹⁴ V. P. Danilov, *Sovetskaia dokolkhoznaia derevnia: Naselenie, zemlepol'zovanie, khoziaistvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

¹⁵ Special mention should be given to the Soros Foundation, which financed the publication of handbooks for many regional former party archive and regional archives alike. Since 2010 or so, many archives have posted updated handbooks online.

¹⁶ The classic examples of the two sides of this debate are, on the one hand, Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1990), who championed the coup interpretation, and on the other, Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1932* (New York: Oxford

the advance of social history in the 1960s, a pioneering group of scholars of the Russian Revolution started to ask different types of questions. Scholars attempted to understand the social context of the revolution across the empire, asking what groups of peoples such as workers, soldiers, and peasants desired from political change and what were their value systems. But Soviet restrictions on travel and access to archives continued to limit the source base for this research.¹⁷ Even with these restrictions, Donald J. Raleigh's early work pioneered the regional approach to the revolution with a detailed study of Saratov province in 1917.¹⁸ A major turning point came with the era of *glasnost'* when the Soviet government relaxed restrictions on research and travel and scholars began to research deeply across the Soviet Union and to collaborate more closely with Soviet historians. Orlando Figes became the first Western scholar to provide an in-depth picture of rural revolution with his study of the Lower Volga Region, and several other scholars soon followed.¹⁹ Figes,

University Press, 1980). This is a simplification of a much larger issue of Cold War politics, scholars' intellectual interests, and visions of mobilizing the social sciences to understand and change the world. See David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) for the backstory of this debate. The early works by William Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1921*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1935); and E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 14 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1950–78), do pay attention to the regions and take nuanced positions on the Bolshevik seizure of power and early rule.

¹⁷ For example, Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Imperial Russian Army*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980 and 1987); Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Graeme J. Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); John L. H. Keep, *Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), etc. On the need for a social history of the revolution, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution," *American Historical Review* 88, 1 (February 1983): 31–52.

¹⁸ Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); *A Russian Civil War Diary: Alexis Babine in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Raleigh and Figes's works were part of a larger wave of social histories that gave us local histories, even without full access to the archives. See, for example, Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixtor, eds., *Peasant Economy, Culture*

Raleigh, and other Western scholars who had begun work in the provinces uncovered local political culture in the villages and towns that was guided by events of the center, but which established its own rhythms.

Eventually, the two lines of research that developed largely independently in Russia and the West coalesced, and in the last 15 years or so, a new wave of scholarship emerged that is grounded in deep local archival research. This new historiography complicates our understanding of the provinces and the questions that we ask about the revolution. Historians have recently used specific case studies in the provinces to examine how state practices devised in the center were implemented. Peter Holquist's work, for example, draws on the Don Region and focuses on how the compressed crises of war, revolution, and civil war shaped overlapping state practices on grain, population, and surveillance.²⁰ At the same time, new research also goes in the opposite direction to demonstrate how the complicated developments in the provinces influenced decisions in the center and the pace of the revolution more generally. They also focus on the role of place and space in understanding local revolutionary events.²¹

The work on the revolution was part of a larger trend in Russian scholarship that focused on the provinces. The new research both on pre- and postrevolutionary Russia underscores the importance of place in creating history and reveals the diversity of histories, mixing the politics of state formation from

and Politics of European Russia, 1800–1921 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²⁰ Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Lars Lih asks some of the same questions on grain without access from regional archives: Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²¹ For example, Michael C. Hickey, "Local Government and State Authority in the Provinces: Smolensk, February–June 1917," *Slavic Review* 55, 4 (1996): 863–81; and Hickey, "Paper, Memory, and a Good Story: How Smolensk Got Its 'October,'" *Revolutionary Russia* 13, 1 (December 2000): 1–19; Tanja Penter, *Odessa 1917: Revolution an der Peripherie* (Vienna: Bohlau Verlag, 2000); I. V. Narskii, *Zhizn' v katastrofe: Budni naseleniia Urala v 1917–1922 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001); Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War*; Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the People: A Provincial History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Matthew Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland: The Tsarist Elite in Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); L. G. Novikova *Provintsial'naia "kontrrevoliutsiia": Beloe dvizhenie i Grazhdanskaia voina na Russkom Severe, 1917–1920* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011); Willard Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak: A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

above and social and political change from below.²² Larger historiographical trends toward deep regional and micro studies that examined how local factors like environment, economics, and kinship shaped the historical experience or everyday life, as well as postcolonial studies that tried to uncover lost voices of colonial subjects and to overturn the dominant narratives, informed these new provincial histories.²³ Regional histories of the Russian Revolution have emerged as a field where different national historiographies and broader theoretical approaches intersect and inform one another.

Recasting the Revolution through the Regional Lens

Regional perspectives of the Russian Revolution highlight several important themes of the period that are reflected in the subsequent chapters: a multitudinal state, the fluidity of party politics, the importance of violence as a historical agent, individual experiences, and the importance of economics and social forces. It is in these points where local experiences most closely intersect with the larger political issues and where they help to explicate more general phenomena.²⁴

²² For just a few more recent examples, see, for example, Paul Werth on the Volga-Kama Region, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Mary W. Cavender on Tver', *Nests of the Gentry: Family, Estate, and Local Loyalties in Provincial Russia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007); Robert Geraci on Kazan', *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Larry Holmes on Kirov, *Grand Theater: Regional Governance in Stalin's Russia, 1931–1941* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Tracy McDonald on Riazan', *Face to the Village: The Riazan' Countryside under Soviet Rule, 1921–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Rex A. Wade and Scott J. Seregny, eds., on Saratov, *Politics and Society in Provincial Russia, Saratov, 1590–1917* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989); Donald J. Raleigh, ed., *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

²³ For example, Christian Gras and Georges Livet, eds., *Régions et régionalisme en France du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Vendôme: Presses universitaires de France, 1977); David Sabeau, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁴ In this way, the editors see this volume as a regional extension of the questions raised in Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History*, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See especially pp. ix–xiii.

Regional studies reveal the grassroots mechanisms of fragmentation and the reestablishment of state power, and allow us to gain a deeper conception of the state as a whole. The transformation of the Russian state was one of the defining events of the revolution. On one hand, the state became weak and fragmented. The centralized imperial state collapsed in 1917 as power drained to the provinces. As Matthew Rendle underscores in his chapter about Moscow province, during the revolutionary period “prioritizing the local was an essential part of building democracy for most ordinary people.” As a result, centrifugal forces in 1917 hit not only distant provinces, but also the center itself when authorities at every level “exerted their independence from those above.” Sarah Badcock, focusing on Nizhegorod and Kazan’ provinces, similarly demonstrates that “localism and economic interests dominated the rural population’s responses to the events of 1917” and as a result, “seats of power were multiple, overlapping and shifting.”

On the other hand, protracted military conflict made the state more powerful than it had ever been. The war’s totality engendered new state powers of mass mobilization of people and resources and interventionism into its subjects’ lives. These powers only grew in the Civil War period with both the Bolsheviks’ and the Whites’ larger visions of social transformation. The reconstitution of state authority found support at the grassroots level, particularly in those territories where the local population depended on the state-organized supply of food resources or its mediation in local disputes, as L. G. Novikova demonstrates in her chapter. In another region, however, as S. V. Liubichankovskii reveals for the Southern Volga, provincial society vehemently resisted state intervention and the emergence of new layers of state bureaucracy in the form of the *zemstvo*. It even regarded these new self-government institutions as an unnecessary burden. Regional studies allow us to contextualize and eventually to understand these seemingly contradictory trajectories, including the temporary weakening of the state but simultaneously the penetration of state institutions into the localities.

Several contributions to this volume reveal the importance of local officials and local agents of power in shaping revolutionary policies. Recent historiography has demonstrated how the state experimented with revolutionary policies in the provinces, notably surveillance, population politics that grouped, exiled, or even attempted to annihilate whole peoples, and the expanded welfare state. Likewise, forced grain requisition was tried in specific regions and then made into universal policy. Regional studies can give greater insight not only into the grand schemes of modern state visionaries acting as local officials, but also into the challenges and distinctions between policy and practice. Studying how regional officials in the regions received and implemented the policies pronounced by the central government reveals

that local party members and citizens interpreted them in multiple ways and often resisted them. Peter Fraunholtz illustrates how the initiative of local agents in Penza helped to prevent excessive grain requisitioning. As a result, the province could avoid the large-scale peasant uprisings that swept neighboring Tambov province in 1920. Thus local political actors could choose among the options available to them, and as a result influenced larger political developments.

Political violence performed by local state and non-state actors defined the Civil War experience in the regions. The Soviet and White states did not hesitate to exact violence on all of their enemies, real and imagined. In order to establish their control in the provinces, the Bolsheviks needed to rely on various armed groups, including military units, workers' militias, and the Soviet political police (the Cheka). As Stefan Karsch demonstrates in the example of Voronezh province, the Bolsheviks used their often randomly applied violence to spread terror and to further their political ends. Both the Bolsheviks and their adversaries tried to channel violence from below to fit their political goals. State-sanctioned violence (as well as violent crimes of individuals) destroyed the lives of ordinary people in towns and villages across Russia during the Civil War.

Several chapters in this volume cast light on why popular democratic institutions in 1917 metastasized into an undemocratic authoritarian state during the Civil War. As scholars have spelled out, ideology, modernist ideas of the state's need to rationalize its citizens, wartime mobilization, the Civil War itself, and leading personalities (namely Lenin) were all probably factors in this move. There was not just one path from the democratic decentralized state of 1917 to the one-party state that emerged from the Civil War. The chapters in this volume show that there were several local varieties of the Soviet state. In some locales, Bolsheviks were willing to rule with other parties, while in others they moved quickly toward expelling non-Bolsheviks. In other regions the Soviet state remained quite weak throughout the Civil War and could not assert complete political control.

Regional studies reveal the centrality of local social organizations in shaping the political process at a grassroots level. Tanja Penter focuses on the Soviet of the Unemployed in Odessa that for several weeks challenged the power of the local soviet and cast the whole meaning of soviet power in a different light. In his contribution, Aaron Retish discusses the role of soldiers returning to Izhevsk. This huge but so far very little studied social group often played a crucial role in local politics through the revolutionary period. Returning soldiers could join the movement of the unemployed, as was the case in Odessa. In Izhevsk, though, many of them openly turned against the Bolsheviks. The contributors show the importance of local social forces and

non-state powers in contesting both the Bolshevik regime and its adversaries. Clearly the Soviet regime could not control these social forces that held their own visions of politics. The Bolsheviks hastily and violently cracked down on these organizations in several regions, as opponents to their control of politics.

Several authors in this volume also combine studies of local politics and economics with national identities. They underscore that national minorities' experience of revolution paralleled the experiences of other social groups. They refuse to make sweeping generalizations that treat the empire's national minorities as undifferentiated masses whose aspirations simply echoed national leaders' demands for independence from the center. Instead, they note the multiplicity of ideas and languages of nationalist dreams and aspirations. As Daniel Schafer puts it in his study of different visions and languages of Bashkir nationalism, "the political scene among non-Russian peoples of the empire was no less broad or nuanced than among the Russians themselves." War and revolution opened up internal debates about the nature of national communities and their perspectives in the revolutionary world. Michael Hickey shows that the Smolensk Jewish community, just like other social groups, responded to the war and revolution through new participation in public life and, in 1917, tried to realize their dreams of equality. At the same time, they too had multiple political ideas of revolution and, as Hickey reveals, continued to suffer from antipathy and anti-Jewish violence through the whole period. Mark R. Baker focuses on peasants of Kharkiv province in eastern Ukraine in the period of 1914–18 and their experiences of war, revolution, and German occupation. From his account it becomes clear that Ukrainian peasants, like Russian villagers, reacted to these events "in a decidedly local manner, reflecting their localist understanding of the world." Their actions undermined the attempts of the Ukrainian national elites to establish a national government with German support. In contrast, in Estonia, as Karsten Brüggemann demonstrates, German occupation actually contributed to the success of the national movement as it guarded this former imperial province from Bolshevik influence for several months. Estonian independence gained popularity because of the ability of the Estonian elites to implement a nationally specific land reform. Finland's path to independence, according to E. Iu. Dubrovskaja, was quite different. To a significant degree, it was facilitated by the joint actions of Finnish workers and Russian soldiers and sailors stationed in Finland during World War I. Although their goals in the revolution diverged, their mutual radicalization in 1917 weakened the control of the center over this former imperial periphery. Thus the complex patterns of national revolutions included particular local combinations of political and social factors as well as external forces that influenced the events, be it in the Urals, Smolensk, Eastern Ukraine, Finland, Estonia, or Odessa.

Provincial histories successfully deconstruct the central narrative of events by revealing a multiplicity of local agencies and interests, and set an agenda for further research that will eventually lead to a new synthesis of Russia's revolutionary experience. Although it is still too early to see the concrete shape of this new narrative, its most important components are already evident. They include the crucial role of the state and its local agents, the formative role of revolutionary violence, and the complexity of social and national responses to the revolution in their localized contexts. Looking at Russia's revolutions through the image of a kaleidoscope allows us to see the ever-changing patterns and interconnections of the period. In the end, viewing the revolution through its local and multihued patterns reveals the multifaceted complexity of human experiences.



Map of European Russia, 1914 by University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Laboratory