

Introduction: Russia's Great War and Revolution, the Central Powers

John Deak, Heather R. Perry, and Emre Sencer

This volume is not about Russia's Great War and Revolution, and yet, it is. As Russia mobilized millions of men in 1914—faster than probably anyone in Berlin and Vienna had predicted—Germany enacted its war plans and crossed the frontiers into Belgium. The bulk of Germany's mobilized armed forces stood on the Western Front, leaving a smaller contingent in the East.¹ The Russian army entered German territory, spreading waves of panic and reports of horrific atrocities against civilians. East Prussian towns and villages became scenes of fire and plunder.² The Russian threat in the East thus moved from the Central Powers' imaginary to their grim reality. The aim of this volume is to introduce readers to the myriad ways in which the populations of the Central Powers nations both perceived and encountered Russia's Great War and Revolution.

Why the Central Powers?

Despite the long-standing fear of Russia within the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires before 1914 as well as in the early days of the war, it is only recently that scholars have begun to examine how perceptions and stereotypes of "the Russian peril" influenced the people, policies, and proce-

¹ For a recent summary of the German war plans in the west, see Holger H. Herwig, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2011), chap. 2; Robin Prior, "The Western Front," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, ed. Jay Winter, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1: 204–33.

² For the important psychological legacies of Russia's brief and violent invasion of Prussia, see above all Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914–1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 162–81.

dures of the Central Powers.³ The reasons for this are many and are well covered in the other volumes of this series. For years, longstanding restrictions on access to archives both in Russia and behind the Iron Curtain; the greater significance of the Second World War in Central and Eastern European history than the First; and the research obstacles of mastering various languages and national historiographies created the initial barriers to conducting scholarly work on the Eastern Front. But, more important than this has been the national splintering of scholarship on the First World War to which the conflict gave birth. This process has produced, by its very nature, a corresponding absence of academic conversations between these various national historiographic schools, from the Oder to the Dnieper, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe has for a long time been siloed into numerous national historiographic sandboxes.

The isolation and lack of interaction between these various scholarly communities as well as their insular interpretations of the First World War are giving way to more open and shared conversations, through conferences, centenary collaborations, and edited volumes.⁴ But this conjuncture may have come too late for the centenary of the war and the concomitant surge in popular interest. “Globalization” and the “global reach” of the war have become buzzwords and influenced scholars to look beyond Europe in their study of the war. The focus on imperial history and the examination of the war’s imperial dimensions have also garnered new interest. The idea that the First World War was a global phenomenon has enriched our understanding of the scope of the conflict. Yet, at the same time, it has refocused scholarly attention on

³ See, for instance, Troy R. E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, the Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890–1914* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010); and James E. Casteel, *Russia in the German Global Imaginary: Imperial Visions and Utopian Desires, 1905–1941* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

⁴ In addition to scores of conferences undertaken by academic groups or sponsored by national and local governments (which are too numerous to name here), since 2001 the International Society for First World War Studies (ISFWWS) has taken as its mission the promotion of scholarly collaboration and communication about WWI around the globe. For more on the ISFWWS, see their website and scholarly journal, *First World War Studies*: <http://www.firstworldwarstudies.org/index.php> (accessed 10 December 2019). Examples of collaborative publications include the essays in the following volumes: Judith Devlin, Maria Falina, and John Paul Newman, eds., *World War I in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Conflict and Military Experience* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018); Joachim Bürgschwentner, Matthias Egger, and Gunda Barth-Scalmani, eds., *Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Wolfram Dornik, Julia Walleczek-Fritz, and Stefan Wedrac, eds., *Frontwechsel: Österreich-Ungarns “Großer Krieg” im Vergleich* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013); Bernhard Bachinger and Wolfram Dornik, eds., *Jenseits des Schützengrabens: Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten. Erfahrung—Wahrnehmung—Kontext* (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 2013).

English and French imperial narratives, or narratives of the emergence of the USA as a world power, skipping over the East once again as a focus of international attention.⁵ This is a shame, since the topic is fundamental and scholarship on it is awakening. And moreover, as recent scholarship on the First World War has extended the time parameters of the conflict beyond the years of 1914 and 1918, broader histories of the Eastern Front reveal that the First World War was just one moment in a much longer chronology. The seminal catastrophe of the First World War was nowhere so seminal or so catastrophic as in the East. This was no side show; not for the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe and not for the history of Europe in the 20th century. And it was there in the shatterzone of the four landed empires that the war morphed and continued well after the guns *in the West* fell silent after the armistice of 11 November 1918.⁶

The larger goal of this volume is to sit in conversation with the others in this series that directly deal with Russia and its Great War and Revolution. Our task was to provide an entry point for scholars who need a quick assessment of recent historiographic perspectives from the “other side of the hill.”⁷ In some matters of history writing, the war looks from this angle markedly different from trends within the Russian and Soviet contexts. Major events that have different weights and turning points on one side of the front can represent more the story of continuity on the other. We make no claims to

⁵ Publications reflecting the imperial turn in WWI historiography are too numerous to list here, but examples include Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Richard Fogarty and Andrew Tait Jarboe, eds., *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Xu, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War, 1914–18* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018); Santanu Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶ Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016); Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ For an analog point of reference, see also the volume in this series David Wolff, Yokote Shinji, and Willard Sunderland, eds., *Russia's Great War and Revolution in the Far East: Re-imagining the Northeast Asian Theater, 1914–1922* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2018).

settle accounts with historians and historical interpretations on the Russian side of the front. Scholars of the Central Powers' experiences have different narratives, different turning points, and differing orders of importance that we give to events and developments in the Great War. We have differing ideas of change and continuity. These differences of interpretation cannot be settled here. But we can, and should, begin to talk across the academic front that looms over the historical lines of demarcation. We are academics for whom no man's land exists only in our minds.

De-centralizing the Central Powers

Though perhaps united *during the war*, we want to remind readers that the Great War *historiographies* of the Central Powers nations carry a diverse set of meanings—both then and now. Just as it was for the nations of the Entente, the main weight of First World War memory in Germany was focused on the Western Front. The Eastern Front, on the other hand, remained a more complicated area, in which the Central Powers won the conflict, at least until the Versailles Treaty undid the gains of Brest-Litovsk. And as it was for almost every nation in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the culture of remembrance in Germany, especially in West Germany during the Cold War, zeroed in on the legacy of the Eastern Front as a precursor of the war of annihilation and genocide that was to be the Second World War. The campaign in the East presaged practices of colonialism and pseudoethnographic classification of the peoples of the Baltic, Belorussia, and Ukraine, and turned the self-assured gaze of the German bureaucratic and officer classes on the Eastern “other.”⁸ German troops in the occupational mode in the East found themselves in a very different environment than those in the trenches of the Western Front, a difference that was echoed in postwar memoirs. Like those who fought in the desert landscape of the Middle Eastern campaign, the veterans of the Eastern Front fought and remained in an expeditionary mode, a fact bolstered by the more “liquid” nature of the campaign theater.⁹ The literature on the

⁸ See, for example, Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1932* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹ For a comparative study of the Germans in the Near East and the Ottomans in Galicia as remembered by the veterans, see Emre Sencer, “From Galicia to Galilee: The Ottoman and German Expeditionary Experiences in the First World War in Comparison,” in *Expeditionary Forces in the First World War*, ed. Alan Beyerchen and Sencer (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 261–88.

campaigns tended to highlight these points accordingly. A further significant aspect of the legacy of the campaign in the historiography is the link between the veterans of the German Eastern Front and the emergence of the Freikorps units at the end of the war, shifting the focus further to the postwar developments in Germany.¹⁰

For Ottoman historiography, until recently the First World War in general has remained in the shadow of the War of Independence (1919–22) that followed. In many ways, the Great War in popular memory is more significant as a precursor of the events that happened “after,” especially as the “seminal catastrophe” became the harbinger of the nation-state and national revival in the form of the republic. In fact, in the early years of the republic, the official historiography used the memory of the First World War as a tool to criticize the imperial military leadership and to glorify the cadres that established the new state. With the exception of a handful of isolated victories in 1915–16, the war was remembered by most as a series of severe mismanagements and costly misfortunes, a conflict that ruined a generation and defeated the empire. And the land campaign against the Russians, the Caucasus Front, became the most complicated chapter of this memory, not only because of the Russian occupation that it brought to Eastern Anatolia during 1916–17, but also because it provided the path for the ruling Committee of Union and Progress’s murderous policies toward the empire’s ancient Christian populations in the region. As such, the historiography of the war, especially the campaign against the Russian Empire, until very recently involved areas of silence, evasion, and discomfort.

The narratives of Habsburg history and the First World War are just as convoluted. The collapse and subsequent splintering of the empire into little national and nationalizing empires after 1918 has, for a long time, relegated the First World War to a background role or mere catalyst in the origin stories and birth narratives of the Polish, Yugoslav, or Czechoslovak nation-states.¹¹ In such narratives, the Habsburg Empire fulfilled the role of the prison of the peoples and the First World War was the earthquake that broke open the doors of the prison cells. As a consequence, the narratives of the empire in the war have been splintered national ones. Moreover, such stories were supported by the larger operational history of the Habsburg war. Tellingly it was members of the Habsburg High Command who became the very historians

¹⁰ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

¹¹ Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2016), 442–52.

that provided the narrative of the war.¹² Echoing the stab-in-the-back myth that was cultivated in interwar Germany, the authors of operational history in the aftermath of the First World War blamed the loss of the war on the civilian population, especially the empire's Slavs.¹³ Such narratives worked to save the reputation of the generals, but they also channeled thinking on the Habsburg's Empire's last war into national channels of blame and hindered any coherent and cohesive understanding of the war experience.¹⁴ In the past 30 years, however, new narratives have emerged that jettison easy nation-state official histories and look to the common war experiences, deprivations, and suffering. Moreover, the Habsburg experience of the war was not just one of devastating losses in battle and the deprivations of the home front: it also includes the stories of POWs, refugees, national difference and encounter, military justice and retribution, and especially the histories of forces of occupation.¹⁵

This sheer variety of focal points and narratives *within* the Central Powers' WWI history has made the writing of a unifying approach historically difficult. Nevertheless, recent analytical trends have promoted new academic

¹² Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, ed., *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914–1918*, 8 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der militärwissenschaftlichen Mitteilungen, 1930–38).

¹³ Kurt Peball, "Österreichische militärgeschichtliche Forschung zum Ersten Weltkrieg zwischen 1918 und 1960," in *Geschichte und Militärgeschichte: Wege der Forschung*, ed. Ursula von Gersdorff (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard und Graefe, 1974), 89–98; Peter Broucek and Kurt Peball, *Geschichte der österreichischen Militärhistoriographie* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000).

¹⁴ Richard Lein, *Pflichterfüllung oder Hochverrat? Die tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: LIT, 2011). See also Lein, "The Military Conduct of the Austro-Hungarian Czechs in the First World War," *Historian* 76, 3 (2014): 518–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12046>.

¹⁵ For a sample of recent work in these areas, see Claire Morelon, "L'arrivée des réfugiés de Galicie en Bohême pendant la Première Guerre mondiale: rencontre problématique et limites du patriotisme autrichien," *Histoire@Politique* 28, 1 (2016): 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.3917/hp.028.0005>; Julie Thorpe, "Displacing Empire: Refugee Welfare, National Activism and State Legitimacy in Austria-Hungary in the First World War," in *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102–26; Oswald Überegger, *Der andere Krieg: Die Tiroler Militärgerichtsbarkeit im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 2002); Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Christoph Mick, *Kriegserfahrungen in einer multiethnischen Stadt: Lemberg 1914–1947* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

encounters between historians of the successor states with good results. The larger conversations, across the no-man's-land into Russian history, are the next desideratum. The actual frontline experiences of the war in the East reveal that the battle fronts and home fronts were less clearly demarcated than in the West, and they often caught larger civilian populations in their nets.¹⁶ In the East, mobility—not a static line of trenches and barbed wire—characterized the front experiences of the troops and often brought civilians directly into contact with soldiers. The Eastern Front was longer, sparser, and the battles less static. The Eastern Front was a war of movement, of attack, of retreat, and of occupation.¹⁷ At the start of hostilities in the East, the bulk of Russia's forces focused on knocking out Germany's less powerful ally, the Habsburg Empire. The Habsburg army mobilized nearly a million men on a long and rolling Eastern Front and dutifully attacked, following their chief of the General Staff's operation plan. No sooner had the Habsburg army entered into Russian Poland and Ukraine when they were repulsed by a larger and more aggressive army than they ever imagined. Over the next few months, the Habsburg armies were continually pushed back by the invading Russians. By the end of March 1915, the professional core of the Austro-Hungarian army had been annihilated and large swathes of Galician farmland—one of the Habsburg Empire's core grain-producing regions, were under Russian occupation.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the Ottoman entry into the war on the Central Powers' side opened a new front against the Russians. However, the failure of the Sarikamış offensive in the winter of 1914–15 frustrated Ottoman plans of conquest in the Caucasus, precipitated tens of thousands of otherwise unnecessary casualties, dealt a huge blow to the Ottoman leadership's prestige, and eventually opened

¹⁶ Robert Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse: Warsaw during the First World War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ For a recent overview of the Eastern Front, see Holger Afflerbach, "The Eastern Front," in Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 1: 234–65. See also Gerhard Paul Gross, ed., *The Forgotten Front: The Eastern Theater of World War I, 1914–1915*, trans. Janice W. Ancker (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018).

¹⁸ For the disastrous "Battle of Galicia" and the winter campaign that followed, see John R. Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle: The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015); Graydon A. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); and Alexander Watson, *The Fortress: The Siege of Przemyśl and the Making of Europe's Bloodlands* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

the path to Russian occupation of Eastern Anatolia by 1916.¹⁹ (See “Map of the Caucasus Front” on the page facing page 179.)

Russian victories in the East and the entrenchment of a static front in the West dissolved the Central Powers’ strategy for a short war. All sides searched for new allies in an attempt to open additional fronts and spread thin the enemy’s lines.²⁰ But the emerging realizations that the Great War would be a long war meant that the belligerents had to find new soldiers, make new weapons, and find ways to transform war enthusiasm into duty and endurance.²¹ And they endured. But shifting the war into one of endurance opened up the home front to the war. Economic production became tied more closely to an achievable victory. The concept of Total War centralized economic and industrial control, linked national unity with war production, and eliminated the possibility of meaningful labor activism.²² The Allied blockade, haphazard at first, solidified and started to bite the Central Powers as well.²³ Civilians became targets—as cogs in the war economy in the hinterland and as targets of vio-

¹⁹ See Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (New York: Praeger, 2000); also see his *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2007). For the Ottoman Empire’s path to war, see Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The analysis of the existential struggle between the Ottoman and Russian empires can be found in Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For the story of the competition for influence between the Austrians and Germans during the war in the Ottoman Empire, see Alexander Will, *Kein Griff nach der Weltmacht: Geheime Dienste und Propaganda im deutsch-österreichisch-türkischen Bündnis 1914–1918* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012). For Ottoman mobilization, see Mehmet Beşikçi, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War: Between Voluntarism and Resistance* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For a study of Ottoman conscription in the decades leading up to the war, see Elke Hartmann, *Die Reichweite des Staates: Wehrpflicht und moderne Staatlichkeit im Osmanischen Reich, 1869–1910* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016).

²⁰ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, “1915: Stalemate,” in Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 1: 81.

²¹ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²² Jürgen Kocka, *Facing Total War German Society, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²³ For the most recent treatment of the blockade, see Alan Kramer, “Blockade and Economic Warfare,” in Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 2: 460–88. An excellent study of social changes wrought by deprivation and total war in Habsburg Bohemia is Rudolf Kučera, *Rationed Life: Science, Everyday Life and Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands, 1914–1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2016).

lence and atrocities in the zones of military activity.²⁴ Moreover, home front morale and civilian understanding of the war became more important—both to influence and to manage.

The view “from below” is just as important. The image and place of Russia in the minds of the diverse populations within the Central Powers existed along a wide spectrum.²⁵ Newspapermen, ordinary citizens, and public intellectuals all raised their voices as part of defining and redefining what Russia was. Russia was cast as a looming threat in some quarters. For others, such as some Czech or radical politicians, or Ukrainians who were hostile to Polish elites in Austrian Galicia, or for Serbian elites, it was promoted as a great hope.²⁶ For the Ottomans, the image of Russia as an implacable enemy since the 17th century endured. Home front and war front were not hermetically sealed off from one another, but existed in a near constant conversation.²⁷ Moreover, these cultivated mentalities and popular imaginaries had very real repercussions on battle plans—just as the experiences of soldiers with Russians informed and influenced the thoughts of the peoples back home.

The movement of the front meant that the conversation on Russia and the East did not remain static. In May/June 1915, the joint Austro-Hungarian and German offensive at Gorlice-Tarnów pushed the Russian armies back out of much of Habsburg Galicia and far into the interior of Russian Poland.²⁸

²⁴ For an important intervention in this regard, see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

²⁵ Troy R. E. Paddock, *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*; Elisabeth Haid, “Galicia: A Bulwark against Russia? Propaganda and Violence in a Border Region during the First World War,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 24, 2 (2017): 200–13.

²⁶ Anna Veronika Wendland, *Die Russophilen in Galizien: Ukrainische Konservative zwischen Österreich und Russland, 1848–1915* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001). The concern with radicalized Czech “Russophiles” in the Habsburg Empire has long been a part of the story of national antagonisms in the Habsburg Empire. See some of the traditional Czech imagination of the “brother Russians” in Ivan Šedivý, *Češi, české zeme a velká válka, 1914–1918* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2001). See also Richard Lein’s excellent work on Czech-speaking regiments in the First World War cited above in note 14.

²⁷ For an excellent example of the connections between home front and war front in France, see Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); for Germany, see Dorothee Wierling, *Eine Familie im Krieg: Leben, Sterben und Schreiben, 1914–1918* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013).

²⁸ R. L. DiNardo, *Breakthrough: The Gorlice-Tarnów Campaign, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

Streams of refugees marched east as the fields of rye and barley once again were trampled by a wave of invading armies. For Germany and Austria-Hungary, war turned from repelling invasion to managing an occupation.²⁹ In Habsburg-occupied Poland, centered in Lublin, the Austro-Hungarian armies encountered the new task of managing civilians.³⁰ Successes on the Eastern Front freed troops for more ancillary campaigns. The Habsburg armies, with German manpower, likewise took over large swathes of Serbia, sharing the occupation of that country with Bulgaria.³¹ German territory in Russian Poland and the Baltics became Ober Ost. Romania's ill-fated choice to enter the war on the side of the Allies likewise meant occupation and economic exploitation by the German and Austro-Hungarian war machine.³² Occupation meant encounter, between soldiers and civilians, between soldiers and POWs. But it also created an opportunity for the awakening of political imaginations. In the context of the First World War, whether it was the German occupation of Ober Ost or Romania, Habsburg forces in Serbia, or Ottomans in Galicia, military men reimagined space and peoples. Irredentist phantasies of reconquering lost territories or forging new utopias abounded.³³ New political ideas, new understandings of relationships between peoples emerged. The character of the war, the way it was fought and perceived, changed as the war went on. The significance of the "seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century," as George Kennan famously described it, lay just as much with the new ideas that the war birthed and the seeds of future violence it sowed as in the millions of people who lost their lives due to the war.

²⁹ Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Wolfram Dornik et al., *The Emergence of Ukraine: Self-Determination, Occupation, and War in Ukraine, 1917–1922* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2015); Tamara Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat: Österreich-Ungarns Militärverwaltungen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009).

³¹ Literature on Austro-Hungarian occupation regimes has boomed in the last decade. See, for example, Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Wolfram Dornik, ed., *Die Besatzung der Ukraine 1918: Historischer Kontext—Forschungsstand—wirtschaftliche und soziale Folgen* (Graz: Verein zur Förderung der Forschung von Folgen nach Konflikten und Kriegen, 2008); Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*.

³² On Germany's policy toward Romania within the framework of the "German East," see David Hamlin, *Germany's Empire in the East: Germans and Romania in an Era of Globalization and Total War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³³ These are important themes in the collection of essays edited by Eric D. Weitz and Omer Bartov, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

These events increasingly drew civilians into the conflict and not only as economic units. Often enough in this war of movement, armies faced suspect populations as administrators, displacing civilian officials and the rule of law.³⁴ As a consequence, civilians, especially ethnic and religious minorities, became targets or obstacles in the struggle, at best hindrances to be moved out of the way, at worst problems to be annihilated. Nowhere was this more crucial than in the Ottoman Empire, where the war effort simultaneously focused on resisting the Entente forces at Gallipoli and ethnically cleansing Anatolia. The deportation of Armenians and other Eastern Christians starting in April 1915 soon turned into genocide, eventually claiming around a million lives.³⁵

By 1916, the war had changed everywhere from the Somme and Verdun, to the Julian Alps, to the fields of Galicia. The empires of the East (German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian) were engaged in a life-or-death struggle, a total war in which enduring became the key goal. It was a war that would claim all of their thrones. Brusilov's offensives nearly destroyed another Habsburg army, claiming much of the territory that Russia had conquered at the beginning. But the Russian army was largely spent in the process.³⁶ The blockade's grip on Central Europe tightened. The harvest was bad, the food supply fell dangerously low, and the militaries greedily gobbled up much of the resources to be had. Hunger and deprivation became defining features of urban populations in Central Europe.³⁷

On the Caucasus Front, Iudenich's armies pushed Ottoman defenders well into Anatolia in the summer of 1916, and despite repeated counterattacks, defeated two Ottoman armies and occupied large swathes of territory. The situation would remain static after that until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. From that point on, the bulk of the Ottoman war effort would focus on

³⁴ For the ramifications of these developments on the Western Front, see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁵ For the most recent research on the Armenian Genocide, see Ronald Grigor Suny *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

³⁶ Timothy C. Dowling, *The Brusilov Offensive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front, 1914–1917* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), chap. 10.

³⁷ Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*; Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

the Mesopotamian Front, with one major success during the period, the siege and surrender of British and colonial troops at Kut El Amara.³⁸

In the grip of the war, entering its fourth year, the armies stood exhausted, hungry, and locked in a contest for survival. For many, further offensives were unthinkable. Hundreds of thousands of troops sat behind the lines in prisoner-of-war camps. Political unrest at home—a very real fear on the part of elites that kept the belligerents in the war—was now a reality. Bread riots hit German cities.³⁹ French troops staged a mutiny and refused to launch assaults or man the front lines. Austrian soldiers dreamed of food and hoped that Romania or Serbia would finally fill their bellies.⁴⁰ Severe food shortages, especially of grains such as rice, hampered the Ottoman war effort and caused famine behind the front lines. At the same time, desertion began to weaken the sources of Ottoman manpower; by the end of the war, estimates of deserters reached around a half a million men.⁴¹

And then the Russian Revolution came; first with the Provisional Government and then, later, Lenin's Bolshevik coup. These events also impacted the way that different populations within the Central Powers imagined, perceived, and constructed what they thought of as "Russia." Men who had been held in captive in Russia slowly filtered back to their homes in war-torn Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire—filled with new ideas of

³⁸ For the Ottoman war effort in Mesopotamia, see Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

³⁹ For the German home front, see Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Davis, *Home Fires Burning*. For an overall view of economic warfare and food production, see Offer, *The First World War*.

⁴⁰ Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918*, chap. 4.

⁴¹ For the Ottoman home front, as well as the problem of desertion, see Yiğit Akın, *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). Another source on frontline experience is Erik J. Zürcher, "Between Death and Desertion: The Experience of the Ottoman Soldier in World War I," *Turcica* 28 (1996): 235–58. A study of Ottoman soldiers at war can be found in Veysel Şimşek, "Under Fire and Lice: Experiences of an Ottoman Soldier in the First World War and the War of Independence (1919–1922)," in *Ottoman War and Peace: Studies in Honor of Virginia H. Aksan*, ed. Frank Castiglione, Ethan Menchinger, and Şimşek (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming in 2020). See also Şimşek's "'Backstabbing Arabs and Shirking Kurds': History, Nationalism, and Turkish Memory of the First World War," in *The Great War: From Memory to History*, ed. Kellen Kurschinski et al. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 99–126. For the experiences of Ottoman prisoners of war, see Yücel Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation: Prisoners of War, Medicine, and Nationalism in Turkey, 1914–1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

class conflict and world revolution.⁴² The front melted in the East, but it did not go away. The war had created a culture of its own, one from which it was increasingly hard to escape. The two treaties of Brest-Litovsk (the Bread Treaty of 9 February and the Peace Treaty of 3 March) carved out new territories, satellite states for the Central Powers to feed at last their populations and their armies.⁴³ But these new states demanded administrative manpower and resources from Germany, and the successes of the treaties sustained the belligerents for only a short while in their other offensives. The German July Offensives in the West ended with huge losses and a massive Allied counter-attack that pushed the German armies back to the Hindenburg Line.⁴⁴ Austro-Hungarian troops fell exhausted in the waters on the Piave Offensive.⁴⁵

The Bolshevik Revolution provided the Ottomans with a second chance. The ceasefire of December 1917 and the second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk together with further agreements during the summer of 1918 returned all of the lost territory from the Russians. Yet the region was now an arena of constant battle—a series of interlocked conflicts between the emerging Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), Ottoman armies, and a German intervention. As the Ottoman war effort collapsed at the end of October 1918, the border had stabilized, yet the future of the Ottoman Empire was far from certain.

As the armies of the Central Powers collapsed one by one in the fall of 1918, the war in the East did not end, but was once again transformed. Bands of troops roamed the countryside stealing and living off the land.⁴⁶ Without any international system or armies to uphold them, the treaty settlements of Brest-Litovsk dissolved; new nation-states emerged and resorted increasingly to using makeshift armies for ethnic cleansing when laying claim to territory.

⁴² Verena Moritz and Hannes Leidinger, *Gefangenschaft, Revolution, Heimkehr: Die Bedeutung der Kriegsgefangenenproblematik für die Geschichte des Kommunismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1917–1920* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003).

⁴³ Borislav Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

⁴⁴ David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013), chap. 1.

⁴⁵ Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915–1919* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), chap. 26; Manfred Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914–1918*, rev. and exp. ed. (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 910–26.

⁴⁶ Jakub Beneš, "The Colour of Hope: The Legacy of the 'Green Cadres' and the Problem of Rural Unrest in the First Czechoslovak Republic," *Contemporary European History* 28, 3 (2019): 285–302; Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," *Past & Present* 236, 1 (2017): 207–41.

The once state-directed conflict in the East dissolved into a continuum of violence—decentered, less organized, and even more lethal for the men, women, and children caught in its net.⁴⁷

The story of the First World War in the East is therefore a vast and sweeping one, far beyond recounting by any one, single historian. Because the Eastern Front was a shatter zone in both the First and Second World Wars, the archival records of the war are scattered in a broad arc that spans from Berlin to Warsaw, Vienna to L'viv, and Sarajevo to Istanbul. The sheer range of sources, lost and recovered, presents a staggering mountain for any one person to climb on her own, not to mention the linguistic range necessary to undertake such a task. Thus this volume brings together a group of Habsburg, German, and Ottoman specialists to provide at once a broad-ranging view of war experiences, on the home- and battlefronts. At the same time, it aims to include some of the more neglected areas of the conflict, including POWs, political activists, and ethnic/sectarian violence on both sides of the border.

The Volume's Concept and Contributions

Changes in First World War historiography in the past 25 years have brought new approaches as well as new accessibility to the sources.⁴⁸ Our view of the war has expanded, as have our abilities for cooperation and conversation. New research on frontline experiences, representations of the Other, and the multivalent nature of war culture have reanimated the study of the war. So, too, has the reexamination of war aims and the mentalities of the statesmen who took the world to war.⁴⁹ This volume brings together the work of researchers in North America, Central and Eastern Europe, and Turkey, each of whom is generating important, archival-based scholarship in their respective fields, languages, and nations of study.

⁴⁷ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*.

⁴⁸ The sheer number of innovative studies of the First World War in the last 20 years has been enormous. For an overview of recent literature on the eve of the centenary, see Alan Kramer, "Recent Historiography of the First World War—Part I," *Journal of Modern European History* 12, 1 (2014): 5–27; Kramer, "Recent Historiography of the First World War (Part II)," *Journal of Modern European History* 12, 2 (2014): 155–74. For recent work on the Eastern Front, see Jesse Kauffman, "The Unquiet Eastern Front: New Work on the Great War," *Contemporary European History* 26, 3 (2017): 509–21.

⁴⁹ Marvin Fried's work on Habsburg aims in the Balkans is exemplary here: Marvin Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Our authors have embraced new forms of military history.⁵⁰ Operational history has been infused with themes of encounter. Social and cultural approaches illuminate lesser-known aspects of interaction and occupation. Political histories mix with the history of mentalities. And war experiences show how violence and environment combined to create a unique “culture of the war” that shaped how contemporary decision makers both understood their contexts and made critical choices that had fateful consequences for their soldiers and the civilians around them. Thus what is found in these pages is the result of significant heavy lifting—work that is intended both to provide our readers with the latest research on the Central Powers’ war with Russia and to help update the scholarship on the relatively neglected Eastern Front with approaches similar to what historians have been using to analyze the Western Front since the 1990s.⁵¹

We have organized the volume around four key areas in order to give the reader a glimpse into new lines of research on the war experience of the Central Powers. The first section looks at the ways in which Russia appeared in the eyes of others. The Central Powers went to war against Russia with their own preconceived notions. How those notions changed when put in the pressure cooker of violence, invasion, and occupation forms a crucial point for understanding Russia in the imagination of the people and elites in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. The war also brought peoples into direct contact. The second section examines the variety of borderland encounters: positive, negative, and ambiguous. Ethnic violence and atrocity is certainly one aspect of those encounters that needs telling. But the war also opened up new spaces for economic exploitation and fraternization that colored and shaped the experiences of the soldiers and civilians. Section 3 focuses on the big-picture mechanics of strategy and policy. Armies in this new era of warfare increasingly functioned as administrators—of occupation regimes, veteran programs, and as quartermasters of the entire war economy. The chapters here explore the facets of military policy toward the end of the formal fighting in the war. And finally, the fourth section speaks to the transformation of the war in the East and its legacy for the continuum of violence that succeeded formal hostilities.

⁵⁰ For an overview of the state of the field in the “new military history,” see Robert M. Citino, “Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction,” *The American Historical Review* 112, 4 (2007): 1070–90.

⁵¹ The work of the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, France, was a key moment in the opening up of histories of the First World War to new approaches that embraced a common war experience on both sides of the Western Front. See the work that emerged from the curation, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War*.

No single volume could hope to capture the full story of how various social, military, and regional communities envisioned or encountered Russia's Great War and Revolution. Such a task would be impossible. Yet we would be remiss if we did not mention one glaring omission: Bulgaria, whose late-coming intervention made her the fourth member of the Central Powers. Despite our best efforts during the years we were working on this volume, we were unable to recruit successfully any contributions that could address the overall goals of this volume. This is a reminder of the lacunae in this area of First World War scholarship that continues to exist and warrants exploration. It is our hope that the essays in this volume might inspire future scholars to undertake such scholarly endeavors that would provide insight on the Bulgarian perspective.⁵²

We conclude with this final thought: Each chapter in this volume represents just one avenue of entry into the rich and complex historiography of the Central Powers' experiences and encounters with Russia's Great War and Revolution—all of which are deserving of further study. As we continue to research the Great War and deepen our knowledge of the Eastern Front experience—from both sides of the front lines that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea—we hope the reader will see these chapters as only the first step on a potentially longer voyage of further discovery.

⁵² For more on Bulgaria's experience in WWI, see the works of Richard C. Hall, including *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1996); and *Balkan Breakthrough: The Battle of Dobro Pole 1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).