

Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905–21*

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But why did the storm that was gathering over the whole of Europe break in France and not elsewhere, and why did it acquire certain characteristics in France which were either absent in similar movements in other countries, or if present, assumed quite different forms?

Alexis de Toqueville, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution*¹

The events of the [Russian] revolution present us with a twofold historical aspect. First, the crisis was one of the numerous European revolutions that emerged out of the Great War.... But it would be wrong to assume that the war, with all its enormous difficulties, could explain, in and of itself, the Russian catastrophe....

At the same time, and to an even greater degree, the Russian Revolution was the product of a certain domestic condition.... In short, the two aspects of this concrete historical situation are but two different sides of one and the same sociological reality.

Boris Nolde, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution russes*²

The Russian Revolution has become a preferred topic for discussing modern political violence. Given both the type and extent of violence during this period, such a focus is entirely justified. More than merely analyzing the sources and forms of this violence, studies of violence in the Russian Revolution often also

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¹ Alexis de Toqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1983; original, 1856), 20.

² Boris Nolde (Nolde), *L'Ancien régime et la révolution russes* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1948), 102–3. Nolde, a leading Russian specialist on international law and prominent Constitutional Democrat, had served in the imperial Russian Foreign Ministry and then in the Provisional Government. In emigration he turned to history.

seek to serve as object lessons – on the nature of Russia, or the effects of Marxism. Due to the way the debate has developed, scholars of the Russian Revolution argue either for a theory of “circumstances” or one of “ideology” to account for the widespread violence in this period. This terrain – a binary opposition between “context” and “intent” – has parallels in the debates on the Terror in the French Revolution and the origins of the Final Solution in Holocaust studies.³ To be sure, to explain the widespread violence of the Russian Revolution one must account for both ideology and Russian specificities. But the binary model – *either context or intent* – fails to account for how these two factors interact. An emphasis either on the circumstances of Russia’s past or the role of Bolshevik ideology risks de-historicizing the specific conjuncture in which these two components catalytically acted upon one another. Rather than siding with one or the other of these two schools, this article argues for the need to study the historical conditions in which circumstances and ideology intersected to produce the Bolshevik state and Soviet society – to trace “the complex dialectic of ideology and circumstance, consciousness and experience, reality and will.”⁴

The theory of “circumstances” in the Russian case presents Russia’s revolutionary violence as a feature specific to Russia. This interpretation argues for a Russian *Sonderweg*, in which the Russian past and Russian backwardness made Russian society particularly prone to convulsions of violence. In *Krasnaia smuta*, a work overflowing with suggestive thoughts, Vladimir Buldakov focuses on violence as one of the crucial aspects of the Russian Revolution. In his view, the particular structure of the Russian empire (specifically, its patriarchal nature) produced a specifically Russian form of imperial mindset (what Buldakov terms “*imperstvo*”). This mindset constituted a type of collective psychology both towards and about authority. Deeply imbued with peasant traits, this mindset in turn gave rise to a specific *sotsium* – psycho-social type – that accounted for the Russian Revolution’s spontaneous and chaotic violence. It was, thus, a specifi-

³ Michael David-Fox, “Ideas vs. Circumstances in the Historiography of the French, Russian, and Nazi Revolutions,” paper presented at the AAASS National Convention, Pittsburgh, November 2002. On the Terror, see Mona Ozouf, “The Terror after the Terror: An Immediate History,” in *The Terror*, vol. 4 of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Tarrytown, NY: Pergamon, 1994), 3–18, and Michel Vovelle, “1789–1917: The Game of Analogies,” in *The Terror*, ed. Baker, 349–78; on the ongoing debate on “intent” versus “circumstances” for the Holocaust, see Christopher Browning, “Nazi Policy,” in Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26–57.

⁴ Reginald E. Zelnik, “Commentary: Circumstance and Will in the Russian Civil War,” in *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War*, ed. Diane Koenker, William Rosenberg, and Ronald Suny (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 374–81, quotation 379. A concrete model of such an analysis is Donald Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

cally Russian *sotsium* that produced revolutionary violence. Indeed, Buldakov's very title – “The Red Time of Troubles” – evokes the heavy hand of Russian history on the revolutionary period.⁵ From a somewhat different perspective, Orlando Figes finds the “revolutionary tragedy in the legacies of [the people's] own cultural backwardness rather than the evil of some ‘alien’ Bolsheviks.” It was “the legacy of Russian history, of centuries of serfdom and autocratic rule” that caused the Russian people to be trapped “by the tyranny of their own history.”⁶ The arguments of both Buldakov and Figes contain much good sense and highlight Russia's specificity in the pan-European crisis of 1914–21. In doing so, however, they both stress the weight of Russian history over the contingencies at play in the period from 1905 to 1921.

The school of ideology posits much different reasons for Russian revolutionary violence. Rather than features distinct to Russia or its revolutionary conjuncture of 1905–21, proponents of the ideological approach point either to the culture of the Russian revolutionary movement in general or Marxism as ideology in particular as the font for the violence in the revolutionary period.⁷ From this perspective, Russia's history from 1917 represented not a Russian *Sonderweg*, but a revolutionary or Marxist one.

Due to the polemical nature of the debate, both schools remove the violence of the revolutionary period from its context: the violence is either timelessly Russian, or the product of an ideology that immediately and inexorably unfolds into violence and terror. Arno Mayer, reacting specifically to the latter ideological argument, has rightly insisted on reinserting Russia's revolution into its wartime and geo-political context.⁸ These “circumstances” – the geopolitical context and

⁵ Vladimir Buldakov, *Krasnaia smuta: Priroda i posledstviia revoliutsionnogo nasiliia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), 7–8, 13, 239–40, 339–42. See also “‘Krasnaia smuta’ na kruglom stole,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 4 (1998), 139–68, and Daniel Orlovsky, review of Buldakov, *Krasnaia smuta*, in *Kritika* 2: 3 (Summer 2001), 675–79. I concur with Orlovsky that Buldakov's book “offers provocative insights, mixed with sweeping generalizations” (679).

⁶ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 808; see also 646, 649, 774, 788, 809, 813.

⁷ For discussions of the role of Marxism, see Stéphane Courteois et al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. xviii, 262, 727, 735, 739, and Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); for treatments that emphasize the culture of the Russian revolutionary tradition, rather than Marxism per se, see Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1990), and Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁸ Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Mayer's work has been extensively reviewed: see Carla Hesse, “Revolutionary Historiography after the Cold War: Arno Mayer's ‘Furies’ in Context,” and William G. Rosenberg, “Beheading the Revolution: Arno Mayer's Furies,” both in *Journal of*

the violent opposition to the revolution's agenda – account, in his view, for the behavior of both the French revolutionary and Soviet regimes. Indeed, Mayer's book is thematically structured to highlight what he believes are the structural similarities between the two revolutions. This form of analysis, in which the French case serves as prototype and the Russian case then simply further illustrates these general processes, is productive in some respects. At the same time, it flattens out the specific revolutionary context in Russia and the particular chronological conjuncture at which the Russian Revolution occurred. Revolutionary Russia, in important ways, was different from revolutionary France. More broadly, for Europe as well as Russia, the geopolitical and ideological universe of 1917 was quite different from that of 1789. While Mayer provides a context, it is a structural one shorn of its specific historicity.

In this article I seek to provide a different geographic and chronological framework for the violence of the Russian Revolution. Russia's historical heritage *did* matter. But this historical heritage played out not as a set of eternal conditions, but as a set of factors within a specific time and space.⁹ The specific chronological conjuncture was the period from 1905 to 1921. In this period Russia's specific post-1905 domestic convulsions catalytically intersected with the overall European crisis of 1914–24. This "Europe" had its own historical specificity. Russia's own "Time of Troubles" unfolded within the eastern European shatter zone of dynastic land empires, at precisely the moment that these societies were imploding during World War I. Thus, rather than treating Russia's 1917 experience in isolation, both chronologically and geographically, I propose situating 1917 instead both as a fulcrum in Russia's 1905–21 "Time of Troubles" and within the overall European convulsion from 1914 to 1924.

Precedents

In resituating Russia's Revolution within the broader European context of World War I, there is no need to replace the 1917 watershed with a 1914 one. Many of the patterns and methods of violence commonly identified with the 20th century in fact were first employed over the 19th and early 20th century, both in the pursuit of domestic order and in the expanding colonial spaces. The Russian political and social order – Russia's "Old Regime" – had witnessed the rise of a new revolutionary situation from at least the 1890s. During this period the opposi-

Modern History 73: 4 (December 2001), 897–930; and the collection of responses in *French Historical Studies* 24: 4 (Fall 2001).

⁹ Alfred Rieber lucidly distinguishes between the essentialist notion of "permanent conditions" and the historically contingent notion of "persistent factors": "Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretative Essay," in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Washington, DC: Wilson Center Press, 1993), 315–59, here 322.

tion to autocracy crystallized into the almost universal form of modern political parties: the Revolutionary Armenian Federation (Dashnaktsutun) (1890); the Polish Socialist Party (1892); the Jewish Bund (1897); the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (1898) and its subsequent split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (1903); the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party, Poalei-Tsion (1900); the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (1901); the journal *Liberation* (1902) and subsequent *Union of Liberation* [*Osvobozhdenie*] (1904); and then, emerging out of the Revolution of 1905, the Constitutional-Democrats (Kadets), the Union of 17 October (Octobrists) as well as the Popular Socialists.¹⁰ Many of the new Russian parties strove to emulate their counterparts in other countries, struggling to establish party press organs and to issue members with party cards. Unlike their foreign models, however, Russian political parties had no legal parliamentary forum until 1906. Without a legalized domestic forum for their activities, and granted few institutional assets by the autocracy, these parties had little stake in the existing political order, making them correspondingly more radical than their foreign prototypes.¹¹

These mounting domestic crises came to a crescendo in the 1905–7 Revolution, itself emerging in the midst of the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War. The resulting broad anti-regime coalition pressed for a minimal program, granted in October 1905 as the result of a near-universal general strike. This settlement produced a quasi-constitutional order, but did not immediately put an end to the revolution.

While liberals and moderates accepted the reforms, more radically-inclined parties and movements pressed on, culminating in the failed December 1905 insurrection in Moscow, suppressed by crack Guards regiments with the help of artillery. While not nearly as bloody as the 1871 suppression of the Paris Commune with its 20,000 dead, it was a quite violent event nonetheless.¹² (Indeed, one lesson Marxists had drawn from the Paris Commune was the need to conquer the state, in order to turn the state instruments of coercion which had been used against them in 1871 against their own foes.)¹³ In the aftermath of the December uprising in Moscow, revolutionaries on both the right and the left en-

¹⁰ See the very useful *Politicheskie partii Rossii: Konets XIX–pervaia tret' XX veka. Entsiklopediia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996).

¹¹ S. V. Leonov, "Partiinaia sistema Rossii (konets XIX v.–1917 god)," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 11–12 (1999), 29–48 provides a fine overview.

¹² On the suppression of the Commune, see Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris, 1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chaps. 9–10.

¹³ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, introduction by Frederick Engels (1871; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1940), 22, 78; Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism* (1920; reprint, Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1961), 69–90.

gaged in a widespread campaign of terrorism and assassination. Distinctive here was not simply the acts of terror by radicals, but equally the ambivalent acceptance of such acts even by Russia's "liberals," the Constitutional Democrats.¹⁴

In Stephen Wheatcroft's view, the violence of the 1905–7 period marked the first breaker of four great waves of violence in the first half of Russia's 20th century.¹⁵ Outside St. Petersburg and Moscow, "simultaneous if not coordinated risings in 1905–6 ... exhibited particular features in the borderlands. In the case of 1905–6 they were more violent and explicitly political on the periphery than in the ethnically Russian center."¹⁶ To be sure, the violence of the Revolution of 1905–7 was of a different order than that of the period to come. But the variety of intersecting axes along which it unfolded – the state's reliance on practices of repression (punitive detachments, courts-martial), traditional agrarian conflict, incipient class warfare, ethnic strife, as well as along lines of party political divisions – was a precursor of the multifarious forms violent struggle would take in 1917 and afterwards.

In the aftermath of October 1905, the government moved from concessions to a policy of "pacification," dispatching punitive detachments to Siberia, the Baltic, and the Caucasus. The imperial government granted military commanders in charge of such detachments *carte blanche* to operate against civilian populations. Intended to intimidate the population, they were "a form of state terror directed against its own citizens."¹⁷ Their employment after 1905 was a major innovation in domestic violence. One Russian political commentator observed in 1907:

Over the past century, not one European government resorted to punitive expeditions against internal revolutionary and oppositionist movements within the boundaries of civilized states.... Harsh measures were sometimes employed in suppressing popular rebellions. [T]here were even mass executions of individuals seized with arms in hand, as for ex-

¹⁴ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988 and 1992). Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, is especially good on terrorism in the imperial borderlands and the acceptance of terroristic methods by the Constitutional Democrats.

¹⁵ Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "The Crisis of the Late Tsarist Penal System," in *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History*, ed. Wheatcroft (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 27–54, esp. 43–44, 53–54 n. 38.

¹⁶ Alfred J. Rieber, "Civil Wars in the Soviet Union," *Kritika* 4: 1 (Winter 2003), 129–62, here 138–39.

¹⁷ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 1: 330–36, quotation 330; see also William C. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 136–41, 144–46, and Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 270–86.

ample during the Paris Commune of 1871. [B]ut once open armed conflict had ceased, military campaigns against the population of certain regions or against whole categories of civilians were never practiced. The punitive expeditions of 1905–1906 ... were an entirely extraordinary innovation.¹⁸

While such detachments were especially active in the non-Russian periphery, they were also employed in the Russian core. Russia's domestic "civil" rule was therefore more "colonialized" and "militarized" than most other European powers. As Alfred Rieber notes, "for Russia, there was no hard and fast distinction between colonial questions and the process of state building. This was not true of any other European state."¹⁹ One Russian political observer noted in 1907 that, whereas the post of governor general in Western states existed "for the goals of colonial administration," in Russia "their powers progressively expanded from the end of the 1870s, under the influence of disorders [*smuty*] and reaction, and reached their apogee in 1905.... [The governor generals] were first and foremost military men; and the main goal of their activities was to subdue the country [*pokorenie strany*]."²⁰

Agrarian and ethnic unrest and class violence in the prewar years were not the only precursors to the expansion of violence in the 1914–21 period. Hannah Arendt observed that 19th-century imperialism had served as "a preparatory phase" for the 20th century's "coming catastrophes."²¹ While in Europe government officials often found various limits placed upon their programs to assimilate and uplift the lower orders, James Scott notes that in the colonial setting they could often pursue fantastic plans with near impunity, ruling with "greater

¹⁸ L. S., "Karatelnye ekspeditsii," in *Politicheskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. L. Z. Slonimskii (St. Petersburg: P. I. Kalinkov, 1907–8), 2: 799–800.

¹⁹ Rieber, "Persistent Factors," 346 n. 51. I am grateful to Laura Engelstein for emphasizing this point. On the correlation between domestic and colonial rule in Russia, see also Hans Rogger, "Reforming Jews, Reforming Russians: Gradualism and Pessimism in the Empire of the Tsars," in *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism*, ed. Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 2: 1208–29, here 1229; Stephen P. Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), chap. 1; Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backwards: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 133–34.

²⁰ Sergei Shumakov, "General-gubernatory," in *Politicheskaia entsiklopediia*, 1: 514–16, quotations 514, 516. In the last sentence, Shumakov is quoting M. Taganskii, "Voina praviashchei kasty s narodom" (1906).

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1973), 123. Similarly, see Sven Lindqvist, 'Exterminate All the Brutes!' trans. Joan Tate (New York: New Press, 1996), and Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner, 1998).

coercive power over an objectified and alien population.”²² The self-perception regarding its colonial holdings among the educated public and government in the Russian empire differed greatly from that of other Western colonial powers. The Russian empire was a dynastic land empire, structurally more akin to the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, and its forms of imperial administration correspondingly differed from forms of trans-oceanic colonial rule.²³ Yet the colonial *practices* employed by the Russian imperial state and its military must be seen within the spectrum of other European colonial measures. Russian officers knew of, and sought to emulate, the practices of other European powers, devoting particular attention to the French experience in Algeria. This exchange was not entirely in one direction. French officers, such as France’s leading theorist of colonial warfare, Hubert Lyautey, studied the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Indeed, Lyautey “frequently refers to various episodes of Russian Asiatic warfare as models for colonial officers in general.”²⁴

It was in these imperial borderlands that the Russian imperial military first conceived and then implemented the practice of compulsory population transfers.²⁵ Most notably, in the early 1860s (the heyday of Russian progressive reforms) Dmitrii Miliutin – an “enlightened” bureaucrat and long-serving war minister – drew up the plans for the “definitive” subjugation of the Western Caucasus through demographic conquest by expelling the region’s native inhabitants and settling Cossacks in their place. He himself described the aims of his policy:

resettling [the mountain tribespeople] is proposed not as a *means* towards clearing lands which allegedly are insufficient for new Cossack settlements; on the contrary, [resettling the tribespeople] is the *goal*, to

²² James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 378. The most powerful portrayal of the effects unbounded power in the colonies had on bureaucrats’ imaginations is Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

²³ Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building. The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (New York: Westview Press, 1997); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁴ Jean Gottmann, “Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 246.

²⁵ On the following, see Peter Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, To Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111–44.

which end the territories presently occupied by our foe will be settled by [Cossacks], and the numerical force of the hostile native population will thereby be reduced.²⁶

In campaigning to achieve this end, lasting from 1860–64, between 500,000 and 700,000 individuals were either deported or forced to emigrate in the face of purposely ruthless military operations. These policies remained in the imperial military repertoire. Half a century later, in the midst of World War I, Aleksei Kuropatkin – who early in his military career had actually toured French Algeria in an official capacity, before winning his spurs in the Russian conquest of Central Asia – proposed similar measures to secure Turkestan in the aftermath of the 1916 Central Asian Steppe uprising. He drew up plans for expelling the Kirghiz from certain districts of Semirech'ie and placing Russian settlers on their lands, all in order to form districts “with a purely Russian population.” Only the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917 prevented him from putting his plans into effect.²⁷

The colonial setting saw the first systematic use of concentration camps for civilians. In their modern guise, they were initiated by General Valeriano Weyler during the Spanish 1896–97 anti-insurgency campaign in Cuba. While not intentionally lethal, these camps were deadly nonetheless. Weyler's measures resulted in at least 100,000 civilian deaths. With the Boer War (1899–1902), concentration camps came to international prominence. While British policies were not unique, they became notorious because of extensive critical coverage by the British press and public. General Frederick Roberts and General Lord Horatio Kitchener, the British commanders in South Africa, both had extensive prior experience in colonial warfare. In South Africa, they pursued a twin policy of clearing the country and concentrating the entire non-combatant population in camps. By the end of the war, the British held 110,000 Boer civilians and more than 37,000 Africans in concentration camps, resulting in nearly 30,000 deaths among the Boers (five-sixths of whom were women and children) and over 13,000 among African detainees, a mortality rate for these detainees of over one

²⁶ Miliutin's original report to the War Minister (29 November 1857), and subsequent correspondence responding to General-Adjutant Kochubei's criticism, in *Akty sobrannye kavkazskoiu arkhograficheskoiu kommissieiu*, ed. E. Felitsyn (Tiflis: Kantseliariia glavnonachal'stvuiushchego grazhdanskoi chast'i, 1904), 12: 757–63, citations 763, 761 (emphasis in orig.).

²⁷ “Vosstanie 1916 g. v Srednei Azii: Iz dnevnika Kuropatkina,” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (34) (1929), 39–94, here 60; Kuropatkin's proposal can be found in *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane*, ed. A. V. Piaskovskii et al. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), 684–87, 99–100. On the revolt, see Edward Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953); Holquist, “To Count,” 120–22; Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 35–36.

in three.²⁸ Russian military men reported on these measures in great detail.²⁹ So too did the Russian press. The earliest reference I have found for the term “concentration camp” in Russian [*kontsentratsionnyi lager'*] refers to British measures in South Africa.³⁰

Yet Arendt, who incisively noted colonialism’s role as incubator for forthcoming catastrophes, simultaneously insisted that the horrors of colonialism “were still marked by a certain moderation and controlled by respectability.”³¹ For most of Europe, the exercise of more or less unlimited violence was as yet geographically circumscribed to colonial territories, just as real class warfare (as in the 1871 Paris Commune or the 1905 Moscow uprising) was strictly confined to “dangerous” urban spaces. In Russia, however, the boundary between “colony” and “metropole” (as well as between the correspondingly different attitudes and methods of rule) was much less clear to begin with. Moreover, the 1905 Revolution had gone some way toward eroding this boundary between a colonial realm of militarized “extraordinary rule” and a domestic civil realm. This boundary was to collapse entirely with World War I and the Russian Revolution.

World War I

Speaking in November 1919 – almost exactly two years after the October Revolution and one year after the Armistice that ended the Great War – Petr Struve observed that “the world war formally ended with the conclusion of the armistice [on 11 November 1918].... In fact, however, from that time all that we have experienced, and that we continue to experience, is a continuation and transfor-

²⁸ For both Spanish and British measures, see S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism: Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900–May 1902* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977), 148–49, 214–16, 265–66. Spies demonstrates the roots of many of these practices in the American Civil and Franco-Prussian wars (296).

²⁹ For Russian military studies of these measures, see General Staff Colonel [Iak. Grig.] Zhilinskii, *Ispano-Amerikanskaia voina: Otchet komandirovannogo po vysochaishemu povelenniu k ispanskim voiskam na ostrove Kuby* (St. Petersburg: Ekonomicheskaiia tipo-litografiia, 1899), 52, 66; Vasiliu Iosifovich Gurko, *Voina Anglii s iuzhno-afrikanskimi respublikami, 1899–1901 gg.: Otchet komandirovannogo po vysochaishemu povelenniu k voiskam iuzhno-afrikanskikh respublik V. I. Gurko* (St. Petersburg: Voennaia tipografiia-izd. Voenno-uchennogo komiteta Glavnogo shtaba, 1901).

³⁰ “Inostrannoe obozrenie,” *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 9 (1901), 398–99 (Kitchener’s September 1901 deportation order for Boers serving in commando bands); *ibid.*, no. 1 (1902), 379–81 (“a special system for concentrating [*sosredotochenie*] Boer women and children under the guard of British forces.”); *ibid.*, no. 7 (1902), 364–72 (“women and children were driven into concentration camps” [*kontsentratsionnye lageri*]), citation 368.

³¹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 123.

mation of the world war.”³² Pavel Miliukov, who disagreed with Struve on much else, concurred. Writing in 1921, he declared that “of course it is the war of 1914–18 which claims first place among the factors which determined the *specific physiognomy*” of the Russian Revolution.³³ These observations indicate that contemporaries viewed the Russian Revolution as unfolding within the overall European wartime experience. Thus, instead of bracketing the years of “normal” war (1914–17) and those of revolution and civil war (1917–21) as entirely separate periods, it is more productive to speak of an extended convulsion over the period 1914–21, a period some contemporaries described as Russia’s second “Time of Troubles.”³⁴

This expanded chronology for the war – 1914–21, rather than 1914–18 – does not set Russia off from the rest of Europe. Rather, Russia’s “long” war experience can throw valuable light on how we conceive World War I for Europe as a whole. In the literature in the Russian field, the 1917 revolution often overshadowed the war experience.³⁵ Conversely, for much of the rest of Europe the war has equally eclipsed the revolutionary ferment and the civil wars that followed it. Throughout much of eastern and central Europe, methods forged over the preceding four years for external war were now turned inward, to domestic conflicts.³⁶ In this light, Russia’s civil wars might be seen as only the most extreme case of a more extended “Central and East European civil war” stretching through and beyond the Great War.

³² Petr Struve, “Razmyshleniia o russkoi revoliutsii,” *Russkaia mysl* no. 1–2 (1921), 6–37, here 6 (text of a lecture given by Struve in Rostov-on-Don in November 1919).

³³ Pavel Miliukov, *Istoriia vtoroi russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001; original, Sofia, 1921–1923), part 1, 25 (emphasis in orig.); see also Nolde’s observations in the epigraph.

³⁴ E.g., S. Lukjanov, “Revoliutsiia i vlast’ in *Smena vekh: Sbornik statei*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Otto Elsner, 1922), 72–90, esp. 73–76; Anton Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty*, 5 vols. (Paris: J. Povolozsky, 1921–26). For academic studies employing this periodization, see Lars Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁵ This is no longer the case, due to several new studies: see Nikolai Nikolaevich Smirnov, ed., *Rossia i pervaiia mirovaia voina* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999); Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*; Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

³⁶ Nolde, *L’Ancien régime*, 102; Adrian Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence in Post-War Italy,” in *Social Protest, Violence, and Terror in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Wolfgang Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982), 257–74, here 259; Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), chap. 9; István Deák, “The Habsburg Empire,” in *After Empire*, ed. Barkey and von Hagen, 132–33.

As Miliukov himself observed, “many, many of the developments which are commonly considered specific to the revolution actually preceded the revolution and were brought about by the conditions of wartime.”³⁷ Population deportations were one such “development” often identified as “specific to the revolution,” but which had emerged during wartime. During World War I, the Russian authorities deported up to one million Russian subjects – mostly ethnic Jews and Germans – from the western borderlands to interior provinces, making it, Eric Lohr reminds us, “one of the largest cases of forced migration up to World War II.”³⁸ The Russian government uprooted “unreliable elements from the western and southern borderlands” – hundreds of thousands of individuals, both as individuals and as entire groups – and dispatched them to the interior provinces. This policy had an unintended consequence, as noted by Mikhail Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruevich, commander of the Petrograd military district. “Purely Russian provinces are being completely defiled by elements hostile to us,” he wrote in a 1915 letter to General Nikolai I. Ianushkevich, “and therefore the question arises of the exact registration of all deported enemy subjects, in order to liquidate without a trace this entire alien element at the end of the war.”³⁹ While not as elaborately conceived or theorized as later Bolshevik policies, these policies – often initiated on an *ad hoc* basis – were nevertheless implicitly aimed at transforming society.⁴⁰

Russia certainly was not alone in pursuing such endeavors. German occupation policy in the vast expanses of Ludendorff’s military fiefdom, *Land Ober-Ost*, was a quasi-colonial endeavor, complete with deportations and ruthless exploitation of the local population. Here too the policies were not simply the result of military exigencies. The *Ober-Ost* administration pursued an elaborate program

³⁷ Miliukov, *Istoriia vtoroi russkoi revoliutsii*, 25.

³⁸ Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review* 60: 3 (July 2001), 404–19, here 404. See also Genrikh Zinov’evich Ioffe, “Vyselenie evreev iz prifrontovoi polosy v 1915 godu,” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 9 (2001), 85–97, and S. G. Nelipovich, “Nemetskuiu pakost’ i bez nezhnostei,” *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 1 (1997), 42–52. For the Russian Army’s deportations from occupied Galicia, see Mark von Hagen, “The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire,” in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-building*, ed. Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), 34–57, and Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Military-Historical Archive, Moscow) [RGVIA] f. 2005, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 89–90, 110–12, 118.

³⁹ Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, chap. 5, quotation 155 (I am indebted to Professor Lohr for clarifications regarding these policies). Bonch-Bruevich, like many other military officers, later entered Bolshevik service (see below). Mikhail Tukhachevskii, another officer trained in the imperial military who entered the Red Army, drafted guidelines for combating anti-Soviet insurgents: “Cheka and GPU organs should compile lists, as complete as possible, of both bandits ... and the families they come from” (Holquist, “To Count,” 131).

⁴⁰ See Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, esp. 84, 120–22, 164–65.

to manage space and peoples.⁴¹ Bordering Russia along the sensitive ethnic shatter zone of empires, the Ottoman empire deported and interned whole sectors of its population who were deemed unreliable, such as the Greeks, and embarked on genocidal measures against its own Armenian population.⁴²

In this and other measures, the conduct of total war would have been impossible if the combatant states had tried to rely on the preexisting state institutions alone. Total war was made possible by the fact that society restructured *itself* in order to make it possible to continue the war. Michael Geyer has insisted that “it is indeed not war or ‘militarization’ that organizes society, but society that organizes itself through and for war.... [M]ilitarization originated in civil society, rather than being imposed on it.”⁴³ In food supply, for instance, it was in fact public organizations and professional specialists who pressed the government, at times against its will, to intervene ever more extensively in the economy. The Russian political class’s interventionist view on this issue reflected not a traditional, paternalist outlook. Rather, it represented the coalescence of existing aspirations among Russian educated society to uplift “the masses,” with the shared European heritage of economic management from the Great War. As part of the larger agenda of “mobilizing” or “organizing” societies for total war, all combatants in World War I concentrated the collection and distribution of food supplies in the hands of government agencies. Contemporaries themselves understood revolutionary food measures under the early Soviet regime as an extension of wartime measures begun under the imperial government.⁴⁴ By late 1916, the Ministry of Agriculture widely promoted a draft proposal “for a state monopoly on the grain trade.” This document – produced in a tsarist ministry – argued that:

The war has advanced the social life of the state, as the dominant principle, to top priority; all other manifestations of civic life must be made subordinate to it.... Germany’s military-economic practice, the most in-

⁴¹ Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴² Aron Rodrigue, “The Mass Destruction of Armenians and Jews in Historical Perspective,” in *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominick J. Schaller (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2002), 303–16; Vahran N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995).

⁴³ Michael Geyer, “Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945,” in *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. John Gillis (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 79–80, 75.

⁴⁴ E.g., N. A. Orlov, *Prodovol’stvennoe delo v Rossii vo vremia voiny i revoliutsii* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii otdel narodnogo komissariata po prodovol’stviu, 1919); Nikolai Dmitrievich Kondrat’ev, *Rynok khlebov i ego regulirovanie vo vremia voiny i revoliutsii* (1922; reprint, Moscow: Nauka, 1991).

tensive in the world conflict, shows how far this process of *étatisation* [*ogosudarstvlenie*] can proceed.... All these state measures related to the war ... all these cells of our economic organization, represent a hitherto under-appreciated foundation for the systematic construction of future domestic and foreign trade.... The State cannot allow grain to remain a circumstance of free trade.⁴⁵

Leading economists, many of whom later worked for the Soviet government, wrote about Germany's seemingly successful wartime measures of economic management. Over the course of 1917, *before* the Bolshevik seizure of power, this technocratic ethos, fostered throughout Europe by the war, would lead many members of Russia's educated society to advocate the use of compulsion and, eventually, armed force to compel Russia's rural dwellers to comply with educated society's tutelary, mobilizational programs.⁴⁶

Revolution

World War I transformed all states that passed through it. But not all states that passed through it experienced revolution in the manner of the Russian empire. Experiencing revolution in the midst of war, Russian political movements deployed state practices that were emerging out of Russia's total war experience to achieve their revolutionary goals. Political movements in 1917 and afterwards incorporated, both consciously and unconsciously, certain working assumptions and categories that were implicit in these practices. As Alexis de Tocqueville noted, revolutionaries "took over from the regime not only most of its customs, conventions, and modes of thought ... in fact, though nothing was further from their intentions, they used the debris of the old order for building up the new."⁴⁷ But while French revolutionaries drew upon the practices of a centralizing old regime, in Russia the revolutionaries employed tools inherited from a regime moving, haltingly, to a total war footing. In his analysis of the French Revolution, Karl Marx had noted that Napoleon "*perfected* the *Terror* by *substituting*

⁴⁵ *Russkoe slovo*, 30 August 1916; Iakov Bukshpan, *Voenno-khoziaistvennaia politika: Formy i organy regulirovaniia narodnogo khoziaistva za vremia mirovoi voiny, 1914–1918* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929), 391.

⁴⁶ See Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 41–42, 94–110. On the technocratic ethos among Russia's political class, see Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward*, and John F. Hutchinson, *Politics and Public Health in Revolutionary Russia, 1890–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). For this general ethos throughout Europe, see the classic treatment by Charles Maier: "Between Taylorism and Technocracy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5: 2 (1970), 27–61, and Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

⁴⁷ Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, vii.

permanent war for permanent revolution": war replaced revolution.⁴⁸ Emerging out of World War I, the Russian Revolution inverted this equation. Instead of "substituting permanent war for permanent revolution," Russia moved from total war to total revolution.

The Provisional Government that succeeded the autocracy was a self-consciously *revolutionary* government, defining itself in explicit contrast to the previous "Old Regime." It was the Provisional Government, not Soviet power, which established a state monopoly on grain and formed an entire new ministry devoted to food supply. Both ideas emerged out of proposals drafted over the course of 1916 by Constitutional Democrat and Menshevik specialists serving in wartime public organizations. The autocracy, however, had balked at implementing these plans. Iakov Bukshpan, former editor of the imperial government's official journal on food supply, drafted the law. (He would continue as editor of the Provisional Government's successor journal on food supply. Under the Soviet state, Bukshpan would serve on the committee to study lessons of the Great War and pen a study, on the eve of collectivization, examining economic measures by all combatants during World War I.) In drawing up the draft for the grain monopoly, Bukshpan transposed large blocks of existing German and Austrian legislation. By the end of the month the Provisional Government, led by a minister of agriculture who was a Constitutional Democrat, had instituted the grain monopoly, claiming the country's entire grain supply for the state.⁴⁹

Many such programs were promulgated by the Provisional Government, but it was the Soviet state that eventually came up with the coercive means to implement them. Nikolai Kondrat'ev, a leading economic specialist and official first under the Provisional Government and then the Soviet one, pointed out that "under Soviet power, the basic principle of food supply policy – the monopoly – remained the same as it had been under the Provisional Government.... But," he notes, "qualitatively, and in its relative significance, it had changed radically. As much as the moment of freedom and persuasion had been hypothesized under the Provisional Government, under Soviet power the moment of compulsion increased by an unprecedented degree."⁵⁰ Kondrat'ev suggests that what distinguished the two was not so much their policy, as the ability of Soviet power to mobilize support for coercive measures to carry out these policies. The distinctive

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *The Holy Family* (1845), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 123 (emphasis in orig.).

⁴⁹ On drafting the law, see Bukshpan, *Voenna-khoziaistvennaia politika*, 148, 509.

⁵⁰ Kondrat'ev, *Rynok*, 222; also 186. Lih, *Bread and Authority*, extends this argument for food supply.

feature of Bolshevik policies, then, was that they were “essentially a radical extension, rather than revolutionary break, with the past.”⁵¹

The Provisional Government initially placed much hope in the population’s ability to recognize the necessities of the moment of its own accord. Prior to 1917, the intelligentsia had found fault with the common people, but had preferred to indict the autocracy and its neglect of the people as the root cause for the people’s condition.⁵² February 1917 finally removed the autocracy and the root cause, many in educated society believed, for the people’s benightedness and passivity. Over the course of 1917, however, educated society increasingly lost faith in the common people’s ability to tutor itself to responsible citizenship. Sergei Chakhotin, a Constitutional Democrat heading the Provisional Government’s “central committee for socio-political enlightenment,” recalled how the intelligentsia in early 1917 harbored a near-mystical faith that “the people” would instinctually find its way to state consciousness. Over the course of 1917, however, “these unfounded expectations were replaced by disappointment, mixed often with animosity toward that very same people in whom they had – up until then – believed.”⁵³ Confronting the common people’s “irresponsibility,” public activists looked to the state as the one institution capable of imposing order on the immature and impulsive masses. By mid-September, men such as Viktor Anisimov, one of Russia’s leading cooperative activists and a prominent Popular Socialist, had lost faith in organic democratic development and had come to place their hope instead on force. Anisimov had advocated increased participation by cooperatives in the war effort in order to foster new cooperative structures. After May 1917, he entered the Provisional Government’s Ministry of Food Supply. Addressing a gathering of food supply inspectors on 25 September, he described why he had come to abandon his faith in democracy. “The initiators of the law on the grain monopoly,” he declared, “demonstrated too great a fascination with a democratic system for organizing the cause of food supply.” They had, he argued, placed too much hope in the ability of the local population to understand the tasks of state. “We ought to acknowledge that the gamble on the autonomous activity by broad sectors of democracy and their statist outlook has failed.” Anisimov – cooperative activist and leading Popular Socialist – argued that food supply would have to rely instead on “organs that are capable of taking a statist point of view.” Anisimov’s embrace of the state and his skepticism of the common people’s ability to mature “autonomously” prepared the ground

⁵¹ William Rosenberg, “Social Mediation and State Construction(s) in Revolutionary Russia,” *Social History* 19: 2 (1994), 168–88, quotation 188.

⁵² Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 24–25, 179–80.

⁵³ Sergei Chakhotin, “V Kanossu!” in *Smena vekh*, 151–52.

for his future service as a cooperative specialist for the Soviet state, until his death by typhus in 1920.⁵⁴

By autumn 1917 officials in the Provisional Government – liberals and moderate socialists – had embraced the idea of employing coercion to extract grain from the obdurate countryside. Throughout September and October 1917, civilian appointees of the Provisional Government bombarded the army command with requests for military units to use in securing grain for the state.⁵⁵ After the Soviet seizure of power, government commissars, ministry of food supply emissaries, and provincial food supply committees – all initially appointed by the Provisional Government *before* October – continued to request armed force from the army to secure grain, now for the Soviet state. In January 1918, the old army's distintegration meant that it could not meet the frantic requests from civilian officials for more and more armed force for food supply operations. Tellingly, civilian officials proved much more willing to demand military aid for "internal duties" than the army was willing to provide it. (As Russian military men pointed out with some exasperation, they still had to contend with the German Army.)⁵⁶

The war experience alone did not shape the Soviet state; revolution was an equally crucial component. Russia had been at war since 1914, but only in the aftermath of 1917 did violence become a regular and constitutive feature of everyday political life. The revolution provided a new matrix for practices that were emerging out of total war. Whereas these tools had originally been devised for use against external foes, and intended for use only during the extraordinary period of wartime, the revolution transformed the ends to which these practices were deployed. The emerging tendency to employ wartime techniques as tools to achieve the revolutionary re-ordering of the political system and society predated the Bolsheviks.

Civil Wars

The crescendo in the 1905–21 continuum of violence came during the period of civil war. Beyond the profligate amount of state violence, this period witnessed

⁵⁴ On Anisimov, see A. V. Sypchenko, *Narodno-sotsialisticheskaia partiia v 1907–1917 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999), 190–91, 246; *Politicheskie partii Rossii: Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Anisimov, V. I."; RGVIA f. 499, op. 1, d. 1657, ll. 234–35.

⁵⁵ E.g. RGVIA f. 2005, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 40–41; RGVIA f. 499, op. 1, d. 1657, l. 250; RGVIA f. 2003, op. 4, d. 26, l. 38; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow) [GARF] f. 1791, op. 2, d. 153b, ll. 138, 193; GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 181, l. 59; *Russkoe slovo*, 13 September 1917.

⁵⁶ RGVIA f. 2009, op. 2, d. 20, ll. 95–98; RGVIA f. 2009, op. 2, d. 105, ll. 6–8, 12, 97, 105, 129–30, 138–39, 157–58, 181, 183, 184, 193; RGVIA f. 2009, op. 2, d. 107, ll. 13, 18.

hunger, ruin, deprivation, and hardship. Everyday citizens experienced civil war viscerally and directly, in a way entirely unlike World War I. This experience was not ephemeral; it imprinted itself upon Russian society and the government that emerged “victorious” from the civil war. In civil war, “a basic pattern of governing had taken root that combined elements of violence, mobilization, and control of human resources.... A basic pattern of being governed emerged as well.”⁵⁷

Seemingly, this civil war is what set Russia apart from the rest of Europe, which in the accepted narrative moves, unlike Russia, from war to peace. Nearly all studies of World War I tie their narratives up with the November 1918 Armistice, or with the peace making in the summer of 1919.⁵⁸ By this narrative, Russia’s path was fundamentally different from that of the rest of “Europe.”

To be sure, the territories of the former Russian empire experienced civil war to a degree – demographically, politically, militarily – unlike other European states. Yet while the degree and intensity of civil war in Russia was unparalleled, the trajectory from war into civil war was not unique. In fact, for much of central and eastern Europe, the Great War did not end neatly at the peace table, but wound down in an extended convulsion of revolutions and civil strife. While Great Britain, France, and the United States are usually taken as the yardstick for postwar demobilization, one might well argue that the Russian case was in fact *more* representative of the European wartime experience, especially for continental Europe. Unlike Western Europe, the societies of central, southern, and eastern Europe were consumed by civil strife at least through 1920, and often longer: Finland, Ukraine, the Baltic region, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Rumania, the Turkish “war of independence” with Greece, the ferment on the Adriatic coast, as well as civil strife in Germany, Italy, and Ireland. While not revolutionary in the same way as the Bolsheviks, the leaders of the newly-established states perforce were engaged in revolutionary state-building. Indeed, the “revolutionizing” program of the Bolshevik state bore certain parallels to the “nationalizing” programs of the new states throughout eastern and southern Europe.⁵⁹

Rather than viewing these civil wars, and the Russian Civil War in particular, as distinct episodes in their own right, we might instead think of them, as Struve suggested, as a “continuation and transformation” of the world war. In

⁵⁷ Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War*, 418.

⁵⁸ See almost any English-language study of World War I, e.g.: John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), or Hew Strachan, ed., *World War I: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, “Population Displacement, State-Building, and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1917–1923,” *Kritika* 4: 1 (Winter 2003), 51–100. See also Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires*, and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), chap. 2.

this light, the violence of the Russian Civil War appears not as something perversely Russian or uniquely Bolshevik, but as the most intense case of a more extended European civil war, extending through the Great War and stretching several years after its formal conclusion. The Russian Civil War, in this light, was that conjuncture at which many of the practices of violence forged for “normal” war were redirected to the project of the revolutionary transformation of society. Certain contemporaries thought precisely in such terms. In his opposition to World War I, Lenin had never argued for pacifism, but for “the conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war.”⁶⁰ It was not “circumstances” of war and revolution that forced the Bolsheviks into civil war, thereby derailing an otherwise popular and legitimate revolution. Civil war was what the Bolsheviks *sought*.⁶¹

Yet Marx himself observed that “ideas carry out nothing at all. In order to carry out ideas men are needed who can exert practical force.”⁶² The ideology of Bolshevism became meaningful not as a set of abstract ideas, but as a program embraced by people who found it a compelling interpretation of their lived experience in this time of crisis. As one veteran of the White side in the civil war wrote in emigration, chiding his fellow émigrés: “*how was it possible to organize the terror itself?* It is evident that words alone, or simply mercenary bayonets, are not enough for its organization.”⁶³ The desire to remake Russian society provided the urge; the tools of wartime mobilization, the means. The Bolshevik commanders who oversaw the ruthlessly systematic anti-insurgency operations against the Antonov movement in Tambov province were not Bolsheviks of long standing, but “progressive” officers who were products of imperial military schools. Indeed, many had received General Staff education. Mikhail Tukhachevskii, notorious for his techniques for combating Antonov in Tambov, was one such product of an imperial military school. Nikolai Kakurin, his chief of staff at the height of the anti-insurgency operation from May to August 1921, was a 1910 graduate of the General Staff academy. These commanders’ most notorious measures against civilian populations – deportations, the use of concentration camps, the employment of poison gas and air power – turned practices originally devised in colonial contexts and massively expanded during the Great War onto a new front: domestic civil war. Individuals with a similar background – imperial military training and experience in the world war – would

⁶⁰ Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, “The War and Russian Social Democracy” (written September–October 1914), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 21: 27–34, here 34; Lenin makes this demand repeatedly in his works of the war period.

⁶¹ Pace Arno Mayer, *The Furies*, 10.

⁶² Marx, *The Holy Family*, 119.

⁶³ Luk[anov, “Revoliutsiia i vlast’” 73.

later employ those practices perfected against Antonov in Tambov, and Makhno in Ukraine, in equally determined and ruthless anti-insurgency campaigns throughout the 1920s against “bandits” in Central Asia or the Caucasus.⁶⁴ Instead of colonial violence coming home, now revolutionary violence was being exported to the periphery.

Bolshevism, and its class-manicheism, produced a distinctive and much expanded form of state violence. There can be no doubt that the Soviet state extensively and quite consciously employed massive violence against not only its armed foes, but just as much against its own civilian population. In particular, the Red Terror – modeled on its French revolutionary counterpart, and with the Paris Commune always in mind – was a signal departure in state use of violence.⁶⁵ While more people died in peasant revolts or due to famine, the Red Terror, like its French prototype, marked a qualitative shift to the instrumental use of state violence in the political arena.

Traditionally, scholars have distinguished White terror from its Red counterpart by suggesting that White violence was arbitrary and non-instrumental.⁶⁶ Yet the Whites too employed a prophylactics of violence on those segments of the population deemed to be malignant or harmful. White violence may have been less centralized and systematic, but it did not lack ideological underpinnings. One might suggest here an analogy with the German *Freikorps*, whose ideology was much more an ethos and a style than a coherent doctrine – but was no less an ideology for that.⁶⁷ It is hard to imagine that the massacre of tens of thousands of Jews by the anti-Soviet armies during the civil wars (estimates run from 35,000 to 150,000 victims, with a general consensus of at least 50,000

⁶⁴ For an overview, see Holquist, “To Count”; the anti-insurgency operations in Tambov are documented in *Antonovshchina: Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. Viktor Danilov (Tambov: Redaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel, 1994). The men to whom S. S. Kamenev entrusted the campaign against *basmachestvo* in Turkestan from March 1921 through August 1923 were all officers of the former imperial Army; two were also graduates of the General Staff (V. S. Lazarevich and V. I. Kork); see “S. S. Kamenev o bor'be s basmachestvom,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 5 (1995), 40–45; see also the introduction to the document for orders that implemented this system.

⁶⁵ For a fine overview of Soviet violence in the Civil War, see Nicolas Werth “A State against its People,” chaps. 3–4 in *The Black Book of Communism*, and, Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, chap. 18.

⁶⁶ E.g., Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 792 (White “executions were as often as not ordered by field officers, acting on their own initiative, often in an emotional reaction to sights which greeted their eyes.... Odious as it was, the White Terror was never systematic”); Werth, “A State against its People,” 82. I share Pipes’s outrage at the Bolshevik regime’s use of civilian hostages, but it is erroneous to charge that the practice was introduced by the Bolsheviks (818); it had been widely practiced by imperial military authorities toward Jewish communities during World War I.

⁶⁷ Liulevicius, *War Land*, chap. 7; Robert Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

dead), could have occurred without *some* form of ideology – and particularly the virulent linkage drawn between Jews and Communists.⁶⁸ Anti-Soviet commanders and foot soldiers alike believed they knew who their enemies were, and they equally believed they knew what they had to do with such foes. White commanders sifted their POWs, selecting out those they deemed undesirable and incorrigible (Jews, Balts, Chinese, Communists), and executed these individuals in groups later, a process the Whites described as “filtering.”⁶⁹ One official of the White counterintelligence agency (the analogue of the Cheka) explained why his agency resorted so frequently to execution: “that which is harmful can never become useful” and, in such cases, “surgery is the best cure.” Needless to say, among those who could never be made useful – and who thus required surgical excision – he counted Jews.⁷⁰ The compiler of *The Green Book* (a 1921 collection of documents relating to a 1920 popular uprising along the Black Sea coast directed against both White and Red forces) included orders issued by punitive detachments of both sides. The compiler then opined that both “the Volunteer Army and Bolsheviks resorted to entirely identical measures: burning down villages, requisitioning property, persecuting families, executions.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ See, on this question: Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), chap. 4; Oleg Budnitskii, “Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique,” *Kritika* 2: 4 (Fall 2001), 751–72; Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293–313.

⁶⁹ For the argument that White violence was ideological, see Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology,” and Budnitskii, “Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement,” esp. 768–71. See also Aleksei Lʹvovich Litvin, “Krasnyi i belyi terror v Rossii, 1917–1922,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 6 (1993), 46–62; E. I. Dostovalov, “O belykh i belom terrore,” *Rossiiskii arkhiv*, vol. 6 (1995), 637–97; on “filtering,” 678.

⁷⁰ “Nashi agenty ot millionera do Narkoma,” *Rodina*, no. 10 (1990), 64–68; on the targeted violence of White counter-intelligence agencies, see also Dostovalov, “O belykh,” 668–86. For a remarkably detailed Cheka handbook of the anti-Soviet counter-intelligence and punitive agencies in Siberia, see *Svodka materialov iz belogvardeiskikh fondov po Sibiri (1918–1920)* (n.p.: Izdanie predstavitelʹstva V.Ch.K. po Sibiri, n.d.): the post-1912 “Omsk military district counter-intelligence has a direct link [with the subsequent White organs]; after 1916 individuals changed, but the system, with few exceptions, remained identical” (5). The volume’s compilation of these agencies’ employees (its alphabetical index has 48 pages of names, in two columns on each page) bears out this claim.

⁷¹ N. Voronovich, ed., *Zelenaia kniga: Istoriia krestʹnanskogo dvizheniia v chernomorskoj gubernii* (Prague: Chernomorskaia krestʹnanskaia delegatsiia, 1921), 27–28, 152–54.

In highlighting the violence of White and Red, however, we should not romanticize these insurgent “green” movements, either.⁷² They too resorted to many of the same practices, including “people’s courts,” “special” punitive detachments, and mandatory labor conscription. The Veshenskaia insurgency in the Don Territory, directed against Soviet power in the spring and summer of 1919 but claiming its own republican profile, was one of the most significant “green” movements. A large portion of the population in this region nevertheless remained unconvinced that the Greens were their “liberators.” Some communities opposed conscription and argued for negotiations with Soviet forces. The insurgents, however, proceeded to mobilize all males between 19 and 45, and then formed their own “special detachment for special service” (*osobyi otriad osobogo naznacheniia*). This unit’s purpose was to engage in “punitive functions.” Conscripts recruited for the insurgency were under no illusions about the nature of the “special detachments” employed to advance the “people’s cause.” In letters left behind for the Red Army, they wrote “we conscripts don’t want to fight anymore, but we are assembled by punitive detachments.”⁷³ Nor did the insurgents’ hostility to White courts-martial and Red revolutionary tribunals prevent them from decreeing that individuals who agitated against the “popular uprising” would be punished with the full severity of martial law. The insurgency soon instituted “people’s courts” to visit “retribution upon anyone who is even unsympathetic to the people’s cause.”⁷⁴ The insurgents executed not only captured Red Army men, but also members of the civilian population who refused to endorse the cause, causing some dissension among younger recruits in the insurgency’s ranks. In two outlying settlements, the insurgents executed 300 people.⁷⁵

Employing both appeals and the practices they had just legislated for themselves, the Veshenskaia insurgents attempted to expand their base. They did not have to rely solely on their coercive practices. They did have broad support, but it was far from universal. The community of ten thousand in Slashchevskaia (Upper Don district) split right down the middle over whether to support the insurgency. The inhabitants of the western half, bordering Veshenskaia and Kazanskaia, centers of the uprising, joined the insurgency from its very beginning. The administrative center and settlements of the eastern portion, however, sided

⁷² E.g., Vladimir Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5–8, 104–5, 149–55.

⁷³ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive, Moscow) [henceforth RGVA] f. 100, op. 2, d. 235, l. 266; see also Andrei Venkov, *Pechat[isurovogo iskhoda: K istorii sobytii 1919 g. na verkhnem Donu* (Rostov: Rostovskoe knizhnoe izdatel[stvo, 1988), 113, 128, 157.

⁷⁴ RGVA f. 100, op. 2, d. 235, l. 219; d. 205, l. 18.

⁷⁵ RGVA f. 100, op. 2, d. 173, ll. 240–41; d. 205, ll. 18–21; d. 106, l. 125.

with Soviet power. They enlisted in a 150-man “special armed formation” [*osobaia družhina*], demonstrating yet again the ubiquity of “special” (read: punitive) formations. It operated in concert with Soviet forces and served as the anchor of Soviet power in the region until the arrival of the anti-Soviet Don Army.⁷⁶

The Soviet “expeditionary force” dispatched against the Veshenskaia insurgency was even more brutal. Most accounts of the uprising lavish attention on its activities.⁷⁷ I have dwelt on the violence of the insurgents to demonstrate instead the near universality of this militarized vision of politics in the civil wars. One early Cheka study of its struggle against banditism in Siberia from 1920 through 1922 noted that “the seven-year experience of war [1914–21] had a marked impact upon the insurgent movement: the mass habit of remaining in a military condition, to orient in this condition quickly and to seek solutions, but above all in the masses’ understanding of the need for organization.”⁷⁸

The insurgents’ reflexive reliance on these measures suggests that, whatever the political authority they invoked, various sides in the civil war partook a common unspoken set of regularities in political practice. All sides seem to have had a common repertoire of measures upon which they drew in pursuing their explicitly articulated political goals.⁷⁹ And many of these regularities were ones of military practice. The violence of the Russian civil wars did not emerge from within the Russian village itself. It was *imported* there from the war fronts. The war had come home.

Throughout Europe in the aftermath of the 1914–21 crisis, domestic politics “could no longer be described as peacetime politics.” In Germany, “the violence in German politics after 1918 was both qualitatively and quantitatively different.” Domestic politics after the war were not peacetime politics: they were instead a form of “latent civil war.”⁸⁰ In Italy, “[b]efore [World War I], political violence was either associated with ‘protest’ or with repression by state organs; its deliberate, large-scale use by a party to further political aims was something which most pre-war politicians, even revolutionaries, did not seriously contemplate.” It was World War I that marked a watershed in Italian political life, after which political violence was used in a deliberate and large-scale way to further political aims. Fascism exemplified this transformation in Italian political culture.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 452, op. 1, d. 14, l. 19.

⁷⁷ E.g., Brovkin, *Behind*, 105–6.

⁷⁸ *Obzor banditskogo dvizheniia v Sibiri s dekiabria 1920 po ianvar’ 1922* (Novonikolaevsk: Tipografiia predstavitel’stva V.Ch.K. v Sibiri, 1922), 18.

⁷⁹ S. A. Esikov and V. V. Kanishev make a similar argument for the anti-Soviet Antonov insurgency: “Antonovskii NEP,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 4 (1993), 60–72.

⁸⁰ Bessel, *Germany*, 254–84, here 261.

But the emergence of fascism was “the most important but not the only manifestation” in the “general growth of violence in postwar Italy.”⁸¹

In Russia, as in Italy and Germany, the war experience alone did not cause this shift; revolution was a necessary component. While the Bolsheviks employed violence more instrumentally and more consciously than their competitors, it had become an enduring feature of the post-1917 Russian political landscape. Bolshevik violence took place within this broader tectonic shift in Russian – indeed European – political culture. If war and revolution were the crucial components, the experience of civil war provided the necessary catalyst. The practices of the governing and the governed crystallized in a concrete experience of civil war. Utopian dreams fused with an experience of want, fear, devastation, and brutalization.⁸² It was not simply Bolshevik measures that summoned forth violence from the Soviet state’s opponents. To see Bolshevik measures as the cause of their opponents’ violence is to miss this larger tectonic shift.⁸³ Red political violence did not cause White violence, or vice versa. Rather, they were twin strands, inextricably intertwined, emerging out of the 1914–21 maelstrom of war, revolution, and civil wars.

Bolshevik State, Soviet Society: Products of Ideology and Context

Yet the Bolshevik regime *did* represent a significant departure from the imperial regime, even in total war, and the revolutionary Provisional Government; it *was* distinct from other competing movements in the civil wars. What was specific to Russia was the breadth and horizon of aspiration for revolutionary change, to which tools of mobilization and state violence could now be harnessed.⁸⁴ In Soviet Russia, military officials trained in the imperial period often commanded in the field; economic planners trained before 1917 issued orders in offices. They made it possible for the Bolsheviks – quite a small party in the vastness of Eurasia – to implement their policies. But these specialists did not determine the ends to which their practices and skills were put; it was the “new regime” that dictated

⁸¹ Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence in Post-War Italy,” in *Social Protest*, ed. Mommsen and Hirschfeld, 259, 271.

⁸² Donald Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War*, chap. 4 and conclusion. Memoirs and writings from this period portray this dynamic: Viktor Shklovsky, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917–1922* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*, in *Collected Stories* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

⁸³ E.g., Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 240–81.

⁸⁴ For treatments of why broad segments of Russian society embraced such broad-ranging revolutionary aspirations, see Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness*; Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Holquist, *Making War*, chaps. 1, 7.

the course.⁸⁵ While all sides in the Russian civil wars extravagantly employed violent practices and coercive measures, the Soviet state's use of violence clearly was both more open-ended and more purposeful. What particularly distinguished Soviet violence from its competitors was that it was not a temporary and extraordinary tool intended only for the period of civil conflict. Rather, the Soviet state would wield state violence throughout the following decades as part of its open-ended project to shape a new, revolutionary society.

In other words, what distinguished the Soviet regime was not its use of this or that practice. What distinguished the Bolsheviks is the extent to which they turned tools originally intended for total war to the new ends of revolutionary politics. These new goals now distinguished how and to what extent the Soviet state employed these instruments from the common tool kit of state. NEP and the establishment of an authoritative Soviet political order in Russia coincided with the more generalized postwar consolidation throughout Europe. Yet these other states were attempting to reconstitute some type of order and normalcy, to "recast" a bourgeois political and social order.⁸⁶

The Soviet state, by contrast, did not view the revolution solely as its foundation event. Revolution as event had ended. Soviet power set new ends for employing practices drawn from a common European tool kit. Unlike other combatant societies in World War I – Germany, Hungary, Italy – Russia's revolution came *during* war, and not after it. Consequently, Russia amalgamated the phases of war and domestic restructuring. In revolutionary Russia, the institutions and practices of wartime mobilization became the building blocks of a new state and socio-economic order. Due both to this particular moment of emergence and the nature of Bolshevik ideology, the centralized Soviet state for the duration of its existence would have very few institutional checks in formulating and implementing policy. Other states had resorted to these measures in conditions of total war. But they by and large relinquished them once the war and subsequent crises had passed. The Bolshevik regime was less remarkable for the measures it took during the extended period of war, revolution, and civil wars, than for the fact that it continued these measures after that period had wound to an end. The Bolshevik Revolution, one might say, fixed the near-ubiquitous, but

⁸⁵ The French case, especially the rule of Napoleon, provides interesting parallels: see Isser Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).

⁸⁶ Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*; Charles Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Note, however, Baron and Gatrell's argument that the new states of Eastern Europe pursued "nationalizing" projects analogous to the Soviet Union's "revolutionizing project" ("Population Displacement").

transitory practices of the trans-European 1914–21 catastrophe as a permanent feature of the Soviet state.

Circumstances of origin go far in explaining the shape and form of the Soviet state. They cannot, however, explain the further course of Soviet history. While the period was one of ruin and slaughter, Bolshevism provided a *particular* explanation to this devastation of war, revolution, and civil war. Bolshevism was distinct not so much because it was ideological, or even utopian, but on account of its specifically manichean and adversarial nature. Russia's pre-revolutionary crisis and, even more so, people's lived experience in wars and civil wars, made such manicheism plausible, and even appealing.

Soviet Russia was not simply a product of pure ideology, nor of the nature of the Russian village. Bolshevik ideology, sustained by resentments fostered in the late imperial period and exacerbated by the course of 1917, came to structure Soviet state violence. Violence, then, was not either timelessly Russian or the spontaneous product of ideology. It resulted from the intersection of preexisting "persistent factors" with a chain of historical conjunctures: Russia's post-1905 domestic crisis and the attitudes it fostered; the emergence throughout Europe of new techniques of violence during World War I; the imbrication of formative ideals with these militarized practices during the period of revolution; and, finally, the experience of ruin, devastation, and death in the civil wars.

The purpose of my overview of the "epoch of violence" has not been to normalize the Bolsheviks. It has, rather, sought to historicize the conditions in which the Bolshevik regime crystallized. The Soviet state was the product of a specific time and place – and of the Bolshevik ideology that seemed to many to make sense out of this ruin. This experience, together with the ideology imbricated with it, would produce a society steeped in a worldview of "catastrophic historicism," a worldview that both conditioned state policy and informed individual identity.⁸⁷

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⁸⁷ See Irina Paperno, "Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience," *Kritika* 3: 4 (Fall 2002), 577–610; on "apocalyptic historicism," 584–96.