

Introduction: Ukraine in Revolution, 1917–1922

Mayhill C. Fowler

The years 2017–2022 mark the centennial of war, revolution, and state-making and unmaking across Eurasia. Yet the years 1917–1922 unfolded differently across the collapsing empires. Kyiv's Central Rada, the basmachi rebellions in Central Asia, the Menshevik experiment in Georgia, and the sudden existence of Poland (never mind leftist uprisings in Hungary and in Germany) all emerged from the vacuum of power in Petrograd that inspired and catalyzed social, political, and cultural movements. In Ukraine, in particular, the story of revolution is one of war and multiple and competing political, social, and national projects.

This forum aims to address this period in Ukraine, but the question of names poses an initial challenge. The region under investigation is Ukraine—or rather, the southwest provinces of the Russian Empire that eventually became Soviet Ukraine. One might also focus on the eastern provinces of Austrian Galicia, however, which experienced the Polish-Ukrainian war and became part of independent Poland. The competing projects of the region, after all, crossed imperial boundaries. The specification of chronology is equally as challenging. All four forum contributions interrogate the term “Russian Revolution,” attempting to pay attention to the entire “revolutionary” period: World War I, the collapse of the tsarist empire, and the ensuing “civil war,” which encompasses the Polish-Bolshevik war, the Polish-Ukrainian war, violence between the armies of nationalists, Bolsheviks, Symon Petliura, Anton Denikin, peasants and anarchists, and the emergence of new states, in particular independent Poland and Soviet Ukraine.

The multiple histories of this region are vast, overlapping, and often not studied together: The experience of the Jews¹; the story of villages and

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1. Recent work includes Thomas Chopard, *Le martyre de Kiev: 1919, L'Ukraine en révolution entre terreur soviétique, nationalisme et antisémitisme* (Paris, 2015); Mihaly Kalman, “Shtetl Heroes: Jewish Self-Defense from the Pale to Palestine, 1871–1929” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012); Sergius Hirik, “Ievreis'kyi natsional-komunizm i fenomen radians'koi bahatopartiinosti (1918–1928),” in Artem Kharchenko and Oleksii Chebotariiov, eds., *Ievrei v etnichnii mozaitsi ukrainskykh zemel' u XIX-XXI stolittiakh* (Kharkiv, 2011): 99–106. On pogroms in particular, see Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites*, trans. Timothy Portice (Philadelphia, 2011); Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood: Jews, Pogroms, and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets* (New York, 2019). On antisemitism in the Red Army, see Brendan McGeever, *Anti-Semitism and the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, Eng., 2019).

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peasants²; the vagaries of nationalism and nation-building³; the cases of Donbas, Odesa, and peripheral cities that at times were central⁴; the history of the wars themselves⁵; and the geopolitical and diplomatic dimension.⁶ This forum cannot do everything, but all of the forum's contributions put the "Ukraine" story in larger context, aiming to de-emphasize the "Russian" in the revolution in favor of focus on collapse and war in multiple empires, the contingent emergence of new states, and the story of minority voices.

This period is tricky because it falls into a historiographic Pandora's box—often categorized either as failed Ukrainian state-building (for those who work on Ukraine), or as a footnote (for those who work on the "Russian Revolution"). While there is much new research on Ukraine, little focuses on this particular period. Rather, there is increasingly more new work on gender, including during World War II, and the Ukrainian nationalist underground.⁷ There is new work on the Holocaust, focusing on the intricacies of local case studies that shatter categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander.⁸ Scholars on the Holodomor are not only using new technology to track famine, but also

2. Dimitri Tolkatsch, "Lokale Ordnungsentwürfe am Übergang vom Russischen Reich zur Sowjetmacht: Bauernaufstände und Dorfrepubliken in der Ukraine, 1917–1921" in Tim Buchen and Frank Grelka, eds., *Akteure der Neuordnung. Ostmitteleuropa und das Erbe der Imperien, 1917–1924* (Berlin, 2017), 93–111.

3. On Ukrainian nationalism, see Christopher Gilley, "Beyond Petliura: the Ukrainian National Movement and the 1919 Pogroms," *East European Jewish Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2017): 45–61, and "Untangling the Ukrainian Revolution," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17, no. 3 (2017): 326–38; on anarchists, Misha Akulov, "War without Fronts: Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917–1919" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013); on the failed Western Ukrainian National Republic, Oleh Pavlyshyn, "Suspil'no-politychna kryza v ZUNR u pershii polovyni 1919 r.," in Oleh Pavlyshyn, ed., *Ukraina: kul'turna spadshchyna, national'na svidomist', derzhavnist'* (L'viv, 2009), 119–30.

4. See Tetiana Portnova, "Misto i revoliutsiia: Katerynoslav 1917–1919 rr. v ukrains'kykh memuarakh," *Moloda natsiia: Almanakh* 32, no. 3 (2004): 52–62; Tanja Penter, *Odessa 1917: Revolution an der Peripherie* (Cologne, 2000).

5. Recent work on the war in Galicia is particularly rich; see, on gender, Mar'iana Baidak, "Prostory zhinochoho povsiadennia v roky Pershoi svitovoi viiny (na prykladi Halychynyi u svitli osobovykh zherel)," *Istorychni ta kul'turolohichni studii*, vyp. 6–7 (2014–2015): 118–33; on disability, Oksana Vynnyk, "Postwar 'Normalization': The Reintegration of Disabled Veterans to Civilian Life in Interwar Lviv" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2018); on theater, Oksana Dudko, "Mizh natsiona'lnoiu i populiarnoiu kul'turoiu: teatry v okupovanomu L'vovi (veresen' 1914 roku–cherven' 1915 roku)," *Ukraina Moderna* 23 (2016): 45–76.

6. Borislav Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Re-making of East-Central Europe* (Toronto, 2018); Jochen Boehler, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford, 2018).

7. On gender more generally, see Oksana Kis', "(Re)constructing Ukrainian Women's History: Actors, Agents, and Narratives," in Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, eds., *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine* (Toronto, 2012), 152–79; on gender and Ukrainian nationalism during World War II, see Marta Havryshko, *Dolaiuchy tyshu: Zhinochi istorii viiny* (Kharkiv 2018). After Marta Havryshko's book, her work in English: and "Love and Sex in Wartime: Controlling Women's Sexuality in the Ukrainian Nationalist Underground," *Aspasia* 12, no. 1 (2018): 35–67.

8. On the Holocaust, see, for example, Jared McBride, "Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944," *Slavic Review* 75, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 630–55; Yuri Radchenko, "Accomplices to Extermination: Municipal Government and the Holocaust in Kharkiv, 1941–1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 3 (2013):

fundamentally re-thinking categories of perpetrators and victims.⁹ Of course, social scientists are producing excellent studies of the current war in eastern Ukraine.¹⁰ Mark Von Hagen, Serhy Plokhy, and Timothy Snyder have written multiple pieces about bringing the story of the revolutionary years into a greater narrative.¹¹

The contributors to this forum, however, have researched the years of war and revolution in depth. They work in academic communities in Ukraine, Canada, and the United States, are at different stages of their careers, and pursue different areas of research. This diversity highlights the richness of Ukraine as a field of study.

Several common themes emerge across these essays that contribute to a greater understanding of the years of war, revolution, and state-building. First, the connection between revolution and war lies at the foundation of each argument. While well researched by scholars such as Eric Lohr, Josh Sanborn, and Peter Holquist, the case of Ukraine shows us to what extent revolution and war are inextricable. In some ways, as Olena Betlii shows, this period is best analyzed as a path out of the war. Second, all contributions engage a multiplicity of perspectives, whether spatial or minority. Third, all argue against the category of “Russian Revolution,” while also complicating the category of “Ukrainian revolution,” eschewing a simple nationalist teleology of state creation. Rather all contributions draw attention to the need for fresh categories, methods, and approaches to this period in general.

Serhy Yekelchuk offers a macro-level story of the Ukrainian revolution and its authors, showing how the history of revolution in this region actually reaches into Galicia with the Polish-Ukrainian war, and extends far beyond the collapse of the monarchy in Russia. Olena Betlii details how a microhistory of a city using an urban lens throws standard narratives into disarray. Revolution never happens on an everyday level, as painstaking archival work reveals, the way it does in later polished scholarship. Larysa Bilous argues that the Ukrainian revolution is a Jewish one, and explains how studying the events in this region is impossible without attention to the Jewish experience.

443–63; and Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York, 2018).

9. See the MAPA project at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, at <https://www.huri.harvard.edu/mapa.html> (accessed October 2, 2019); see also, for example, Daria Mattingly, “Idle, Drunk and Good-for-Nothing: The Rank and File Perpetrators of 1932–1933 Famine in Ukraine and their Representation in Cultural Memory,” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2019).

10. For nuanced work on the current conflict, see, for example, Ioulia Shukan, *Generation Maidan: Vivre la crise ukrainienne* (Paris, 2016), and Anna Colin Lebedev and Ioulia Shukan, eds., “S’engager dans la guerre du Donbass (2014–2018): Trajectoires individuelles et reconfigurations sociales,” special issue of *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest* 49, no. 2 (2018).

11. For example, see, Timothy Snyder’s *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, 2003), and opinion pieces at <http://timothysnyder.org/ukraine> (accessed October 2, 2019); Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York, 2017); Mark Von Hagen, “1917: The Empire’s Diverging Revolutions,” *The Russia File: A Blog of the Kennan Institute*, November 7, 2017, at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/1917-the-empires-diverging-revolutions> (accessed October 2, 2019).

Mayhill Fowler's contribution shows that revolutionary art happened far outside the capital cities of the former empire, which demands a new understanding of the geography of revolutionary art.

Since 2013 many journalists, historians, and pundits have made comparisons between this early twentieth century period of state-building and war and the current war in Ukraine. Olena Betlii rightly notes that these comparisons are often pat, ignoring historical specificity and lacking historical expertise.¹² Yet surely this forum, in challenging standard narratives and drawing attention to overlooked themes, places, and people, should contribute to showing the importance of Ukraine for understanding the course of events in Russia and Europe, in the twentieth as well as the twenty-first centuries. Focusing on Ukraine demands wrestling with contingency, minorities, and how historical narratives most often reflect the privilege of dominant political authority.

12. For an excellent comparison, however, see Tanya Zhurzhenko, "The Making and Unmaking of Revolutions: What 1917 Means for Ukraine in Light of Maidan," *Eurozine*, November 30, 2017 at <https://www.eurozine.com/the-making-and-unmaking-of-revolutions/> (last accessed October 2, 2019).