

OLIVER ROWE

Self-determination in Theory
and Practice: The Reconfiguration
of the 'Russian' Empire, 1914–1924



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INTRODUCTION

The Topic and Relevance of the Dissertation

Before touching on the substance of this document, it is impossible not to dwell on what is perhaps its most striking aspect: its general tone and style.¹

From the 1st of January 1914 to the 31st of December 1924, the world changed in ways almost inconceivable to the average person of a few years prior.² Numerous empires, the political form that most of the globe's population was subsumed under in some way, collapsed or were actively destroyed. Industrialised warfare killed, injured, and traumatised millions of people, and both directly caused and indirectly accelerated a wide variety of social, economic, and political changes further from the frontlines. A pandemic, along with other more familiar diseases and famines, further ravaged peoples' lives. Cessations of conflict did not arrive all at once, nor were they guarantees of lasting peace, even in the short term.

The Russian Empire experienced all these changes and more, undergoing a popular revolution in early 1917 that led to the regime's downfall, followed months later by a successful coup d'état, the leaders of which styled as another revolution. Multi-party conflict – civil, international, and that of the grey zone between the two – soon developed and engulfed the entire former empire. Several new states were created by and around this process. Other older states re-emerged from imperial ashes, though not all of them fully shed imperialism itself. Many other attempts at statehood and alternative forms of political existence proved to be ephemeral. Until the end of 1924, the political structures of the ultimate victors of these struggles were still being moulded by the experience of these conflicts, with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) emerging as a founding member of the larger Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922, with 1924 seeing the first constitution for this union of national republics. How did this occur?

One facile answer is self-determination. We could say, for example, that in large part due to the ideological battle between the US President Woodrow Wilson and the Russian revolutionary V. I. Lenin³, the end of the First World

¹ Editorial from the newspaper *Rech'* on the declaration of war aims of the Provisional Government of Russia, 28th of March [10th of April] 1917, No. 73, 2. Available here (all hyperlinks in this dissertation last accessed 19/05/2026).

² For the sake of consistency, all dates in this dissertation follow the 'New Style', Gregorian calendar format unless otherwise specified. Dates adjusted to New Style appear in square brackets, as in the above reference, in order to still make the original source easily identifiable and traceable.

³ A quick note on Russian names and transliteration is warranted. Generally, for a Russian (or clearly Russian-identifying) individual's first appearance in the text, I identify them with the initials of their first name and patronym followed by their surname. Subsequently, I use

War (1914–1918) resulted in the formation of many new and re-established states underpinned by the principle of self-determination. That, at least, remains a conventional narrative. However, that both Wilson and Lenin employed the term self-determination during this period has only descriptive value for scholars.⁴ In reality, we still understand little about *how* the concept of self-determination was formulated in theory and realised in practice during this broader period of imperial reconfiguration, especially in ‘Russia’ between the years of 1914 and 1924. Given that this was when self-determination achieved such consistent and widespread use for the first time, developing explanations as to how the concept actually functioned through these usages is much needed.

Self-determination was not (only) an abstract concept but a practical tool to be used towards ends. Political agents had *agency* in the most literal sense of the word, to be able to use or not use the language of self-determination in specific ways at specific moments. Therefore, it is important to recognise the contingency of political outcomes, especially during a period of conflict – it was not a bygone conclusion that Wilson’s and Lenin’s words would reverberate around the world, nor that the Bolsheviks would emerge victorious in the Russian Civil War and thus be capable of at least partially enacting their vision of a new world order. Most importantly, it was never a certainty that self-determination itself would emerge and hold such resonance in domestic and international politics. That could only be the result of a wide range of political agents using the specific language of self-determination across different settings, regardless of whether these agents agreed on what exactly the term meant, or to what end it should be used.

I contend, in other words, that we slightly miss the point when looking exclusively at *what* concepts like self-determination are. The most revealing, and arguably more interesting questions, are *who* the agents choosing to use the language of self-determination are, and *how* self-determination is used by these political agents in pursuit of their goals. As will be seen below in more detail, this dissertation focuses mainly on political agents who were in a position (or considered themselves to be in a position) of offering self-determination for others, rather than claiming it for ‘themselves’. In the case of this work, this refers primarily to Russian liberal-reformists (as represented by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia), the Bolsheviks, the White Movement, and the Allied and Associated Powers. Beyond the obvious implications about one’s

only their surname, except in the conclusion for the sake of clarity at the end of a long text. Some transliterations of Russian names may be inconsistent according to modern standards. This is largely due to my adoption of ‘best practice’ in reckoning with the fact that many of the individuals discussed below first became known in the Anglophone world before the widespread adoption of the Library of Congress’ Russian-English transliteration standard, so are better known in this form. The RSFSR’s first People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, therefore, is referred to as L. D. Trotsky, not Lev Trotskii, and so on.

⁴ Moreover, as is now more well established, 1918 was not such a neat marker for the end of conflict for much of Russia, northern, and eastern Europe, as it is often taken as for other regions. See Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York City, 2016).

sense of self and the relative political power between those who offer and those who claim self-determination, this distinction is also meaningful because of the specificities it reveals about those who offer self-determination. Who do these agents offering self-determination extend the offer to, and in what ways – who or what are the legitimate selves for these agents? Are they national, class, religious, or historic in their composition? Self-determination claims are expectedly mediated by external circumstances, but also by one's own identity, even if unacknowledged or unrecognised. This is reflected in who is making self-determination claims as offers, as well as how they these claims are made.⁵

Beyond this *who*, *how* did these political agents then use self-determination during this time? How did they formulate and frame self-determination – with what adjectives and nouns was it paired with or contrasted to? What questions did it answer? By extension, this 'how' also necessarily includes the literal dimension of 'in what form' these ideas were presented. In the period between 1914 and 1924, there were several dominant 'genres' of political intervention: political pamphlets and polemics; speeches and declarations, including those of independence; peace treaties and international agreements; and constitutions. What does an analysis of self-determination during this period that is sensitive to the form, as well as the substance, of political interventions tell us about the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire that others may lack?

This doctoral dissertation therefore applies a methodological innovation to the study of a concept 'in action'. Ultimately, this novel methodological approach results in a main thesis that we can characterise as a more general reading of how self-determination functioned in political discourse between 1914 and 1924. The methodological innovation of the dissertation rests on the assumption that where intellectual transfer occurred concerning the reconfiguration of heterogeneous empires and states, including the use of terms and concepts such as self-determination, it did so through identifiable and traceable literary-political genres. This matters because when considering self-determination in practice, these genres, which were by definition temporally and spatially contingent, can unlock two features essential for any history of political thought – the influences of their creators, and the intended purposes of the specific political intervention.

Consequently, the dissertation argues that analysing its sources in the context of their genre allows us to situate political interventions more precisely in the period of their creation and occurrence. Recent analyses of declarations of independence have begun this process, but current literature has thus far treated the other significant documents of the period as divorced from their unique form(s) and purposes. These other genres – political polemics, revolutionary declarations, and documents of international law such as treaties and covenants, to namecheck just some for the time being, all have their own histories, conventions,

⁵ This dissertation does also necessarily look at those who claimed self-determination for 'themselves', specifically some of the non-Russian national movements, but they are not the focus of this work. More on this in later sections of this introduction.

and purposes that need to be brought in when discussing those created between 1914 and 1924.

As a result of this methodological shift, the dissertation finds that, within Russian language discourse, and especially from those who offered self-determination for others rather than claimed it for ‘themselves’, there was a general terminological rise and fall of self-determination in political interventions during this time, ending with the relatively surprising Bolshevik removal of the term from their political language (and now consolidating state) in 1921.⁶ This removal was achieved through intelligent genre usage and manipulation as well as straightforward political argumentation. The dissertation concludes by asserting that the Bolsheviks were clearly the most effective users and modifiers of genre throughout these years, though they were certainly not its *only* effective users and modifiers. There is more to say on how this removal occurred, especially considering the adjacent terms political agents used with self-determination at different points in time, such as the adjectives free, cultural, and national, as well as on the implications of this when considering the functions of the concept of self-determination during this period. For the purposes of this introduction, however, it is enough to highlight that this dissertation has identified a clear terminological rise and fall of self-determination, performed through genre usage and modification, over the course of its research.

With regard to the structure of this work, the remainder of this introductory chapter covers the more technical matters of the dissertation, such as the main research puzzle, objectives, and research questions of the study. Following this, I provide a theoretical framework for the dissertation, outlining the state of the art as well as my own contributions to this body of literature. Finally, I outline my research design, methodological approach, and sources. The remaining chapters of the dissertation are empirical and analytical in nature.⁷ Chapter 1, ‘Self-determination in Pamphlets and Polemics (1914–1917)’, provides readers with an overview of the heterogenous makeup of the Russian Empire of the early twentieth century; discusses the positions of members of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia on self-determination and the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire; and covers the views of the Bolsheviks (and other revolutionary socialists to a lesser extent) on self-determination and, to use their own term, the ‘National Question’.

Chapter 2, ‘Self-determination in Declarations and Deliberation (1917–1918)’, takes readers through the February Revolution to and beyond the onset of the

⁶ As will be seen, this ‘fall’ occurred earlier in the case of some of this dissertation’s other main political agents.

⁷ Some parts of some of these empirical chapters are more expansive and analytically detailed versions of articles already published elsewhere. See Oliver Rowe, ‘From Self-determination to Secession? The Bolsheviks and National Self-determination, 1914–1924’, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2024), 16–38; Oliver Rowe, ‘For a United Russia? The White Movement’s Rejection of National Self-Determination, 1918–1920’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 83 (2024), 577–594.

Provisional Government of Russia. It then discusses the tensions between the Provisional Government and other bodies such as the Ukrainian Central Rada, as well as the impact of the Bolshevik seizure of power on these events. Lastly, it traces the impact of other empires (mainly the Central Powers during Brest-Litovsk negotiations) and wider international phenomena (e.g. the reception of Wilson and peace movements) on local self-determination discourse in the former Russian Empire.

Chapter 3, ‘Self-determination in Turmoil and Treaties (1918–1921)’, gives readers an analysis of self-determination during the Russian Civil War period, beginning with the Bolsheviks’ internal conflicts on war and peace during Brest-Litovsk negotiations, followed by the persistence of the party’s internal disagreements on self-determination throughout the Russian Civil War. Following this, the chapter moves to the Bolsheviks’ main military adversaries in the Russian Civil War, the White Movement, and discusses their various iterations and corresponding attitudes towards self-determination. In particular, the internal politics of the ‘government’ of A. V. Kolchak, and the Omsk regime’s attitude towards self-determination and the future structure of the Russian state is discussed. Lastly, the chapter covers the Paris Peace Conference, and repositions the city as just one of many ‘centres of self-determination’ during the Russian Civil War, albeit an important one, given the spatial and temporal differences in experiences of conflict and political agency during this time. As such, Omsk, Kyiv, Tartu, and Tbilisi are emphasised in addition to the already well-established Paris-Moscow dynamic.

Chapter 4, ‘Self-determination in Covenants and Constitutions (1921–1924)’, guides readers through the immediate postwar years, emphasising various conflicts’ lingering effects. The Bolsheviks’ discursive reframing of self-determination is discussed at length, both on the theoretical level and in relation to their practical policies and practices, such as *korenizatsiia*. This leads into an examination of the formation of the Soviet Union, and an evaluation of where self-determination was or wasn’t during the disagreements over the nature of Soviet federalism and the precise structure of this novel polity. Lastly, the chapter provides an overview of the policies (and realities) of the republics of Poland and Estonia on their ‘new’ minority groups, as well as detailing how and why different political agents advocated for or resisted usage of certain terms in administrative contexts. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the persistence of internationalist, relational conceptions of self-determination and national liberation, primarily through Prometheism.

The final chapter provides a conclusion for the dissertation as a whole, highlighting the main findings through key examples and outlining their wider implications. While this conclusion emphasises this dissertation’s contribution to the relevant literature, it also acknowledges its limitations, suggesting routes for further study and refinement of the work and the field.

Research Puzzle

Current literature has conclusively established that the concept of self-determination, especially in the form of explicit mentions of the exact term, achieved global resonance during the years of this dissertation's chronology (1914–1924). However, this literature has been significantly less effective in its explanatory power and potential in relation to this. To be brusque – so what? Knowing that certain figures appealed to the concept does not necessarily explain anything about self-determination, nor its political usages in context. There is therefore a need to develop explanations as to how exactly self-determination was formulated, and what the purposes of the employment of this term from a wide range of agents were intended to be. More specifically, while there has been effective emphasis on the strategic usages of the term self-determination during this time, current literature has not fully explained how and why self-determination was used (or not used) by competing agents in 'Russia' between 1914 and 1924 in their pursuit of new and/or reconfigured states, including imperial states, and the construction of a new international order, however conceived.

Objectives

The objective of this dissertation is to develop an explanation of how various competing visions of self-determination were **formulated, interrelated, and enacted** between the beginning of 1914 and the consolidation of the Soviet Union in 1924.

To this end, the dissertation undertakes three sub-objectives. Firstly, the dissertation will describe and explain the self-conceptions of the political agents who offered self-determination during this time, and position these in relation to the idea of the Russian Empire and to some of the political agents who claimed self-determination. Secondly, the dissertation will describe and explain the genre, content, and meaning of material produced by the Bolsheviks, Russian liberal-reformists, the White Movement, the Allied and Associated Powers, and *some* of the non-Russian national movements on self-determination and imperial reconfiguration within these years. Thirdly, and in firm relation to the two previous sub-objectives, the dissertation seeks to go some way in establishing the relationships between these agents, the concept of self-determination, and wider attempts to create international order from crisis, with sensitivity to the presence of imperialism across them.

Research Questions

Accordingly, the research questions of the dissertation are as follows:

1. **Who** were the political agents offering (and claiming) self-determination in 'Russia' between 1914 and 1924, **what** were their theoretical understandings of and practical policies regarding the concept, and **how** did these change throughout the period?

2. **How** did these political agents formulate and employ self-determination towards their goals?
3. **Why** did these political agents employ self-determination in the ways in which they did in their attempts to achieve their objectives, in the context both of imperial collapse and Allied attempts to create a new international order from crisis?

Theoretical Framework and Key Terms of the Dissertation

Self-determination

According to a simple dictionary definition, self-determination can be defined as “the ability or power to make decisions for yourself, especially the power of a nation to decide how it will be governed”.⁸ In its broad meaning, this is an acceptable definition for my purposes here. Certainly, the emphasis on ability and power, that is to say, capacity and agency, is helpful, but hardly the end of the matter. The popular conception of self-determination today is one that very clearly relates to secession and independent statehood, and there are two main reasons for this. Firstly, this is clearly a long term legacy of the popularisation of the Bolshevik (and specifically Leninist) conception of self-determination, which consistently and explicitly combined the right to self-determination with a right to secession.⁹ As this conception of self-determination was frequently referenced throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by a wide range of groups, most notably by nationalists and anti-imperialists, the supposed link between self-determination and secession was reaffirmed on several occasions across different locales.

Secondly, the post-Second World War international order has also played a significant role in reaffirming this apparent link, given the inclusion (and political usages) of the “self-determination of peoples” in the founding Charter of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and documents relating to decolonisation and human rights from the 1960s.¹⁰ Of these latter documents, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights is the most frequently quoted, as its first article proclaims the right of all peoples to self-determination; the right of all to “freely determine their political status”.¹¹

Yet hidden even within these documents is a fundamental tension. Self-determination as found in the UN Charter applies very clearly (and, originally, very exclusively) to *state* peoples – citizens of existent mutually recognised

⁸ Definition of “self-determination” from the Cambridge English Dictionary. Available here.

⁹ Evidence for this claim will be provided later in the dissertation where more relevant.

¹⁰ Charter of the United Nations (1945), Article 1, Point 2. Available here.

¹¹ International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), Article 1, Point 1. Available here.

regimes. It says nothing of sub-state peoples, however defined, such as nationalities within states (whether numerically/politically dominant or not), nor minorities of different types (national or other). By contrast, the later human rights covenants unambiguously assert the rights of non- or sub-state peoples to self-determination, and state that regimes, regardless of their form, must respect the rights of these groups to self-determination. As such, today, even within the documentation of the UN, a central institution of international relations and international law, the subject self of self-determination is inconsistent, before one even gets into the meaning of the determination aspect. What light, then, can academic scholarship shed on the concept?

Four academic areas have seen the greatest discussion of the concept of self-determination thus far: international law, international relations, political theory, and the history of political thought. This dissertation draws on many of the findings and discussions from all four areas but is most clearly related to, and directly develops, the literature on self-determination from the history of political thought field. Nonetheless, these other three areas have informed this research in helpful ways. International legal scholars have emphasised the (juridical) definitional problem of what a ‘people’ is, as well as looked at the legality or otherwise of secession and firmly established the distinction between internal (within an existing state) and external (secession¹²) self-determination.¹³ International relations scholars have done excellent work on the establishment and maintenance or otherwise of the norms of international relations, proposed the notion of degrees of state recognition, and increasingly emphasised the role of non-state agents in the international system.¹⁴ Political theorists have scrutinised and sometimes argued for understandings of the state as the ‘natural’ site and/or subject of self-determination, often returning to the more fundamental questions of what

¹² Including the potential of subsequently joining with another, different state.

¹³ See some of the foundational texts for excellent overviews of these: Malcolm N. Shaw, *International Law* (Cambridge, 2021); Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (Cambridge, 1999); James R. Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law* (Oxford, 2007); Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia, 1990).

¹⁴ For an overview of this, see Neil MacFarlane and Natalie Sabanadze, ‘Sovereignty and Self-determination: Where are we?’, *International Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2013), 609–627. A recent doctoral dissertation also provides a good summary of the movement within international relations scholarship towards non-state agents in the context of Civil Society Organisations’ activities in international affairs. See Butrint Berisha, *Exploring the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in foreign relations of de facto states: A comparative analysis of Kosovo, Palestine and Taiwan* (University of Tartu doctoral dissertation, 2025), 17–28. Available here. On the varying degrees of recognition, see Nina Caspersen, ‘Degrees of legitimacy: Ensuring internal and external support in the absence of recognition’, *Geoforum*, Vol. 66 (2015), 184–192. This particular volume of *Geoforum* featured a themed issue on legitimacy which covered similar themes, especially vis-à-vis *de facto* states that are formally unrecognised.

makes a political community a community (and what *should* make a political community a community)?¹⁵

This dissertation primarily seeks to offer a new history of political thought of self-determination in the Russian Empire between 1914 and 1924. In the broad sense, self-determination has been a consistently popular object of study for some time now, both globally and in the European context.¹⁶ However, self-determination's intellectual history has only recently begun to be seriously considered, and there are surprisingly few studies of the concept in the Russian imperial and revolutionary context, especially positioned within wider global imperial transformations and reconfigurations.¹⁷ Nonetheless, this literature has clearly developed over the past twenty years. Well known works on the concept by Erez Manela and Borislav Chernev have made the case for certain 'moments' of self-determination included within this dissertation's chronology; in the case of the former, a 'Wilsonian Moment' at the end of the First World War, and in the case of the latter, aiming to further nuance Manela's work, a 'Brest-Litovsk Moment' of early 1918.¹⁸ Adapting this further still in a 2020 work, Rita Augestad Knudsen has even extended the study of self-determination through such 'moments' to the twenty-first century.¹⁹

While I accept the insightful findings of these works, I do wish to problematise their central framing of various 'moments' of self-determination. This is partly to do with my methodological approach, which will be detailed below, but primarily because of the context of events in the years of my chronology. What may well have been a moment for one was not necessarily a moment for all, especially

¹⁵ See the debate between the so-called neo-Kantians and their critics. As one neo-Kantian, Anna Stilz, states in her article 'Nations, States, and Territory', *Ethics*, Vol. 121, No. 3 (2011), 579: "Only states – and not any other actor, such as the nation – can claim territorial jurisdiction". For a critical response to these approaches, see David Miller, 'Neo-Kantian Theories of Self-Determination: A Critique', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2016), 858–875.

¹⁶ André Liebich, *Cultural Nationhood and Political Statehood: The Birth of Self-Determination* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2022); Eric Weitz, 'Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 120, No. 2 (2015), 462–496. For an older classic work, see Alfred Cobban, *National Self-Determination* (Oxford, 1945).

¹⁷ With some relatively recent exceptions. See Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, Michal Kopeček (eds.), *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume I: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'* (Oxford, 2016).

¹⁸ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007). Manela essentially argues that, functionally, it was not so important what Wilson actually said, nor even what he meant and did, but what others heard and saw when he said and did things. This description comes partially from Leonard V. Smith as in a public lecture he gave, available here; Borislav Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment: Self-Determination Discourse in Eastern Europe before Wilsonianism', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2011), 369–387.

¹⁹ Rita Augestad Knudsen, *The Fight Over Freedom in 20th– and 21st–Century International Discourse: Moments of 'Self-Determination'* (London, 2020).

given the realities of conflict, foreign occupation, and (non-unidirectional) shifts in agency in a given region at a given time. In other words, I cast doubt on the existence of single, universally experienced moments and, moreover, believe that contradictory ‘moments’ of self-determination could happen simultaneously. Even, as will be seen, within single documents or speech acts.²⁰ Therefore, I contend that we must move beyond the framing of ‘moments’ of self-determination and instead study the usages of the concept through contextualised speech acts as part of wider processes.

This is in line with more recent history of political thought studies with similar chronologies, including those of self-determination in other spatial contexts. László Bence Bari’s recent doctoral dissertation, for example, unpacked the concept of national self-determination in the case of the Habsburg Empire in the 1910s.²¹ In the work, Bari criticises narratives that depict the concept as intrinsically tied to the nation-state, providing evidence of many visions of self-determination that accommodated, rather than openly contested the framework of the Habsburg empire.²² Self-determination became associated with the nation-state (and related ideas and terms, such as sovereignty and secession) in the Habsburg context only in 1917 and 1918, not earlier.²³ This dissertation will serve as a *de facto* test of this association in the context of the Russian Revolution and Civil War – was this also the case here? Regardless, identifying statehood as only one (agent-reliant) outcome of wider processes to do with imperial reconfiguration and large-scale conflict is certainly a move in the right direction away from an *assumption* of this link, and away from any assumptions that this link appeared in several places at the same time and in the same ways.

Bari also convincingly makes the case for looking at self-determination’s “parallel concepts” during the timeframe of one’s research, with some he identifies and analyses being the nation, independence, and autonomy.²⁴ Tracing how these were used by political agents alongside or in opposition to the central concept of his research has proven fruitful, and this dissertation adopts a broadly similar approach. The doctoral work of Timo Aava has also inspired this dissertation in the same way; Aava found evidence of these kinds of terminological-conceptual distinctions in the case of the Estonian theorists and drafters of the Republic of Estonia’s well-known Law on Cultural Self-Government for National Minorities of the 1920s.²⁵ These authors’ emphasis on specific terms,

²⁰ This concept will be explained in detail in the upcoming methodology section of this introduction.

²¹ László Bence Bari, *Trans(national) Concepts of Self-Determination and the Future of Central Europe in the Late First World War, 1917–1918* (Central European University doctoral dissertation, 2023).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Bari, *Trans(national) Concepts of Self-Determination*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Timo Aava, *Minorities and the State. Non-Territorial Autonomy in Estonia in the Late Tsarist and Interwar Periods* (University of Vienna doctoral dissertation, 2023).

and their usages in combination with other linguistic qualifiers is a trend this dissertation forms a part of and develops for my own object of study. In the case of self-determination in Russian language discourse, the adjectives national, cultural, and free were among the most common, and these will be unpacked below.

Recent works that have combined this with an analysis of the connections between self-determination and international peace-making processes and ideas, including those of a federal and confederal nature, have proven fertile ground for academic study. Marcel Radosław Garboś' 2021 doctoral dissertation, entitled *The Clash of Internationalisms: Prometheism, National Communism, and the Fate of the Soviet Borderlands, 1889–1939*, performs this task effectively, utilising a sweeping chronology that examines the intellectual trends of the turn of the century and where their theorists went (both intellectually and literally) during and after the turmoil of war and revolution.²⁶ While Garboś' work is less terminologically grounded than those just mentioned (and this current work), its broad chronology places self-determination, particularly national self-determination, in the context of wider ideas of creating a more just international order, and has been informative for this work in this regard. In his reading of the Russian Civil War, highly relevant for the later arguments of this dissertation, Garboś states; "...The Bolsheviks not only crushed individual national governments in the civil war years but also interrupted the formation of alternative visions of international order that cut across lines of ethnicity, religion, ideology, and geography".²⁷ The ideological battle lines of this period were not drawn solely between nationalism and internationalism, or between empire and nation-state, but rather between different forms of all of these.

Garboś' dissertation has echoes of previous studies that have emphasised the open-ended nature of imperial reconfiguration during this dissertation's time-frame.²⁸ The work of Mark von Hagen has been particularly insightful in this regard in at least two ways. Firstly, in this dissertation, I continue von Hagen's attention paid to various contemporary ideas and ideals of imperial reconfiguration that were, ultimately, unsuccessful.²⁹ From a history of political thought perspective, these (mostly federal) ideas proposed by many primarily non-Russian imperial subjects around the time of the turn of the century, and particularly during the revolutionary events of 1905–1906, continued to influence political agents'

²⁶ Marcel Radosław Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms: Prometheism, National Communism, and the Fate of the Soviet Borderlands, 1889–1939* (Harvard University doctoral dissertation, 2021).

²⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁸ As well as in the previous century. See Dimitri von Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Russia: Plans and Projects of Federal Reconstruction of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (East Brunswick, 1981).

²⁹ Mark von Hagen, 'Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire' in Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (eds.), *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington, 2007), 494–510.

views in later years, especially those of this dissertation's chronology.³⁰ As such, they formed parts of this work's political agents' worldviews, even if this was not always recognised or represented in final political outcomes.³¹ Secondly, and in relation to this, von Hagen was among the first to genuinely recognise the importance of Ukraine as an intellectual centre both in its own right and in relation to these ideas of imperial reconfiguration, especially federalism and autonomism.³² As mentioned, this dissertation focuses more on those who *offered* self-determination, rather than claimed it, but, as will be seen below, Ukrainian self-determination claimants³³ had significant impact upon those in the conventional imperial centre in their readings of imperial reconfiguration.

In many ways, von Hagen's and Garboś' studies are a refinement of earlier works on the international aspects of self-determination during this time period, including the concept's intentional internationalisation by a wide range of political agents. While this dissertation also develops this literature in some ways, it does so mainly by challenging some of its basic assumptions, especially its epistemological and methodological contentions. In looking at peace-making ideas around the time of the end of the First World War, some works have focused too much on a reductive binary between Wilson and Lenin.³⁴ These studies are frequently effective when considered within their own frameworks, but appear incomplete when considering a more specific regional and temporal focus.³⁵ Placing Lenin, in particular, solely in the context of the 'end of the First World War', and not *also* in the context of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, is clearly flawed. Manela's aforementioned *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2007) remains a landmark study of the reception and usage of Wilson and Wilsonian language

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Due to a wide range of reasons, most obviously the impact of the First World War on the region.

³² Von von Hagen, 'Federalism and Pan-movements'; Mark von Hagen, 'Does Ukraine Have a History?', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (1995), 658–673.

³³ As well as self-determination claimants who were based or were temporarily in Ukraine. More on this in the empirical chapters of the dissertation.

³⁴ Arno J. Mayer largely began this trend with his *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy 1917–1918* (New Haven, 1969). Mayer's arguments on the necessity of both the Wilsonian and the Leninist forms of the 'new diplomacy' being argued for simultaneously for this outcome to be produced are certainly insightful, and has been further developed by more recent scholarship on similar themes. See Jörg Fisch, *The Right of Self-Determination of Peoples: The Domestication of an Illusion* (Cambridge, 2015). Translated by Anita Mage; Arthur Herman, *1917: Lenin, Wilson, and the Birth of the New World Disorder* (New York City, 2017); Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Redwood City, 2020).

³⁵ Considering, for example, the number of other agents involved in self-determination discussions during the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire throughout the early twentieth century. Many of these agents were not even consistently based in the empire's territory, but moved around different European cities and intellectual centres – Vienna, for example.

in self-determination struggles during and after the First World War.³⁶ However, its central argument cannot be over-extended beyond Manela's four main case studies (India, China, Korea, and Egypt) into the regions of this dissertation's focus, not least because self-determination was already a prominent part of political discourse in these regions, long before the entry of the United States of America into the First World War.³⁷

Nonetheless, this work differs in at least two key ways from, for example, the monographs of Bari, Aava, and Garboš. Unlike these dissertations, this work is centred on an examination of how various representatives of the dominant national group of an empire (indeed, its 'titular' adjectival group) used self-determination in political interventions between 1914 and 1924. The specific agents themselves will be detailed more in the upcoming research design section of this introduction, but already, whether within the Romanov regime, liberal-reformist critic, or revolutionary, the main political agents of this dissertation shared this status (and, to some extent, this self-conception), even if this was unrecognised.

Moreover, as will be detailed below, this dissertation differs from those already mentioned in its emphasis on studying political interventions (speech acts) through their form, their genre, as well as their content. This is related to some of the empirical findings of the work but is also based on my reading of genre choices as being a constituent part of intellectual exchange. All genres, I propose, are vehicles for mediation; between the particular and the universal, the national and the international, the theory and the practice. Alongside the language used within them, they appear to be a way of consciously framing contradictions, among other things, in order to best achieve particular goals. In this sense, understanding speech acts through their genre therefore allows us to situate them more precisely in the period of their creation, since political interventions were governed by exigencies and political expediency as well as by ideology. Choosing a genre in which to make a particular political intervention was as inescapable as these exigencies, but political agents were still able to choose forms that best suited their current needs.

This is certainly a development from the preeminent body of literature on Bolshevik/Soviet nationalities policy, which has not only neglected the form of political interventions thus far, but, in some cases, simply accepted the analytical framing of agents such as the Bolsheviks on, in that group's formulation, the 'National Question'.³⁸ In this sense, my methodological and epistemological assumptions are closer to scholars such as Holly Case. Case has made a strong contention in this area more generally through her study of the urgent 'questions'

³⁶ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

³⁷ Though many other points Manela makes in *The Wilsonian Moment* are worth highlighting, such as the efforts of Washington to foster a positive image of Wilson in other countries through the usage of growing US military and financial power.

³⁸ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964).

of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the Eastern Question, the Jewish Question, the Woman Question, etc.), arguing that how one framed a question itself revealed how the individual thought about the world, the relevant concepts of the question, and, in some cases, even the supposed answer of the question.³⁹ Questions were, in other words, ways of thinking about the world and methods of organising one's response to the respective agent's reading of the world simultaneously.⁴⁰

I also believe that questioning the assumptions and frames used by political agents in particular speech acts is itself stimulating and revealing. I see no reason to simply accept my political agents' formulations of self-determination, whether paired with adjectives such as national, cultural, and free; or as related to the so-called 'National Question'; as tied to secession or other political-institutional outcomes, and so on. These are quite clearly *framings* of self-determination; the political claims that agents chose to make and argue for towards specific goals. In order for there to be a perceived link between, for example, the nation and self-determination, agents needed to make effective (and often repeated) political interventions to this end.

As will be seen in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, Case's contention is largely validated by this analysis. Many political agents' disagreements between conceptions of self-determination were revealed by their attitude towards specific terms and frames of reference as used in political interventions. This research pays attention to the kinds of questions, adjectives, and nouns political agents used in combination with self-determination and, indeed, whether they supported the term itself. In this regard, the dissertation also develops the history of political thought literature of the Russian Revolution and Civil War field that *has* emphasised the study of specific terms. Often, this has taken a secondary role in wider political history studies – Jonathan D. Smele's well-reasoned scepticism of the political language of the regime of A. V. Kolchak, particularly the notion of 'non-predetermination' (*nepredreshenie*), is one such example.⁴¹ More recent history of political thought literature has also explicitly developed this line of thought, though, particularly with regard to the Bolsheviks. Rudolf A. Mark, for example, has looked at the Bolsheviks' views on national self-determination through a close reading and analysis of the group's use of language in key documents.⁴²

³⁹ Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (New Jersey, 2018).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* As will soon be seen in the methodology section of this dissertation, we may also think of the genre of political interventions playing a similar role in the organisation and construction of one's arguments.

⁴¹ Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918–1920* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁴² Rudolf A. Mark, 'National Self-Determination, as Understood by Lenin and the Bolsheviks', *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008), 21–39.

Arguably, most of the recent significant developments of the history of political thought literature on the Russian Revolution and Civil War have also come from studies with this terminological focus, similar to the above-mentioned works on other imperial reconfigurations and national minority policies. For example, the Boris I. Kolonitskii-edited *Slova i konflikty: iazyk protivostoianii i eskalatsiia grazhdanskoi voyny v rossii* (*Words and Conflicts: The Language of Confrontation and the Escalation of the Civil War in Russia*, 2022) adopts a similar methodological approach to that of this dissertation, with contributions on concepts of the republic, the citizen, and peace, among others, from a range of well-established authorities in the field.⁴³ Taken collectively, the work highlights the importance of political agents' language choices and usages in the escalation of conflict and the polarisation between its main agents. These have been highly effective in demonstrating the purposes behind political agents' actions, suggesting the benefits of such approaches, but have not yet been extended to the concept of self-determination, a central concept of the time both in this more localised sense and beyond. This dissertation clearly directly develops these approaches.

Most other history of political thought developments with regard to self-determination in the Russian Revolution and Civil War area have taken the form of academic articles (as opposed to monographs or other longer-form texts), and have therefore usually performed these conceptually and terminologically grounded analyses on single objects of study: a single political party or political agent, a specific national or political movement during a particular chronology, and so on.⁴⁴ This dissertation therefore brings these recent works together, expanding their reach by including other political agents in this analysis and by widening the common timeframe to include all of the First World War and the immediate postwar period in one study.

In relation to this, the dissertation's exploration of federalist, pan-imperial (sometimes pan-European), and relational conceptions of self-determination also contributes to recent wider literature on broader ideas of imperial reconfiguration during and after the First World War.⁴⁵ This dissertation represents an attempt to combine this literature, much of which focuses on *claimants* of self-

⁴³ Boris I. Kolonitskii (ed.), *Slova i konflikty: iazyk protivostoianii i eskalatsiia grazhdanskoi voyny v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 2022).

⁴⁴ Mark, 'National Self-Determination'; Chris Ford, 'Reconsidering the Ukrainian Revolution 1917–1921: The Dialectics of National Liberation and Social Emancipation', *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2007), 279–306; Hanna Perekhoda, 'Re-examining Lenin's Writings on the National Question: An Early Marxist Critique from the Imperial Periphery', *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2024), 125–133. As an edited volume of individual contributions, the Boris I. Kolonitskii-edited text just mentioned can also be included in this sense, too.

⁴⁵ Bari, *Trans(national) Concepts of Self-Determination*; Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, 'Catalonia and the «War of Nations»: Catalan Nationalism and the First World War', *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2018), 379–398.

determination, with an empirical study focused primarily on representatives of a dominant national group that *offered* self-determination in this context. Given that the Provisional Government of Russia was the first belligerent power to explicitly refer to the self-determination of peoples as a war aim in early 1917, understanding where this came from ideationally and how exactly this phrase was understood by those who uttered it marks a clear contribution to this body of work.

A related strand of literature has covered the history of political thought of parliaments, parliamentarism, and parliamentary debates, including in the Russian imperial, revolutionary, and Soviet contexts.⁴⁶ Ivan Sablin and Alexander Semyonov have been trailblazers in this regard, recently contributing much to more general conceptual histories of parliamentary debates and especially to our understandings of, among other assemblies, the State Duma of the Russian Empire.⁴⁷ Both authors argue well that many inclusive forms of Russianness and/or membership of the Russian imperial state were negotiated during the successive sittings of all four Dumas, especially the first two between 1906 and 1907.⁴⁸ As Sablin argues, “The State Duma played a key role during the imperial transformations in Eurasia, which featured parliamentary solutions to the crisis of sovereignty...becoming part of a wider parliamentary moment of 1900s–1910s”.⁴⁹ However, it is important to state that most of the ‘liberal nationalists’ of the State Duma were not assimilationists, but rather supported what they understood as a modern, inclusionary ‘imperial nationality’ that, while united by the Russian imperial centre, facilitated and tolerated national, class, religious, regional, and linguistic difference.⁵⁰

While legislative debates are not a particular focus of this study, these works have nonetheless been informative for the dissertation’s research process in how the work considers representative experimentation, as well as discourse and discursive movement through reciprocal speech acts. In particular, this dissertation also contributes to the notion that different, conflicting, and even contradictory

⁴⁶ Pasi Ihalainen, *The Springs Of Democracy: National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919* (Helsinki, 2017); Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie, and Kari Palonen (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York City, 2016); Ivan Sablin and Egas Moniz Bandeira (eds.), *Planting Parliaments in Eurasia, 1850–1950: Concepts, Practices, and Mythologies* (London, 2021); Alexander M. Semyonov, ‘Imperial Parliament for a Hybrid Empire: Representative Experiments in the Early 20th-Century Russian Empire’, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020), 30–39.

⁴⁷ Ivan Sablin and Alexander Semyonov, ‘Autonomy and decentralization in the global imperial crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924’, *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2020), 543–560; Ivan Sablin, ‘An imperial community: difference and inclusionary approaches to Russianness in the State Duma, 1906–1907’, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (2022), 819–843.

⁴⁸ Sablin and Semyonov, ‘Autonomy and decentralization’; Sablin, ‘An imperial community’.

⁴⁹ Ivan Sablin, *Parliaments in the Late Russian Empire, Revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2024), 1.

⁵⁰ Sablin, ‘An imperial community’, 820.

conceptualisations of the same idea can be used simultaneously by political agents with surprising ease. The dissertation also seconds Sablin and Semyonov's more generally implicit arguments that, far from being the conventional 'backward' empire of the continent, the Russian Empire was very much a part of wider international processes that sought to (re)negotiate the basis of political legitimacy for empire itself. While self-determination was only one concept of many in this context, it was nonetheless a central one. Especially, as seen below, following the start of the First World War.

There is, of course, a wealth of wider historical literature on the Russian Revolution and Civil War period from a number of angles, most of which are continuing to be developed by current generations of scholars. The empirical political and military history matters of the Russian Revolution and Civil War have, unsurprisingly, been the oldest and most consistent broad basis for scholarly analyses of the period.⁵¹ Works on the so-called 'National Question' and Bolshevik/Soviet nationalities policies are also numerous, on both empirical and more conceptual levels.⁵² More recently, economic historical studies have become more prominent, and have been integrated into works that question the previously assumed inevitability of imperial collapse.⁵³ While taking much of this highly effective literature as read, it is clear that this dissertation contributes most to the history of political thought literature that concerns or overlaps with the period and regions of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, some of which has been mentioned already.

Generally speaking, the history of political thought literature on the Russian Revolution and Civil War has focused most on the theory and practice of Bolshevik ideology (including in comparison to its other revolutionary opponents), the nature of liberal and conservative ideas in Russia and any overlap between the two (especially as manifested through political parties and specific individuals), and constitutional reform and practice writ large, including parliamentarism.⁵⁴ Much of this literature has implicitly and sometimes explicitly discussed self-determination, especially those that have discussed the views of specific political

⁵¹ For an exceptional recent (and voluminous) account of the revolutionary period, almost matching the years of this dissertation's chronology, see Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914–1921* (Oxford, 2017). The international and transnational character of the Russian Civil War (and related, often overlapping conflicts) is being increasingly understood and emphasised within these broader works, too – see Jonathan D. Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (London, 2016).

⁵² Outlined in more detail below.

⁵³ Andrei Markevich and Mark Harrison, *Pervaiia mirovaia voina, grazhdanskaia voina, i vosstanovlenie: natsional'nyi dokhod Rossii v 1913–1928 gg* (Moscow, 2013); Boris Mironov, *Rossiiskaia modernizatsiia i revoliutsiia* (St. Petersburg, 2019).

⁵⁴ See, among many others, Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Liberalism in Pre-revolutionary Russia: State, Nation, Empire* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2020); Sablin, *Parliaments in the Late Russian Empire*; Paul Robinson, *Russian Liberalism* (Ithaca, 2023); Paul Robinson, *Russian Conservatism* (Ithaca, 2021); Perekhoda, 'Re-examining Lenin's Writings'; Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge, 2012).

parties and agents on the non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire. At the same time, there has been no single history of political thought study of the concept of self-determination during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Certainly not one that pays such attention to the employment or otherwise of the specific term self-determination as part of wider processes. This dissertation marks the first such study, clearly developing this preexisting corpus.⁵⁵

Scholarly attempts to understand the Russian Revolution and Civil War beyond Russian urban centres have provided the field with beneficial innovation, at the very least challenging notions of ‘the revolution’ as a single event.⁵⁶ This is especially the case with regionalist accounts of the period or studies of regionalist ideas themselves. I am particularly indebted to Liudmila Novikova’s work in this regard, since it made thinking about space and spatiality – the physical locations where political interventions were made – unavoidable. Where the intellectual development of self-determination did not occur in an intellectual vacuum, it did not do so in a single space, either. Keeping geographic differences in mind is not only beneficial conceptually, but also when thinking of the specificities of this work’s political agents. This dissertation therefore attempts not just to walk in others’ shoes, but to consider the soil upon which these steps were taken.

As stated, the ‘National Question’ as answered by the Bolsheviks and the emergent Soviet Union has nonetheless long held a significant place in this body of wider literature. Soviet nationalities policy, most notably *korenizatsiia*, has been covered in detail. Now-classic works by Francine Hirsch, Terry Martin, Richard Pipes, Yuri Slezkine, Ronald Grigor Suny, and others, remain groundbreaking and foundational studies for any even tangentially related works.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Though I do not claim that this study is exhaustive or the final word on the matter, as detailed more in my methodology subchapter (in particular when discussing the limitations of my methodology and the dissertation as a whole towards the end of the methodology section).

⁵⁶ Aaron Retish, *Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914–1922* (Cambridge, 2008); Ford, ‘Reconsidering the Ukrainian Revolution’; Liudmila Novikova, *Provintsial’naia “kon-trrevolutsiia”: Beloe dvizhenie i Grazhdanskaia voina na russkom Severe, 1917–1920* (Moscow, 2011). See also the earlier article from the same author: Liudmila Novikova, ‘A Province of a Non-existent State: The White Government in the Russian North and Political Power in the Russian Civil War, 1918–20’, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005), 121–144. Recent scholarship has also effectively problematised the conventional ‘centre-periphery’ dynamic in general, making the case for a more horizontal history of the empire. See Catherine Gibson and Anton Kotenko, ‘Horizontal Threads: Towards an Entangled Spatial History of the Romanov Empire’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 84, early online version (2025), 247–265.

⁵⁷ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2005); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001); Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*; Yuri Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1994), 414–452; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993). In his somewhat revisionist approach to the late Russian Empire, based largely on quantitative analyses of economic and social phenomena, Boris Mironov has argued

Empirically, these studies are hugely valuable. Placing some of them, Hirsch's most notably though by no means exclusively, within wider literature on post-imperial regimes that still possessed or came to hold some imperial traits is more valuable still. Here, we may also refer to the work of Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, and Marina Mogilner, who have examined the history of ideas of post-imperialism and postcolonialism in Russian history and politics. Through their analysis of Eurasianism and the 1920s, the authors assert that "a properly post-colonial theory can espouse deeply conservative scenarios of emancipation...and have a hidden restorationist agenda and imperialist potential of its own".⁵⁸ Of course, and as the authors argue, this is dependent on human agency as opposed to being deterministic, but the general point is one to take note of. We will see below that this was generally the case with the Bolsheviks, and that their approach to self-determination was emblematic of this idea.

Within and beyond these works, however, there has been little discussion of the significance of the usage or rejection of specific forms of language until very recently. Richard Pipes' works were a notable and early exception to the general trend in this regard, but Pipes tended to simply dismiss what he (correctly) identified as unique and/or revealing usages of language exclusively as a cynical game of political slogans, rather than seeing these differences more conceptually, as different ways of framing and resolving a perceived issue.⁵⁹ Jeremy Smith began his resistance to this Pipesian view of Bolshevik nationalities policy as something purely expedient with his doctoral work in the 1990s, and later followed this up with a monograph based on this text, published as *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–23* (1999).⁶⁰ Smith's view is that the Bolsheviks, most fundamentally as Marxists, had the ultimate aim of raising the cultural level of various nationalities (however this was defined) as a means to achieve greater economic development on an equal basis for all of the different areas of what became the Soviet Union, regardless of any other differences in terms of these areas' inhabitants.

We might suggest that rather than choosing one or the other view of Bolshevik nationalities policy, we should instead synthesise these approaches. It is entirely possible that both could be valid simultaneously as well as at different points in time. Regardless, what both Pipes and Smith do helpfully acknowledge is the intensity of the Bolsheviks' debate over the issue, and in this regard this

that the empire was a largely integrative, rather than oppressive system, and one that attempted, mainly through economic modernisation measures, to gradually include all of its subjects in its rule in some sense. See Mironov, *Rossiiskaia modernizatsiia i revoliutsiia*. This work has been criticised by some scholars; see Michael Ellman, Boris Mironov's New Interpretation of the Russian Revolution, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2022), 153–163.

⁵⁸ Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, and Marina Mogilner, 'The Postimperial Meets the Postcolonial: Russian Historical Experience and the Postcolonial Moment', *Ab Imperio*, Vol. 2 (2013), 108.

⁵⁹ Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923* (London, 1999).

dissertation aligns with both scholars' work and provides further evidence for the strength of these disagreements. In both scholars' works, however, there is an absence of unpacking the purposes of specific political interventions within these debates, in favour of wider readings of Bolsheviks nationalities policy. To be clear, these are primarily works of political history, not the history of political thought, so this is both explicable and logical. Nonetheless, the result of this is that, from a history of political thought perspective, there are too many discussions (or assertions) of whether political agents meant what they said or not, and not enough unpacking of the theoretical implications of what they were saying, and how they were choosing to engage in specific debates. This dissertation therefore contributes to this particular strand of literature by emphasising that there was a terminological debate occurring here as well as a policy one.

What, then, are the more general issues with this literature, and how does this dissertation contribute to its development? Perhaps the most substantial flaw found consistently across these bodies and strands of literature is the tendency to study individual agents or groups in relative analytical isolation. It is surprising, for example, how many works on the Bolsheviks' theories and practices of self-determination entirely neglect or skate over any combination of the Provisional Government of Russia, the White Movement, and/or the Russian Civil War. Regardless of intention and the understandable need to maintain a strict area of focus in one's research, the unfortunate result of this is that Bolshevik political interventions and ideational movement on imperial reconfiguration through time appear somewhat free floating, divorced from the firm military, political, and cultural-linguistic realities that impacted both the initial theorisation and subsequent realisation of these ideas.

In reality, there is significant evidence, including from Bolshevik polemics themselves, that the ideology of Lenin's party was always subject to external influences, particularly rival or 'competing' ideas from revolutionary and non-revolutionary international socialists and from nationalists of different kinds.⁶¹ Therefore, relationships and networks of thought can and have been empirically established that help us build a picture of the kinds of (linguistic) worlds individual agents inhabited.⁶² In this sense, recognising the entangled nature of agents and their thought provides beneficial context for the actual work of the dissertation. However difficult it may be to try and keep all of these plates spinning simultaneously, any even half-successful attempt to pay attention to this is already more productive than seeing agents in a vacuum.

Aside from this somewhat artificial separation of agents (or groups of agents) from others lies another theoretical issue to address at this point. Many older

⁶¹ See the discussion in Chapter 1.3, 'The Revolutionaries and the 'National Question'' below.

⁶² Lars T. Lih has been highly effective in demonstrating this. See Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context* (Leiden, 2005). This has been echoed by more recent scholarship; see Lara Douds, 'A Hundred Years On: What can Lenin do for us and What can we do for Lenin?', *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2024), 91–100.

studies, again, the vast majority of them exceptional in terms of their respective empirical basis and analysis, adopt rather uncritically the language of revolutionary socialist groups and others at the time of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, the notion of *national* self-determination, and of an almost natural link between the concepts of the nation and self-determination. The implications of this have already been addressed above with respect to the work of Holly Case. Nonetheless, and just as crucially for the purposes of this dissertation, an emphasis on the nation and on the national disregards other forms of self-determination in which the self was not constituted as the nation. There is significant potential for interpreting the subject of self-determination as something or someone other than the comparatively narrow frame of the nation – one’s religious, class, or linguistic group, for example; perhaps even their local community in a spatial rather than a social sense. The county, the city, the village. All of these can be conceived as sites of self-determination, but they could also just as easily be seen as its subjects. In the period of my research, it was not always clear that when self-determination was invoked it was done so in a national (or exclusively national) sense.⁶³

In relation to this, and as referred to several times already, many studies have also not paid enough attention to the employment or (intentional) absence of the specific term self-determination in this period, nor its other linguistic qualifiers. Empirically speaking, many political groups’ internal disagreements over imperial reconfiguration came over usage of this specific term in this process, and how and why these political agents saw invocations of the term as either necessary or problematic. Primarily a trend of older literature on self-determination during the period, recent works have moved more in this terminological direction. Rudolf A. Mark and Mark R. Beissinger, for example, have both looked at the Bolsheviks’ employment of the term, and generally argued from a Western liberal understanding of self-determination that, in Mark’s words, self-determination was a “mere slogan” that the group unsuccessfully invoked as a political tactic.⁶⁴ Lauri Mälksoo has expressed a similar view from a legal perspective, arguing that the Bolsheviks’ usage of the term, alongside their ultimate victory in the Russian Civil War, marked the point at which Russia departed from the (European) conventions of international law.⁶⁵ This dissertation is therefore in line with this more recent strand of literature, developing it in terms of tracing the employment of the specific term self-determination from other political agents *as well as* the Bolsheviks (including how it was described with other linguistic qualifiers). As will be seen, I am less convinced of this exploitative slogan view of Bolshevik

⁶³ As will be seen, it was also not only socialists prone to viewing self-determination through a class lens.

⁶⁴ Mark, ‘National Self-Determination’, 21–39; Beissinger, ‘Self-Determination as a Technology of Imperialism’, 479–487.

⁶⁵ Lauri Mälksoo, ‘The Soviet Approach to the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination: Russia’s Farewell to *jus publicum europaeum*’, *Journal of the History of International Law*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2017), 200–218.

self-determination than some scholars, but I nonetheless consider this dissertation to be developing this strand of literature by looking more terminologically at invocations of self-determination by political agents all the same.

Returning to the more conceptual issues of self-determination, it is worth signalling now that we may at some points need to distinguish between self-determination as a process or method to achieve wider goals, or self-determination as a goal in itself. In the latter case, we can presume that statehood, or some other specific institutional result, is the end goal; the representation of self-determination that can be measurably achieved or not achieved. However, this does not mean that the concept simply ‘stops’ or is no longer relevant, properly understood, even if a political agent may have achieved their goals (or failed to). Perhaps, therefore, it is better to think in the language of ‘projects’: nation-states, empires, federations, and so on, that self-determination has the potential to either legitimise or be subordinated to.⁶⁶ Here, I would also extend ‘projects’ to include more abstract (but still nonetheless *real*) political results, for example, the creation of a new international order or a widespread change in norms across a domestic or international setting. Is a specific project viewed as a means to facilitate the more primary goal of self-determination, or is the project itself the achievement of self-determination? Understanding this distinction through specific political interventions, and identifying instances in which both understandings were present, will be helpful in answering this dissertation’s research questions.

In sum, though, that self-determination contains within it these many contradictions and different potential interpretations is neither surprising nor revealing from a scholarly point of view. While a general dictionary definition serves us as well as any other for describing the overall concept, this dissertation is more interested in how different political agents used the concept and specific term for their own ends. Self-determination, and its usages, are my object of study, not a category of analysis.

Entanglement

This dissertation engages with and contributes to the notion of ‘entangled’ studies as a framework for academic research. Originally most associated with the historical discipline, this still somewhat novel idea of entanglement, sometimes referred to as *histoire croisée*, has influenced many researchers beyond

⁶⁶ Though we should be careful not to fall into the trap of these ‘projects’ simply becoming our current times’ ‘questions’, as Holly Case addressed. See Andrew Graan, ‘What was the project? Thoughts on genre and the project form’, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (2022), 735–752; and Andrew Graan and Carl Rommel, ‘Projects and Project Temporalities: Ethnographic Reflections on the Normative Power of the Project Form’, *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2024), 1–19. So long as the dissertation maintains projects as an object of study, rather than a frame for its analysis, the potential for replicating this problem is minimised.

history departments and is now very much an interdisciplinary framework⁶⁷. Fundamentally, entangled studies rely on the interrelationship between states, agents, cultures, etc., with the central assumption being that no individual state, agent, or idea can be understood without an explanation of their place in and relationship to a wider, usually transnational context. Often, entangled studies deal less with ‘X causes Y’ or other causal logics and more with understanding complex, multidirectional, and altogether ‘messier’ processes where causality is difficult to assess.⁶⁸ Previous entangled studies have largely dealt with cultural and intellectual entanglements in peacetime, with some exceptions.⁶⁹ This dissertation still looks at intellectual entanglements, of course, but within the context of two exceptionally large-scale conflicts, the First World War and the Russian Civil War. I believe that the context of conflict significantly impacted the transfer and transformation of ideas in both theory and practice and am directly developing the work of others who share this contention.

For my specific purposes, Mark von Hagen has been the most important trailblazer in bringing this entangled framework to the study of conflict, starting his work in the area with the 2014 chapter ‘The Entangled Eastern Front in the First World War’, present in the Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen edited *The Empire and Nationalism and War: Russia’s Great War and Revolution* (2014).⁷⁰ In the chapter, von Hagen establishes the military, diplomatic, economic, and population entanglements between the Russian, German, and Habsburg empires before and during the First World War.⁷¹ Among the most interesting results of this study are new ways to think about military occupations and prisoners of war as being “forced entanglements”, as well as the actions and desires of empires not to suppress but to actively promote nationalism and national aspirations in other empires for their own ends.⁷² The Russian Empire’s eyeing up of Ukrainians in Galicia while seeking to downplay Ukrainian nationalism within its own formal borders is a case in point. The idea, therefore, that nations and nationalism can be placed in a simple binary opposition to empire

⁶⁷ Werner and Zimmermann have been among the most prominent theorists and advocates of entangled approaches to academic research. See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: *histoire croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2006), 30–50. This was an expanded version of an original French language article from 2003. Andreas Kappeler and Philip Ther, among others, have explored entanglements in Russian, Ukrainian, and German history in several works. Just exactly how novel the entangled framework is remains up for debate, given its close links to international, transnational, and global history approaches. Nonetheless, the explicit and intentional framing of such studies as ‘entangled’ is relatively novel.

⁶⁸ As well as not really being the main goal of such studies in the first place.

⁶⁹ Mark von Hagen, ‘The Entangled Eastern Front in the First World War’ in Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen (eds.) *The Empire and Nationalism at War: Russia’s Great War and Revolution* (Indiana, 2014), 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 9–48.

⁷¹ von Hagen, ‘The Entangled Eastern Front’, 9–48.

⁷² *Ibid*, 22.

and imperialism is misleading, and likely the simple result of our contemporary nation-state eyes looking backwards. As Ronald Grigor Suny describes:

Following the collapse of empires and the foundation of new nation-states, the principal explanation for the rapid transformation of European geography had borrowed from the teleology of the nationalists and depicted the triumph of nations as an irresistible assertion of a natural process. Nations were modern, empires antiquated, and the two were incompatible, indeed deeply inimical. The former were destined to succeed the latter.⁷³

As Suny makes clear, this is false, pointing out that a number of other scholars, including Suny himself as well as von Hagen, Eric Lohr, Alexei Miller, and Aviel Roshwald have identified numerous instances in which empires intentionally contributed to nationalist fervour, rather than seeking to neuter it.⁷⁴ This was especially the case during the First World War, when political nationalism became a tool for the imperial projects of militarily rival empires. These results would not be possible if one only used the entanglement framework for peacetime studies, if at all, suggesting the potential for using this approach in my own work.

Nonetheless, given his emphasis on military and economic entanglements, von Hagen's empirical focus is very different from mine, but his work is important here as one of the first major attempts at using this entangled framework to study a wide-reaching, multipolar conflict. My own research also uses this framework but on a yet wider scale still, exploring more of the ideational entanglements between a larger number of political agents within, as well as between empires. In fact, von Hagen himself refers briefly to this in his work in a throwaway comment, stating, "When the war in the east – which turned in many places to civil wars fought by and between newly created states – ended, the pressures and constraints of the various entanglements also resulted in a much more radical postwar reconfiguration of borders and populations than was the case in the west".⁷⁵ This, in essence, is what this research project examines in detail in the case of self-determination in 'Russia', with the idea of entanglement being a helpful 'first principle' in this process. Such an approach allows the dissertation to trace the usages of self-determination by political agents *in relation to one another*, as opposed to seeing the concept's invocations either too abstractly or overly causally.

⁷³ Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Introduction' in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ von Hagen, 'The Entangled Eastern Front', 11.

A Few Words on the Key Terms of this Dissertation

Before continuing further, it is best to clarify what I mean when using the remainder of this dissertation's key terms beyond self-determination, in particular: empire (and specifically the 'Russian' Empire, in my framing), imperialism, reconfiguration, federalism, and democracy. The below definitions are designed for the *analytical* purposes of this work, but these are all also terms that were used and debated by political agents during the period of this dissertation's chronology. As such, we should remain attentive to the ways in which political agents used the same language as presented here to a wide variety of ends. This is especially so in cases of divergence, where the historical meaning(s) and/or political usages of the below terms differed from their functions here, as categories of analysis that help structure research.

Empire and Imperialism. For my definition of empire, I borrow from Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, who, in turn, borrowed from Anthony Padgen's work on the history of empires and specifically the meaning of the word 'empire' through time. In the former authors' *Russia's Empires* (2016), the scholars argue for a five-part set of attributes that together constitute an empire: supreme power of the ruler; a vast domain; diversity of lands and peoples; dominion over distinctive, separately constituted (or imagined to be separate) lands and people; and an unequal distribution of power between the centre, or 'metropole', and periphery or colony.⁷⁶ One may quibble over the details, but this seems to be both a fully encompassing and practically helpful definition. Perhaps the only other point to make in relation to this definition before continuing is that self-referentiality as an empire is not, in my view, a key component of an empire. An empire need not proudly call itself an empire to be one.

I define imperialism as the act of or intention to perform the above characteristics, including a belief in the superiority of these ideas and an unwillingness to consider other forms of rule. This could be expressed ideationally, though, of course, imperialism can also be a distinct type of foreign policy. By some contrast, *empire* denotes an actual structure or form of rule. Imperialism refers variously to policies, strategies, and modes of action. Often, this reference is critical in nature; an idea associated with modernity and tethered to other concepts such as expansion(ism), domination, capitalism, and other ideas. It is also worth stating very clearly that imperialism and imperialistic actions, modes of thought, and speech acts can exist outside of the realm of formal empires. Again, an absence of self-referentiality does not preclude the presence of imperialism.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York City, 2016), 2. This is an expansion of Padgen's original definition, which rested on the first three of these five attributes.

⁷⁷ On the contrary, according to some. As Gerasimov, Glebov, and Mogilner write, "Soviet postcoloniality essentially shows that the colonial situation tends to reproduce itself, only changing hegemonic discourses and identifying different hegemons and subalterns, or their different combinations". See Gerasimov, Glebov, and Mogilner, 'The Postimperial Meets the Postcolonial', 118–119. A somewhat related work to bring up here is Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (Oxford, 2015).

This will be important to remember when discussing both the White Movement and the Bolsheviks in the later empirical chapters of this dissertation.

The 'Russian' Empire. In the title of this dissertation, I use the term Russian in singular quotation marks to do some philosophical heavy lifting on my behalf. Firstly, this is an attempt to reflect upon the fact that in the Russian language, there are two words that can be translated into English as 'Russian': *russkii* and *rossiiskii*. The former has largely ethnic connotations, and in the period of this dissertation's research, ethno-cultural connotations. The latter term, *rossiiskii*, is broader, and encompasses aspects relating to Russian subjecthood or citizenship – one's formal 'nationality', regardless of ethno-linguistic or cultural background, let alone national identity. The official name of the Russian Empire in its state language was based on this latter adjective form. However, there is no way to reflect this in English succinctly that I can think of, short of implying with punctuation that this adjective might not mean 'Russian' in the sense of that word's colloquial meaning in English. Moreover, in neither language does the phrase 'Russian Empire' answer the question as to whether 'Russian' here also refers to the political dominance of the Russian nation within the imperial state.⁷⁸

Secondly, and by some extension, this is an attempt to reflect that while this may have been the formal title of the state, the empire itself was not wholly *Russian*. Other scholars have favoured the adoption of a dynastic adjective form for a specific empire to this end. Here I could also employ the phrase 'Romanov Empire', as has become the trend among scholars of, for example, the Habsburg Empire, but I believe this obfuscates rather than clarifies matters in the case of this dissertation. Firstly, while this term does theoretically allow for a greater degree of inclusion of the 'non-Russian' elements of the empire, it does so by tying this to the ruling dynasty of the empire. This is a problem because of the dissertation's chronology. While a slightly technical point, the Provisional Government of Russia that took power following Romanov rule did not (immediately) abolish the Russian Empire and formally declare a republic. In other words, the Russian Empire as such continued beyond the abdication of the Romanovs. Referring to the 'Romanov Empire' when discussing events in, say, July 1917, simply does not make sense. Moreover, there are clearly aspects of the Russian Empire (including those that represent aspects of Russian imperialism) that were non-dynastic in nature, even if they were overseen by the ruling dynasty. I contend that the Russian Empire's 'Russian Empireness' transcended the lineage of a single bloodline.

Reconfiguration. Here, another simple dictionary definition helps us most: "The process of making a new or different arrangement or pattern of a group of related things".⁷⁹ We may understand the 'related things' of this definition to be variously the territories, peoples, and practices of the Russian Empire. I do not consider it necessary for this process to be 'whole' for it to be defined as recon-

⁷⁸ Compare this to the Habsburg Empire, for example, which very explicitly had two dominant nations of the imperial state.

⁷⁹ Definition of "reconfiguration" from the Cambridge English Dictionary. Available here.

figuration – in other words, a political form of existence can be reconfigured by the loss (or expansion) of territory alongside these other elements. At the same time, the political agents of this dissertation often saw these ‘related things’ as overlapping in important ways. Desires for the creation of representative institutions of local self-government, for example, reflected ideas of national liberation and democratisation at the same time. While the creation of a certain kind of political institution was a single goal, it was also reflective of other goals (including those related to a more abstract ‘political culture’) that were expressed through a practical action.

Without straying down the difficult philosophical territory of asking at what point something has been reconfigured to the point of being something entirely different, in the case of this dissertation I should state clearly my reading of the Soviet Union as a partially reconfigured Russian Empire. While this new polity was theoretically anti-imperialist, its rule over its heterogenous peoples and its centre-periphery dynamic expressed itself in imperialistic ways alongside its socialist character. In line with some scholarly analyses of the USSR, I would style the resultant polity as a hybrid regime that was both socialist and imperialist simultaneously.⁸⁰

Federalism. I define federalism to be a system of government (or principle, if imagined by someone rather than describing an existent situation) in which a central political authority is combined with lesser-tiered, but still constitutionally strong sub-state units. These units could be established on the basis of perceived nationhood, dominant language group(s), historic forms, as well as any combination of those just mentioned. In the period of this dissertation’s research, federalism was widely associated with the models of the United States of America and the Swiss Confederation, although, as the name of the latter suggests, both the American and the Swiss forms of governance preceded this more contemporary definition of federalism, which only emerged in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

In any case, the open-ended nature of federalism should be stressed here, since the idea could include a wide range of practical constitutional designs, from autonomies conceived of as independent in all but a few areas (usually foreign policy, military affairs, customs, and infrastructure) to less powerful replications of central government institutions on a smaller or more local scale. In the case of

⁸⁰ Some scholars have explicitly styled the emergent Soviet Union as an empire. See Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*. Others have spoken of its imperial and/or colonial traits. See Olaf Caroe, ‘Soviet Colonialism in Central Asia’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1953), 135–144. The notion of the USSR as a hybrid regime has been developed by the following, among other works: Mark R. Beissinger, ‘Soviet Empire as “Family Resemblance”’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2006), 294–303; and Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2007).

⁸¹ As such, it was also tied to changes in the international system and conceptions of modern statehood. Similarly, many proposals for what is today most often referred to as confederalism could still be found during the period of this dissertation’s research using the term ‘federal’ or ‘federative’. In this text, I have always described these as confederal for analytical clarity, while leaving all original sources untouched.

the Russian Empire of the early twentieth century, this latter form was often seen as the extension or development of preexisting bodies of local self-government. More on this in the empirical chapters below. The main purpose of briefly outlining federalism here is to emphasise for the reader the role it can play in acting as a bridge between different visions of self-determination. Specifically, federal ideas of imperial reconfiguration demonstrate the possibility of multiple, coexisting layers of belonging – one could support both a broadly constituted central government and a local unit constructed more narrowly at the same time.⁸² Often, the question was not over a binary choice of scale or belonging, but of the final term discussed here; democracy.

Democracy. Perhaps with the exception only of self-determination itself, democracy is the most difficult key term of this work to succinctly define and describe. In any case, here, democracy refers to a set of ideas and practices that both holds and attempts to realise the idea that political power is and should be vested in the people of a given regime. In most understandings of democracy, and certainly within this work, the notion of ‘the people of a given regime’ is understood in as broad a sense as is possible. Something described adjectively as democratic thus points to this definition. Importantly, this definition can also be processual – this work speaks of *democratisation*, mostly in the sense of the late Russian Empire’s moves towards some transfer of power from the autocracy to the people. Since these changes still fall short of being ‘democratic’ in at least one obvious way, it is described as being in motion, rather than as fact.

Nonetheless, this deceptively simple definition conceals many issues. Firstly, the differences between democratic *ideas*, democratic *designs*, and democratic *practice* should be noted. A general principle, such as representative democracy, makes clear that a people who serve as a regime’s ultimate source of authority should be represented in decision-making. This is a democratic idea. However, this idea does not define its design – does this mean an elected legislature; if so, how is it elected, of how many chambers does it consist, and what determines their type; what are the terms of such a body’s sitting, etc.? Similarly, this does not necessarily mean that in democratic practice this institution functions in the way its creators intended. Generally, in the below analysis, it is made clear when something may have been democratic *in theory* but differed (or would differ) in

⁸² Although we might also wish to distinguish between federalism as a practical idea; a constitutional design, and a kind of ‘federative politics’, with the latter denoting a way of thinking about the world and how to do politics. This ‘federative politics’, centred on solidarity across lines of difference such as region, nationality, and religion, was prominent throughout this period, though ultimately unsuccessful in many ways. For some commentary on this, see Eva Piirimäe, Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, and David Smith, ‘Introduction. States, Nations, and the Quest for Self-Determination: A Long-Term Historical Perspective’, *Nationalities Papers* (forthcoming; special issue introduction); Holly Case, ‘The Strange Politics of Federative Ideas in East-Central Europe’, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2013), 833–866. Some sections of the empirical chapters of this dissertation will provide further evidence to support this claim by demonstrating self-determination’s usage in relational, ‘federative politics’ arguments.

practice. Similarly, it should be noted that many of this dissertation's political agents expectedly defined democracy differently, based on contrasting theories of, among other ideas, representation and the rule of law. Such variations are explained and unpacked in relation to this analytical definition of democracy.

Research Design, Methodology, and Sources

Research Design

When it comes to my research design's general process, my first aim was to take a set of historical sources (detailed in a below section) and subject them to the scrutiny of analytical political theory. What were these agents saying, suggesting, and arguing for or against (or trying to)? Did they have a conception of self-determination, and if so, what was it? With what adjectives and nouns was it articulated and qualified? What were these political agents' general worldviews and belief systems? What was their 'intellectual hierarchy' – which ideas and beliefs were subordinate to which others, and in what ways? What theoretical contradictions can be found in their works?

My second aim was to trace this through time via a history of political thought methodological approach. What were the ideational and historic influences of these agents that informed their formulations of ideas? What were the historic and more immediate contexts of agents' political interventions? What happened when these ideas and their proponents and opponents moved (not necessarily unidirectionally) from theory into practice? What were these agents doing, as well as saying, through all of this?

My final aim was to synthesise these two approaches to answer my broader research questions. What were these theoretical understandings and practical policies regarding self-determination, and how did these change (or not change) between 1914 and 1924 in the region that begins the period as the Russian Empire? How did agents formulate their understandings and policies of self-determination – that is, both on the theoretical level as well as the literal level of 'in what forms' they said and did things in? Why did agents employ (or not employ) self-determination towards their goals? Done effectively, this would clearly provide particular findings for the period and regions under scrutiny, but it might also be able to suggest general trends if significant similarities were found between disparate agents and groups.

Further elaboration is nonetheless required. Who are the political agents of this dissertation? By and large, this dissertation looks at Russian (perhaps read as 'Russian-speaking') political agents who made political interventions in texts, deliberation, and actions between the years of 1914 and 1924. I will address the non-Russian political agents and where they sit in my research shortly. Most of these political agents were members of political parties, but not all were, and there was no selection based on formal political status or membership of a political group. Instead, political agents were included simply if they made political

interventions relevant to a discussion of self-determination during the period. At times in the below empirical chapters, this has admittedly had the effect of some individual political agents appearing and then disappearing in rather quick succession, but generally most of the significant political interventions on self-determination during this timeframe came from a relatively consistent set of political agents.

It is not fair to characterise all of these political agents as political *elites*, as many of these individuals did not possess any formal political power, or, if they did, gained and lost it at different points throughout my chronology that did not correspond to their interventions on self-determination and ideational significance. Arguably, for example, a plurality of Lenin's most significant interventions on self-determination came before the Bolshevik seizure of power in late 1917. While these political agents cannot therefore be classified as political elites in a general sense, they are still mostly similar in terms of social background. Most were some combination of: male, highly educated (most through university, some through military academies, and some through forms of autodidacticism⁸³), economically privileged, bi- or multilingual to differing degrees, and between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five for most if not all of this dissertation's chronology. There are, of course, exceptions to all of these characteristics. With regards to sex, Rosa Luxemburg and E. B. Bosh are the most notable, and so on. Nonetheless, this means that in many ways the majority of the political agents of this dissertation are *unrepresentative* of the general population of the region between 1914 and 1924.

More importantly, though, most of the political agents I look at in this dissertation were in a position, or considered themselves to be in a position, of offering self-determination for others, rather than claiming it for 'themselves', however this self was defined. Analytically, this is important, because it already tells us something about the specific political agent's sense of self. If you consider yourself to be a or *the* person, group, or institution that offers self-determination, there is an implicit premise within this that you have the power – the political, legal, or social authority – to do so.⁸⁴ This is quite different to being a conscious *claimant* of self-determination, where the implicit and sometimes explicit premise is that your self-conception does *not* currently have the political, legal, or social authority to realise its desires. A self-conception that is centred on a position of offering something such as self-determination is already in a position of *reaffirming* some kind of power structure, even considering the transformative potential of self-determination itself. Beyond 'Great Power' politics, the self-conception of representatives of the politically and/or numerically dominant nation of a given regime, in this case, Russians of the Russian Empire, is important

⁸³ Often after being expelled from university for political reasons.

⁸⁴ Or, if this appeared in materials used for party programmes and elections, that you at some point in the near future *would* have this authority.

to take note of as a commonality of all of this dissertation's main Russian political agents, regardless of the other significant differences in their political thought.⁸⁵

There are certainly methodological advantages and disadvantages to primarily focusing on those who offer, rather than claim, self-determination. I will discuss the disadvantages of such an approach in the methodology section of this dissertation below, but one obvious benefit is analytical cohesion, with these agents providing a manageable object of study that is, at least to some degree, internally comparable, precisely because of this asymmetrical self-conception relative to the other peoples of the imperial space. This is especially the case given the documentary source base of this dissertation (detailed below). Certainly, there is more scope for 'internal' comparison than with the numerous claimants of self-determination, whose aims, histories, and political structures were far more heterogenous. However, this does not mean that I subscribe to the notion that only 'central' authorities, as conventional power holders, were important in self-determination's conceptualisation and usage during these years. In fact, the empirical chapters of the dissertation will challenge this perception in several ways.

Instead, by internal comparison, I refer primarily to examining how agents who offered, rather than claimed, self-determination evaluated and responded to multiple (and different types of) self-determination claims through time, while also maintaining, debating, and utilising their own conceptualisations of the idea. Understanding how self-determination claims were mediated by those who theoretically offered the 'same' thing will clearly tell us something about how self-determination functioned in practice.⁸⁶ Moreover, as self-determination was ideationally entangled with wider processes of war, imperial collapse and reconfiguration, and nation- and state-formation, a focus on those who offered self-determination also assists us in seeing the concept in political practice as part of these broader developments. In particular, when considering how tsarist, Provisional Government, and then Bolshevik figures responded to the 'compound interest' effect of external events and their own internal choices through time.

In relation to this, we should also note the existence of a 'third way' between the analytical framing of those who offered versus those who claimed self-determination. Some of this dissertation's political agents patently did both, offering *and* claiming self-determination, sometimes in succession and sometimes simultaneously. Federalists and autonomists from non-Russian backgrounds, for example, such as Jaan Tõnisson, clearly made self-determination *claims*, but their insistence on decentralisation across the entire imperial space (especially from 1905 onwards) can just as easily be read as an *offer* of self-determination for others at the same time. In other words, to some political agents, the debate around self-

⁸⁵ I do not mean Russian in any kind of ethnic sense here, since there were many non-ethnically Russian individuals who either considered themselves to be Russian or possessed this broader dominant self-conception, J. V. Stalin being the most obvious example.

⁸⁶ This is also advantageous because these agents tended to interact with the largest number of self-determination claims when compared to claimants themselves, even if in perceived asymmetrical ways.

determination was characterised by the question of whether or not to offer self-determination (and for what self or selves), while for others it was a straightforward claim based on a given self-identity, but these were not binary. This 'third way' is therefore also borne in mind in the dissertation's below analysis.

What place, then, do non-Russian political agents hold in this dissertation? Generally speaking, where this work engages with non-Russian political agents, it deals most consistently with the nationalist political agents of Ukraine and Estonia, and, to a far lesser extent, Georgia and Poland (the latter two mostly in specific, shorter chronologies where relevant to wider discussions). It is categorically not an exhaustive study of the history of political thought of every non-Russian group of the Russian Empire on self-determination during this time. Linguistic issues, for example, rule this out immediately, but practically, limits also needed to be placed on my research design, especially considering my focus on numerous agents in a position of offering, rather than claiming self-determination. Certainly, this was not as binary in reality as presented here – as above regarding the distinction between those who offered and those who claimed self-determination, the boundary between Russian and 'non-Russian' was porous, and depended on one's own and external assessments at different points. Most importantly, it should be stressed, especially in the context of a vast, heterogenous empire, that one could have multiple overlapping identities that 'theoretically' might be seen as conflicting. In other words, a political agent could identify themselves as both Russian and not Russian at the same time. To be more explicit still, it should be signalled at this point that the phrases 'non-Russian political agents', 'non-Russian nationalists', and similar formulations used below, are knowingly rather blunt catch-all terms that problematically define groups and individuals via their relationship to Russia and to Russians. Alongside this is the obvious point that these political agents were not intellectually uniform merely because of their (usually national) similar self-conception. All possessed an expectedly wide range of views from subscriptions to the broad 'isms' (conservatism, socialism, liberalism, nationalism, etc.) to specific policies or visions of, for example, federal reconfigurations of the empire.⁸⁷ These are not reflected in the phrase 'non-Russian nationalists' explicitly, but I assure the reader of an awareness of them, while still needing a convenient, succinct term for this (heterogenous) group that is not the main focus of this study.

What, therefore, is my rationale for more of a focus on the representatives of these four 'groups', Ukraine and Estonia in particular? All share some important general similarities – nationalist political agents from all four were prominent claimants of self-determination throughout this period (and occasionally offered it, too) and had to fight for recognition of their nationhood and culture within the Russian Empire from long before the beginning of this dissertation's chronology, for example. More importantly, political agents from all four played a consistent

⁸⁷ Complicated further by the fact that what 'non-Russian' was at this point was contestable. Aside from the potential for multiple, overlapping identities, different individuals also had different relationships to the imperial centre and/or the imperial 'peripheries'.

role in advocating for various forms of autonomy and decentralisation in the years up to and included within this dissertation's chronology. Even if these were originally most prominently articulated in political debates in the 'centre', the imperial capital of St. Petersburg (later Petrograd)⁸⁸, knowledge of this dynamic in relation to my main political agents is necessary and beneficial. Understanding any dissonance between how prominent claimants of self-determination and prominent political agents who offered self-determination thought about and attempted to realise imperial reconfiguration is insightful, especially the misunderstandings this dissertation's main political agents possessed towards wider notions of decentralisation.⁸⁹

The four also share some important differences – the respective size of the claimed territories of Estonia and Georgia versus Poland and Ukraine, and the makeup of these territories' populations, was very different. So, too, was the eventual outcome of the four by 1924. (Anti-Bolshevik) Estonian and Polish nationalists succeeded, at least until the Second World War, in establishing and maintaining independent states. (Anti-Bolshevik) Ukrainian and Georgian nationalists were defeated in these years, and their territories were integrated into the emergent Soviet Union as founding members of the polity in 1922 (though Georgia did so as part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republic).

I am not attempting to develop any kinds of causal explanations for the outcomes of non-Russian political agents in this work, but rather I use the four, and other non-Russian political agents to a lesser extent, to see how these different circumstances and trajectories related to specific political interventions of different groups over time. Beyond general identifiable trends and/or where these non-Russian political agents made political interventions in the Russian language, I do not claim that this dissertation studies these non-Russian political agents to the same degree as its Russian counterparts.

Even beyond linguistic considerations, which I address in more detail in the text's upcoming methodology section, it would be impossible to consider all of the non-Russian groups of the Russian Empire of 1914 in a single dissertation while still doing justice to all of the respective specificities of each group. Moreover, such an approach would likely render individual perspectives on self-determination (including ones that diverged from dominant approaches) less significant than they were, in favour of presenting broader, and therefore more crude representations of 'non-Russian groups' as more coherent groups than they typically were. Therefore, focusing on a smaller number of non-Russian agents also reduces the potential for essentialising large groups in sweeping narratives, something epistemologically problematic, before one even considers more methodological language issues. This is by no means a perfect solution to a

⁸⁸ During the sittings of the State Duma of the Russian Empire, for example, though this can be easily contested, especially following the establishment of the Provisional Government of Russia in early 1917. More on this in the empirical chapters below.

⁸⁹ Again, more on this below, but one may also refer to the already mentioned Sablin and Semyonov, 'Autonomy and decentralization'.

difficult research design problem, but it is, I believe, far better than simply ignoring these groups altogether.

The timeframe of the beginning of 1914 to the end of 1924 was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, and simply, to ensure the inclusion of the entire First World War period in this research. In line with the historical consensus, I contend that the First World War was materially and ideationally transformative for the world in general and the Russian Empire in particular. This does not seem to be in any serious contestation, even from consciously revisionist scholars. Secondly, beginning the chronology on the rather arbitrary first day of the year allows the dissertation to consider some of Lenin's writings on self-determination that were written and published in 1914, but *before* the outbreak of the First World War. An even earlier starting point could also have been an option, but would have stretched the credibility of this dissertation's focus on the role of the concept of self-determination in the practical reconfiguration of the Russian Empire to an unreasonable degree. The concluding date of this dissertation's chronology, the last day of 1924, was chosen to extend the study of self-determination in the region under scrutiny beyond that in which it is usually considered. This could perhaps have been accomplished with the end of 1922, given the foundation of the Soviet Union that occurred that December, but empirical discoveries in the early months of this dissertation's research process made a continuation of this beyond 1922 logical. This extension from 1922 to 1924 is therefore to perform a kind of 'control' on my reading of the sources of 1921 and 1922 that relate to the Bolsheviks' qualification and ultimate replacement of the right to self-determination in Soviet discourse.

Methodology

This dissertation utilises and further develops the methodological approach to the history of political thought commonly associated with the so-called 'Cambridge School', especially the strand deriving from the work of Quentin Skinner.⁹⁰ This approach builds upon older works on the notion of speech acts, which I outline below, before discussing Skinner's usage of this concept in relation to political interventions and what I take and develop from this. Lastly, the dissertation combines this with more recent interventions from David Armitage on the methodology of the history of political thought. In particular, Armitage's conceptualisation of genre is unpacked, developed, and applied to the sources of this dissertation. The result is a methodology that reads political interventions as speech acts within unique, time-and-space-sensitive contexts as well as through their genre conventions. To this end, the dissertation's development of Armitage's view of genre as historically contingent political practice is emphasised.

⁹⁰ Though this will be my first and last reference to the 'group' with this name, since scholars associated with the movement categorically do not see themselves as in sufficient alignment to be grouped together as such, and have expressed opposition to the name.

Speech Acts

For the purposes of this dissertation, I understand speech and instances of written language to be ‘speech acts’. According to J. L. Austin, a philosopher of language and one of the main developers of the modern theory of speech acts, a speech act is something expressed by an individual that presents information and performs an action (or multiple actions) at the same time.⁹¹ In Austin’s own words, this theory is essentially an understanding that “to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something”.⁹²

In *How to do things with Words* (1962), an edited compilation of Austin’s lectures on language as a form of action, the philosopher distinguished between three sub-categories for his definition of a speech act, namely the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act refers to the speech or utterance itself, and its apparent meaning (including its literal meaning, its social meaning, and its rhetorical meaning, if relevant). The illocutionary act is best described as the intended result of the implied meaning or request of the locutionary act, the ‘what’ the speaker wants or is trying to achieve through the speech act. Finally, Austin’s perlocutionary act described the actual effect of the former two sub-acts, whether this was getting someone to perform a specific action, persuading them of something, or resolving an issue in a certain way.

To accept Austin’s tripartite frame for the time being, I am most interested in the former two sub-categories of the speech act, the locutionary and illocutionary. While I will also follow the success or failure of specific speech acts, my research here is far more interested in what political agents were saying and doing (or trying to do) than the outcome of these interventions. I am interested in explaining the meaning and purposes of political interventions – speech acts – rather than what happened in a wholly causal or descriptive way. Austin also made clear that his distinction between the first two of his sub-categories was rather academic, pointing out that “in general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both”.⁹³

Nonetheless, the consequences of speech acts are important. In order to continue developing explanations as to the meaning and purposes of specific political interventions, I necessarily need to examine them in context. This includes knowledge of both the general and the particular events, ideas, individuals, etc., being referred to in a given political intervention. This much is clear, but I reiterate that my primary aim is explaining how language was used in specific forms and formulations towards political ends. In this dissertation, a speech act’s

⁹¹ J. L. Austin, *How to do things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford, 1962), 1–11 and beyond. It is worth noting that Austin was developing the earlier work of, among others, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Austro-British philosopher of language known in that field for his work to the effect of ‘do not ask for the meaning, ask for the use’. Neither Austin nor Wittgenstein created the notion of speech acts or coined the term.

⁹² *Ibid*, 12.

⁹³ Austin, *How to do things with Words*, 146.

consequences are necessary but secondary considerations to explaining the purpose of a given speech act.

In relation to this, it follows that I have a firm belief in the agency of individuals, particularly concerning language usage. Agency is a notoriously tricky concept to define, as one classic work from the field of archaeology, *Agency in Archaeology* (2000), has well demonstrated.⁹⁴ Regardless, when I use the term agency below, I intend it to carry a very simple and perhaps even slightly normative meaning – that someone has the ability to do something. This someone is, therefore, an *agent*, even if there are significant constraints upon them and upon actions they are able to take. Certainly, for the purposes of speech acts, it is already enough that an individual is capable of making a political intervention for me to be satisfied that they have agency. We can be relatively certain, I think, that in such a case a person possesses enough individual agency to be able to make their own choices regarding language usage, even if there will be numerous other influences on these choices.⁹⁵

By extension, even if an individual is clearly part of a wider group of some description (I am thinking here of a member of a political party, for example, though this could also be far broader and refer to a representative of a particular nation, social group, etc.), I do not believe that this element renders them non-agents in my meaning of the term. Their agency may be impacted by this collective identity element, in some cases enhancing and in other cases reducing their individual capacity for action depending on the given circumstances, but I do not believe this ever reaches the point where I can consider them political non-entities. Whether they are listened to is another matter altogether (either as an individual or as part of this collective), but I would not characterise them as lacking sufficient agency to make political interventions in the form of speech acts. This is quite separate, it seems to me, from their raw political significance.

Developing Quentin Skinner's Approach to the History of Political Thought

Focusing on the concept of self-determination 'in action' through political interventions, this dissertation examines the kind of individual agency described above more than, for example, structures or institutions.⁹⁶ I contend that to understand the history of political thought and specifically the use of precise terms and concepts through time, researchers must understand the context of their formulation and usage, especially in argumentation. While Quentin Skinner was not alone in his innovations and contributions to this aspect of the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and the social sciences⁹⁷, the scholar's 1969 article can still

⁹⁴ Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (eds.), *Agency in Archaeology* (London, 2000).

⁹⁵ Including, of course, influences that an individual may not be aware of themselves.

⁹⁶ Though I do not neglect the *significance* of the latter two.

⁹⁷ As J. G. A. Pocock, Peter Laslett, and James Tully, among others, all penned developmental works on potential methodologies for the history of political thought around the same time.

nonetheless be taken as an authoritative start point of the wider ‘school’.⁹⁸ To go to the essence of that work’s central argument, Skinner’s ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’ article concluded with the following:

...The appropriate methodology for the history of ideas must be concerned, first of all, to delineate the whole range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion by the utterance of the given utterance, and, next, to trace the relations between the given utterance and this wider linguistic context as a means of decoding the actual intention of the given writer.⁹⁹

Obviously, Skinner’s approach to the history of political thought is knowingly historicist, especially with regard to the history of language.¹⁰⁰ It is not ordinary language *in general* that is relevant for the approach, however, but rather distinct political languages, within which arguments are made, developed, and sustained. Similarly, Skinner’s history of political thought is contextualist, based also on these political-linguistic contexts. While Skinner explicitly acknowledges the longer-term histories of specific and otherwise recurrent concepts in his works, he maintains a belief that the meanings and purposes of invocations of these concepts can only be explained in the specifics of these instances, and not via a more generalist history of the concept in question.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Skinner was an early

⁹⁸ For that work, see Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1969), 3–53. For an overview of the development of these scholars’ work beyond their typical European focus, see David Armitage, ‘The International Turn in Intellectual History’ in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (eds.), *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York City, 2014), 232–52, as well as the text as a whole. For an overview of the other prominent methodological approach to the history of political thought, *Begriffsgeschichte*, or conceptual history, see Jan Ifversen, ‘The Birth of International Conceptual History’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2021), 1–15; and for a very recent example of the development of this approach in the case of the Russian Empire, see Harry John Fennell, *Orthodoxy and Liberalism: A Conceptual History of the Religious Aspect of Liberal Ideas of National Identity in Russia* (International Master’s Thesis, University of Glasgow, University of Tartu, KIMEP University, 2025). See also Jussi Kurunmäki, Jeppe Nevers, and Henk te Velde (eds.), *Democracy in Modern Europe: A Conceptual History* (New York City, 2018); Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freeden and Javier Fernández-Sebastián, *Conceptual History in the European Space* (New York City, 2017); and Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), Translated by Keith Tribe.

⁹⁹ Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding’, 49.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 3–53; Richard Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge, 2015), 41–44.

¹⁰¹ Since Skinner also argues that a focus on allegedly ‘timeless’ questions risks projecting the researcher’s own concerns onto historically specific texts and political interventions. Pocock has perhaps been the most generalist in this sense, given how he talks of common language transfer across centuries, rather than shorter timeframes, as is common among the other scholars just mentioned, although to him, language also served a purpose through providing context, as well as material to analyse. For more on this, see John G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985); J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge, 2009).

critic of broader ‘conceptual history’ approaches for this and other reasons, though more recent scholarship has clearly demonstrated the possibility of performing a synthesis of both.¹⁰²

In the Skinnerian model, understanding a text’s meaning and purpose(s) requires reconstructing its linguistic context; the historically specific conventions or ideologies within which it was written. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Skinner has frequently placed great emphasis on an adapted version of speech act theory (outlined above), and treats political texts as *actions* performed within these conventions – actions that both reproduce and strategically modify them. In this way, Skinner developed an early theory of the structured nature of ideas, and contributed more widely towards repositioning the history of political thought into a field grounded in the analysis of political language. In later works (also influenced by Weberian interpretive sociology), Skinner further extended this approach to the interpretation of political action itself, emphasising that political agency involves struggles over power that must be publicly legitimised through existing normative languages.¹⁰³

This ‘what are you saying?’ and ‘what are you doing?’ pair of interrogative questions is the crux of a Skinnerian approach to the history of political thought. As James H. Tully described Skinner’s approach in a later reflective article, “to fully understand the ‘historical meaning’ of a text...considered as a linguistic action performed by its author...it is not sufficient to understand its locutionary meaning. It is also necessary to understand what the author was doing in writing it; the ‘point’ or ‘force’ of the author’s argument”.¹⁰⁴ There has, by contrast, been a worrying trend, principally from political scientists and historians, to dismiss political declarations and similar sources as purely rhetorical devices that are intended to mask the actual intentions and ideologies of their creators.¹⁰⁵ In this view, declarative sources matter less because they are insincere and, in many cases, false representations of the motives of their agents.¹⁰⁶ In short, propaganda.¹⁰⁷

However, there has been some notable and convincing pushback from this trend from other historians and especially from scholars of international law. As one historian makes clear, these documents “provide access to the normative beliefs of much larger sections of European society than do the normative theories

¹⁰² See David Armitage, ‘What’s the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée’, *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2012), 493–507; in which the scholar argues for a history *in* ideas, not a history *of* ideas.

¹⁰³ See Eva Piirimäe, ‘Keeleline pööre’, *Keel ja Kirjandus*, No. 8 (2008), 589–603.

¹⁰⁴ James H. Tully, ‘The Pen is a Mighty Sword: Quentin Skinner’s Analysis of Politics’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1983), 491.

¹⁰⁵ See Pärtel Piirimäe, ‘Just war in theory and practice: The legitimization of Swedish intervention in the Thirty Years War’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2002), 500.

¹⁰⁶ We might see Mark, ‘National Self-Determination’; and Beissinger, ‘Self-Determination as a Technology of Imperialism’, as examples of this in the case of the Bolsheviks and self-determination.

¹⁰⁷ In the modern pejorative meaning of that word.

themselves”.¹⁰⁸ In other words, they relate to far wider moral, legal, and cultural views (and therefore linguistic contexts), and their interrogation results in a greater understanding of the concept at the time – in this case, self-determination. Textual political interventions should be scrutinised as such, not through a sincerity-insincerity binary. When assessing how a concept functioned in theory and practice, an agent’s sincerity is not as significant to establish as presence and purpose.

Linguistic context, therefore, as a kind of structural material, is more important here.¹⁰⁹ Skinner, and Skinnerian adherents, see this ‘linguistic world’ as organised through political languages; political discourses. These scholars therefore reason that to ascertain *meaning*, individual speech acts should be measured against these more ‘structural’ language worlds.¹¹⁰ In other words, the normative language of a given period is something to pay attention to, since those making speech acts could reinforce, adapt, or subvert this language to their own ends. Contemporary language was a resource for political agents, meaning that any attempt to understand a specific speech act necessitates some understanding of the more general linguistic world in which it was performed. What wider concepts are being appealed or referred to? Do these have local meanings that differ from more general ones, or meanings different to those using the same term in a different time period? Skinner reasoned that while political agents were more than capable of choosing and re-inventing the meaning of specific terms, they were nonetheless still tied to the linguistic context of their day and had to engage with this in some way, even if to ‘correct’ this in a particular speech act. This view led the scholar to memorably quip that “every revolutionary is to this extent obliged to march backward into battle”, appealing in some way to these preexisting normative languages.¹¹¹

In general, then, the methodological approach of Skinner appears well suited to this dissertation’s research questions and overall research design. However, Skinner’s works tend to focus on a canon of ‘great thinkers’ and ‘great texts’. While this has resulted in insightful scholarship on those works and their authors, in this dissertation I expand out this approach to include a broader range of agents and texts in the analysis. This is largely because of the dissertation’s objectives and timeframes – it makes more sense to study a greater number of agents’ political interventions when trying to understand how a concept functioned during a ten-year period, in which several sequential or concurrent speech acts were performed. Ultimately, the concept of self-determination is my main object of study here, so there is a clear logic to applying a Skinnerian lens to political

¹⁰⁸ Piirimäe, ‘Just war in theory and practice’, 501.

¹⁰⁹ See Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?*, 51.

¹¹⁰ It should also be noted that the ‘political languages’ Skinner writes of are relatively coherent linguistic sub-systems that offer rival interpretative frames and normative visions of the world.

¹¹¹ Quentin Skinner, ‘Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action’ in James Tully (ed.) *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (New Jersey, 1988), 112.

interventions in which it and/or related concepts can be found, regardless of their status in any history of political thought pantheon.

Indeed, I contend that one of the main advantages of understanding particular conceptual invocation, especially the employment of the specific term ‘self-determination’ in historical context (that is, through studying them as speech acts) is the result of examining exactly how individual and collective agents used the term. That is, as opposed to broader and frequently more passive narratives about how self-determination moved universally in meaning; narratives which make little sense when examining any concept in theory and practice across a particular space and time.¹¹² This modified application of Skinner’s approach ensures a more specific focus on speech acts – specific political interventions – that allows for a more effective answering of my own research questions.

Genre and Political Intervention

In this dissertation, my central methodological assumption¹¹³ is that where intellectual transfer concerning ideas of imperial reconfiguration occurred, including the use of specific terms such as self-determination, it did so through identifiable and traceable literary-political genres. The academic significance and consequences of this shall be discussed shortly. First it is best to provide a sense of what I mean by the term genre. My conceptualisation of genre comes directly from David Armitage, who, in his exceptional monograph on the American Declaration of Independence and its global legacy, defined genre as follows:

By “genre” I mean a distinct but repeatable structure of argument and literary form. Similar documents, whether or not they are consciously or directly indebted to a specific original, become instances of such a genre. Literary genres can be as strict as a sonnet or as loose as a novel; utopias and constitutions, declarations of rights and declarations of independence, are among similar genres of political writing. They supply the forms that capture, and allow us to comprehend and criticize, similar ideas and events. They provide the recurring shapes assumed by documents arising from comparable circumstances. Genres are born. They break apart and recombine with elements of other genres. Sometimes they die. Like the ideas they contain, they are both movable and mutable, and they do not recognize national borders.¹¹⁴

This definition of genre as “a distinct but repeatable structure of argument and literary form” is the one I employ whenever genre is referred to in this work.¹¹⁵ It seems logical that political agents chose their genres out of habit – as these

¹¹² Especially considering that different and even contradictory meanings of the same term can coexist in the same space and time.

¹¹³ Beyond the more general assumptions of Skinner’s approach, of course.

¹¹⁴ David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007), 13–14.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

genres formed the most conventional ways of making political interventions; out of convenience – as these genres served as more-or-less coherent templates for making political interventions; and with purposeful intention – as specific genres were generally well aligned with the purpose(s) of their creation. Political pamphlets, party programmes, declarations of independence, peace treaties, and constitutions, for example, all have clear purposes that are reflected by their genres, as well as possessing unique histories to take into account as well.

At the same time, it is conceivable that while a political agent may have chosen a particular genre to make a political intervention in, this choice may not have been consciously made ‘in genre’, so to speak. In many cases, particularly in the earlier period of this dissertation’s chronology, I identify many examples of political agents writing back-and-forth to one another in the genre of political polemics – usually styled as scientific articles in journals, and sometimes as books. Here we can imagine the logic of this cycle of political interventions; these political agents were unlikely thinking that they *must* reply to one another in this specific genre, rather that they *passively* chose (they still chose) this genre because it was habitual, because it was convenient, and because it served their purposes well. In this case, because they could frequently and easily cite earlier works and texts in the references of the scientific article genre.

At the same time, there are many instances where empirical evidence exists of political agents actively choosing to make their political interventions in specific genres. For example, after political protests forced the resignation of Provisional Government minister P. N. Miliukov in the spring of 1917, the latter gave a speech explaining his actions in drafting the so-called ‘Miliukov note’. One excerpt of this speech is illuminating for us when thinking about agents choosing the genre of their own political interventions:

...Later another phase developed, when people began to insist that the document which I had purposefully made a declaration to the people of Russia and not a diplomatic document should be turned into a diplomatic act...The new discussions led to a new compromise. I agreed to send, not a note, but the document itself, accompanied by a note which should guarantee the Ministry of Foreign Affairs against the evil results of an incorrect understanding of the compromise.¹¹⁶

The specific nature and content of the document referred to here is not important for us at the moment, and is covered below in detail.¹¹⁷ What is important is Miliukov’s assertion of purposeful choice with regard to the form – the genre – of a specific document. By his own admission, a document Miliukov had produced was “purposefully” constructed as a declaration issued to a general public.¹¹⁸ This

¹¹⁶ Extract from Miliukov’s explanation of his resignation. Available in *Rech’*, 5th of May [18th of May] 1917, No. 104, 3. Available here.

¹¹⁷ See chapter 2.1, ‘The Provisional Government of Russia’.

¹¹⁸ Miliukov’s explanation of his resignation.

very clearly signals a relationship between one's choice of genre and a desired political outcome, and also suggests that an audience factor was important to both.

Whether or not political agents' genre choices were more passive or active, in both cases I consider genre to have informed the process of intellectual transfer. In other words, genre choice was a constitutive part of intellectual exchange and development, helping to shape concepts themselves, not just their expression, and how this occurred will be unpacked presently. Armitage's definition above touches on whether or not a document is consciously or directly "indebted" to a previous one, which is indeed important, but he says little about what this choice represents outside of furthering the genre itself (or its development), at least in the above conceptualisation.¹¹⁹ I propose that within the period of my research, one's choice of genre can be seen as an 'action' of sorts. An action in the sense of being a kind of 'speech act' as above, that has a meaning beyond its literal locutionary function. Here we could bring in a number of works from other disciplines, such as linguistics and most notably rhetorical studies, which typically see genres as types of actions rather than specific forms of or for texts.¹²⁰

Rhetorician Carolyn R. Miller, for example, is a scholar who has notably called for and developed the idea of genre as a form of action, in her case specifically a social action, in a series of articles from the 1980s onwards.¹²¹ Miller emphasises that genre acquires meaning situationally, and that this meaning is therefore to some degree socially constructed. In her pioneering 'Genre as Social Action' article, she states: "as action, it [genre] acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose".¹²² One can draw obvious links here with how contextualist historians view speech acts, but I will leave these aside for the time being, since another aspect of how Miller views genre is more important to highlight at this time. This is the idea of genre as a socio-linguistic technology – as Miller states, form is a means: "A genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent".¹²³ Genre, therefore, is not abstract or 'neutral' but intrinsically tied to an agent's goals within the latter's social context. To use a genre is in itself to *do* something, and to do something that is grounded in time and place.

Armitage's text on the American Declaration of Independence is now almost two decades old, and the implicit call to action featured within has been answered by many scholars across different fields, most notably by historians and

¹¹⁹ Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, 13–14.

¹²⁰ See the Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff chapter, '5. Genre in Rhetorical and Sociological Traditions', in their *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (West Lafayette, Indiana, 2010), 57–77.

¹²¹ Carolyn R. Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (1984), 151–167.

¹²² *Ibid*, 163.

¹²³ Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', 163.

international relations scholars.¹²⁴ Clearly, then, there is fertile ground for the development of such approaches, especially given the examples referred to by Armitage as other potential genres in which to undertake similar analysis of. As discussed in more detail below, these genres of documents; constitutions, declarations of rights, declarations of independence, and a few more besides, form the main basis of this dissertation's sources, so utilising a methodological approach that is sensitive to this element is clearly complimentary to these relevant sources.¹²⁵

Most pertinently, an Armitage- and Miller-inspired genre reading of political texts here unlocks two recurrent aspects of documents that are essential for historians of political thought in making sense of political interventions, and for political theorists in reflecting about the nature, meaning, and function of the concept of self-determination more broadly. Namely, such a reading uncovers the influences and the purpose(s) of a given political intervention. More plainly, what agents were trying to emulate or respond to, and what they were trying to achieve in doing so. To properly unlock how a concept was used in action, it is not enough to take it at face value; its ideas and language must be traced, and its purposes understood in historical context.

Here, I should reiterate my conviction that genre choice was a constitutive part of intellectual exchange and development. In one plain sense, because the different genres in which ideas and political arguments were discussed and made in were the primary ways in which all people, regardless of demographic differences, encountered these ideas. Conscripted soldiers, for example, often received grand political ideas through short pamphlets¹²⁶, a form that typically utilised more terse and Manichean language than the longer scholarly books on topics such as the history of law in Russia that more formally educated individuals engaged with. I do not make any causal claims about this state of affairs, while also believing that it would be naïve to assume that this had *no* impact on how

¹²⁴ Ruth Houghton and Aoife O'Donoghue, 'Manifestos as constituent power: Performing a feminist revolution', *Global Constitutionalism*, Volume 12, No. 3 (2023), 412–437; Aleksandar Pavković, 'Self-Determination or the will of the People? Declarations of Independence and the Paradox of 'Alien-Determined Self-Determination'' in Matt Qvortrup (ed.) *Nationalism, Referendums and Democracy: Voting on Ethnic Issues and Independence* (London, 2020); Emma Stone Mackinnon, 'Declaration as Disavowal: The Politics of Race and Empire in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', *Political Theory*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2018), 57–81. Armitage himself has also continued this work in important ways. See David Armitage, 'Declarations of Independence and the Law of Nations' in Liliana Obregón, Juan Amaya-Castro, and Laura Betancur-Restrepo (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Law in the Americas* (Oxford, forthcoming).

¹²⁵ Armitage also helpfully suggests that political agents can make political interventions in forms that combine elements of different genres at the same time, something he refers to as "generic promiscuity". Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, 14.

¹²⁶ That, due to their smaller size, were cheaper to produce at scale and easier to smuggle into desired areas. Their language style often reflected this but was also intentionally used for mobilisation (as opposed to discursive) purposes.

these audiences thought about and engaged with political ideas. Such a view can be found in previous academic scholarship. Pärtel Piirimäe, for example, has examined various sources of propaganda (primarily polemics and manifestos) in the early modern public sphere in a similar way, around the time of the Thirty Years War.¹²⁷ As Piirimäe convincingly argues, we cannot neglect this aspect of political culture, since, in one of the scholar's own examples, the Swedish regime published their manifesto justifying their intervention in the conflict in no less than five languages across well over twenty editions.¹²⁸ If mass perceptions of political actions' legitimacy were *not* important, why go to such lengths in appealing to public audiences within and beyond the domestic? Why, indeed, make the effort at all?

Secondly, and more intellectually, genre choice was a constitutive part of intellectual exchange and development because of widely understood, but ultimately malleable genre *conventions*. In this dissertation, I modify Miller's view of genre as being a form of social action to also include genre conventions within this framework; socially understood forms of communication performed by political agents. Put simply, genre conventions are the mechanism for shaping the concept of self-determination, as well as its expression. While it might be tempting to see self-determination in different genres as simply the same idea in different textual forms, I argue that the conventions of the genre in which the concept appeared impacted its perception and usage. Specific genres, such as revolutionary declarations, international treaties, and constitutions carry with them social meanings about, among other things, political and legal authority, temporality, agency, and action. Armitage, for example, argues that declarations of independence do not necessarily express a preexisting sovereignty but produce it performatively.

I claim that the same holds for self-determination as it appeared in other genres. Other declarations, especially revolutionary declarations, are clearly designed to *declare* something into existence, not merely convey information. The conventions of a law are to regulate something; a constitution to constitute something; a treaty to represent shared agreement on something. An analysis of self-determination through genre conventions is therefore doubly sensitive to the role, the *function*, of concepts within these forms. Firstly, because these texts' linguistic formulations already tell us something about how political agents are using the concept (in a straightforward speech act sense as described above), and secondly because the conventions of these genres can be considered as actions that relate to the purposes of political interventions. Self-determination, in my view, cannot be separated from the speech act element of the conventions of the genre in which it appeared.

¹²⁷ Pärtel Piirimäe, 'War and Polemics in Early Modern Europe' in Melissa Calaresu, Filippo de Vivo, and Joan Pau Rubiés (eds.), *Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke* (Farnham, 2010), 133–149.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 134.

In this dissertation, I provide evidence to suggest that many political agents were acutely aware of the implications of specific genre forms and tailored their political choices to suit the inferences of particular genre conventions. The dissertation finds several instances of political agents arguing over the implications of, for example, a *declaration* (in contrast to a law), as well as agents' effective innovations of genre forms to ends novel from their conventions. While the work ultimately argues that the Bolsheviks were the group who embodied the conscious usage and development of genre as a strategy of political intervention most notably and consistently, it is important to stress even at this point that this manipulation was not limited to the group. Members of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia, as well as ministers of the Provisional Government and even external agents such as the Central Powers took care to exploit the form, as well as the content of their arguments regarding self-determination.

All this conveys that while genre conventions served as some kind of preexisting framework for individuals to align their interventions with, they were also mutable forms that political agents could tinker with to desired ends, as Armitage also described in the above-quoted passage. Following this Armitagean line, I understand genre conventions to be loose conditions for conceptual formation, formulation, and dissemination: they help determine what kinds of political ideas can appear, how they acquire authority, and what forms of action they enable. For example, articles in international treaties clearly served a purpose of reflecting mutual agreements on certain terms, but why could they not also be modified to hold propaganda value too? As addressed below, both the Estonian and the Soviet negotiators of the Treaty of Tartu (1920) understood this. Therefore, while this dissertation's empirical chapters analyse political interventions through their genre (conventions), they do so with an awareness of the mutability of these different forms by political agents.

Limitations of the Dissertation

Before continuing further into a discussion of the sources of this research and the empirical chapters of the dissertation, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are several significant limitations to both my methodological approach and the dissertation as a whole that should be addressed at this stage. Firstly, it should be clearly stated that the research for this dissertation is based on primary sources and secondary literature in Russian, French, English, and, to a lesser extent, Estonian and Ukrainian, reflecting my own linguistic competences. In terms of its source collection and selection the dissertation is therefore best read as an invitation for further refinement and development rather than a conclusive statement, especially for the regions and peoples discussed whose languages are not known by the author.

With regard to the sources of this dissertation, I should state that in most cases I have not uncovered 'new' archival or published material that radically alters our conventional empirical understandings of the course of events between 1914 and 1924. There are exceptions to this, particularly when it comes to the employment

or otherwise of the specific term self-determination from Bolshevik political agents, and I have made clear where this is so both in the empirical chapters of the dissertation as well as in the conclusion. Nonetheless, I feel it is important to signal this at this time, as well as noting the general absence of other archival materials based on the aforementioned linguistic limitations of this work. There may, in other words, be helpful materials hidden from my view at this time for reasons largely outside of my control.

In relation to this, this study does little, in fact effectively nothing, to really develop understandings of how people who were *not* active political agents thought about concepts such as self-determination. While I utilised thousands of pages of newspaper articles and other widely accessed sources (contemporaneously), I did not consistently attempt to understand the *reception* of these same sources. While this is partly because this is a far more difficult task empirically speaking, it is also because doing so would only relate tangentially to my research questions. I was more interested, for example, in the editors of, and contributors to, specific newspapers, as they were often active political agents making public engagements and contributions to political discourse. I do not deny that the reception of these documents was an important part of conceptual movement, but I also had to place practical limits on both my research design and consequently my sources in relation to my research questions. Developing explanations as to how these documents were received by non-political-agents may indeed be a fruitful path for future research beyond the work of this dissertation, but it did not greatly factor into this research here.

Others may also wonder how a history of political thought approach can be pursued during a time of multiple conflicts, especially ones on as large a scale as the First World War and the Russian Civil War. In comparison to the other limitations of this research, which I accept without major reservation, on this I wish to more firmly stand my ground. I contend that conflict is where the transformation of ideas becomes *most* interesting, as it is when they are both put into practice and exposed to extreme circumstances. In other words, they demonstrate better than the texts themselves the contingency of their realisation. While experiences of conflict inevitably make the tracing of specific individuals and their writings more difficult, it does not correspondingly make it less valuable.

Sources

In this section I provide an overview first of the general sources available for the study, and secondly my areas of focus within these areas and their accompanying rationale. Firstly, some words on the general potential source points as they exist at present. Generally speaking, most of the relevant material concerning the period is either held in archives or has been previously published in some form (or both). Some of the archives in which the relevant sources live, it goes almost without saying, are more easily accessible than others (logistically and politically), and this I will cover in more granular detail below. Many, perhaps most, of the previously published sources were first published contemporaneously: books;

scholarly and newspaper articles; declarations and treaties; constitutions, and so on. Some publications came years or decades later, as individuals who had taken part in the events of the period (and survived them) sought to clarify the essential facts of the time, as well as put their own spin on these facts; more on this below, too. Lastly, some publications come directly from the academic world, as later generations of scholars have sought to publish and publicise documentary compilations of their historical detective work (usually, these compilations consist of rarer or more difficult-to-access materials, though not always).

In the early months of this research project, I identified and built up a collection of overtly and implicitly political documents that pertained to the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire. This was intentionally broadly conceived – I did not rule out documents that did not employ the exact term self-determination, for example, since there were clearly documents that pertained to the *concept* without using the exact term, as well as necessarily needing to examine broader trends and discussions, in order to find out self-determination's place within this place and intellectual hierarchy, so to speak.

Unsurprisingly, the resultant collection of documents included, but was by no means limited to: works of political and legal philosophy; political programmes and declarations (including of independence); domestic legal texts (such as constitutions); and documents of international law (such as peace treaties and the covenants of international organisations). Wherever possible, these documents were accessed and read in the language(s) of their creation. When this was not possible, translations (often contemporary) were used, though this was intentionally kept to a minimum, and my arguments do not live or die based on this small number of translated sources, nor do I claim that this work could not be further developed by scholars with different linguistic abilities to myself; as will be seen, quite the contrary. In some rare cases, I was able to contrast the language used in a translation with the language used in the original source. This had stimulating analytical consequences, but it was also a helpful reminder of the perils of engaging with translations of political concepts in different cultural and linguistic settings.

As is well known, access to physical archives in the Russian Federation for many researchers was effectively cut off following the expansion of the Russian state's war against Ukraine in February 2022. This is a practical matter (as the state has both formally and informally reduced access to its archives), a logistical matter (acquiring visas and traveling to the territory of the Russian Federation from the European Union is now very difficult without family links, and is not currently advised for citizens and residents of Estonia, likely made more difficult by my own citizenship and personal connections), and an ethical matter. As I began my doctoral research in late 2021, this situation occurred early into the process and is unlikely to abate any time soon. It is therefore worth acknowledging that subsequent archival work may develop or even contradict the arguments of this dissertation in important ways.

At the same time, owing largely to their age, many of these sources were still easily accessible through other means. In some cases, digital archives within and

beyond the region have filled the void of physical access to a large degree, and in other cases traveling to the region was not necessary due to previous research trips and private collections I had access to or maintained myself. Helpfully, all of the most relevant Russian language newspapers of the time (*Rech'*; *Izvestiia*; *Iskra*; *Volia naroda*; *Pravda*, etc.) are available through various online archives, primarily via the State Public Historical Library of Russia and the Russian National Library, with some even providing additional information on the 'behind the scenes' of their publishing and editorials.¹²⁹ The Presidential Library of the Russian Federation also has an impressive collection of digitised documents, including many compilation books of primary sources, providing a significant, if not entirely equalising, counterweight to the restriction of physical archives within Russia.¹³⁰

The materials of many key White Movement figures (with regard to self-determination in particular) are mostly held within Europe and North America, owing to the emigration and their resettlement in centres like Paris, Berlin, Belgrade, Brussels, Prague, and New York City. Many of these notable *émigrés* founded organisations and journals to continue their struggle via other means. One figure previously associated with both the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia and the White Movement, I. V. Gessen, oversaw the publication of the *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* (*Archive of the Russian Revolution*) in Berlin between 1921 and 1937. This twenty-two volume collection was a mixture of a long form political polemic and a documentary source compilation simultaneously. Naturally, its authors and contributors sought to use the latter to bolster their claims in the former. As such, one finds all the usual tropes of the white *émigrés* within, especially the recurrent blame game scholars have noted for some time now, with the culprits of White failure ranging from other White generals, the non-Russian national movements, and the Allied and Associated Powers.¹³¹ Overtly political nature aside, the documents themselves remain valuable, particularly since many of the volumes contain letters and other private correspondence that add further substance to the published/public documents within or accessible elsewhere. Moreover, several of the volumes contain documents that were otherwise all-too-ephemeral – drafts of adopted resolutions and constitutional proposals, for example.

These published works were not limited to anti-Bolsheviks. In the months, years, and decades following the Russian Civil War, the Soviet Union published the well-known *Collected Works* of Lenin and J. V. Stalin in multiple languages. Lenin's emerged first, beginning in 1926, with Stalin's beginning in 1946 and

¹²⁹ See here and here respectively. The Russian National Library also hosts many of the local editions of the same papers.

¹³⁰ This is at least a positive aspect of the current regime's aim to depict its governance as 'transparent' in digital spaces, even if this is clearly false in many other areas. See how the institution describes itself here (in Russian).

¹³¹ Although not so prominent in the *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, some of the more right wing *émigré* circles were also beginning or continuing to blame 'the Jews' for their supposed collective role in the success of the Bolsheviks and the failure of the White Movement.

running until 1952.¹³² This was largely for propagandistic purposes, not only as just described in terms of projecting a certain political narrative about past events and individuals, but also as an *implicitly* pro-Stalin move in the case of the latter – who else could warrant such a well-supported string of publications of their former writings and correspondence, thereby putting them on the same level of state-sanctioned esteem as Lenin? Again, political nature and purposes aside, the content remains valuable, though one must also take into account the burdensome editing these volumes underwent through the process of publication, with several sections of texts, or whole texts themselves, redacted from the official record. Copies of the purged texts exist elsewhere, of course, but one needs to maintain an awareness of this when looking at the volumes.

Some other archives that hold the papers of political agents of import for this research have also done exceptional work over the past decade in digitising their collections. One example to draw particular attention to is Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History, which, as part of their Centrale Project (2012–2016), comprehensively digitised the papers of B. V. Savinkov, among others.¹³³ All the documents of Savinkov's the Institute hold are now freely available online to all. Similar situations exist in other archives and are developing by the day – the Blavatnik Archive is another case here to single out. As well as stimulating future scholarship, these situations have greatly assisted the work of this research.¹³⁴

Beyond these source points, I also utilised archives located in states that, at the time of my research's chronology, were members of the 'Allied and Associated Powers' during and immediately after the First World War, primarily the National Archives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The UK's main state archive is a particular treasure trove, since it contains many copies of documents whose originals are to be found elsewhere, from Russia and Eurasia to the US and North America. Often, but not always, these document copies included the original source in some form as well, which was helpful as a comparison piece if the copy was a translated version.

Nonetheless, none of these archives and source locations should be considered sites of essentialist veracity, regardless of location. They should engender the usual amount of scepticism and questions of their provenance in exactly the same way as researchers should hold for any materials from any archive, regardless of location. Here, it may also be helpful to refer to a conversation between John Biggart and Jonathan D. Smele, two notable scholars of the Russian Revolution

¹³² These are the original publication start dates. Subsequent versions also exist, and I use these later-published editions in this dissertation, as is standard. David Riazanov, the founder of the Marx-Engels Institute (later the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute), was largely responsible for the first publication run of Lenin's *Collected Works*.

¹³³ Available here.

¹³⁴ I have also been aided in my source acquisition throughout the years by numerous friends, colleagues, mentors, archivists, and acquaintances; a great debt I aim to repay by passing on this collective knowledge in turn.

and Civil War, on the topic of whether one's empirical or theoretical work should take primacy in producing new understandings of the period and region. As Biggart stated:

It was always, I think, a fallacy to believe that access to archives alone would transform our understanding of anything. There was just as much a likelihood that new empirical wine would be poured into old conceptual bottles. I would therefore disagree with the notion of [the necessary primacy of] a 'cutting edge of empirical research'. The most valuable research, I think, begins with a revision of the conceptual framework...The archival material is only of use in substantiating interpretation.¹³⁵

Certainly, Biggart's assertion can be questioned. Often, an incidental empirical discovery in an archive serves as a spark to then develop a new research design or apply a certain framework to it to develop knowledge. However, it is certainly true that those of the historical discipline have a tendency to fetishise 'the archive', which, more than the above-mentioned points from Biggart, is also a potential problem if a researcher does not also consider what is *not* in the archives, and why this might be so. This potential problem is compounded in circumstances of reduced general access to physical archives, and therefore a reliance on published and/or digitised materials. For my purposes here, I believe that what is most important is an attempt to be as holistic as possible given the circumstances of the given time of one's research, which I believe I have been. Future scholarship, perhaps even from an older version of myself, may well correct or further nuance the claims made in this dissertation, and this is only a good thing. With all this covered, we may now proceed with the remainder of the dissertation, its four empirical chapters and the conclusion.

¹³⁵ Quote from John Biggart to Jon Smele, 10th of May 2005. Quoted in Jonathan D. Smele, 'The Study Group on the Russian Revolution: The First Thirty Years', *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005), 204–205.

1. SELF-DETERMINATION IN PAMPHLETS AND POLEMICS (1914–1917)

1.1 ‘Self-determination’ in the Russian Empire

This chapter covers the necessary empirical context for the remainder of the dissertation, beginning with an overview of the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The empire’s size and heterogeneity are emphasised, as are aspects of ‘modernity’, loosely understood, that its rulers attempted to refute, coopt, or encourage. The chapter’s second subsection moves towards an explicit discussion of self-determination as formulated by the dissertation’s main political agents, in this case the liberal-reformists of the period as represented by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia. Here, the chapter outlines notable Constitutional Democratic agents’ styling of ‘cultural’ self-determination and demonstrates the party’s use of the term (with this adjective) in the party programme of 1917. The chapter’s third subsection turns to the explicitly revolutionary political agents of the 1910s, the Bolsheviks most consistently, and outlines their views on self-determination and the so-called ‘National Question’. This section argues that while the international socialist movement spoke frequently of both self-determination and *national* self-determination in polemical articles and pamphlets designed for agitation during these years, disagreement over the concept persisted. While the broad movement’s usages of self-determination stimulated Lenin’s specificity in his own writings on the concept (also demonstrated in the subchapter), the Bolshevik leader’s clear and firm association between the concept of national self-determination and the notion of secession was unique for the time. While this was influential, it did not stop internal and external critiques of the concept of self-determination, which continued between and beyond 1914 and 1917.

In 1914, the Russian Empire had an estimated population of around 170 million people.¹³⁶ Its territory extended from eastern Europe in the west to the natural border of the Pacific Ocean in the east¹³⁷, from the arctic in the north to Central Asia in the south.¹³⁸ In other words, by 1914, the Russian Empire was colossal, by some margin the largest uninterrupted empire of its time. In terms of its landmass, the majority of the empire was located in Asia, east of the Urals mountain range. In population terms, the majority of the empire’s subjects lived west of this conventional geographical marker, in the European part of the

¹³⁶ Estimated, as the previous census of the Russian Empire, ultimately its first and last, occurred in 1897, and was therefore almost two decades out of date. See Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, xviii.

¹³⁷ Though prior to 1867, the Russian Empire also possessed territories in North America.

¹³⁸ For a visual representation of this scale, see this map from Rand McNally and Company, published by M. J. Kruming in New York City, 1913. Available here on the Library of Congress’ digital archive.

polity's territory. The Russian Empire was modernising, especially in economic and infrastructure terms, but the overall breadth of its industrialisation and urbanisation was less far-reaching than other broadly comparable European empires, despite the rate of these changes likely exceeding these other polities by the 1910s.¹³⁹ Indeed, only fifteen percent of this c.170 million people lived in cities, and the overwhelming majority of those who did not were agricultural peasants, especially in areas where ethnic Russians predominated, and across the great forests and hills of Siberia.¹⁴⁰

Owing to this titanic size, with different territories becoming part of the empire over the course of its long history, the Russian Empire's large population was also diverse – in terms of its native and spoken languages, its religious practices, its ethnic groups, its social classes, its economic output, its literacy rates, and its national identities. Many of these categories were not clearly outlined or enquired about in the only existing census of the empire from the previous century. Partially because of this, contemporaries (and some past and current generations of scholars) often conflated, for example, the native language statistics with ethnicity or national identity, neither of which were categories for the 1897 census. Moreover, by 1914, the census was clearly outdated. Taking into account the changes the Russian Empire experienced within these seventeen years, from large scale events like the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905 (and its results in 1906), to 'smaller' but still socially and demographically important events or processes like the population's birth and death rates, improvements in healthcare, and the development of the Trans-Siberian Railway, it is clear that the census alone cannot be seriously used for a demographic analysis of a rapidly changing imperial state. Nonetheless, the results of the census taken in combination with other statistical data from the 1910s clearly demonstrates the heterogeneity of the Russian Empire's population.¹⁴¹

The question, of course, was whether all or any of this mattered in the governance and administration of a large imperial power. The Russian Empire was ruled dynastically by the House of Romanov, whose position as the ruling dynasty stretched back centuries – three, to be precise. In 1913, festivities across the empire marked the three hundredth anniversary of the accession of Mikhail I to the imperial throne, the first Romanov to do so, thereby succeeding the Rurik dynasty, which had itself ruled for over seven centuries. The Russian Empire of the 1910s, however, was not the Russian Empire of 1613, nor 1894, the year of Tsar Nicolas II's accession to the throne, nor even the empire of a decade prior. A series of reforms initiated by Nicolas II's grandfather, Tsar Alexander II, such as the effective abolition of serfdom, reform of the judiciary, and the expansion of access to education had begun the true modernisation of the Russian Empire.

¹³⁹ See Markevich and Harrison, *Natsional'nyi dokhod Rossii v 1913–1928 gg.* For work on this that explicitly uses modernisation theory to make its arguments, see Mironov, *Rossiiskaia modernizatsiia i revoliutsiia*.

¹⁴⁰ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, xix.

¹⁴¹ Markevich and Harrison, *Natsional'nyi dokhod Rossii v 1913–1928 gg.*

Further reforms were not forthcoming later in Alexander II's reign, however, and were actively opposed and in some cases reversed by his son, namesake, and successor, following the tsar's assassination in 1881 by the *Narodnaia volia* terrorist group.¹⁴² Nonetheless, the long term effects of, for example, a more literate population and more expansive rail and communication infrastructure were 'bedded in', and were already being used by the Russian Empire's subjects in ways both anticipated and unanticipated by the modernisers.¹⁴³

It is undeniable that in the late 1800s and early 1900s the Russian Empire was in many ways culturally resistant to change, especially on the dynastic level. As a ruler, Tsar Nicolas II believed strongly in the historic autocratic rights of tsarism as a regime. He had resented the concessions he was forced to make as a result of the Revolution of 1905 and was an opponent of constitutionalism as a point of principle.¹⁴⁴ Nicolas II was less overt about his autocratic instincts than his father, Alexander III, who was prone to several public and private '*L'État, c'est moi*'-style statements, but clearly felt he had no need to justify his position through anything other than the cyclical argument of him being Tsar Nicolas II.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, it is also undeniable that the Russian Empire was on the road towards a modernity, and at considerable speed. This state of affairs was not as contradictory as it might appear, partly because while Tsar Nicolas II was the head of state of an autocratic regime, he was not and could not be responsible for many of the changes the Russian Empire was undergoing, nor their wide-ranging impact. Furthermore, and perhaps just as importantly, because the Russian Empire had always been a contradictory system in flux.

The administrative regime of the Russian Empire in 1914 is best understood as a patchwork system. It goes almost without saying that considerably different regions and territories were incorporated into the empire at considerably different periods of time. As a result, there was often not parity in the levels of social cohesion and economic development within and between regions, as well as inconsistent attitudes towards local and/or Russian elites and, importantly, differing degrees (and different types) of agency among local populations. The great

¹⁴² Margarita Nelipa, *Alexander III: His Life and Reign* (New York City, 2014); Anna Geifman (ed.), *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894–1917* (Hoboken, 1999); Alexander Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change, 1814–1914* (Armonk, 2005). Translated by Marshall S. Shatz.

¹⁴³ Also important to mention at this time is the fostering of civil society organisations and associations following Alexander II's reforms. See Joseph Bradley, 'Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (2002), 1094–1123; Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009); Joseph Bradley, 'Associations and the Development of Civil Society in Tsarist Russia', *Social Science History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2017), 19–42.

¹⁴⁴ Indeed, as is well known, in 1907 Nicolas II had been successful in further restricting the electoral basis of the already constitutionally weak State Duma of the Russian Empire. See Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century*, 190–208.

¹⁴⁵ Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century*, 174–208.

swathes of Siberia, for example, were conquered, colonised, and settled by successive generations of Russians¹⁴⁶ between the sixteenth century (1580) and the late eighteenth century (1778). Other territories were brought into the Russian Empire overnight with the signing of peace treaties (often concluded with the Swedish and Ottoman empires, the empire's historic rivals in the Baltic Sea space and southeastern Europe respectively). Some had existed under the Russian Empire for some time but were historically ruled in practice by non-Russian local elites just as much as or arguably more than the *de jure* (Russian imperial) Governor-General, whose duties were typically more military than civic. In the Baltic region, the Baltic Germans served as these local elites, with the more formally senior Governor-General responsible for the region's defence, prison system, the collection of taxes for the state coffers, and the somewhat vague task of 'supervision' of the local elites.¹⁴⁷ The Russian Empire modified this state of existence in the second half of the nineteenth century in significant ways discussed below, but the absence of uniformity in the structures of the Russian Empire's governance remained. Regardless, these histories and empirical examples serve as helpful reminders to not necessarily view the Russian Empire as a monolithic imperial bloc.

At the same time, a complex and hierarchical system of regional delamination did exist. As John P. LeDonne has argued, this was developed in part to provide clarity on whose authority lay where within areas of potentially overlapping imperial jurisdiction, but mainly to enshrine a unitary imperial state over time.¹⁴⁸ By 1914, there were 117 formal *gubernii*, or provinces¹⁴⁹, in the Russian Empire.¹⁵⁰ Within these were 35 *oblasti*, mainly on the outer reaches of the empire, but also in predominantly Cossack areas in what was historically called 'South Russia',¹⁵¹ among other regions. On the next administrative level down were many more subdivisions with the name *uezd*, or county, with a great number of them in the more densely populated western regions of the Russian Empire. There was no consistency between these administrative divisions' size, either in terms of geography or population. That is, one *uezd* could encompass a significantly

¹⁴⁶ At the beginning of this period as the Tsardom of Russia and after 1721 as the Russian Empire, officially speaking.

¹⁴⁷ This describes the historic situation, before the policies of so-called Russification, which will be discussed later in the subchapter.

¹⁴⁸ John P. LeDonne, *Forging a Unitary State: Russia's Management of the Eurasian Space, 1650–1850* (Toronto, 2020).

¹⁴⁹ The Russian word *guberniia* can be translated as either governorate or province. As the latter is more well-known in English as a state subdivision (formally or informally), I use this translation when referring to *gubernii* in English.

¹⁵⁰ For a full overview of this and the following statistics, see Sergei Tarkhov, 'Izmenenie administrativno-territorial'nogo deleniia Rossii v XIII–XX vv.', *Logos*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2005), 65–101.

¹⁵¹ Today this region also includes the legal territory of Ukraine, as well as modern Russia.

different geographic area and/or number of residents to another; likewise with the *oblasti*, and so on.¹⁵²

Furthermore, there were also exceptions even to this delamination – the starkest two being the Grand Duchy of Finland and the Kingdom of Poland. This latter territory originally had some identifiable degree of autonomy, at least in theory, as a result of its creation following the Congress of Vienna in 1815.¹⁵³ Tsarist authorities, however, had also violently suppressed mass Polish uprisings against Russian imperial rule throughout the nineteenth century, most notably in 1830 and in 1863–1864. As Malte Rolf has identified, while this led to the tsarist regime formally restricting the autonomy of Poland in significant ways, it did not necessarily mean the end of ‘Congress Poland’ as a zone of political experimentation for the regime.¹⁵⁴ In Rolf’s reading, the period between 1864 and the Russian Empire’s eventual retreat from the territory in late 1915 was marked not by a single, oppressive, Russifying centre-periphery dynamic but rather by a more complex negotiatory system that contained within it both conflict *and* cooperation.¹⁵⁵ On one level, this facilitated the system’s continuation into the future, while also simultaneously eroding faith in the Russian imperial regime through time, first in imperial Russian Poland, and then in the capital itself, a process Rolf refers to as the ‘provincialisation of the centre’.¹⁵⁶

The Grand Duchy of Finland, meanwhile, while also firmly under the sceptre of Nicolas II, was able to exercise comparatively more autonomy in some aspects of its politics than elsewhere in the empire. Here Nicolas II ruled as a Grand Duke¹⁵⁷ over a system that had a semi-independent legislature, the Parliament of Finland. When considering economic rights (if not economic self-determination more broadly), the Grand Duchy of Finland also had its own national bank, and even its own currency from 1860 onwards. At the same time, the Russian Empire also demarcated the Grand Duchy using the Russian imperial *gubernii* system, suggesting that this autonomy was still subsumed under the same central administrative regime, at least theoretically. These administrative, economic, and social differences between different areas of the same empire are significant because they served as the context for, among other things, the transfer of ideas.

One noteworthy example when considering the transfer of ideas can be seen in the comparative literacy and formal education rates among different groups. Aside from informing scholars of who was capable of receiving different types

¹⁵² Tarkhov, ‘Izmenenie administrativno-territorial’nogo deleniia Rossii’, 67–69.

¹⁵³ Including a constitution that was widely seen at the time as being one of the most liberal in the world.

¹⁵⁴ Malte Rolf, *Imperial Russian Rule in the Kingdom of Poland, 1864–1915* (Pittsburgh, 2021). Translated by Cynthia Klohr.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Rolf, *Imperial Russian Rule in the Kingdom of Poland*.

¹⁵⁷ The notion of a ‘personal union’ notwithstanding, this raises obvious contradictions and questions as to exactly how an absolute monarch could rule part of their territory ‘non-absolutely’ without being a formal constitutional monarchy.

of information individually, these statistics assist us in establishing the general potential *scale* of a particular audience for a specific instance of intellectual transfer. For example, according to the 1897 census, the literacy rate among Estonian and Finnish native speakers was exceptionally high – by any comparative metric, either with other linguistic groups within the Russian Empire or across the world. Of the Estonian speakers of the Baltic *gubernii*, 96.1 percent of people over ten, male and female, were literate.¹⁵⁸ In the Grand Duchy of Finland, this percentage was even greater among Finnish speakers. These groups' accompanying levels of Russian language proficiency, however, were significantly lower, and usually limited to educational elites, be they Baltic German or Estonian/Finnish, as well as smaller numbers who needed or benefitted from knowledge of the language in their work – merchants who traded beyond their local area, for example.

It is worth reiterating the contrasts between this situation and others within the same political system. Further south, especially pious Christians of Georgia and Armenia crossed paths and shared mountains with equally devout Muslims in Chechnya and Azerbaijan. Jews were the subject of both official and unofficial prejudice, only being permitted permanent residency in the Pale of Settlement, an inconsistent strip of the Russian Empire's western regions from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Often, cities within the Pale of Settlement still excluded Jews from residency, and many found the resultant social and economic situation so pitiful they emigrated, often to the United States of America, and later to Palestine. In Central Asia, close to the border with the Republic of China, several nomadic groups roamed the plains, trading goods with Chinese, Mongolian, and other farmers and merchants with little regard and, frankly, little need of the internationally recognised border between the two.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps in part because of the absence of uniformity across the empire, a notable sense of localism could often be found. This is not to say that national and/or imperial identities were not present, but that strong regional identities were also possible within broader national or pan-imperial identities at the same time. The *zemstvo* system introduced by Tsar Alexander II had been quietly revolutionary in this regard. While these new institutions of local self-government and self-organisation were initially dominated by the ennobled as intended by tsarist authorities, by the 1900s they had been transformed in practice into a political training ground for agency-seeking members of local intelligentsias, whether they were supporters or critics of the political status quo.¹⁶⁰ As Susan

¹⁵⁸ Toivo U. Raun, 'Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Estonian nationalism revisited', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2003), 136.

¹⁵⁹ For more on this, including the Russian Empire's relationship to nomadic peoples, see LeDonne, *Forging a Unitary State*, and for the subsequent period Alun Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 2018).

¹⁶⁰ Though it should also be noted that *zemstvo* organisations could not be found across the entire breadth of empire – tsarist authorities considered extending them to the Polish, Finnish, and Baltic provinces too much of a political risk, for example.

Smith-Peter has argued, the local had become “an especially important site of an emerging sense of civil society because the autocracy had long relied on cooptation of local elites to provide it with local knowledge”.¹⁶¹ Although *zemstvo* ‘employees’ (be they representatives or members of the more advisory executive board) were required by law to be approved by the governor of their overarching province, this did not always occur.

By the time of the Revolution of 1905, members of these local intelligentsias (as opposed to the aristocracy) were by some margin the most active attendants and participants of *zemstvo* assemblies. This was as much to do with their desires for political self-assertion as it was apathy or laziness on the part of the local aristocracy. Nonetheless, it was an unintended consequence of an unintended consequence; that the *zemstvo* organs were to be hijacked by the intelligentsia¹⁶² and that this, in turn, increased regional identities and contributed to ideas of alternative forms of governance, rather than reinforced imperial loyalty universally.¹⁶³ As Thomas Earl Porter and Lawrence W. Lerner write, “the main point to be made here is an obvious one: any real system of local self-government is incompatible with the very idea of autocracy”.¹⁶⁴ The more one felt agency in the local, the more distant the *ukazi* (edicts) of Tsar Nicolas II felt, even if one remained a fundamental supporter of the regime.

Alongside these local developments was the Russian Empire’s grand four-part experiment with parliamentarism, the State Duma of the Russian Empire. The creation of this body was the result of the Revolution of 1905, and its first two sittings (1906 and 1907) can be viewed, at least in a conceptual history of

¹⁶¹ Susan Smith-Peter, *Imagining Russian Regions: Subnational Identity and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Leiden, 2018), 25. She continues “...As new ideas of civil society from Adam Smith to G.W.F. Hegel filtered down to the local level, this cooptation could be interpreted more as cooperation. Over time, the implications of this would become unacceptable to the autocracy, which shifted more toward the direct mobilization of its subjects, aside from peasants”.

¹⁶² Who were just as likely to oppose as support the current form of the regime, as emphasised in the following subchapter.

¹⁶³ Though there were also numerous other projects for regionalism, up to and including federalism and autonomies, that were not directly connected to the *zemstvo* reforms of the regime. The Ukrainian-Russian historian Mykola Kostomarov, for example, was an advocate of a federated pan-Slavic union as an extension of his *narodnichestvo* and political thought on Ukrainian nationalism as a progressive force. Conservative figures could also support comparable proposals, with Prince Czartoryski ultimately coming to favour a reinvigorated (and federal) Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the means to liberate his own Polish nation. Similar general ideas could also be found in Siberia, with the *Oblastniki* there supporting a wide range of decentralisation policies and ideas that included self-government in some instances and federalism in others, owing to the ‘big tent’ nature of the movement over time. As this subchapter aims to provide context for the regime’s own management of difference, I mention these examples only in passing here.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Earl Porter and Lawrence W. Lerner, *Prince George E. L’vov: The Zemstvo, Civil Society, and Liberalism in Late Imperial Russia* (Lanham, 2017), 2.

parliamentary debates sense, as revolutionary assemblies.¹⁶⁵ While constitutionally weak (the body could not, for example, pass laws itself), its existence and initially broad political and national composition engendered a wide range of discussions that both continued and transformed debates of imperial reconfiguration in the 1900s. This was particularly the case with ideas of imperial community, as Ivan Sablin has identified.¹⁶⁶ There was considerable debate in the first two sittings of the Duma as to how to unify the population of the empire; that is, how to create a sense of shared identity and loyalty to the political regime while at the same time reform this regime to better facilitate this and other related (usually democratising) goals.

Most of these liberal-reformist¹⁶⁷ figures in the Duma *opposed* non-Russian assimilation into Russian culture to this end. As Sablin writes, “Many deputies articulated the need to build an inclusionary and internally diverse Russian people or nation. The dominant strains of the Duma discourse of Russianness were integrative and composite”.¹⁶⁸ Numerous representatives on the integrative side of the argument proposed the formal legal equality of all of the Russian Empire’s subjects as an essential first step in any valid process of imperial community building. This, they reasoned, would foster the eventual development of a more homogenous, civic nationhood for the empire, one that in theory also allowed for the unrestricted development of the numerous and distinct ‘non-Russian’ national, religious, and other identities of these same *citizens*.

Those who supported a composite approach emphasised the importance of difference within the empire, even more than those who favoured an integrative path. These Duma members “sought to accommodate particularistic interests by reshaping the existing hierarchies, for instance through decentralization and autonomous rights”.¹⁶⁹ Rather than seeing legal equality as the *or a* solution, these agents borrowed from imperial differentiation ideas and believed that enshrining certain hierarchical statuses in law was a more effective path to respecting difference while maintaining loyalty to the regime. They consequently stressed, either implicitly or explicitly, the idea of group rights, expressed through, for example, proposals for various national autonomies.¹⁷⁰

Arguably, that there was some intellectual overlap between these two positions (certainly in their mutual patriotism and desires for the maintenance of the current

¹⁶⁵ Diliara Usmanova, ‘Oratorika v Revoliutsionnom Zakonodatel’nom Sobranii: Ritoricheskii Portret Gosudarstvennoi Dumy 1-Go i 2-Go Sozyvov (1906–1907)’, *Ab Imperio*, No. 1 (2014), 127–156.

¹⁶⁶ Sablin, ‘An imperial community’. See also Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (eds.) *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden, 2009).

¹⁶⁷ More on my use of this term in the following subchapter.

¹⁶⁸ Sablin, ‘An imperial community’, 820.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Sablin, ‘An imperial community’, 820–821. Importantly, autonomy was not framed as an ‘alternative’ to independent statehood, but as a goal in its own right.

external borders of the regime) contributed, alongside the variety of the parties and individual members of the Duma, to a genuinely pluralistic assembly. As such, depending on the specific point(s) being discussed, nationalists could find common cause with socialists, religiously constituted parties with localist ones, and so on. A commonality was reconstituting the basis of legitimacy for the empire, rather than opposition to the framework of 'empire' itself. Ultimately, however, the State Duma was weakened further, most severely in the so-called 'Coup of the 3rd of June' in 1907, an event that *de facto* ended the Duma's role as a potentially subversive intellectual development zone. Its sittings continued into the First World War, however, with some members still testing its limits and purposes into the 1910s, but it was no longer a 'revolutionary assembly' in any meaningful sense.¹⁷¹

Figures within the state apparatus of the Russian Empire were acutely aware of these developments, as well as the imperial population's demography, geography, and social diversity, and were pursuing a number of (often contradictory) policies simultaneously in response to what were increasingly perceived as problems for a modern imperial state. There were indeed systemic contradictions as addressed above, but those within the tsarist administration believed that it would be possible to maintain and develop this unitary imperial state with effective policies.¹⁷² Disagreements on what these policies should be, however, were abundant. Central to them was the recurrent debate among Russian imperial rulers on the empire's place in and relationship to Europe. This debate was not novel in the 1900s and 1910s, nor was the 'place in Europe' discussion purely a question for demographers and cartographers. If the origins of the Russian nation, and, later, the Russian Empire, were European, should the empire continue to emulate and move in the direction of 'Europe', however conceived, or adopt an alternate path into the future?

The most commonly discussed alternative to the 'Westernisation' or 'Europeanisation' of the Russian Empire was a Slavophile vision of the regime's future. This vision was united in its reverence for what were seen as the unique traditions and culture of the Russian nation. However, Slavophilism was a broad movement, meaning that Slavophiles did not always agree on what these unique traditions and cultural aspects of the Russian nation that needed protection were. Some, indeed perhaps most, believed in the indefatigability of the Russian Orthodox Church, with an accompanying respect for mysticism over contemporary science.¹⁷³ Others, meanwhile, believed that there was a uniquely Russian democratic tradition that stretched back to the medieval days of old Novgorod. Fundamentally, though, the Slavophile movement was localist and conservative, opposing processes of modernity such as industrialisation in favour of a romanticisation of the rural community, the *mir*. Slavophiles were, for example, opposed to the historic modernisation undertaken by Peter the Great and

¹⁷¹ More on this in the following subchapter.

¹⁷² Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century*, 174–208.

¹⁷³ Laura Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path* (Ithaca, 2009), 1–12.

Catherine the Great on the grounds of it being a mere imitation of Europe, rather than an extension of Russian culture as they saw it.¹⁷⁴ By contrast, to Europeanists, these reforms and reformers were sources of great inspiration and optimism for the future.

The unresolved tension between the Europeanists and the Slavophiles within the ruling elite resulted in a similarly inconsistent set of policies. The most relevant for our subsequent discussions of self-determination was a series of reforms often grouped together as ‘Russification’, which had been intensified from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (albeit in a spatially and ideologically inconsistent manner).¹⁷⁵ While these policies were most fervently supported by Russian (cultural) nationalists, some of whom were pan-Slavists and/or adherents to the concept of the All-Russian nation¹⁷⁶, they were not a set of practices solely or initially designed to appease such groups. Instead, such policies, focused on the centralisation and generation of uniformity of the patchwork system of the regime, were first developed as an instrument for more efficient imperial governance.¹⁷⁷ In particular, the policies’ architects in the tsarist regime tended to tie the broad developmental idea to groups perceived as less culturally developed, such as those of the Caucasus, who were therefore ‘likely’ to soon assimilate with larger cultures (generally imagined as Russian, German, or Turkish).¹⁷⁸ Prioritising the ‘Russification’ of these regions, as well as providing benefits for those non-Russians across the imperial space who actively chose to assimilate, was entirely logical from St. Petersburg’s point of view, serving as both a tool of management of difference and of modernisation.¹⁷⁹

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, tsars Alexander III and Nicolas II had intensified these policies, and tied them more explicitly to Russian nationalist dogma, hence the perception of the reforms not as

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ For an engaging edited compilation of recent scholarship on this, see Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima (eds.), *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation: Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1905–1915* (Budapest, 2021).

¹⁷⁶ This term (usually styled as *obshcherusskii narod* in Russian), is a concept which posits that the Russian nation is composed of three smaller groups or sub-nations: Great Russians – Russians, Little Russians – Ukrainians, and White Russians – Belarusians. The concept was at its core a Russian imperial dogma.

¹⁷⁷ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003), 6.

¹⁷⁸ Karsten Brüggemann, ‘Defending the Empire in the Baltic Provinces: Russian Nationalist Visions in the Aftermath of the First Russian Revolution’ in Staliūnas and Aoshima, *The Tsar, the Empire, and the Nation*, 331.

¹⁷⁹ Consequently, there is no clear consensus within the literature that deals with ‘Russification’ as to whether this term refers to a process by which one changes their identity to ‘Russian’, in whatever sense and for a wide variety of reasons, to policies of administrative reform and centralisation, or to the intentional spread of the Russian language and/or culture to areas in which it did not previously exist/dominate.

‘administrative change’ but ‘Russification’.¹⁸⁰ Some non-Russians subsequently became increasingly opposed to what they understood as Russification because of these associations – a state of affairs that was compounded if the region was not already being ruled directly by Russian imperial figures. For example, such reforms in the Baltic provinces significantly changed some of the general population’s perceptions of the Russian ‘centre’, from largely distant and occasionally positive (as a counterweight to the Baltic Germans) to overburdening at least and oppressive at most.¹⁸¹ However, in the early twentieth century, the situation changed once again. The persistent visible strength of Latvian and Estonian nationalism in the region, particularly during the revolutionary period of 1905–1906, transformed the perception the regime had of the majority populations of the region. As Karsten Brüggemann has identified, from this point onwards, St. Petersburg viewed the Latvians and Estonians as “socialists and potential separatists, and thus no longer as future objects of any kind of “Russification””.¹⁸² Yet even without the continuation of ‘Russification’ in the region, resentment against the regime could now more easily take on a national form, especially following the Russian Empire’s response to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and Duchess Sophie of Hohenberg in June 1914, given the unfortunate coincidence of the locations of many non-Russian populations and regions of the empire.

When war broke out in the summer of 1914, one important response of the Russian Empire was a heightened and intentional campaign of hostility towards ‘enemy aliens’, even those who, legally, were subjects of the Russian Empire, as Eric Lohr has identified.¹⁸³ Over a very short period of time, tsarist authorities designated some entire groups of non-Russians of the Russian Empire as foreign and dangerous, and pursued policies of largely arbitrary arrests, confiscation of property, and deportation.¹⁸⁴ As there were limited legal protections from such actions in the Russian Empire, tsarist authorities were able to persecute this campaign both quickly and effectively. However, in doing so, they provoked predictably strong reactions from radicals *and* alienated moderate figures more likely to otherwise see the empire’s efforts in the war in good faith. Lohr argues that this was especially noteworthy in the case of nationalising the Russian imperial economy (chiefly against its ‘Germanness’), arguing that “the old regime deeply undermined principles protecting private property and the rule of law, and exacerbated social tensions along class and national lines in its wartime attempt

¹⁸⁰ Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 5–7.

¹⁸¹ Raun, ‘Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Estonian nationalism’, 135. Especially considering that the intensification of these policies was occurring after the rise of mass nationalism in the region.

¹⁸² Brüggemann, ‘Defending the Empire in the Baltic Provinces’, 331.

¹⁸³ Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

to forge a more national Russian economy”.¹⁸⁵ The First World War therefore both radicalised the tsarist regime and created new critics of the latter at the same time.

A related notion was the slogan ‘Russia for the Russians’ (*Rossiia dlia russkikh*).¹⁸⁶ There is some dispute as to the exact origins of the phrase, but it is clear that senior figures within the tsarist regime, and its most steadfast supporters in society as a whole, used it as a political shorthand on several occasions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.¹⁸⁷ These ranged from V. A. Gringmut, a member and theorist of the ultra-conservative monarchist group the Black Hundreds, to Russian Imperial Army officers, such as General M. D. Skobelev, and even Tsar Alexander III.¹⁸⁸ The choice to use this specific linguistic form of ‘Russian’ suggested, indeed was intended, to mean the ethno-linguistic Russian nation, excluding those who by subjecthood or identity were also ‘Russian’. While some who used the phrase intended its meaning to be support for special privileges for the Russian nation within the Russian Empire (Tsar Alexander III was one such proponent of this reading), most assumed it to be an assertion of Russian ethno-linguistic superiority over non-Russian ‘others’, with all the accompanying implications for such groups.¹⁸⁹ The legacy of ‘Russia for the Russians’, the effects of ‘Russification’ (real or perceived), and the nationalisation campaigns of the First World War resulted in a far more radical and complex intellectual space for competing visions of self-determination, however defined, in subsequent years.

Unlike with the reforms associated with ‘Russification’ and the nationalisation campaigns, however, the Russian imperial state was not a firm supporter of the ‘Russia for the Russians’ doctrine, even if individual tsars (most obviously Alexander III but also Nicolas II to far lesser extent) engaged with the idea. In the prewar years S. U. Witte had in fact explicitly advised Tsar Nicolas II away from the ‘Russia for the Russians’ idiom when serving as the Russian Empire’s first Prime Minister, seeing it as an unnecessary risk with few benefits (as he reasoned ethno-linguistic Russian nationalists would largely support the regime anyway). Furthermore, the Russian Empire was the *Rossiiskaia imperiia* – the alternative adjective form of Russian that was ethno-linguistically inclusive, not

¹⁸⁵ Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 55. Certainly, Lohr is correct to describe concepts such as private property and the rule of law as *principles* in the Russian Empire, rather than established rights, either by law or by custom.

¹⁸⁶ Here the word Russian is being translated from *russkii* – the ethnically rooted form of “Russian” in the Russian language. In the ‘Russia for the Russians’ slogan, it is clear that this was intentionally used in opposition to the broader *rossiiskii*. More on this below.

¹⁸⁷ Don C. Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁸⁹ Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856* (Lanham, 2000), 127.

exclusive.¹⁹⁰ Witte would later write in detail about this in his memoirs (1912 [first published 1921]).¹⁹¹ It is worth quoting some of his reflections in full, as they are representative of the problems, factions, and tensions within the ruling elite of the Russian Empire:

The fundamental error of our decades-long policy [of managing population differences within the empire] is that we still have not realised that since the time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, there has been no Russia, but rather the Russian Empire. When approximately 35% of the population consists of non-Russians, and Russians are divided into Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians, it is impossible to conduct policy in the 19th and 20th centuries ignoring this historical fact of fundamental importance, ignoring the national characteristics of other nationalities that became part of the Russian Empire – their religion, their language, and so on...The motto of such an Empire cannot be “I will convert everyone into true Russians”. This ideal cannot create a common ideal for all subjects of the Russian Emperor; it cannot unite the entire population or create a single political soul. Perhaps it would be better for us Russians if there were a Russia, and we were only Russians, rather than sons of a Tsar of the Russian Empire, common to all subjects. In that case, abandon the outlying regions, which cannot and will not accept such a state ideal. But our Tsars did not desire this, and the Tsar today is far from such an idea.¹⁹²

These opposing views – between the Europeanists and the Slavophiles, the reformists and the conservatives, the inclusive and the exclusive nationalists – were ever-present even as the Russian Empire modernised. Fundamentally, these were big differences – an industrialised, European, centralised, bureaucratic state did live in fundamental opposition to a more agricultural, decentralised, ‘spiritually-aligned’ Slavophile Rus centred around the *mir* locale. As there was conceptual and political disagreement within the ruling elite, as well as within wider society, the broad inconsistency of the policies of the Russian Empire in both theory and practice is understandable. At the same time, the general reaction of otherwise ‘loyal’ non-Russian subjects of the regime to policies seen as Russification, given their own respective histories, is also explicable.

Witte’s explicit identification of the difference between Russia and the Russian Empire was noteworthy, and it is quoted above specifically because it was *not*

¹⁹⁰ Although this could be literally translated as both ‘Russian Empire’ and ‘Russia’s Empire’, with both terms but especially the latter implying ownership at the very least and some kind of dominance or special status at most.

¹⁹¹ Interestingly via English translation in the first instance. They were published in Russian soon after, also in 1921.

¹⁹² S. U. Witte, *Vospominaniia: Tsarstvovanie Nikolaia II, Tom II* (Berlin, 1922), 239. The contemporaneous English translation of Witte’s memoirs has some interesting semantic differences with the Russian language text; “single political soul” is rendered as “one body politic”, for example. See S. U. Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (Translated and edited by Abraham Yarmolinsky, New York, 1921), 265. In general content, however, they align closely.

the norm.¹⁹³ To those within the ruling elite of the Russian Empire, such self-awareness and self-reflection was rare, and the idea of ‘empire’ as a concept was something close to a value neutral category, and at times a positive one.¹⁹⁴ It should be remembered that in 1914 the word ‘empire’ (*imperii*) did not generally hold the same normatively negative connotations as it does today in the post-decolonisation world.¹⁹⁵ The question for figures within the tsarist system was ‘what *kind* of empire are we and what *kind* of empire *should* we be?’¹⁹⁶ With the exception of Witte, there was no substantial talk of disintegration, secession, or separation from figures within the autocracy or regime.¹⁹⁷ Through the same logic, the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century, even despite its policies of ‘Russification’, was opposed to the idea of ‘Russia for the Russians’. If, as the ruling elite believed, that the Russian state was “one and indivisible” as in the Constitution of 1906, the question was one of administrative modernisation and improving the uniformity and governance of its territory, rather than altering its fundamental constitutional nature.¹⁹⁸ The clearest dividing line between these agents and the liberal-reformist agents discussed in the following subchapter was precisely their willingness to discuss deeper constitutional issues. Whether, in essence, the events of 1905–1906 were settled or unresolved.

This subchapter provided an overview of the Russian Empire in the 1900s and 1910s, emphasising its social diversity and its governmental non-uniformity. It established the spatial and temporal context for the remainder of the dissertation, including important aspects of intellectual transfer, such as local literacy rates. Policies enacted by political agents within the tsarist regime, such as administrative reforms sometimes seen as ‘Russification’, the nationalisation campaigns, and the evolution of the *zemstvo* organs of local self-government

¹⁹³ Although Witte’s firm belief in the idea of the All-Russian nation was certainly representative of those within the ruling elite of the Russian Empire.

¹⁹⁴ To say nothing of imperialism as a concept, which will be addressed below.

¹⁹⁵ For more on this, see Richard Wortman, ‘The Russian Empire and Russian Monarchy: The Problem of Russian Nationalism’ in *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule* (Boston, 2013), 223. Wortman writes “First, empire signified dominion or supreme power unencumbered by other authority. Second, it implied imperial expansion, extensive conquests, encompassing non-Russian lands. Third, it created equivalents to other empires, the Roman, and the Byzantine, the latter as the Christian empire, the defender of Orthodoxy. These meanings were conflated and served to reinforce each other”.

¹⁹⁶ Here, other concepts, such as *natsiia*, *narod*, and *narodnost*, also played a role in contributing to the ambiguity of what exactly the empire was. See Alexey Miller, ‘Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost’ in *Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (2008), 379–390.

¹⁹⁷ At the same time, there was a longer history of figures within the regime advocating for various schemes of administrative and regional autonomy – M. M. Speranskii serves as a notable example from the early 19th century, whose ideas had clear (if delayed) results in the *zemstvo* institutions and the creation of the State Council.

¹⁹⁸ *Svod osnovnykh gosudarstvennykh zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* [Code of Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire] (1906), Article 1. Available here.

were discussed. Alongside this, the rationale and worldview of these agents was also touched upon, highlighting that regardless of the significant differences between the Europeanisers and the Slavophiles, neither consistently had the perspective of non-Russian groups within the empire as their focal point. Generally speaking, the Russian Empire did not have a coherent approach to its own social diversity, and did not settle on a state ideology that sought to legitimise this beyond the right of conquest and a self-justifying historicism.

1.2 Russian Liberals, Liberalism, and the Imperial Laboratory

Several political agents in the Russian Empire, whether within or outside the formal structures of imperial power, self-identified as liberal. Generally speaking, we can place these self-professed Russian liberals at the time of the turn of the century and into the 1900s and the revolutionary period into three relatively distinct groups.¹⁹⁹ The first group can safely be called the ‘constitutional liberals’, whose variety of liberalism was generally legally positivist. This group supported grand, central government-based, legalistic reform of the current constitutional settlement, crucially including equal citizenship, equal suffrage for representative institutions, and the rule of law. The second broad group can be called the ‘Slavophile liberals’, whose liberalism was most concerned with the strength of local government institutions (the *zemstvo* most consistently) and the stressing of non-interference in these organs and towards individuals in general, as opposed to wide-scale state reconfiguration. Indeed, Slavophile liberals generally *supported* the principle of an autocratic tsar.²⁰⁰ Lastly there were what we might call the ‘gentry’ or ‘local elite liberals’, who in policy terms were closest to the Slavophiles, given their equally firm support for local self-government, but who in overall outlook also differed fundamentally from them because of their generally positive view of Europe, ‘European values’, and Europeanisation.²⁰¹ In this subchapter, I focus on the liberals of this first ‘constitutionalist’ group, as they were the agents most consistently engaged in debates about the more fundamental nature of the

¹⁹⁹ For a recent work reaffirming the categorisation presented here, see Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 59–60.

²⁰⁰ Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 59. Whether this means that they are ineligible for classification as liberal in the Russian Empire of the early twentieth century is a question for another time.

²⁰¹ Robinson describes the individuals of this group as moderate (in relation to these other two groups), but it is not clear to me that they really were a central pole between two more ‘extreme’ forms of Russian liberalism. Many of these agents did not see themselves as different parts of a coherent whole and saw fundamental incompatibility between each other – see the views of Miliukov and Maklakov on the Slavophile liberals below. Certainly, these individuals expressed gradualist views, but I hesitate to call them ‘moderate’ in relation to these other groups simply because of this.

Russian imperial state and the place of concepts such as self-determination within this polity.

Although I will also occasionally use the term liberal to describe these agents in the below discussion, in line with general scholarly trends, this is more the result of their self-identification than external categorisation. Generally, I prefer the lesser used (but, in my view, more precise) term reformist rather than liberal to describe these individuals, but compromise by referring to 'liberal-reformists' in this dissertation to avoid further death spirals of conceptual discussion. Of course, not all reformists were liberal in the context of the Russian Empire of the early twentieth century²⁰², but if we understand 'liberal-reformist' here to mean an agent or group in favour of reform of the state and/or societal structure of the Russian imperial state away from its dynastic and aristocratic privileges and towards something approximating the rule of law, the meaning is still clearer than attempting to define Russian liberalism during this time. As Susanna Rabow-Edling and others have identified, there was considerable overlap between liberal and conservative self-identification among these agents, as well as the usual ideological distinctions that can be made between economic and civic/social liberalism, before one even addresses the dynamics of Russian liberalism during this time as addressed by Robinson, Gerasimov, and others.²⁰³ As with the agents more overtly friendly towards the Russian Empire's status quo referred to in the previous subchapter, many of these liberal-reformist agents believed fundamentally in a concept of 'Russia' that, almost organically, included other less numerous non-Russian groups. At the same time, and unlike those discussed above, these agents had fundamental constitutional questions for the rulers of the Russian Empire on these and other issues, especially following the revolutionary events of 1905–1906.

As Holly Case has well demonstrated, this was *The Age of Questions* – the Jewish Question, the Polish Question, the Eastern Question, the Woman Question, the Kansas Question, the Irish Question, and, indeed, the National Question, among many others, dominated the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰⁴ Framing these issues as questions implied on some level that they were both problems *and* problems that had specific, identifiable resolutions. Writers who engaged with issues through these interrogative frames were often at the intellectual crossroads between politics, literature, science, and economics.²⁰⁵ Consequently, their works frequently assumed the forms – the genres – of newspaper editorials, long form political polemics (whether as essays or whole books) and, increasingly, academic science-style articles. As the next subchapter will

²⁰² Given that some figures within the government of the Russian Empire could be described as reformist, but not liberal – P. A. Stolypin, for example.

²⁰³ Rabow-Edling, *Liberalism in Pre-revolutionary Russia*; Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*; Ilya V. Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, 189–215; Porter Lerner, *Prince George E. L'vov*.

²⁰⁴ Holly Case, *The Age of Questions*.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

demonstrate, this was especially evident in revolutionary Marxist political interventions, as such agents typically subscribed to the Marxist theory of history, dialectical materialism, and so on, and therefore believed that there *were* correct, final solutions to these questions to be affirmed in such articles and polemics.

This at times extended to Russian liberal-reformist figures, but most often from the perspective of civic questions about what the Russian state *should* be, in theory and in practice, as opposed to a more abstract discussion of ‘Politics’ with a capital P. It is noteworthy, for example, that, especially after Tsar Nicolas II’s re-embracing of his autocratic sensibilities from 1906/1907 onwards, liberal-reformist agents of the Russian Empire were as concerned with instilling aspects of basic universal citizenship – equal treatment under the law, Jewish emancipation, and so on, as pursuing more fundamental constitutional issues, such as the establishment of a permanent independent legislature with accompanying checks and balances.²⁰⁶ In some ways, these ‘smaller’ issues were microcosms of their overall desires, but expressed practically, since many liberal-reformists had previous life experience in *zemstvo* organisations and/or as legal professionals. Many liberal-reformists walked outside of the formal corridors of tsarist power but still possessed official or semi-official positions in (local) community organisations and institutions that allowed them, to varying degrees, to execute small-scale reforms and reconfigurations more ‘quietly’ than the overt political activism of the revolutionary period of some of their pasts or of their more radical contemporaries, such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) or the Bolsheviks.

One of the most important vehicles for Russian reformism during this time was the Party of People’s Freedom, better known as the Constitutional Democratic Party. Founded in 1905 shortly before the publication of Tsar Nicolas II’s October Manifesto, the party was initially known for its radical liberalism during the revolutionary events of 1905–1906 (exemplified by their steadfast support for the abolition of tsarist autocracy until 1907), before moving towards a more general form of republicanism, broadly conceived, in the subsequent years.²⁰⁷ This liberal republicanism included support for an eight-hour working day, universal suffrage²⁰⁸, Jewish emancipation, and the abolition of all legal restrictions on the empire’s non-Russian groups. Many ‘Kadets’ – the founders, members, and supporters of the party were educated, politically conscious representatives of professional sectors of the economy: lawyers, teachers, engineers, and university professors, for example.²⁰⁹ The party was also

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Stephen F. Williams’ biography of V. A. Maklakov, *The Reformer: How One Liberal Fought to Preempt the Russian Revolution* (New York City, 2017).

²⁰⁷ Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 73; Anthony Kröner, ‘The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov on the chances for Russian liberalism’, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1994), 239–271.

²⁰⁸ That is, regardless of gender as well as social class, degree of property ownership, etc. At the same time, women were underrepresented in the party, especially when compared to parties to the left of the Kadets.

²⁰⁹ Kröner, ‘The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov’, 240.

popular among certain segments of some minority groups, such as the Russian Empire's Jews and the Volga Germans.²¹⁰ Many of the party's representatives in the State Duma of the Russian Empire were reform-minded *zemstvo* veterans who believed that the events that had led to the establishment of the Kadets were the beginning of the Russian Empire's journey towards the rule of law, not a settled matter.

The founder of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia, and one of the most prominent Kadets before and after Russia's entry into the war was P. N. Miliukov. Miliukov's background was somewhat typical of many liberal-reformists (and some revolutionaries) of the time – born into an upper-class family, Miliukov was exposed from a young age to cultural and political pursuits that were alien to the overwhelming majority of the Russian Empire's population: the advanced study of history, other languages, and law. Like many of his contemporaries, Miliukov's university studies helped form and radicalise his views simultaneously, and he became convinced – enough to participate in student demonstrations – that he needed to use his academic education and political skills to help establish a system of constitutionalism in Russia. Miliukov's constitutionalism was both inspired and informed by his profoundly Europeanist outlook; though he did not deny his own background by any means, he sought solace in the theoretical works of Montesquieu as well as the practical work of the *zemstvo* organisations.²¹¹ Partly because of this, Miliukov was adamant that the *Code of Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire* edict, more commonly referred to as the Constitution of 1906, was not a genuine constitution, and that no compromising accommodation should be made with what he perceived as the *ancien régime*, short of an existential threat to the state.²¹²

Miliukov was also cognisant of the demographic issues facing the Russian Empire, and aware of their politicisation. In particular, he expressed a sensitivity towards the linguistic (and cultural) aspirations of large non-Russian speaking populations within the imperial state. As discussed above in more general terms, many examples of Miliukov's (and others') expressions of these ideas come from the State Duma of the Russian Empire.²¹³ For example, in 1909, in response to several Duma members' professed support for the notion of 'Russia for the Russians', Miliukov unambiguously rebutted the deputies' views, arguing that to reject, for example, the validity of Jews and Muslims of the Russian Empire who identified as Russian was ineffective in the pursuit of a universal imperial

²¹⁰ Of which they logically drew most support from those of the aforementioned categories of employment – lawyers, teachers, and so on, who happened to be Jewish, Volga German, etc., as well as a result of their emancipation policies.

²¹¹ Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 76–77.

²¹² Kröner, 'The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov', 242–246.

²¹³ Sablin, 'An imperial community'; Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 73–77.

citizenship, as well as simply vindictive on a personal level.²¹⁴ Though Miliukov did not use the term in this instance, it could well be argued that his critique was based on the concept of individual, as much as national self-determination.²¹⁵ Taking the slogan to what he saw as its logical conclusion, he argued: “Going further, following your policy, you will have to say: “Russia is only for the Great Russians!”. No, gentlemen! This slogan is not even a slogan of Russification, it is a slogan of separation”.²¹⁶ Indeed, Miliukov was a supporter of a united, unitary Russian state, and was unwavering in this regard.²¹⁷ At the beginning of his critical remarks on the ‘Russia for the Russians’ concept, Miliukov had in fact declared:

... We [the Kadets] stand ardently for the unity of the state. We believe that the state is most strong when the national consciousness becomes united, when the population of the state is inspired by one goal, one ideal.²¹⁸

Though approaching the Russian Empire from a considerably different political position than those within Tsar Nicolas II’s inner circle, Miliukov also believed fundamentally that the polity should remain inclusive of these primarily non-Russian regions (and even expand them, as will be seen). Miliukov never provided a particularly rationalised explanation for this position. While a cyclical argument, perhaps there does not need to have been one – if Miliukov opposed secession in all forms, and believed that he stood on the side of oppressed peoples against the ‘Russia for the Russians’ brigade, as well as against militant revolutionaries, it was natural that his more inclusive view of ‘Russia’ explicitly included non-Russians within a reformed imperial framework.²¹⁹ Perhaps most tellingly, the Kadets’ party programme in 1917 included this logic with a reference to self-determination, in combination with a linguistic example:

²¹⁴ This debate was initially focused on the use of Ukrainian in the court system. See Serhii Plokhyy *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, 2005), 462–463.

²¹⁵ As well as the individualism of liberalism in a more general sense, of course.

²¹⁶ Quote from Miliukov during a sitting of the State Duma of the Russian Empire, 4th of December [17th of December] 1909. Transcript available here. A rare audio recording of part of this speech is also available here. Also partly quoted in Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia*, 462–463.

²¹⁷ Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, 76.

²¹⁸ Quote from Miliukov in the State Duma, 4th of December [17th of December] 1909.

²¹⁹ This logic would evolve during the revolutionary period and after the unilateral secessions of many regions, as will be seen, into a more implicitly Russo-centric viewpoint that so long as the ‘centre’ could reform, these regions would want to reunite with Russia. See Michał Patryk Sadłowski, ‘The Baltic States in the Political and Legal Thought of Pavel N. Miliukov During the Civil War in Russia of 1917–1920’, *Latvijas Universitātes Žurnāls Vēsture*, Vol. 18 (2024), 33–51.

The basic law [*osnovnoi zakon*; constitution] of the Russian Empire must guarantee all the peoples of the Empire, as well as full civil and political equality, the right of free cultural self-determination, such as complete freedom of the use of different languages and dialects.²²⁰

Another prominent ideologue of the Kadets was the lawyer and politician²²¹ V. A. Maklakov. Like Miliukov, Maklakov was a prolific writer and speaker, known both for his oratory during the sittings of the State Duma as well as his profound knowledge of law and legal history, especially European legal philosophy.²²² Above all, Maklakov was a staunch advocate of a Russian *Rechtsstaat* – a constitutional state with the rule of law. In his previous work, Maklakov had established a reputation as a lawyer willing and able to defend persecuted groups, most famously in the ‘Beilis Affair’ of 1913, where Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jew of the Russian Empire, was falsely accused of the ritual murder of a thirteen-year-old child in Kyiv. Maklakov and other respected legal professionals came to Beilis’ defence, leading to his eventual acquittal and causing scandal among reform-minded agents in the Russian Empire and beyond, as well as cementing Maklakov’s reputation as an individual willing to risk his professional career to pursue abstract concepts of civic equality.²²³

Maklakov, like Miliukov, was as much an activist as a theorist; a practitioner as well as a writer. Yet unlike Miliukov, Maklakov was a consistent proponent of evolutionary, rather than revolutionary change (though Miliukov was not, of course, a strong advocate of revolution by nature). Indeed, the two Kadets consistently came to blows throughout their lifetimes despite their broad ideological overlap on many issues.²²⁴ Central to their greatest disagreement was the issue of participation in the government of the tsarist regime. As they entered exile following the Russian Civil War, the two developed this debate into one of ‘could the Bolshevik seizure of power had been avoided if X action was taken or not

²²⁰ Available in the text *Programmy glavneishikh russkikh partii* (Moscow, 1917), 40. Available online via the Russian State Library here. Also quoted in Shamil’ Shamkhalov, ‘Sushchnostnye kharakteristiki novogo liberalizma kak ideino-politicheskoi platformy kadetov’, *Vlast*, Vol. 4 (2011), 60–61. This was very Miliukov in style and formulation, and represented a significant victory over P. B. Struve, another founding member of the Constitutional Democratic Party. Struve took a more overtly Russian nationalist-assimilationist stance to the status of non-Russians within the Russian Empire, albeit from the perspective of civic equality. Much of the Kadets’ party programme in 1917 was a reiteration of their previous (though more radical) programme developed during the time of the party’s creation in 1905–1906. Both were heavily influenced by Miliukov.

²²¹ From the period of the Second Duma onwards Maklakov possessed a more ‘official’ political role as a politician in one sense, but he had already been elected to the Kadets’ Central Committee from its inception.

²²² Anthony, Kröner, *Vasilii Maklakov: A Russian Liberal Between Autocracy and Revolution 1869–1957* (Soesterberg, 2021); Williams, *The Reformer*.

²²³ The trial and the media frenzy around it, including from those who conveyed deeply anti-Semitic prejudices, also drew international attention to Maklakov as an individual.

²²⁴ Kröner, ‘The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov’.

taken earlier?', but at the time their disagreements were naturally more focused on their desires for establishing the rule of law in the Russian Empire. Maklakov favoured cooperation with the regime where possible, even while harshly critiquing it and opposing what he saw as its Slavophile undercurrents.²²⁵ As Anthony Kröner states succinctly, Maklakov's principal aim was the "realisation of reforms within the framework of the state".²²⁶ Maklakov made no apology for standing up for the principles both of state power and the rights of the individual simultaneously, arguing that for the Kadets to be taken seriously as a political party, the group needed to demonstrate they had the capacity and the willingness to participate in practical governance, rather than simply remain derisive on the sidelines.²²⁷ In this respect, Maklakov was informed by his legal career, having already faced numerous bureaucratic and political issues within the judicial system, but believed that actively choosing not to participate in altering the system when one had the chance gave more agency, more power, to those opposed to reform.²²⁸ Maklakov believed that the Kadets had to take the risk of unpopularity if they believed in statist, top-down reform over full autocracy or mob rule, and took a great deal of personal responsibility, and suffered a number of inter-collegiate attacks in the Duma, for this viewpoint.²²⁹

By contrast, Miliukov saw little benefit in directly contributing to the tsarist administration, believing that in participating in the government of a regime they had fundamental disagreements with the wider political results would never favour the Kadets. In particular, Miliukov argued that regardless of the significant differences between the Constitutional Democratic Party and the government, to the less politically literate even the most liberal-reformist politician of the Kadets would be tainted by association with the tsarist government. Though self-determination was terminologically absent from this discussion, it was conceptually representative of how senior Kadets viewed their struggle in and with the Russian imperial state – how could the Kadets themselves self-determine? To read their disagreements cynically, it could be argued that they squandered the political capital and opportunities they had to be more 'radical' (in the liberal sense) in the 1900s and 1910s in ways that would have empowered both themselves and non-Russian groups over time. To be more generous, both Miliukov and Maklakov's viewpoints suggest the difficulties of empowering *themselves* as

²²⁵ Maklakov had a particular talent for speeches and polemics that were both forceful and nuanced, where he could attack the government relentlessly over, for example, the death penalty, while also declaring respect for that same state power that was continuing what he considered unjust executions. For details of his opposition to the Slavophile movement – see Kröner, 'The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov', 247.

²²⁶ Kröner, 'The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov', 246.

²²⁷ Maklakov also wished to support measures that would provide or suggest 'legal continuity' between the tsarist regime and whatever was to come next. This was an example of his anti-revolutionary 'conservative liberalism'.

²²⁸ Kröner, 'The debate between Miliukov and Maklakov', 246–251.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

political agents whilst navigating a somewhat accidental middle ground between the regime and its more consistently revolutionary opponents. Had they been more explicit with regard to the status of non-Russians within the empire and supported, for example, institutionalised forms of decentralised governance, or added the adjective ‘national’ to their (infrequent) usage of the term self-determination, it is likely that they would have alarmed those within the government who they could otherwise work with on a *modus vivendi* level, as well as offend the more left wing political parties and groups by appearing to co-opt their distinct way of referring to national liberation within and beyond the Russian Empire.

As will be seen, both Maklakov and Miliukov would go on to make more consistent explicit reference to (national) self-determination and the self-determination of peoples. However, they did so most consistently during or after the February (March) Revolution (1917), the conclusion of the First World War (1918), and the onset of the Russian Civil War proper (1918). This is important because, as addressed subsequently, this is when the term was already enjoying wider usage in relation to state reconfiguration. During these earlier years, the term occasionally appears in Kadet and liberal-reformist articles (and in relation to the situation of non-Russian national groups in the empire), but was not the popular slogan for discussing the issue as it was for socialist and revolutionary groups. When it did appear, it most often took the Miliukovian form of cultural, rather than national self-determination, and was most consistently expressed through support for linguistic rights.

At the same time, it is clear that their views, especially Maklakov’s on the necessity of compromise, were formulations of the concept of self-determination if not uses of the exact term. Maklakov was evidently a believer in a *statist* form of self-determination. Maklakov wished for this state order to be liberal and democratic, but he wished first for the instrumentation of state order in the form of a *Rechtsstaat*. Maklakov’s understanding of self-determination in the years before 1917 was therefore conceptually closer to the principles of self-government and non-interference in other states’ affairs (and vice versa) than a shorthand for his views on equal citizenship and non-discrimination under the law.²³⁰ It concerned, in other words, governance and political practice, rather than group rights in a more abstract sense.

Regardless, more broadly, there were clearly aspects of general Russian liberal discourse that were as conservative as they were liberal, and some more conservative than liberal. As with those within the tsarist elite, however, these figures generally had no conception of a Russia that did not include these non-Russian groups. Given this and their theories of political reform, it is understandable that any solutions to national oppression (real or perceived) were Russo-centric, as this was the frame of their political existence. Perhaps with reform the Russian Empire might, in time, become a constitutional monarchy, or even a formal

²³⁰ As will be seen in a later chapter, this was similar to how many within the British Empire understood the term during and after the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference.

republic. Both outcomes, however, were already ambitious, and in any case, for the Kadets, would have to come from the top down before any discussions of non-central agency. For entirely conceivable reasons, in their own minds, the Russian Empire – Russia, as it was most often called, was a polity that would continue into the future. Arguably, they need not have considered any alternatives – aside from their inability to see into the future, there was, frankly, no rational reason to expect widespread demands for secession before the summer of 1914. If democratic imperial states like Britain, France, and even the United States possessed within their populations numerous groups that did not wholly belong to the ‘national core’ as perceived by contemporaries, yet remained liberal-democratic in outlook domestically, why would the Russian Empire, in the process of democratisation, be any different? While recognising the severity of their own times, considering both the Russian Empire’s participation in the war as well as the future direction of the imperial state, they did not, of course, know or anticipate that they were acting in the final years of the empire.

What then was the precise effect of the war on these liberal-reformist agents, and specifically their views on self-determination? In 1914, when news first broke of the Tsar’s mobilisation order, Imperial Germany’s declarations of war against both the Russian Empire and the French Republic, and the subsequent road to wider conflict, there was, a short-lived sense of positivity towards the Russian imperial state from much of its population. This well-documented ‘rally ‘round the flag effect’ was not lasting, but did affect the trajectory of the liberal-reformists, Kadet and other, in important ways. Indeed, Miliukov and his party were initially strong supporters of the Russian Empire’s participation in the conflict, both because they saw great potential in the endeavour as a catalyst for political reform, and simply as general patriots loyal to their country, if not unconditionally to their regime.

The liberal-reformists’ support for the Russian Empire’s war effort, however, was not enduring. In the summer of 1915, on the instigation and organisation of Miliukov and others, the Progressive Bloc was formed. This was a grouping that represented just over fifty-five percent of the deputies of the State Duma (236 of its 442 seats), and was comprised of Constitutional Democratic Party, Octobrist Party²³¹, and Progressive Party members, as well as several individual representatives aligned with its views and agenda. Chiefly, the Progressive Bloc’s main aim was to argue for, and hopefully in due course provide, a government that enjoyed the confidence of its population, given the numerous military difficulties the Russian Imperial Army was experiencing, alongside the damaging rumours of the influence of the mystic G. E. Rasputin over the Romanov household.²³² Miliukov and many of his Duma colleagues had lost patience, if not in the regime’s participation in the war then its efficacy in its persecution. The Progressive Bloc

²³¹ Primarily those on the ‘left’ wing of the party; not all Octobrists joined the Progressive Bloc.

²³² Maklakov would later have a role to play in the assassination of Rasputin, the extent of which is still debated, if rather cyclically.

was therefore an attempt to claim both agency and legitimacy against a tsarist authority that possessed agency, but whose legitimacy was under increasing scrutiny.

Around the same time, many of these liberal-reformist agents contributed to *What Russia Expects from the War*, an intriguing and inviting window into their thought, including on the Russian Empire's nationalities policies and the notion of self-determination, during the mobilising war years.²³³ *What Russia Expects* was a collection of various essays from a broad group of agents including Kadets, Octobrists, feminist suffragists, economists, and cooperative socialists.²³⁴ The first edition from March 1915 had sold out, and the second more expansive edition became hotly anticipated in politicised literary circles in the following months. Ilya V. Gerasimov, a historian who has written much on the text and its authors, describes this second edition as "the most important public statement of Russian progressives on the war", arguing that it "marked the moment when Russian intellectuals claimed prominent positions for themselves in society's war effort".²³⁵ Considering *What Russia Expects* through its genre reveals its international influences – the initiative for the text came from R. E. Strel'tsov, a liberal-reformist inspired for the collection by a British publication entitled *Why We Are at War: Great Britain's Case*, released in the autumn of 1914. While the British text was penned by historians associated with the University of Oxford, the compilation organised by Strel'tsov featured a far more diverse set of contributors (geographically, politically, and otherwise). Given the differences between the constitutional makeup of the United Kingdom and the Russian Empire, *What Russia Expects* is also arguably more noteworthy as a 'why we fight' document, because it seemed to suggest not that the war necessarily aligned with the empire's values (as was loosely argued in the British text), but that a more just domestic political system within the Russian Empire was an expected outcome of it. In short, that any support for the Russian Empire's participation in the conflict should be transactional to a large degree, in exchange for recognition of the necessity of a more just domestic political settlement. One notable illustration of this perspective came from the leader of the Kadets.

Miliukov was one of the most well-known contributors to *What Russia Expects*, penning a piece called 'The Territorial Gains of Russia', in which he expressed his desires for territorial acquisitions as a result of the Russian Empire's participation in the war.²³⁶ One key aspiration Miliukov possessed – and one that he in fact shared with a great number of members of the tsarist administration – was control of Constantinople (Istanbul) and specifically authority over the

²³³ R. E. Strel'tsov (ed.), *Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny: Sbornik statei* (Petrograd [St. Petersburg], 1915); Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War'.

²³⁴ There was also minor overlap between these categories, as one might expect.

²³⁵ Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 189.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192–193.

accompanying Turkish Straits.²³⁷ Elsewhere, Miliukov supported an expanded Armenia under Petrogradian protection and a reunited Poland along what he called its “ethnographic border”, again under the ultimate authority of the Russian Empire.²³⁸ With the overtly imperialistic exception of the Straits aside, Miliukov’s logic for imperial expansion was, in his own understanding, scientific. The Kadet leader had been taken by contemporary trends in intellectual circles, and wanted to base the Russian Empire’s foreign policy and territorial expansionism on ethnolinguistic and national grounds, rather than, for example, older dynastic or historic justifications for political rule.²³⁹ Annexation was therefore a tool, not an abstract bad – and if embraced with the wisdom of modern science, it could even be emancipatory. Why, in the twentieth century should Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians live apart from one other? The Russian Empire, Miliukov believed, was their natural home. Given some of Miliukov’s earlier comments in the State Duma, this ‘liberal imperialism’ was understandable, and in substance its logical extension. Miliukov did not believe that violating state borders to acquire territory in these cases amounted to a crime – the real crime was German militarism, which he believed the Russian Empire was in the process of saving these nations from.²⁴⁰ The war had demonstrated this – Petrograd was on the side of Britain and France, who had respectively given the world ‘the mother of parliaments’ and the modern concept of equal citizenship, not the Central Powers.

Maksym Slavynskyi²⁴¹, a Ukrainian journalist and Kadet whose liberalism had also been established through his writings as an increasingly prominent public

²³⁷ P. N. Miliukov, ‘Territorial’nye priobreteniiia Rossii’ in *Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny*, 53–66.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, 56.

²³⁹ Miliukov, ‘Territorial’nye priobreteniiia Rossii’, 56. This was a form of pan-Slavism in the relevant cases but had obvious exceptions even considering the just-mentioned case of Armenia.

²⁴⁰ Therefore, the postwar reconfigured Russian Empire Miliukov had in mind was a non-uniform polity that allowed some degree of local self-government, linguistic rights for those who spoke relatively commonly spoken languages other than Russian within the empire (Ukrainian, Belarusian, Georgian, etc.), and cultural freedom, sometimes explained with confessional examples.

²⁴¹ A quick note on Ukrainian names and transliteration. Wherever necessary, I use the standard Ukrainian National System of Romanisation (UNS) for Ukrainian-English transliteration. Ensuring in-text consistency becomes more complicated with naming conventions, however, and my compromise is as follows. If an individual *clearly* identified as Ukrainian, understood as ‘positively acknowledging and subscribing to Ukrainian national identity’ (of whatever particular flavour), then I transliterate their name according to UNS standards. Hence, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi and never M. S. Grushevskii. If they did not, even if we may understand them today as being ‘Ukrainian’, I generally reflect their own styling of names as in their published works. I accept that there are issues with this, given the dominance of the Russian language in Ukrainian urban spaces during this time, as well as there being no way to reflect in a single name that an individual may have had multiple overlapping national identities and/or ones that changed over time, but this seems a reasonable compromise that reflects the contested nature of nationhood and national identity during this time period. I do, however, accept its limitations.

intellectual, was another author featured in the compilation. Slavynskyi's article was entitled 'The War and the National Question', and also sought to tie the conflict to both the status of non-Russian groups within the Russian Empire and the latter's constitutional makeup.²⁴² In particular, as Gerasimov argues, Slavynskyi criticised what he saw as regressive "Russian Germanness" within the empire, by which he meant those who were (Russian) nationalists in favour of discriminatory policies towards non-Russian groups, some of which were addressed in the previous subchapter.²⁴³ The empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary were nationalising states, it was argued, in theoretical contrast to a state of nationalities united by a Russian imperial political nation.²⁴⁴ To this end, Slavynskyi made an explicit comparison between the Russian and British empires, using the interesting construction of a "nation in creation" (*tvorimaia natsiia*) to do so:

Russia, just as England, is a nation in creation.... We have an Ireland of our own—Poland... We have our own Russian... internal national questions, just as the English have their own,... like the Scottish and Welsh... Both Russia and England have produced the powerful... intelligentsia, democratic in its core... [Ideals] elaborated by the intelligentsia of the principal nationality in the state are becoming available to the intelligentsias of the other nationalities of the empire.²⁴⁵

This rich quotation contains several obvious and several more implicit assumptions about the nature of the Russian Empire. Slavynskyi clearly believed in the conventional notion that intellectual development towards democracy was led by the centre, not the periphery. As demonstrated in the next chapter, this can be questioned and even empirically disproven in several key aspects. Moreover, to some non-Russian nationalists, the Russian Empire had proven that it *was* in fact a nationalising state through policies seen as Russification.²⁴⁶ Even some liberal-reformist contributors to *What Russia Expects* fundamentally supported these administrative reforms as a means to instil a more universal sense of Russian

²⁴² Maksym Slavynskyi, 'Voina i natsional'nyi vopros' in *Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny*, 109–122.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 114; Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 201.

²⁴⁴ Some of these conceptions have already been discussed above, but for a more detailed discussion see Sablin, 'An imperial community'.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 203; Slavynskyi, 'Voina i natsional'nyi vopros', 122.

²⁴⁶ Importantly, this was noted around the same time by others – see a British left wing newspaper article, itself a translation of a Czech language article, on this: 'Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Nationality', *Justice*, 24th January 1918. Available online here at the British Newspaper Archive. In other words, the notion of the Russian Empire as a nationalising state is not one that was imposed on the regime after the fact.

imperial citizenship and to increase the efficiency of the governance of the Russian Empire.²⁴⁷

Slavynskyi's comparison between the Russian Empire and both the British Empire and its Commonwealth is also intriguing. Yet his understanding of how the British system worked, whether in the *state* of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland²⁴⁸ or across the globe in the form of the British Empire and the Commonwealth was deeply confused. Arguably, this reveals a view already demonstrated above, that even for the most liberal-minded reformists, 'Russia', as the Russian Empire, possessed borders that were conceptually static. Russia and the Russian Empire were frequently used synonymously, even when their national and constitutional makeup was being discussed in *What Russia Expects* and other texts. Yet this was precisely the question of establishing the 'self' of self-determination, especially when considering the examples Slavynskyi raised to compare the Russian Empire to. Whether Ireland was a 'domestic' issue for the United Kingdom, or Poland for the Russian Empire was a contested issue, normatively speaking. To refer to Poland as an internal matter of Petrograd's authority rejected any notion of local agency on the part of Poles (and other groups that were 'minorities of minorities' within regions inhabited by a majority of Poles) to assert, by and for themselves, a different framework, as well as simply different policies. That England had in effect successfully colonised what became the United Kingdom (and then partially democratised the resultant regime) might have been an appealing comparison to or even a model for reform-minded individuals in the Russian Empire, but it was one that was potentially out of step in its time and place for an empire of the 1910s.²⁴⁹ In this sense, it was more a misreading of political time than an incorrect theory of political change.

Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, the well-known Ukrainian historian and nationalist, also wrote a piece for *What Russia Expects* in 1915. In the chapter, Hrushevskyi argued firmly for Ukrainian autonomy, to be based administratively on what he considered to be the 'national territory' of Ukraine.²⁵⁰ Aware that this territory was inhabited by many other non-Ukrainian individuals, Hrushevskyi argued for broad cultural autonomy for non-Ukrainians, rights permitting their self-organisation, and, perhaps most interestingly for later twentieth century discussions of self-determination, the creation of legal statuses of protected minorities within

²⁴⁷ Though there remains significant academic debate around the nature and experiences of 'Russification', as detailed above.

²⁴⁸ Until 1922.

²⁴⁹ This was in fact pointed out a few years prior by Abram [/Abraham] Kastelianskii, a Jew of the Russian Empire who emigrated from the regime in the early twentieth century. Kastelianskii was the editor of an ambitious multi-author collection of essays on national movements within modern European states and argued that the concept of a 'Great Russian' nationality was essentially the same as the United Kingdom's 'Britannia rules the waves' phrase, as they represented "slogans of hegemonic peoples". See Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 207–208.

²⁵⁰ Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 208–209.

this reconfigured, autonomous Ukraine.²⁵¹ The Russian Empire, Hrushevskyi declared, was an “empire of nations”, and this needed to be rectified with decentralisation policies in the other direction to the same degree as the ‘dominant’ nation oppressed others within the same system.²⁵²

In general, then, there was some discrepancy between the concepts of empire, imperialism, state, nation, and self-determination among and between the authors of *What Russia Expects* and the other earlier publications already discussed. This confusion is hardly surprising. On the purely theoretical level, these concepts are rife with definitional issues and internal contradictions. The path forward for these political agents at this time was therefore much debated. One solution was to simply accept this state of affairs – Russia’s diversity was its strength, not because ‘diversity’ was in itself good, but because the empire’s patchwork of governmental frameworks facilitated different attempts at resolving the ‘National Question’. There was room for experimentation. As Slavynskyi wrote in his contribution: “in the Russian Empire, as in a giant laboratory, one can observe all forms and kinds of national blossoming”.²⁵³ Russia, in other words, was an imperial laboratory for those who wanted to attempt to definitively answer the urgent social science questions of the day. Liberal-reformists had the benefit of the perceived negative examples of the German and Habsburg empires and the perceived positive examples of imperial Britain, the United States, and Switzerland. They could jump the intellectual development queue and choose preexisting constitutional and/or policy templates to adopt, without having to have done the intellectual labour behind their creation. Whether this was practically possible or even logical, by this time it was also ultimately dependent on the Russian Empire’s victory over their mortal enemy, German militarism, as well as the political capital of reformists within the Russian Empire.

This subchapter analysed the views of liberal-reformists (primarily the Kadets) on the constitutional nature of the state in the (unknown) last years of the Russian Empire. Where possible, their views on self-determination and the so-called ‘National Question’ were described and explained. The subchapter argued that as these agents assumed the longevity of the Russian Empire²⁵⁴, they viewed ‘Russia’, by which they meant the empire including its non-Russian elements, as a state in need of a single civic, political nationality for all its peoples. Generally, however, liberal-reformists did not favour assimilation as a path to this end, but

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* For an overview of another well-remembered Ukrainian intellectual who wrote on similar themes in the late nineteenth century, Mykhailo Drahomanov, see Anton Kotenko, ‘Mykhailo Drahomanov’s ideas of parliament’, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020), 6–14; though in this article Kotenko studies Drahomanov’s ideas of representation more than federalism. For the latter, see von Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Russia*, 131–166.

²⁵² Quoted in Gerasimov, ‘What Russian Progressives Expected from the War’, 208.

²⁵³ Quoted in Gerasimov, ‘What Russian Progressives Expected from the War’, 201; Slavynskyi, ‘Voina i natsional’nyi vopros’, 109.

²⁵⁴ Or at the very least, a Russian state composed of the same state borders.

rather the mutual recognition of difference alongside political reform. While liberal-reformists did recognise and acknowledge the genuine inequity between Russian and non-Russian groups within the empire, as well as the relational ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, their solutions (especially the Kadets') were primarily statist and top-down in approach, whether in the sense of grand state reform or in the issuing of what we may call 'negative liberties' on the status of certain languages and cultural practices. Importantly, with a very small number of exceptions, and mostly from non-Russian liberal-reformists themselves, these political agents' support for reform did not extend to empowering non-Russians towards greater political agency in an institutional sense.

There was less explicit attention drawn towards genre in the subchapter for two reasons. Firstly, this was because during this period liberal-reformists made political interventions in a very limited number of genres; mainly polemics and party programmes. As addressed in the methodology section of this work in more detail, this suggests a more passive, rather than active genre choice on the part of political agents. Secondly, and in relation to this, liberal-reformists tended to make political interventions in these genres according to their more recurrent, rather than historically unique conventions. Liberal-reformists were clearly trying to make and win arguments, firstly among themselves and a small wider audience through polemics, and then again to a much broader audience through their party programmes. Taking this further, we can conclude that liberal-reformists like the Kadets were not (yet) manipulating genres and their conventions in any meaningful sense, but were instead relying on the socially understood nature of these forms to make their political arguments.

1.3 The Revolutionaries and the 'National Question'

Between 1914 and early 1917 the revolutionary and more generally radical political parties and individuals of the Russian Empire were also engaged in their own debate over the constitutional future of the state, alongside the above-mentioned liberal-reformist individuals. They were not often alongside these individuals in a physical sense, however. Most were far from the formal centres of power, imprisoned or in exile (sometimes self-imposed) within and beyond the borders of the Russian imperial state. Switzerland, and in particular the city of Zurich in the north and the area around Lac Léman in the west, were well-established focal points for multiple generations of 'Russian',²⁵⁵ revolutionaries, from the 'old guard' of M. A. Bakunin and V. I. Zaslulich to younger radicals

²⁵⁵ This term is used as a convenient shorthand, rather than implying that all such revolutionaries were Russian or considered themselves as such.

such as K. B. Radek and G. L. Piatakov.²⁵⁶ As most self-identified as Marxists or socialists/social democrats²⁵⁷, these agents often framed their discussions of self-determination and national liberation through the language of resolving the 'National Question'.

V. I. Lenin, the exiled leader of what was officially the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) following the party split with the Mensheviks in 1912, was a central figure in articulating his party's position on the 'National Question' during this time. Yet this was as much to do with wider and more long term debates that Lenin was engaging with than his own strength of feeling on the matter. While Lenin possessed a keen interest in Bolshevik nationalities policy and sincere, deeply held beliefs in concepts such as self-determination, he most often articulated these views through responses to other revolutionary agents' works discussing the same issues. Lenin's clearest formulation of his own (and by some extension at this time, the Bolsheviks') view on the term and concept of self-determination and its role in resolving the 'National Question' arrived through a series of articles published in the journal *Prosveshchenie* (*Enlightenment*) between April and June 1914.²⁵⁸ These articles entered Soviet libraries and schools, and therefore Soviet mythology, as one united whole, known collectively as *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, a form of their representation that persists today in contemporary political theory and intellectual history studies of the polemics.²⁵⁹ However, this form conceals well that these articles formed part of a wider and more dialogical debate that Lenin was engaged in and responding to.

Putting Lenin's *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* back into its original form, its original genre, reveals far more than an abstract analysis of the amalgamated text can. As with some of the liberal-reformist individuals mentioned above, Lenin and his revolutionary contemporaries also sought to use the genre of the 'scientific journal article' to publicise and propagate his and their political arguments.²⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, in these works by Lenin and others there

²⁵⁶ La Chaux-de-Fonds in the canton of Neuchâtel was another locale known for Russian imperial exiles during this time. The Bolshevik Party leader V. I. Lenin, for example, lived there for a time.

²⁵⁷ The term social democrats did not imply that these individuals were non-revolutionary as it usually does in today's liberal-democratic usage. Instead, social democracy was the overarching name used for and by a broad church of far left (i.e. revolutionary) socialist groups to refer to themselves. Hence, for example, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), which until it split in 1912 contained within it both Menshevik and Bolshevik factions.

²⁵⁸ Written between February and May 1914. V. I. Lenin, 'O prave natsii na samoopredelenie' in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 25, 255–320.

²⁵⁹ See, of course, Lenin, 'O prave natsii na samoopredelenie'; as well as Mark, 'National Self-Determination'; Perekhoda, 'Re-examining Lenin's Writings'.

²⁶⁰ For those who were also committed Marxists, these works were understood as being perfectly compatible with science (*nauka*) in an abstract sense, since they believed that they were contributing to the progression of dialectical materialism more widely.

are, therefore, a great number of footnotes referencing all kinds of other works of literature and primary sources, as well as tangential or explanatory information, emulating the conventions of scientific research, itself in the process of standardisation.²⁶¹ At the same time, these references provide significant evidence that Lenin's views on self-determination did not emerge from an intellectual vacuum. Instead, his focus on the term self-determination and the specificity of his writings on the topic during this time emerged in *direct response* to others. Lenin was not neutrally expressing his view of self-determination but using polemical articles to argue for the veracity of his interpretation against others'.

Principally, Lenin's first few articles from *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* served as a critique of the Polish-German²⁶² revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg.²⁶³ Luxemburg was a prominent member of several revolutionary socialist and Marxist groups and political parties primarily based in the German Empire and what is today a reunited Poland. In a series of pamphlets and polemics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Luxemburg had controversially argued against Polish independence on essentially Orthodox Marxist grounds.²⁶⁴ This stance was based on a (theoretical) rejection of national self-determination in favour of proletarian self-determination across national and/or state borders.²⁶⁵ Luxemburg took particular issue with advancing the demand for Polish independence using the slogan (as she called it) of the right of nations to self-determination. To emphasise a nation's *right* to self-determination was utterly meaningless for oppressed peoples with no mechanism through which to exercise this right.²⁶⁶ As she argued in 1909, "the 'right' of the Polish nation to self-determination remains – the right to eat off gold plates".²⁶⁷ More simply, so what? What was this right doing? How did it serve the revolution? Luxemburg's unwavering internationalism and calls for both inter- and transnational unity frequently put her at odds with her revolutionary and non-revolutionary socialist contemporaries, who had already begun to attach special value to the specific term self-determination, particularly as paired with the adjective 'national'. To them, it was a convenient shorthand that signalled their respect for the agency and desires of peoples oppressed by imperial regimes and, later, large scale industrial conflict. By the early 1900s it was already in some sense becoming linguistically fashionable among revolutionaries to frame one's attitude towards the 'National Question' through one's

²⁶¹ Lenin, 'O prave natsii na samoopredelenie', 255–320.

²⁶² Luxemburg acquired German citizenship in 1897.

²⁶³ Lenin, 'O prave natsii na samoopredelenie', 255–320; culminating in the later article entitled 'Utopist Karl Marks i praktichnaia Roza Liuksemburg' ['The Utopian Karl Marx and the Practical Rosa Luxemburg'], 299–307.

²⁶⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, 'The National Question' in Horace B. Davis (ed.) *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg* (New York City, 1976 [1909]). This translation is also available online at the Marxists Internet Archive here.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Let alone, as she also identified, the difficulties in discerning 'the national will'.

²⁶⁷ Luxemburg, 'The National Question'.

position on (national) self-determination. Luxemburg, however, insisted that talking of national oppression was more helpful than the vague, metaphysical notion of self-determination, as it led to demands that concerned policies, not abstract ideas.²⁶⁸ Lenin, however, was not in agreement.

How then did the Bolshevik leader articulate his views on self-determination in his articles responding to Luxemburg and others? After several articles designed almost solely to discredit both these other revolutionary socialists and Russian liberal-reformist figures to boot, Lenin eventually outlined his own views and provided a reasonably clear conceptualisation of the term self-determination.²⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, the works that make up *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* marked the first attempt of a senior Bolshevik – in this case, the senior Bolshevik – to explicitly analyse the exact term self-determination (*samoopredelenie*).²⁷⁰ Referring to a resolution adopted by the London meeting of the International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress in 1896 (after significant debate between the different parties on the subject), Lenin described his position as identical to the approved motion, stating that he and his party stood for:

...on the one hand, the absolutely direct, unequivocal recognition of the full right of all nations to self-determination; on the other hand, the equally unambiguous appeal to the workers for *international* unity in their class struggle [emphasis original]. We think that this resolution is absolutely correct, and that, to the countries of Eastern Europe and Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is this resolution, with both its parts being taken as an integral whole, that gives the only correct lead to the proletarian class policy in the national question.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ For more on Lenin's criticisms of the liberal-reformists' views on self-determination, primarily the Kadets' elucidation of cultural self-determination and linguistic rights, see V. I. Lenin, 'Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu' ['Critical Remarks on the National Question'] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 24, 113–150.

²⁷⁰ As opposed to less precise language about the 'National Question', national liberation, national rights, and so on. This in its own way demonstrates the dialogical nature of this transfer of ideas, as different agents used the term self-determination consistently enough throughout the 1900s for a specific treatment of it to be warranted by Lenin by the beginning of 1914.

²⁷¹ Lenin, 'O prave natsii na samoopredelenie', 297. In 1896 and for many subsequent years, such meetings were attended by, among other groups, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, within which existed the emergent factions (and later separate political parties) of the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. Evidently, the Mensheviks also supported calling for the right of nations to self-determination, and voted to this end in various RSDLP and international meetings during these years. However, in the 1900s and 1910s, their position was not as theoretically supportive of secession as Lenin's was. Generally, Menshevik theoreticians tied self-determination to processes of democratisation and constitutional reconfiguration (including supporting autonomies) rather than seeing secession as a logical potential outcome of the right to self-determination. For more on this, see Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge, 1967), 26; 154–156; 165–166; 193–194.

When Lenin referred to the right of nations to self-determination (*pravo natsii na samoopredelenie*), he often stated at the same time that this was analogous to a right to secession. For example, in the fifth article of *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, ‘The Liberal Bourgeoisie and the Socialist Opportunists in the National Question’, Lenin wrote, “It was obvious that Mr. Mogilianskii was trying to evade a direct reply to the question whether or not he recognised the right to political self-determination, i. e., to secession”.²⁷² For Lenin, secession was the political expression of the philosophical principle of self-determination. Moreover, the Bolshevik leader made it his mission to make secession a clear connotation of the term self-determination in using them together as frequently as he did. In the context of the time of Lenin’s writings, that self-determination could or *should* have such a clear connotation with secession was genuinely novel and worthy of note, as are Lenin’s successes when considering his role in establishing this connotation in both intellectual and popular circles.

At the same time, Lenin cannot be called a universal advocate of secession. Insisting upon his ‘scientific’ Marxian analysis of the specific historical conditions of a given time, Lenin argued that while on the one hand, secession was to be permitted as a right, it should not be supported in every case. Lenin explained this more clearly in later works discussed below, but did begin to outline his position in the 1914 works – again in response to Luxemburg. When it came to Luxemburg’s calls for practicality in responding to the ‘National Question’, the Orthodox Marxist had gone beyond the pale, as “her misguided eulogy of practicality, has opened the door wide for the opportunists, and especially for opportunist concessions to Great-Russian nationalism”.²⁷³ Seeming to understand the apparent contradictions of his position, Lenin explained that any secessionist demands should be viewed “*from the angle of the workers’ class struggle [emphasis original]*” and not ‘purely’ national oppression.²⁷⁴ Nationalist demands, Lenin reasoned, were the perfect cover for bourgeois nationalism and national chauvinism, especially of the Great Russian variety.²⁷⁵ Typically sympathetic to fellow revolutionary socialists, Lenin emphatically decried Luxemburg’s writings,

²⁷² *Ibid*, 280. M. M. Mogilianskii was a Ukrainian-Russian Kadet with an educational and employment background in law. At this point in time, Mogilianskii subscribed to the typical Kadet position on self-determination; support for the term’s usage (up to and including its framing as a ‘right’) alongside a reluctance to define self-determination in such a way that connected it to secession.

²⁷³ Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 274. It is certainly interesting to note that many Bolsheviks, including Lenin in this example, used the term Great Russian and the concept of the All-Russian nation rather uncritically. It could quite easily be argued, especially from the angle of anti-tsarist revolutionary socialism, that the dominance of Russians – the ‘Great Russians’ of the All-Russian nation, over non-Russian minorities in the Russian Empire was something inherent to the very concept of the All-Russian nation, something Lenin and other Bolsheviks appear not to have reflected much upon.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 275.

²⁷⁵ Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 275.

stating that they were the equivalent of supporting not only the Great Russian cause, but the desires of the Russian ultranationalist monarchist group the Black Hundreds too.²⁷⁶

Nations, and their oppressive expression through bourgeois national states and empires, existed, much as the Bolsheviks would wish otherwise. Taking after Marx and Engels, Lenin believed that this was not in itself problematic – there were, after all, historic and economic links between the development of capitalism and national movements which meant that over time, these bourgeois nationalists would, to employ the Marxist phrase, become their own gravediggers.²⁷⁷ As Rudolf A. Mark states, for Lenin and the Bolsheviks “The emergence of capitalism, nations and national states was a historic fact, a development that was not to be impeded, because its accomplishment was seen as a precondition for the socialist revolution”.²⁷⁸ Yet as just mentioned, Lenin’s response was not systematic when it came to secession. To argue for secession universally was a folly that bore no resemblance to reality, especially how the Russian Empire functioned as, in Lenin’s own (borrowed) words, a historically constituted “prison house of peoples”.²⁷⁹ To continue Lenin’s arguments with the same analogy, the locked cell doors were the problem, not the building itself.

Lenin’s analysis in 1914 was that a nation could never be truly free while it oppressed other nations.²⁸⁰ Given the form and nature of the Russian Empire, the Great Russians could not themselves be free so long as the empire existed, regardless of the difference between the words *russkii* and *rossiiskii*.²⁸¹ If, however, the proletariat of a given, preexisting state could overcome national and class boundaries simultaneously (or very close to one another), secession would simply not be necessary.²⁸² By definition, the oppressor nation had been overcome

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 255–263. Lenin also cited and discussed the work of Karl Kautsky in this area, defending the Marxist theoretician’s remarks on the economic development of national states against Luxemburg’s critiques of the former. While Kautsky would go on to become one of the Bolsheviks’ most well-known critics within and beyond the left following the party’s seizure of power in 1917, at this point in time his views seemed to align with those of the Bolsheviks’ leader – certainly Lenin seemed to believe so. At the same time, the seeds of their later disagreements are visible; Kautsky’s defence of gradualist approaches to socialism, including a rejection of both council-dictatorship ideas and suppression of internal party dissent, were already at odds with Lenin’s theories of how to best achieve socialism.

²⁷⁸ Mark, ‘National Self-Determination’, 26.

²⁷⁹ V. I. Lenin, ‘O natsional’noi gordosti velikorossov’ [‘On the National Pride of Great Russians’] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 26, 107.

²⁸⁰ Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 276.

²⁸¹ One final reminder for non-Russian speakers: there are two words in the Russian language that can be translated as ‘Russian’. One is *russkii*, which denotes an ethnic sense of Russian-ness, and the other is *rossiiskii*, which has a more statist/civic meaning, and can be used to refer, for example, to someone’s citizenship, as opposed to their ethnicity. The Russian Empire used this broader, more inclusive form.

²⁸² Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 255–320.

by its own working class, as with the oppressed nation/s of the same polity – the result was therefore a free union. Why would a nation subsequently wish to secede?

Consequently, one noteworthy (and recurrent) characteristic of many Bolsheviks' understanding of self-determination, including and beyond Lenin, was unity. At times senior Bolshevik theorists articulated this with the word centralisation (*tsentralizatsiia*), which was perhaps more accurate to their meaning as it occurred in practice, but unity (*edinstvo*) was the most common refrain. In a later 1915 work, Lenin, for example, was resolute in his opposition to small states, even while proclaiming his support for secession:

We demand freedom of self-determination, *i.e.*, independence, *i.e.*, freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we want large states and the closer unity and even fusion of nations, only on a truly democratic, truly internationalist basis, which is inconceivable without the freedom to secede.²⁸³

Other Bolshevik figures involved in this intellectual exchange during this time also expressed similar views. Perhaps the single most well-known revolutionary polemic on the 'National Question' was written by one such 'Leninist' in 1913 in Vienna – J. V. Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question*.²⁸⁴ The influence

²⁸³ V. I. Lenin, 'Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie' ['The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination'] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 27, 255. It is perhaps worth noting that this work was originally written in German – so "self-determination" appeared as "*selbstbestimmung*". In the Russian translation, however (reportedly undertaken by N. K. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife), the term used as its equivalent is "*samoopredelenie*", a word that has shared roots with "*pravlenie*" and "*upravlenie*"; management/board/rule and governance/management, respectively. The term self-government in Russian, for example, is "*samoupravlenie*". The German word for self-determination by contrast has a very literal meaning of determination and could more easily refer to *individual* self-determination without an additional adjective clarifying this. At the same time, this use of the term "*samoopredelenie*" for self-determination in Russian was not innovative; this was how it had been formulated in the language already by the late 19th century. I have not been able to discover the first instance of the Russian formulation/translation of the term, mainly because of my inability to read German sources (presuming that it came from German, of course), but also because this likely occurred long before the beginning of my dissertation's chronology.

²⁸⁴ J. V. Stalin, 'Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros' ['Marxism and the National Question'] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 2, 290–367. There is still some dispute as to the influence of others (principally Bukharin and Lenin) on Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question*, some of which stems from Trotsky's after-the-fact assertions that the article owed more to Lenin than Stalin. On the intellectual level, the content and argumentation are certainly similar, though this is hardly surprising given the established views of the two individuals at the time. This, in fact, was one of the main reasons why Lenin was keen for Stalin himself to write the article in the first place. More pertinently, no scholar has yet provided conclusive evidence for this claim, and there is nothing to seriously suggest that *Marxism and the National Question* was anything other than Stalin's own work, however influenced by his mentor's ideas the content of it was.

of Lenin, who Stalin idolised during this time, is clear throughout the document, but clearer still are the ideas that Stalin was writing the work in response to. Partly, these influences are again revealed by the work's genre as a scientific journal article of the Marxist variety. *Marxism and the National Question* contains several references to national cultural autonomy²⁸⁵ as outlined by the so-called Austromarxists.²⁸⁶ Karl Renner and Otto Bauer were the two political writers who articulated the concept of national cultural autonomy most clearly and comprehensively.²⁸⁷ In its essence, national cultural autonomy was a form of non-territorial autonomy. That is to say, Renner, Bauer, and others who advocated for this approach to the 'National Question' believed that nations²⁸⁸, not states, should possess primacy in determining their own status. At the same time, and partly as a result of this, the Austromarxists recognised that nations existed within permeable systems and structures, and that nations overlapped across different state borders.²⁸⁹ They proposed the establishment of organisations based on one's national identity, that would be recognised by the state or states in which these national groups represented a significant minority. These bodies would advocate for their nation's political, educational, and cultural rights, as well as provide a space in which the respective nation could meet and live as it saw fit without excessive state interference.²⁹⁰ For Karl Renner, at least, this was because the survival and wellbeing of the nation, and not, for example, the international proletariat, was at the top of his intellectual hierarchy.²⁹¹

Stalin's response to the Austromarxist school was to effectively double down on the Bolsheviks' approach to Marxian history and the 'National Question', emphasising the existence and history not just of nations (including their relationship to and place within oppressive capitalistic systems) but of their fundamental territoriality.²⁹² Beginning with a long section defining a nation, Stalin concluded with the well-known statement "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory,

²⁸⁵ This is the most common name for the concept in contemporary English, alongside 'national personal autonomy', though the more general 'non-territorial autonomy' seems to be overtaking these.

²⁸⁶ Stalin, 'Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros', throughout but especially 319–332.

²⁸⁷ Karl Renner, 'State and Nation', in Ephraim Nimni (translator and editor), *National Cultural Autonomy and its Contemporary Critics* (London, 2005); Karl Renner, *Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen in besonderer Anwendung auf Österreich* (Leipzig, 1918); Karl Renner, *Marxismus, Krieg und Internationale* (Stuttgart, 1918); Otto Bauer, *The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy* (Minneapolis 2000). Translated by Joseph O'Donnell.

²⁸⁸ It is clear from reading the Austromarxists' texts in full that they also placed an emphasis on the individual within the nation and their own individual self-determination, over more collective conceptions of national rights.

²⁸⁹ Renner, 'State and Nation'; Renner, *Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen*.

²⁹⁰ Renner, *Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen*.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Stalin, 'Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros', 319–332.

economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”.²⁹³ When justifying the necessity of territoriality for the existence of nationhood, Stalin argued that as nations were formed historically, groups that, for example, spoke the same language but across different spaces could not be considered part of the same nation, owing to the fact that they inhabited different territories over a significant period of time. Stalin’s examples for this claim were the Americans and the “English” (/British), and the Norwegians and the Danes.²⁹⁴ That nations were territorially based, and that these territories were historically constituted, was therefore a key criterion for Stalin’s conception of nationhood, and one that was shared by many other Bolsheviks, including Lenin. The territoriality of nations was the single greatest point of resistance between the Bolshevik and Austromarxist approaches to the ‘National Question’, not least because of its practical consequences in the Bolsheviks’ strong support for territorially-organised political units.²⁹⁵

Marxism and the National Question also spoke far more of national liberation and of resolving the ‘National Question’ than debating the slogans that signified revolutionaries’ consequential demands about them. Indeed, Stalin stated incorrectly but argumentatively that it was a simple fact that social democracy across the world had lined up to support the right of nations to self-determination.²⁹⁶ Echoing Lenin’s statements on large states and unity, Stalin argued that declaring rights was not the same as demanding the exercising of these rights.²⁹⁷ When it came to the specifics of the right to self-determination, Stalin again demonstrated his synergy with Lenin, and argued that:

The right to self-determination means that a nation may arrange its life in the way it wishes. It has the right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign, and all nations have equal rights... This, of course, does not mean that Social-Democracy will support every demand of a nation.²⁹⁸

The crux of the matter for Stalin at this time was not whether or not one should support the advancement of the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination, but how to satisfy (or perhaps placate) really-existing nationhood and national demands with calls for ultimate unity. It is telling, for example, that even in the above quotation Stalin talks of nations’ rights to federalism. As will be discussed, Stalin’s approach to Soviet federalism in practice, in dialogue with Lenin’s attitudes on the same theme, would appear to contrast his openness

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 295.

²⁹⁴ Stalin, ‘Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros’, 293.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 360–361.

²⁹⁶ Stalin, ‘Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros’, 309.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 310. This will become highly relevant in later chapters.

²⁹⁸ Stalin, ‘Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros’, 309–310.

towards the idea here. The ‘National Question’ in the Caucasus, then something of a hot topic in the early 1910s, and one Stalin had experiential knowledge of as a Russified Georgian, was a textbook example of this. The best path forward was for these nations and nationalities to be drawn into a “*common stream of a higher culture* [emphasis original]”.²⁹⁹ For Stalin, this common stream meant alignment with international socialism, while the higher culture referred to the modernisation and development of what he would later term ‘backward’ nationalities under the revolutionary vanguard of the RSDLP(B).

As will be seen in a later chapter, however, Stalin was perhaps more aware than Lenin of how others might read what they wanted into Bolshevik nationalities policy. That is, ‘others’ who had not spent the past several years meaningfully engaging with what were in reality rather niche discussions between and among a group of radical intellectuals, especially considering many of these agents’ lives in exile and the importance of things such as printing and translation in the transfer of ideas across space and time. While widely discussed in these comparatively small intellectual circles in the 1910s, most of the works dealt with in this subchapter were not widely published and distributed, certainly to mass audiences, until after the canonisation of certain Bolsheviks following the Russian Civil War and creation of the Soviet Union.

It was also no accident that Stalin wrote *Marxism and the National Question* in Vienna, the heart not just of another heterogenous empire but of revolutionary thought among a wide variety of socialist and other groups on the ‘National Question’, from Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks to German and Austrian socialist and paramilitary theorists and practitioners. Consequently, the works produced by these agents during and beyond these years cannot be exclusively seen as theoretical abstractions developed in an ivory tower. Instead, we should reaffirm that many of the ideas represented on the page in these works were first discussed and disputed in the cafés of Vienna and the salons of Switzerland. The first drafts of these pamphlets and polemics had coffee stains on them that were not always their own. They were, in other words, part of a preexisting dialogue that stretched into the previous century and served as the next significant interventions in this conversation.

This was also the case with other socialist groups that the Bolsheviks were in competition with. The place and nature of self-determination in the ideology and political programme of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, for example, differed from both the Bolsheviks’ and the Kadets’ approaches. Most SRs, partly due to their agrarian politics, supported widespread local self-government, especially for and of the peasantry.³⁰⁰ While the SRs still generally supported the concept of *national* self-determination and opposed all restrictions based on nationality, their primary focus on class led them to have various kinds of administrative decentralisation as a governmental priority. In practice, this meant support for Russians’ own self-determination (in the sense of self-government) alongside

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 350.

³⁰⁰ See *Programmy glavneishikh russkikh partii* (Moscow, 1917), 15–24. Available here.

others', centred on reforms that would affect the majority of the population – the peasantry. Therefore, various kinds of autonomies and even federations were proposed, with the SRs, unlike the Leninist wing of the Bolsheviks, generally opposing views of self-determination that legitimated secession and the disintegration of the imperial space. This was clearly the result of the long history of revolutionary agrarian politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Russian Empire but was also impacted by more recent transnational trends. N. V. Briullova-Shaskol'skaia, one of the party's main theorists on the issues of imperial reconfiguration, self-determination, and the 'National Question', supported both a federal reconfiguration of the empire *and* national cultural autonomy.³⁰¹ While distinct, her views, and those of the SRs as a whole, could now be associated with the Austromarxist school, and therefore criticised by, among others, Lenin and Stalin for the same reasons.

Regardless, while Stalin was a consistent supporter of his party leader's position at this time, Lenin's firm advocacy of the advancement of the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination was not universally supported among his own party. N. I. Bukharin, E. B. Bosh, and G. L. Piatakov were among the most consistent opponents of Lenin's articulation of the concept, as well as his support for its use as a political slogan. Together in Swiss exile, the three Bolsheviks drafted a series of theses intended for publication in either of the revolutionary socialist publications *Kommunist* or *Sotsial-Demokrat* in the autumn or winter of 1915.³⁰² Their scepticism of Lenin's position echoed the steadfastly internationalist viewpoint of Luxemburg in some key ways, but diverged in others. In essence, though, the logic was the same – as well as being both impractical and utopian, the three saw the slogan as a misuse of energy and resources. One key thesis elucidated this further:

The attention of the proletarian masses is shifted to another plane; the international character of their action disappears; the forces of the proletariat are split up; the entire tactical line moves in the direction of national and not class struggle. Moreover...the slogan...includes the slogan of "defence", for after the achievement of secession...is it not necessary to defend "independence"? Otherwise, what with the constant dangers of the imperialist epoch, why "demand" it at all?³⁰³

Why, Bukharin, Bosh, and Piatakov seemed to be asking, was it the nation and not the proletariat that constituted the self that was entitled to be doing the determining? Giving nationalism precedence over internationalist class-based

³⁰¹ Aava, *Minorities and the State*, 52–54.

³⁰² Owing to an absence of contemporaneous sources, as well as contradictory information within those that do exist, it is difficult to establish these details.

³⁰³ N. I. Bukharin, E. B. Bosh, and G. L. Piatakov, 'Tezisy o prave natsii na samoopredelenie' ['Theses on the Right of Nations to Self-determination]. Unpublished article draft for *Kommunist* or *Sotsial-Demokrat*, Geneva, 1915. An English translation is available here, though note that this website incorrectly states that the article was published; it was not.

solidarity made little sense to the three during a time of global conflict, understood by *all* Bolsheviks as an imperialist war with ultimately economic causes. According to their reasoning, if nations took up this offer of secession, they were also entitled to commit to this new polity perennially into the future. Why, in short, take that risk? Interestingly, this criticism of Lenin's arguments came from a group of individuals with ethnically and nationally diverse backgrounds, making it more difficult for Lenin to respond with one of his conventional *ad hominem* attacks that such people were Great Russian chauvinists in disguise.

Lenin's response to the proposed article was characteristically spiteful and melodramatic, and he made no attempt to hide his outrage at, nor make any concessions towards his party colleagues. Clearly, to both Lenin and the draft's authors, this was not an 'agree to disagree' situation, and the strength of feeling on both sides exacerbated preexisting tensions that served as the final death knell of the *Kommunist* journal, which the four had been attempting to edit together over the previous months. In a letter to the Franco-Russian Bolshevik Inessa Armand, dating from shortly after the fallout from the theses, Lenin wrote "They [Piatakov and Bosh] did not want to study peacefully and comradely...they turned up their noses...Let them go to hell!...I'll punch them in the face and make them look like fools in front of the whole world".³⁰⁴ It stands to reason, therefore, that as neither Lenin nor Bukharin, Bosh, and Piatakov were willing to sacrifice their personal convictions in the name of party unity, the issue of self-determination was one that engendered both sincere and strongly-held beliefs among the Bolsheviks.

At the same time, these disagreements were unresolved. This was particularly noteworthy given the context of the First World War around them, which seemed to entrench both sides' positions, rather than providing a cause for which party unity could be supported.³⁰⁵ Soon after the argument over the theses, Piatakov and Bosh left for Sweden via a brief stint in Oslo, and the journal remained defunct.³⁰⁶ Before formal political power was really conceived of by the Bolsheviks, conflict on both the definition and the suitability of including a *right* to (national) self-determination in the party's programme occurred often, with intensity, and without neat closure.

Nor was Lenin content with appearing to have the last word on the Bolshevik Party's position on self-determination. In works written in 1915 and 1916, that is to say, again with the context of global conflict around him in both a spiritual and, given his position in Switzerland, a literal sense, Lenin reaffirmed the

³⁰⁴ Letter from V. I. Lenin to Inessa Armand, 30th of November 1916. Quoted in Nikolai Valentinov, *Novaia ekonomicheskaia politika i krizis partii posle smerti Lenina* (Moscow, 1991), 158. An English translation is also available here. In a telling phrase later in the letter, Lenin states "The polemics over self-determination are only beginning as yet".

³⁰⁵ Especially given the Bolsheviks' firm antiwar position.

³⁰⁶ The two were in a relationship at the time.

argumentation of his 1914 series of articles in this new context.³⁰⁷ For Lenin, this catastrophic war, clearly an imperialist conflict between the mechanised war machines of oppressor nations, was further evidence of the need to advocate for the use of the right of nations to self-determination as a political slogan. Again, Lenin emphasised that this necessarily included secession, stating that the “right of nations to self-determination means only the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free, political secession from the oppressing nation”.³⁰⁸

Elsewhere, Lenin reiterated his opposition to small states and weak, by which he also meant small, economic units, utilising Marx’s arguments from the previous century in the case of Ireland and Britain.³⁰⁹ Marx had argued that though it was necessary for Ireland to secede from Britain, this separation should only be temporary, as he believed in was in the best interests of the workers of both territories to subsequently reunite in a free union.³¹⁰ Lenin, Stalin, and even other Bolsheviks who opposed the formers’ advocacy of the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination were united in their approach to unity – the solution to the ‘National Question’ in the Russian Empire was not disintegration; certainly not permanently, but reconfiguration. This reconfiguration would come from a revolution led by the revolutionary vanguard, not secession. Support for self-determination was “by no means identical with the demand for secession, for partition, for the formation of small states. It is merely the logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in every form”.³¹¹

Ever the master of the rhetorically effective-if-essentially-incomparable analogy, Lenin argued that this could be compared to the party’s attitude towards legal gender equality. The Bolsheviks, as revolutionary socialists, would always support the *right* of individuals to divorce, no matter their gender. This did not mean, however, that the Bolsheviks promoted divorce for all.³¹² Insisting upon

³⁰⁷ Lenin, ‘Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie’, 252–266; V. I. Lenin, ‘Revoliutsionnyi proletariat i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie’ [‘The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-determination’] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 27, 61–68.

³⁰⁸ Lenin, ‘Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie’, 255.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 256.

³¹⁰ Lenin, ‘Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie’, 256. This was a slightly convoluted way for Lenin to state that he would prefer an instance of secession and subsequent ‘free’ federation to unity under oppressive conditions, since the former would, in Lenin’s eyes, eventually lead to centralism: “One may be a determined opponent of this [federal] principle and a partisan of democratic centralism and yet prefer federation to national inequality as the only path towards complete democratic centralism”. Also 256.

³¹¹ *Ibid*.

³¹² Lenin, ‘O prave natsii na samoopredelenie’, 286. Of course, this analogy falls down immediately when considering the territorial dimensions of nationhood, which the Bolsheviks themselves were keen advocates of. Conceptually, a right to divorce *is* a different kind of right to a right to secession; the former pertains to individual liberties, and the latter to collective political authority over a defined territory. Beyond this, of course, marriages are not ‘historically constituted’ in the same way as the Bolsheviks viewed nations, and so on.

the specific historical circumstances of national and state development, the Bolshevik leader suggested that some nations were not 'ready' to secede, not least because of the risk of these new states being simply bourgeois national states, but also because of the modern, twentieth century economic links between areas that previously made up the same economic, as well as state space.³¹³ In its substance, Lenin's arguments were less about morality than capacity – choosing to support the slogan of the right to self-determination should not violate the more fundamental Marxian history approach to the development of capitalism and national states. As one might imagine, though, the theoretical sophistication of enabling secession as a right, but not a policy, was difficult to convey succinctly to the targets of wider Bolshevik agitation. Even though, as addressed below, many workers, peasants, and soldiers of all national identities could be sympathetic towards remaining united in one political superstructure.

This subchapter analysed the views of numerous revolutionary political agents on the 'National Question' in the 1910s, with the aim of establishing their thought and its movement on the concept of self-determination. It demonstrated that far from being an outlier deserving of the same deification that followed him during and beyond the last years of his life, Lenin's clarity of thought on self-determination was the result of dialogical exchanges with other agents as much as his own initiative. Some of these other key agents who also engaged in discussions about self-determination at the time were Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Renner, and Otto Bauer. At the same time, though Lenin had supporters who also believed in the necessity of advancing the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination, such as Stalin, the Bolsheviks as a whole were not united on the issue. This can be demonstrated by the disagreements between Lenin and Bukharin, Bosh, and Piatakov over the latter's draft article directly criticising Lenin's position on the slogan. In subsequent years, Lenin again argued for the necessity of declaring the right of nations to self-determination, while insisting upon viewing every potential secession from the point of view of the class struggle. Though he was one of the individuals most responsible for popularising a link between self-determination and secession, Lenin was also insistent that the Bolsheviks' ultimate goal was unity. By the beginning of 1917, with war raging around the Swiss Confederation where many revolutionaries had made their home in exile, the Bolsheviks, far from being united by their antiwar programme, had not reached a consensus on their attitude towards self-determination.

In terms of analysing the political interventions discussed in this subchapter through their genre, it is clear that Lenin's view of self-determination emerged not as an abstract political theory but in response to other revolutionary socialists. Understanding this debate on the 'National Question' and self-determination through these polemics therefore clearly revealed some of the immediate intellectual influences on Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin, Bosh, and Piatakov, since these political agents were in many cases replying to existent discussions within and beyond the Russian Empire. Similarly, that many of these same agents were

³¹³ *Ibid*; Lenin, 'Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie'.

replying negatively to these debates informs us of their attempts to disprove, correct, and persuade their audiences. This is an expected purpose of the genre of the political polemic, especially its subgenre of the political journal article. Regardless, some Bolsheviks already seemed to be more aware than others of the potential for modifying the conventions of these and other genres to novel usages. Tellingly, in these years, both Lenin and Stalin highlighted distinctions between declarations of rights and specific demands for the exercising of these same rights. This, as later chapters will reinforce, tells us something about their view of self-determination.

2. SELF-DETERMINATION IN DECLARATIONS AND DELIBERATION (1917–1918)

2.1 The Provisional Government of Russia

As a result of the February Revolution, the political climate in what was still formally the Russian Empire became more open and participatory, with censorship no longer restricting the themes, readership, or discussion of written political interventions.³¹⁴ Given this more tolerant official and unofficial atmosphere, it is not surprising that political agents of all stripes also began to adopt more discursive forms of political intervention, including when referring to self-determination. Certainly, the number and readership of pamphlets and polemics increased during this time, but political agents also began discussing self-determination through various revolutionary declarations and through genuine multiparty deliberation at the same time. This chapter therefore develops an explanation as to how political agents used self-determination in the genres of declarations and ‘deliberation’ (understood as political debate, speeches, and negotiation), covering the period from the onset of the Provisional Government of Russia to the beginning of the Russian Civil War.

In early 1917, mass protests against the regime, and specifically the tsar, greatly intensified.³¹⁵ Popular resentment from the Russian Empire’s subjects, combined with political elites’ criticism of the regime’s persecution of the war in the State Duma (as well as severe disciplinary issues in the Imperial Russian Army) amplified the perceived seriousness of all of these individual factors, putting enormous strain on the government’s legitimacy.³¹⁶ Ultimately, liberal-reformists, including those discussed in the previous chapter, claimed political authority for themselves, and issued a revolutionary declaration seeking to establish a new government, referred to, literally translated, as the Provisional Government of Russia (*Vremennoe pravitel'stvo Rossii*). Soon after, Tsar Nicolas II responded by declaring his intention to abdicate (including on behalf of his son, Tsesarevich Alexei) in favour of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail of Russia.³¹⁷ The Grand Duke refused, stating that were this the wish of a democratically elected legislative assembly, he would accept, but that at this time he could not do so with honour and integrity. With this, the position of the Romanov dynasty as the supreme

³¹⁴ As well as the obvious accompanying consequences for spoken political interventions.

³¹⁵ Further explained by the fact that Tsar Nicolas II had taken it upon himself to become Commander-in-Chief of the Russian imperial military, against all advice. Thus, disquiet concerning the Russian Empire’s war effort could be easily personified in the tsar.

³¹⁶ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 105–130.

³¹⁷ For a good set of sources on the chain of abdications, see Robert P. Browder and Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky (eds.), *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917* (Stanford, 1961), 83–116.

ruling family of the Russian Empire was terminated.³¹⁸ What was the Russian Empire without a tsar?

In the declaration announcing the Provisional Government of Russia, ten temporary ministers were announced, of whom exactly half were members of the Constitutional Democratic Party.³¹⁹ In addition to this, Prince G. E. L'vov, in effect the new Prime Minister (*Ministr-prezident*), was also a former Kadet, and senior party members had significant influence in the drafting of the declaration. P. N. Miliukov, the leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party and according to the declaration now Minister of Foreign Affairs, was one of the chief authors of the document, its content agreed upon only after significant debate between its creators.³²⁰ Nonetheless, in style as well as in substance, the declaration was an expression of broad continuity between the political thought of the liberal-reformists discussed above, as well as the views of those to their ideological right, such as the Octobrists, and their ideological left, such as moderate members of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries. The declaration was widely published and circulated via many newspapers of different political persuasions, and copies of it were made to be placed in public spaces and workplaces to inform as great a number of people as possible of the results of recent events.³²¹ Its purposes, clearly, were to announce and legitimise the new regime to domestic and international publics (i.e. to declare the body into being and imbue it with authority), as well as galvanise and mobilise support for the new government and its work.

“Citizens!” began the declaration *From the Provisional Government*, already consciously imitating the republican language of civic equality and duty.³²² “The Temporary Committee of the members of the State Duma... has now attained such a large measure of success over the dark forces of the old regime that it is possible for the Committee to undertake the organisation of a more stable executive power”.³²³ This more stable power was nonetheless still conscious of its non-

³¹⁸ It is an interesting aside when considering where authority lies within political systems that it was therefore the decision of Grand Duke Mikhail, and not Tsar Nicolas II directly, that ended Romanov rule in the Russian Empire.

³¹⁹ Declaration ‘Ot Vremennogo pravitel’sstva’ [‘From the Provisional Government’], published in *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov*, 3rd of March [16th of March] 1917. Available here. There were also two “Non-Party”, or independent ministers (G. E. L’vov and M. I. Tereshchenko), one Octobrist Party minister (A. I. Guchkov), one Centrist Party minister (V. N. L’vov), and one from the Trudovik group/faction/party of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (A. F. Kerensky). One of the “Non-Party” ministers, Minister-President (effectively Prime Minister) and Minister of the Interior, Prince G. E. L’vov, had also been a noteworthy member of the Kadets in 1905, before leaving the party in 1911 to join the Progressive Party. Upon the February Revolution, L’vov adopted this Non-Party status somewhat symbolically while remaining liberal-reformist in outlook.

³²⁰ See Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 117–125.

³²¹ For example, as well as the *Izvestiia* edition cited above, the declaration can also be found in *Rech’*, 5th of March [18th of March] 1917, No. 55, 2. Available here.

³²² ‘Ot Vremennogo pravitel’sstva’.

³²³ *Ibid.*

existent electoral mandate at the same time as it argued for a democratic reconstruction of the Russian imperial state.³²⁴ After announcing the members of this new Provisional Government of Russia, the document continued, stating that the work of the regime would be guided by the following eight points:

1. An immediate and complete amnesty in all cases of a political and religious nature, including terrorist acts, military revolts and agrarian offences, etc.
2. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and the right to form unions and to strike and the extension of political freedom to persons serving in the armed forces limited only by the demands of military and technical circumstances.
3. The abolition of all restrictions based on class, religion, and nationality.
4. The immediate arrangements for the convening of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage and secret ballot, which will determine the form of government and the constitution of the country.
5. The substitution of a people's militia for the police, with elective officers responsible to the organs of local self-government.
6. Elections to the organs of local self-government are to be held on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage and secret ballot.
7. Those military units which took part in the revolutionary movement shall be neither disarmed nor withdrawn from Petrograd.
8. While preserving strict military discipline on duty and during military service, the soldiers are to be freed from all restrictions in the exercise of those civil rights which all other citizens enjoy.³²⁵

With regard to at least *national* self-determination, point three of these principles was the most obviously relevant. Points two, four, and six, however, were also relevant to broader notions of self-determination. Point two because it signalled for the first time the intention of a government of 'Russia' towards a politically open civil society, in which political ideas could be freely discussed and critiqued.³²⁶ Theoretically, a more politically literate and engaged society has greater capacity for self-determination, regardless of how the concept was expounded. Point four because of the consciously temporary nature of the Provisional Government – its actual form and legal basis was undefined. While

³²⁴ It is important to highlight that the ministers of the Provisional Government did not formally declare the state to be a republic until much later in 1917, so the correct formal term for the state, technically speaking, was still the Russian Empire, as 'only' tsardom had been abolished and a new government established. There was much discussion of this at the time; see again Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 117–125. Later, the Bolsheviks would also take power without immediately proclaiming the state to be a *Soviet* republic. This latter experience also related to Bolshevik discussions of self-determination more explicitly, so will be covered later in the chapter.

³²⁵ 'Ot Vremennogo pravitel'stva'.

³²⁶ Perhaps most importantly, free of any official censorship.

this was conceptually precarious for a regime that expressed democratic values, it remains important as a signal of awareness of this issue on the part of the government. Lastly points four (again) and six, enshrining the widest possible basis of suffrage for future elections, the principle of one person, one vote, and the method of secret ballot. Again, this is an issue of capacity for self-determination. All of these points, it should be remembered, were both radical as a step-change from the old regime, and a demonstration of liberal-reformist ideological continuity from previous years simultaneously.

Yet the Provisional Government of Russia did not exercise a Weberian monopoly on the legitimate use of force following the so-called February Revolution.³²⁷ While it was technically speaking the sole governing power, and recognised by those beyond its borders as such, a rival source of authority in the same host city existed in the form of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The more politically radical Petrograd Soviet comprised mainly of Menshevik, Socialist-Revolutionary, and Bolshevik members, and acted in practice as a more left wing 'check' on the work of the new government. Most deputies viewed the Provisional Government with an initial degree of optimism, wishing simply that it would 'go further', usually in the direction of socialism. Over time, however, its members became more emboldened and resolute in their socialist demands, in part because of the consequences of the return of many revolutionary socialists to the capital following the Provisional Government's general amnesty.³²⁸ As representatives of significant portions of the capital's industrial sector, as well as of armed groups within and beyond the city, the members of the Petrograd Soviet were able to wield a large degree of informal political power. This was made more profound by these groups' roles during the revolution that brought the Provisional Government into existence, a fact that neither the Petrograd Soviet nor the ministers of the new government were unaware of. Sometimes this was made explicit in their negotiations with the Provisional Government, while other times it took on a more unspoken dimension.³²⁹ The deputies of the Petrograd Soviet proved most effective when pressuring the cabinet of the Provisional Government to adopt firmer and, in their view, more precise language in their public declarations.

³²⁷ Which, according to the modern Gregorian calendar, took place in March. The older Julian calendar, still in use at the time, was 13 days behind this. Hence, the February Revolution occurred in March, and the 'October Revolution' in November. Soviet Russia issued a decree bringing the regime in line with the rest of Europe and much of the world in early 1918. Some still nonetheless resisted the change, primarily for ideological and/or religious reasons, and others were simply unaware of the decree until its firmer enforcement.

³²⁸ A key dividing line within and between the two bodies also emerged between those who favoured the Russian state's continued participation in the war, and those who opposed it, often as a point of ideological principle.

³²⁹ For an example, refer to point seven of the declaration 'Ot Vremennogo pravitel'stva', quoted above.

In spring 1917, for example, members of the Petrograd Soviet successfully pressured Miliukov to both moderate his foreign policy goals and employ the specific term ‘self-determination’ in relation to the war and peace aims of the new government.³³⁰ Central to the former was an explicit renouncement on the part of the government of any annexationist or generally expansionist goals as a result of their participation in the war. In this regard, they were assisted by more liberal members of the Provisional Government, such as A. F. Kerensky and M. I. Tereshchenko, who also supported the policy and its communication.³³¹ The mention of self-determination, however, including its precise formulation, was solely the result of pressure from the Petrograd Soviet, the Mensheviks in particular. In the final declaration of war aims, the concept was presented as follows:

Leaving to the will of the people, in close union with our Allies, the final solution of all problems connected with the World War and its conclusion, the Provisional Government considers it to be its right and its duty to declare at this time that the aim of free Russia is not domination over other nations, or seizure of their national possessions, or forcible occupation of foreign territories, but the establishment of a stable peace on the basis of the self-determination of peoples.³³²

Once the specific language had been agreed upon, Kerensky and Tereshchenko forced Miliukov to physically draft the note himself as some kind of overburdened moral seal.³³³ Certainly, the substance of its message differed from Miliukov’s earlier annexationist desires based on an enlightened pan-Slavism, as expressed in his contribution to *What Russia Expects from the War*.³³⁴ The phrase “Leaving to the will of the people”, for example, was in quite stark theoretical contrast to Miliukov’s *assumption* that Poles, Ukrainians, and others were so in favour of coming under Petrograd’s umbrella that they need not even be consulted on the matter.³³⁵ In any case, the statement reflected a clear desire from the ministers of the new government to tie (*their version of*) self-determination to wider questions of peace, even if it was the result of external pressure. This again reflected that

³³⁰ Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and deconstruction of the Russian Empire* (New York City, 2015), 200.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² Declaration ‘Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo o zadachakh voïny’ [The Provisional Government on the Aims/Tasks of the War], 27th of March [9th of April] 1917. Published in *Rech’*, 28th of March [10th of April] 1917, No. 73, 2. Available here.

³³³ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 200. Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 117–124.

³³⁴ Gerasimov, ‘What Russian Progressives Expected from the War’, in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, 189–215.

³³⁵ ‘Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo o zadachakh voïny’. Or that Petrograd was such an effective guarantor of rights that it would simply be ‘better’, in a normative sense, before one even got into the matter of consent.

self-determination had, already by early 1917, entered into political discourse prominently and consistently enough to justify its usage in the government's explanation of its war aims.³³⁶ Moreover, the document implied the Provisional Government's generally understood meaning of self-determination – no occupation of foreign territory, but equally, no renouncement of any claims of sovereignty to any part of the territory of the Russian Empire either. This was based on their aforementioned top-down reading of reform, in which a regime change (or evolution) that aimed to democratise the state was an argument for maintaining, rather than altering, international borders.³³⁷

Shortly after the Provisional Government's declaration of war aims was published, Miliukov decided to issue a note to the Allies that, in effect, reiterated the same points, chiefly the intention of the regime to continue to participate in the war.³³⁸ However, news of this action soon brought vitriolic protesters out onto the streets. Although the note was (perhaps tellingly) not wholly opposed by the rest of the Provisional Government, its author bore the brunt of negativity associated with it. The protesters demanded action, whether this meant resignations or something greater, and some began to use violence to express their anger. Ultimately, in large part due to the Provisional Government's concern for public safety, as well as the resolutely anti-annexationist position of the Petrograd Soviet, Miliukov and A. I. Guchkov (War Minister) resigned from the government.³³⁹

The original declaration of war aims, as well as the 'Miliukov note' and its fallout (which became the first of many reshuffles of the Provisional Government), demonstrated two important aspects of the contemporary situation when considering this dissertation's research questions. Firstly, that the Provisional Government of Russia was actively attempting to tie *their* notion of self-determination to continued participation in the First World War. As described, this conception of self-determination was flexible to a point, but certainly precluded any territorial concessions on the part of 'Russia' to others, whether these 'others' were internal or external. Instead, Petrograd took the liberal-reformist position that if rights could be properly guaranteed within the future state system, secessionist claims would be at once less common and less strong. This, it seems,

³³⁶ Since this rested on an assumption that the audience of the document would have enough of an understanding of this term to not need to expand upon its definition, as had been done in earlier years. At the same time, the Menshevik and Petrograd Soviet desire to include this term in the Provisional Government's declaration could also easily be read as an intelligent political manoeuvre, giving left wing opponents of the Provisional Government something to hold the new regime to over the coming months.

³³⁷ Internal borders were a different matter; more on this below.

³³⁸ For the note itself, see Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 1098. Although the message repeated, among other things, a desire for the self-determination of oppressed peoples, it was interpreted, especially by the Petrograd Soviet, as a text reaffirming the previous regime's commitments to the Allies, and thus appeared to be in sympathy with imperialism more than the new revolutionary regime, at least as the Soviet saw it. See Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 200.

³³⁹ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 203.

was both an intellectual philosophical position as well as a practical political one. However, what this meant for the international system and the new government's relationships with other groups, states, and empires remained something of a mist at this point. Secondly, the public backlash against the 'Miliukov note' revealed the difficulties the government had in articulating this position, not just because of general attitudes towards the war, but also because of the contested nature of self-determination itself. In particular, it highlighted the scope there was for discursive deliberation under the new regime. The Provisional Government's most institutionalised form of deliberative opposition was the Petrograd Soviet (and, indeed, the soviets as a whole), but one should not discount the other bodies discussed below.

Beyond these declarations from the Provisional Government and the public discussions of them, the emerging 'system' of new bodies of local self-government, including soviets, was another important venue for political deliberation in the reconfigured empire. In the spring of 1917, many local community leaders (political, religious, and other), took it upon themselves to self-organise as a result of both the political crisis and the resultant political freedoms.³⁴⁰ The number of existent and functional bodies of self-government, therefore greatly increased during this time. Local soviets (small scale local organisations intended for self-government, literally 'councils') had been first created in the predominantly Russian parts of the Russian Empire during the Revolution of 1905, but took on a new dimension during and after the February Revolution. As noted by several scholars, this was a genuinely bottom-up process that was not led by any centre, and some came to possess significant political authority, formally and informally; most notably the Petrograd Soviet as just described.³⁴¹ However, soviets did not appear universally across the breadth of the Russian state's territory following the February Revolution.

Some soviets were explicitly regional, or city/urban area based. Other bodies, however, in regions inhabited primarily by non-Russian peoples, had more national or nationalist connotations, and typically used local language equivalents or alternatives rather than the Russian word 'soviet' in their official designations. Though they often aimed to serve the same administrative functions as soviets, they wore the apparel of national self-government when doing so. Importantly, many of these bodies tended to be more (intentionally) ideologically pluralistic than soviet forms, seeing national liberation and democratisation as twin goals, rather than wholly separate ideas. For example, Estonian political leaders established the *Eestimaa Kubermangu Maanõukogu*, or *Maapäev*, best known in English as the Estonian Provincial Assembly³⁴², while Ukrainian political agents

³⁴⁰ Many of these were expressions of long-held desires from non-Russian national movements. See Kaarel Piirimäe, 'Federalism in the Baltic: Interpretations of Self-Determination and Sovereignty in Estonia in the First Half of the 20th Century', *East Central Europe*, Vol. 39 (2012), 237–265.

³⁴¹ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 193–195.

³⁴² Though 'council' is probably a better translation than 'assembly'.

created the *Ukrainska Tsentralna Rada*, the Ukrainian Central Rada (or Council, as the word *rada* carries the same meaning in Ukrainian as *soviet* does in Russian).

In both Estonia and Ukraine, as elsewhere, this did not mean that more local soviets did not also appear, but that savvy political agents realised that with political legitimacy an unsettled matter, opportunities had arisen to enact forms of national as well as (or as opposed to) local self-determination. The actions of Estonian and Ukrainian nationalists therefore already rested on a claim or assumption that when political reconfiguration would occur it was the nation that constituted the primary subject self of self-determination, even if secessionist calls were not dominant at the time.³⁴³ Indeed, many such nationalists did not see any theoretical incompatibility between the idea of national liberation alongside a formal legal belonging to a larger political structure.³⁴⁴ What was important were guarantees and features of practices that we would today identify as democratic ‘first principles’; a broad and egalitarian basis for franchise, elected representative institutions, some formalised procedures for accountability, etc. Here and elsewhere, though, as with the Petrograd Soviet itself, these local bodies of self-government also provided alternative and frequently rival sources of authority for these other political institutions, facilitating tension well before the onset of the Russian Civil War.³⁴⁵

One of the first actions Estonian nationalist leaders pursued was a straightforward form of political reconfiguration. The current form of the *Estliandskaia guberniia*, or Estonian Province, was, Estonian nationalists argued, outdated, since many regions immediately to its south (currently in the Livonian Province) were ‘Estonian’ and should never have been excluded from the administrative zone when the province was last modified in 1796.³⁴⁶ By ‘Estonian’, they meant inhabited by an overwhelming majority of people whose ethnic lineage and native language were Estonian, as opposed to, for example, Latvian, German, or Russian. It was both just and, from a central government’s point of view, practically helpful for these provinces to be reconstituted along national, ethno-linguistic lines. Jaan Tõnisson, a prominent Estonian nationalist, petitioned the Provisional Government to this end, and, with others, helped to organise a large rally in Petrograd around the same time, attended by several thousand Estonians, to further suggest the apparent popular local appeal of the idea.³⁴⁷ This was successful, and on the 12th of April 1917, the Provisional Government declared its consent for the proposal, reconfiguring the respective provinces and permitting local temporary self-

³⁴³ From Estonian and Ukrainian nationalists, that is. Other nationalists, such as those from Poland and Lithuania, expressed desires for statehood much earlier. Piirimäe, ‘Federalism in the Baltic’.

³⁴⁴ Piirimäe, ‘Federalism in the Baltic’; Sablin, ‘An imperial community’, 819–843.

³⁴⁵ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 193–203.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 200.

³⁴⁷ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 200; Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 300.

government (in the form of the Estonian Provincial Assembly, the *Maapäev*).³⁴⁸ Following this, members of the body were elected via indirect universal suffrage over the course of subsequent months.

Arguably, this was largely a call for similar rights for a non-Russian region to those that had already existed for some time elsewhere. Crucially, however, the theoretical basis for this change was primarily national – at least for the Estonians pursuing the policy – rather than administrative. This latter aspect was simply a helpful additional argument to make while lobbying the regime in Petrograd. While the Provisional Government approved this measure, it is important to emphasise that this was a movement initiated from local nationalist political agents to the central government, and not the other way around. Moreover, this particular instance of imperial reconfiguration demonstrated the reactive nature of the Provisional Government to such questions on the practical level, in some contrast to the top-down theoretical approaches towards reform that a majority of Provisional Government ministers maintained. Such authoritative, legalistic reform was difficult to enact as an explicitly temporary political body, but clearly, as in the case of the Estonian Province, it was possible with the right combination of political pressure, negotiation, and timing.³⁴⁹

In May 1917³⁵⁰, the Bolsheviks organised a party conference to discuss their policies and formulations of them to wider audiences.³⁵¹ The Bolsheviks considered this especially necessary given the onset of the Provisional Government, the apparent rise in the party's popularity following the fallout from the 'Miliukov note', and the return of many of their members, including their leader, to Petrograd once again. As well as promoting what became known as his 'April theses', Lenin also gave a significant speech on self-determination at the conference, in line with his previous interventions on the topic.³⁵² Becoming increasingly weary of other Bolsheviks repeating their subordination of nationalism to proletarian internationalism, or their rejection of the slogan of national self-determination outright, Lenin fiercely argued:

³⁴⁸ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 200; see also Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 300, for the declaration itself.

³⁴⁹ Though we should not overstate the 'centre versus periphery' paradigm in this instance, since many figures within the Provisional Government were broadly sympathetic to such border adjustments based on their understanding of modern ethnographic science, alongside their publicised commitment to ending what they saw as archaic restrictions based on one's class, religion, and nationality. Even beyond this, consider the commitment of L'vov, the new Prime Minister, to local self-government.

³⁵⁰ The end of April 1917, Old Style.

³⁵¹ For some documentary sources on this, especially those of Lenin, refer to V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 31, 339–453.

³⁵² V. I. Lenin, 'Rech' po natsional'nomu voprosu' ['Speech on the National Question'], 12th of May 1917. Available in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 31, 432–437.

We have been arguing over this so much since 1903 that it is becoming difficult to talk about it. Do as you please...Anyone who does not accept this point of view is an annexationist and a chauvinist. We are for a fraternal union of all nations. If there is a Ukrainian republic and a Russian republic, there will be closer contact and greater trust between the two. If the Ukrainians see that we have a Soviet republic, they will not secede, but if we have a Miliukov republic, they will.³⁵³

Already, Miliukov's name was being associated with the 'bourgeois' Provisional Government's supposed prioritisation of capitalist interests over the notion of a just peace. This was an easy target for Lenin, as Miliukov's wider reputation was still controversial following the fallout from the publication of his more sincere desires of the Provisional Government's continued participation in the war. Nonetheless, it is demonstrative of Lenin's view of the primacy of the soviet form of government, as well as the strength of this form as a silver bullet against national oppression and secession (which, of course, were not the same thing).

Lenin also took the opportunity to take aim at Piatakov's arguments once again.³⁵⁴ Although the substance of the Ukrainian Bolshevik's arguments had not changed (as Piatakov himself and others pointed out at the conference), he now formulated his opposition to the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination with the puzzling phrase 'down with borders!'.³⁵⁵ What did this mean, in either theory or in practice? As Lenin replied: "We maintain that the state is necessary, and a state presupposes borders. The state, of course, may hold a bourgeois government, but we need the Soviets. But even Soviets are confronted with the question of borders".³⁵⁶ Intriguingly, then, before political power was seriously conceived of by the party, Lenin, at this point still a firm believer in world revolution, had some conception of the necessity of territorialised political structures. With his Marxist-historical analysis of the stages of global capitalism (as discussed in the previous chapter), nationhood was simply the most logical characteristic to give primacy to when establishing the borders of these political structures, regardless of Lenin and the Bolsheviks' ultimate goals. Regardless, Lenin continued:

We say that borders are determined by the will of the population...Only when the socialist revolution has become a reality, and not a method, will the slogan 'Down with borders' be a correct slogan...War is a different matter entirely. If need be, we shall not draw the line at a revolutionary war. We are not pacifists.³⁵⁷

³⁵³ *Ibid*, 436.

³⁵⁴ Lenin, 'Rech' po natsional'nomu voprosu', 432–437.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 434.

³⁵⁶ Lenin, 'Rech' po natsional'nomu voprosu', 435.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 436.

Elsewhere in late spring and early summer, the Ukrainian Central Rada was preoccupied with negotiating with the Provisional Government about its status within the latter's territory.³⁵⁸ Plainly, the Ukrainian Central Rada wanted to test the will of Petrograd's honeyed words by requesting concrete action. As with the already-mentioned case of Estonia, the Ukrainian Central Rada was the side taking the lead in this political self-assertion, demonstrating not just this more open political environment that facilitated 'declarations and deliberation' but also its changing spatial dimensions. The boldest forms of self-determination, in both theory and practice, were coming from the old imperial periphery *in*, as well as from the centre *out*. The main aims of the Ukrainian negotiating team sent to Petrograd in spring 1917 were threefold. Firstly, they wished for the formal creation of a democratically constituted³⁵⁹ representative body (as Estonians had achieved with the *Maapäev*, for example). Secondly, the Ukrainian delegation wanted the Provisional Government to issue a statement certifying that Ukrainian autonomy could be permitted in theory as part of the future constitutional settlement once the Constituent Assembly had met.³⁶⁰ Lastly, and more immediately, they requested the right to use the Ukrainian language in institutions such as schools, churches, and, more controversially, the army.³⁶¹ However, the Ukrainian negotiators also demanded several bolder policies that were arguably unrealistic in the prescribed circumstances.³⁶² Namely, this included the appointment of a cabinet minister whose portfolio exclusively covered Ukrainian affairs, and that a certain portion of taxes paid in Ukraine to the government be returned to the Central Rada more directly to be used at its own discretion.³⁶³ The Provisional Government rejected these conditions, unsurprisingly using their provisional status as a half-explanation, half-excuse.³⁶⁴ Such matters could only

³⁵⁸ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 153; for English translations of the documents of the main events of between the Central Rada and the Provisional Government during this time, see Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 370–401. The language of these Central Rada declarations and messages suggests that Ukrainian political agents either misinterpreted (perhaps intentionally) the declaration establishing the Provisional Government as a declaration declaring a federal Russian republic, or that they assumed that this was so likely to be the ultimate result of the political upheaval one could safely refer to a 'Russian federal republic' already. Whichever is more accurate, both are revealing when considering this dissertation's research questions.

³⁵⁹ This could refer to many different meanings, institutions, and practices, of course.

³⁶⁰ Memorandum of the Delegation of the Ukrainian Central Rada to the Provisional Government and the Executive Committee of the Soviets. Available in Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 374–376.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.* The request regarding the usage of Ukrainian in the army came from a suggestion that separate Ukrainian units should be set up, in the rear and, where possible, at the front as well.

³⁶² Circumstances that, lest we forget, included the military situation in the region.

³⁶³ Memorandum of the Delegation of the Ukrainian Central Rada to the Provisional Government.

³⁶⁴ Official Communiqué on the Rejection of the Ukrainian Demands. Available in Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 376–377.

be decided by the Constituent Assembly, *the* institutional answer that both the Provisional Government and the national movements who wished for more constitutional clarity during this time were waiting for.³⁶⁵ Dejected, the representatives of the Ukrainian Central Rada returned to Kyiv and reported their failures to their colleagues. Following discussions on how best to respond, the Central Rada issued the *First Universal*³⁶⁶ on the 23rd of June 1917, which declared:

Let there be a free Ukraine. Without separating from all of Russia, without breaking away from the Russian State, let the Ukrainian people on their own territory have the right to manage their own life. Let a National Ukrainian Assembly (Sejm), elected by universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage, establish order and a regime in the Ukraine. Only our Ukrainian assembly is to have the right to issue all laws which are to establish this regime.³⁶⁷

In other words, the Central Rada declared its own autonomy anyway. The *First Universal* also made reference to those inhabiting the territory of Ukraine who were not (necessarily) Ukrainian: Jews; Poles; Belarusians; and Russians, among other less numerous groups.³⁶⁸ The Central Rada expressed its hope that the “non-Ukrainian peoples who live in our land” would be concerned enough about an orderly life to assist in the struggle for autonomy, “during this trying time of national disorganisation” and “in the spirit of friendship”.³⁶⁹ Therefore, although the Universal was a broad document of intent rather than one of action or procedure, the Central Rada still positioned itself within the text as nationally inclusive, rather than exclusive.

The Provisional Government responded to the document’s publication with shock and outrage, and quickly sent two of its ministers, I. G. Tseretili³⁷⁰ and M. I. Tereshchenko³⁷¹, to Kyiv to express this attitude in person and attempt to

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* See also the Opinion of the [Provisional Government’s] Juridical Council on the Ukrainian Memorandum. Available in Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 377.

³⁶⁶ I use the term First Universal here simply to distinguish it more clearly from the subsequent similarly titled declarations of the Ukrainian Central Rada. At the time, of course, it was not called the *First Universal*. Linguists may be interested to note that the word ‘universal’ was a (contemporaneously) archaic word of Cossack origin for ‘decree’ or ‘declaration’ – see Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 153.

³⁶⁷ Universal Ukrayins’koyi Tsentral’noyi Rady [Universal of the Ukrainian Central Rada], 23rd of June 1917 [public domain]. A Ukrainian version is available here, and an English translation can be found in Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 383–385.

³⁶⁸ Universal Ukrayins’koyi Tsentral’noyi Rady.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ Minister of Posts and Telegraph.

³⁷¹ The new Minister of Foreign Affairs, following Miliukov’s resignation in spring. Tereshchenko was a descendant of the famous wealthy, landed, philanthropic Ukrainian family of the same name. The Tereshchenko family was a large landowner in Ukraine, as well as the owner of several sugar factories, and individual members of the noted dynasty were variously entrepreneurs and investors, philanthropists and political activists, and even patrons for artists.

discuss mutually acceptable paths forward.³⁷² A cursory glance at the official and *de facto* newspapers of the Kadets (*Rech'*) and socialist parties (*Izvestiia*; *Volia naroda*) reveals that these groups were also affronted by the actions of the Ukrainian Central Rada, and did not support its unilateral claim to autonomy and linguistic rights.³⁷³ The Provisional Government's main point of contention appeared to be the Central Rada's unilateralism, from an initial jumping-off point of the rule of law. If the revolutionary government in Petrograd did not consider itself imbued with full constitutional authority, it logically could not permit a lower-tiered local governmental institution this higher form of authority. As such, the negotiations were arduous, but, thanks to the sympathetic ears of Tseretili and Tereshchenko (as well as Kerensky, who was in Kyiv for part of the negotiation period as well), an accord was reached.³⁷⁴

The documentary result of these negotiations was the *Second Universal*, issued by the Ukrainian Central Rada in early July 1917.³⁷⁵ In both style and substance, the document was not radically different from the original declaration, since it was in effect a revised version of its predecessor.³⁷⁶ However, it did reflect the most significant changes forced by the tensions the first document had created. Most interestingly for our purposes, the *Second Universal* invoked the right of all peoples to self-determination to justify Ukraine's unity with Russia, emphasising both the importance of Ukrainian agency (a particularist claim) and the current borders of the former Russian Empire simultaneously (a still particular but far broader claim):

³⁷² Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 153–154; Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 215.

³⁷³ For a wide variety of reasons, of course. The war and its existential impact was an important justification for refusing to accept the Central Rada's claims for all of the aforementioned groups. The response of the Kadet newspaper, *Rech'*, to the First Universal, for example, highlighted these themes as well as stating that the act of the Central Rada was “Yet another link in the German plan to dismember Russia”, attempting to question the legitimacy of the non-Russian national movements through means of association with enemy powers (see *Rech'*, 14th June [27th of June] 1917, No. 137, 1 – available here). Generally, though, the Kadet criticism was based on the absence of a legal basis for the declaration, while the socialist criticism came from the point of view of their reading of the First Universal as a dangerous splitting up of revolutionary forces during a time of instability.

³⁷⁴ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 215. Kerensky was in the region to tour the front, giving speeches intended to inspire the troops with new revolutionary fighting zeal, and therefore was able to more easily drop by for some of the discussions.

³⁷⁵ Druhyi Universal Ukrayins'koyi Tsentral'noyi Rady [Second Universal of the Ukrainian Central Rada], 16th of July 1917 [public domain]. A Ukrainian version is available here, and for an English translation see Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government*, 392–393.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Watching over the freedom gained by the revolutionary people, recognising the right of peoples to self-determination, and leaving the establishment of its final forms to the Constituent Assembly, the Provisional Government proffers its hand to the representatives of Ukrainian democracy—the Central Rada—and jointly with them calls on them to build a new life in the Ukraine for the welfare of all of revolutionary Russia.³⁷⁷

In other words, self-determination was being used to legitimise both a narrower and a broader conception of governmental authority at the same time, rather than in (direct) opposition to one another. While there was tension between these ideas in substance, the *Second Universal* reflected the fact that these two conceptions of self-determination could live together simultaneously, if not always harmoniously. Nonetheless, its terms were unpalatable for several Kadet ministers who took their commitment to the convening of a Constituent Assembly, the rule of law, and unitary statism seriously. A. I. Shingaryov (Minister of Finance), A. A. Manuilov (Minister of Education), and D. I. Shakhovskoy (Minister of Welfare) all resigned from the Provisional Government in protest, with N. V. Nekrasov resigning both from the Provisional Government and then later from the Kadet Party itself.³⁷⁸

The resignation of the Kadet ministers from the Provisional Government signalled two noteworthy features when considering self-determination. Firstly, the substance of their arguments is explicable based on their previous political interventions on the nature of the future Russian state. Although the Kadet ministers did not in any way deny the existence of a Ukrainian nation (though views among their broader party members differed on the nation's connection or lack thereof to the Russian nation), nor oppose the substance of the draft text in principle, they were firm supporters of a strong central government as the legitimator for any such claims and processes. Only both a united Russia and a robust government in Petrograd could effectively implement the constitutional-democratic reforms they saw as necessary. This was in line with their earlier documented thought; that reform had to be 'top down', and that major constitutional questions such as that of the status of Ukraine could not be decided upon without the authority of legal bodies created or designed for this specific purpose. As the Constituent Assembly had not yet been convened, the Kadet ministers felt unable to consent to a document which in practice permitted a region under their claimed territory to unilaterally establish its own constitutional form. From a liberal-reformist legalistic standpoint, this is entirely understandable; self-determination was possible, but within legal limits imposed by a representative central government. For the Kadets, self-determination was subordinated to law and political process, regardless of the question of the Ukrainian Central Rada's popular support or lack thereof.

Secondly, as contemporary sources reveal, there was much debate within the Provisional Government over the implications of the precise genre of both the

³⁷⁷ Druhyi Universal Ukrayins'koyi Tsentral'noyi Rady.

³⁷⁸ Detailed in *Rech'*, 4th of July [17th of July] 1917, No. 154, 1. Available [here](#).

universals and the governmental responses to them, including from both Kadet and socialist ministers, that again highlights the importance of different textual forms for political agents making political interventions. When the Provisional Government representatives returned to Petrograd, they reported not just their agreed terms but also their experiences of the negotiation process itself, including the precise form of what had been concluded. One Kadet account of the meeting went as follows:

I. G. Tsereteli and M. I. Tereshchenko, supported by all the socialist ministers, once more confirmed that the agreement reached in Kiev was final and could not be subject to any alterations. Tsereteli and Tereshchenko argued that the achievement of this agreement was very laborious, that one should not dwell on particulars, that the point in question was not a law but a mere declaration, which, moreover, did not solve the Ukrainian problem in its entirety but concerned only the limits of [Ukrainian] autonomy, etc.³⁷⁹

The phrase, “the point in question was not a law but a mere declaration” is revealing.³⁸⁰ Certainly, political declarations *operate* differently to laws in democratic, or, in this case, democratising societies, even if they come from a central government. Nonetheless, that Tsereteli and Tereshchenko were arguing their point of view by calling upon the declaratory, rather than legislative nature of a specific document demonstrates that they saw the former as having decidedly different purposes to the latter. To some agents, then, a political declaration is declaratory in the most literal meaning of the word. The declaration genre appeared to be performing two main functions in this case: firstly, placating the Ukrainian Central Rada (and by some extension, other non-Russian national movements too) by signalling broad and agreeable but vague statements of intent; and secondly and in relation to this, delaying any substantive resolution to the question of Ukraine and the reconfigured Russian state until the sitting of the Constituent Assembly.

However, the Kadet ministers disagreed, believing that both universals very much intended to, and would in practice substantively resolve the issue of Ukraine’s constitutional status.³⁸¹ Modern readers may be theoretically sympathetic to a rule of law-based understanding of self-determination as espoused by the Kadets, especially during a period of conflict and imperial reconfiguration. However, it should also be stated clearly that it was in no way clear that the Constituent Assembly, within which the resolution of all such issues was placed by the Kadets, would approve widespread decentralisation.³⁸² The Kadets were only one group in this regard, as many other political parties were also either

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Rech'*, 4th of July [17th of July] 1917, 1.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² Moreover, even if we accept that some (Russian or Russo-centric) political parties had such platforms, non-Russian nationalist parties who almost universally supported different kinds of decentralisation were not going to be numerically dominant in the Constituent Assembly.

resolute in their support for the unitary territorial structure of Russia or internally conflicted on questions of centralisation, federalism, and autonomy.³⁸³ In other words, the Kadets' position could also be read as a more cynical political strategy. At the same time, it is not clear that all Kadets came to this conclusion by the same means; it is entirely conceivable that the rule of law *was* a higher principle to some than the unitary territorial composition of the Russian state. What mattered to some was the method more than the outcome, and to others, the reverse held true.

This subchapter analysed the Provisional Government of Russia's attitude towards self-determination from its inception to the summer of 1917. It argued that the Provisional Government was more generally reactive than proactive with regards to the issues of self-determination and related ideas, such as administrative reconfiguration. This was demonstrated with several examples. Firstly, members of the Petrograd Soviet successfully pressured the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Miliukov, to refer explicitly to the self-determination of peoples when restating the war aims of the Provisional Government. Elsewhere, Estonian nationalists successfully campaigned to have the borders of the Estonian Province adjusted along 'national', ethno-linguistic lines. While the Provisional Government performed these actions, they were not the instigators of them, and the new executive suffered from its combination of being a consciously temporary body alongside the institution's leaders believing that only a legally constituted elected assembly could rule on such matters. As discussed, this was most problematic when Ukrainian nationalists, through the Ukrainian Central Rada, unilaterally declared Ukrainian autonomy. For many within the Provisional Government, it was not the idea of autonomy itself that was the issue, but that autonomy was declared unilaterally by a lesser-tiered body that, they reasoned, did not have the legal authority to perform such actions. Many Kadets in the Provisional Government resigned over this issue, demonstrating the strength of their conviction on the matter.

As discussed, political agents of many different persuasions were sensitive to the implications of particular genre conventions when making and responding to political interventions in the first half of 1917. This was the case from the very inception of the Provisional Government, with the declaration announcing the new regime clearly intending to reinforce the existence and legitimacy of the body. Similarly, demands from the Petrograd Soviet for the Provisional Government to refer to the self-determination of peoples in the latter's declaration of war aims

³⁸³ Including the party that would, in time, win the greatest proportion of votes in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs). The SRs had a complicated relationship with such constitutional questions, as many of its members and its platform as a whole was intended to draw support from agricultural peasants (and primarily Russian and Ukrainian speaking individuals at that) rather than propose overly institutionalised solutions to state problems. Their party programmes stressed an idealised or romanticised notion of local self-government, sometimes framed as autonomy, sometimes as federalism. Various ideas of non-territorial autonomy were also present, which came from one of the party's main theorists on the 'National Question', N. V. Briullova-Shaskol'skaia.

was aimed, on one level, at establishing alignment between the two bodies on the issue, while also fostering ‘strategic ambiguity’ for both to interpret what this meant in practice in different ways. Recognition of the implications of genre conventions also caused profound disagreement within the Provisional Government, as demonstrated by the divergent ministerial responses to the *First Universal* just restated. In contrast to, for example, Lenin and Stalin’s arguments described in the previous subchapter, the Kadet ministers of the Provisional Government did *not* see declarations as exclusively declaratory – declarations did things, as well as said them, and did ‘too much’ for the Kadets to ultimately accept. It was with the same logic that Ukrainian nationalists had issued the *First Universal* in the first place; clearly, their aim *was* to declare autonomy into existence, not merely express it as a desire. As such, the onset of the Provisional Government of Russia also marked the beginning of significant political disagreement over the implications of the genres in which self-determination appeared, as well as over the concept itself.

2.2 Kyiv versus Petrograd?

In a political deliberation sense, there were multiple centres of discussions of self-determination and its place in and relationship to the reconfigured Russian Empire, now taking the insecure form of the Provisional Government of Russia. One of the most notable centres was the city of Kyiv, which, as mentioned, acted as the host city of the Ukrainian Central Rada. Whether or not one saw Ukraine as a separate political, ethnic, or national space conceptually, or subscribed to Ukrainian national identity, the city was also the *de facto* capital of the geographic region, and was claimed formally by nationalists as such.³⁸⁴ As well as the public declarations and negotiations addressed above, the Ukrainian Central Rada also sought to mobilise and engage with other non-Russian groups within and beyond their claimed territory through more formal, organised forms of deliberation.

The clearest example of this was the Central Rada’s organisation of the Congress of the Peoples of Russia, sometimes referred to with the more politically active name Congress of the Enslaved Peoples of Russia.³⁸⁵ The aim of this meeting was to put the issue and issues of the non-Russian ‘Peoples of Russia’ at the heart of a democratic reconfiguration of the Russian imperial state. Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, the Ukrainian nationalist who had written of the “empire of nations” in his contribution to *What Russia Expects from the War* back in 1915, was the

³⁸⁴ Of course, this had extra texture for those who saw Kyiv as an indisputably Russian city, and/or those who deified its historic role as the capital of the Kyivan Rus’. There will be more substantive commentary on this later in the dissertation, when detailing A. I. Denikin’s relationship to the Ukrainian national movement.

³⁸⁵ For the best general overview of this event, see O. P. Reent and B. I. Andrusishin (eds.), *Z’ezd ponevolenikh narodiv (8–15 veresnya 1917 r.) (21–28 veresnya n. st.)* (Kyiv, 1994), 1–71.

main organiser of the Congress of the Peoples of Russia.³⁸⁶ Hrushevskyi had been elected President of the Ukrainian Central Rada in spring 1917, and was keen to use his significant political capital (and wider prestige among intellectual and political circles) to position Kyiv as the logical home for non-Russian groups wanting to hold the Provisional Government's feet to the fire within the new and fluctuating system.

While the organisation of the Congress was a move designed to increase the political power of the Central Rada, it also made sense on two other levels for both Ukrainian nationalists and other non-Russian groups. Firstly, as Ukrainians were by far the most populous non-Russian (national) group of the Provisional Government's claimed territory, the Ukrainian Central Rada could claim to represent a large proportion of the new government's population. In so doing, they contributed to a wider normative moving of agency from the old imperial centre to the local. This originally implicit claim, that the Central Rada had the right to act on behalf of Ukrainians and/or the Ukrainian nation, could therefore be replicated by other similar institutions, some of which were discussed above.³⁸⁷ Secondly, given the widespread democratisation projects conceived of and/or supported by non-Russian groups (in which decentralisation and federalism were often a large part), the idea of centring discussions in a city that was not Petrograd had symbolic appeal. The city of Kyiv specifically was a logical choice – it had the cultural esteem of being one of the larger and more historic cities of the old regime, but also represented the political and social heterogeneity present elsewhere. While it was primarily a Russian *speaking* city (as most of the larger urban centres of Ukraine were in the early twentieth century³⁸⁸), it was also home to many Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, several thousand Germans, and so on, and thus to speakers of Ukrainian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and German, among other languages, as well as the dominant language and *lingua franca* of Russian. Politically, the city, and especially the Central Rada itself, encompassed a wide variety of ideological persuasions, including conservative Russophiles, Kadet and Kadet-style liberal-reformists, and numerous socialist and revolutionary groups. Therefore, it could not really be argued on either point that the city was unrepresentative of any specific group.

The most common desire of the delegates to the Congress of the Peoples of Russia was a full reconfiguration of the Russian state into a federal republic,

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*; Gerasimov, 'What Russian Progressives Expected from the War', 208.

³⁸⁷ Though I do not mean to imply that the Central Rada was the first to make such a claim, nor that other non-Russian groups were casually impacted to take certain actions themselves as a result of Kyiv's self-positioning. Rather I believe the significance came from the size and accompanying political power of the Central Rada (and the arable land of agricultural, economic, and strategic importance of the territory of Ukraine to many different agents), which meant that the issue was too large for the Provisional Government to ignore in substance.

³⁸⁸ This says nothing of national identity, of course, since many Ukrainian nationalists, for example, were bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian. Russian was simply the *lingua franca* for most of Ukraine's cities at this time.

based on national territorialised units in most cases.³⁸⁹ Most significantly for our purposes, this was viewed by many delegates as the most logical expression of self-determination. One representative from Latvia, for example, made this quite explicit in his statements before the Congress, alongside emphasising that this went hand in hand with state unity:

We must form one unified front, against all who are opposed to the principle of self-determination. Here in beautiful Kiev, the cradle of people's autonomy, we shall leave behind us the headquarters for our unified struggle – the Council of Peoples... We recognize that these our moderate demands do not threaten the unity of Russia's state and do not impair its general welfare. Therefore we are imploring the Provisional Government at this moment of Russia's history to issue and announce a special decree, recognizing the above demands.³⁹⁰

In other words, there were (at least) two legitimate sources of political authority for the federalist proposal as conceived by its theorists: for the federal units themselves, it was the nation. For the wider state, the source was a broader notion of 'the people', essentially citizenry of the reconfigured regime. There was certainly variation across the Congress' participants as to the exact nature of this federal reconfiguration, particularly regarding the responsibilities hypothetically taken up by the central and local institutions, but *federalism* writ large was nonetheless dominant at the event.

Sceptics may wish to point out the supposed irony of the delegates' use of Russian in this setting. However, this would assume that there was a logical, practical alternative for the meeting's participants. While French was the formal diplomatic language of the time, not all of the delegates to the Congress spoke it, even if they had a reading knowledge of it. That Russian was used by non-Russians to question the legitimacy of the current constitutional settlement is not in itself surprising or revealing. This was simply one of the inherent quirks of the lands administered by the Provisional Government; that non-Russians found a common language, both literally and politically, in Russian was explicable, and arguably contributed to the synthesis of the delegates' respective arguments. This was simply a legacy of the contradictions of empires, rather than any noteworthy point of 'hypocrisy' on the part of the Congress' delegates.³⁹¹

Not every attendee of the Congress supported a reconfigured federal Russian state, however. Some were explicit in their desires for secession; in most cases reaffirming preexisting views of their respective case. Lithuanian nationalists were

³⁸⁹ Reent and Andrusishin, *Z'ezd ponevolenikh narodiv*, 1–71.

³⁹⁰ Quoted in Charlotte Alston, *Piip, Meierovics & Voldemaras: The Baltic States* (London, 2010), 29. I have left the American English spelling as in the translation of this published original, as well as the Russian-English transliteration of Kyiv as "Kiev".

³⁹¹ Even beyond one's capacity to speak French, using the diplomatic language of the time at such a meeting might also imply that the event was 'international', which was not the intention of the majority of its delegates – certainly not its organisers.

among the most vocal supporters of independent statehood.³⁹² Unsurprisingly, Zionist representatives also argued for independent statehood at the Congress, although of course not on formerly tsarist territory but in the region of Palestine, then caught between the Ottoman Empire and Arab groups fighting alongside the British and French empires, with a view to enacting some form of Arabs' own self-determination.³⁹³ Federalist views of self-determination within the Russian state were dominant at the event, however, and the Congress ultimately voted to create (and then elected members of) a body called the Council of the Peoples of Russia, an institution intending to be the supreme representative body for non-Russians within a reconfigured Russian state.³⁹⁴ The organisation of an accompanying journal was also undertaken, and given the telling name *Svobodnyi soiuz* (*Free union*), demonstrating the main aim of the Congress in a succinct phrase.

Maksym Slavynskyi, the Ukrainian journalist and Kadet who had also contributed to the *What Russia Expects from the War* collection in 1915, was also present at the Congress, representing the Provisional Government. His very selection was representative of the intentional ambiguity of the Provisional Government's position. While Slavynskyi was known for his positive attitude towards Ukrainian nationalism, having played a role in the Ukrainian Central Rada and its representation in Petrograd earlier in the year (something that his Russian colleagues had a spectrum of views on), he was nonetheless a liberal-reformist who favoured territorial integrity over secession, especially unilateral action to this end. Ukrainian nationalists in the Rada who took Hrushevskyi's position, by contrast, favoured immediate decentralisation up to the point of Ukrainian autonomy within a reconfigured Russian political system. In theory, these two broad positions were not so incompatible, and may have been resolved through deliberation and political compromise in other circumstances. Slavynskyi was himself a supporter of a federal reconstruction of the Russian state, and could hypothetically have worked to this end from inside the central government as well as assisting those outside who sought the same end goal. However, although the Congress gave many of the non-Russian national movements and their leaders a sense of political momentum, further deliberation and enactment of any such ideas would soon prove impossible.

On the 7th of November (25th October Old Style) 1917, the Bolsheviks staged a successful coup d'état in Petrograd.³⁹⁵ In the following days and weeks, the new self-declared authorities in the form of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK)

³⁹² Reent and Andrusishin, *Z'izd ponevolenikh narodiv*, 24; 27–28.

³⁹³ That, in practice, did not work out as many Arab Revolt leaders had intended or desired, as is well known.

³⁹⁴ Reent and Andrusishin, *Z'izd ponevolenikh narodiv*, 1–71. This body was to be Kyiv based.

³⁹⁵ The Bolshevik seizure of power did have some level of wider support and participation within Petrograd, and appeal to many beyond the city. Nonetheless, I do not think it is fair to call it anything than what I do in this dissertation, 'the Bolshevik seizure of power', or occasionally as their 'coup d'état'.

published a series of documents sometimes known as the ‘Soviet decrees’.³⁹⁶ The Bolsheviks had established Sovnarkom as a direct result of their seizure of power (as such it also included some Left SRs, who also participated in the coup and early Soviet governance, until March 1918), while VTsIK dated from the days of the Provisional Government (and initially also included other political parties, in this case mainly the Mensheviks and the SRs).³⁹⁷ The most well-known of these decrees concerned issues of peace, land reform, and workers’ rights.

In some ways, these documents formed their own distinct genre of political intervention, hence their conventional, distinctive name as the ‘Soviet decrees’. Certainly, there are similarities across them that warrant this grouping, but the decrees (*dekrety*) can also be seen as imitations of revolutionary declarations issued during the French Revolution, such as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.³⁹⁸ The similarities between these forms of political intervention extended beyond pure style, though. Like many of the declarations of the French Revolution, the Soviet decrees had little enacting power behind them, and certainly no ‘legal’ force or basis, even though they were framed as legal acts.³⁹⁹ Instead, they were political interventions that served as statements of intent of universal truths or principles that subsequent and more practical work would be based upon. As the Bolsheviks had not yet established a firm system of governance, the decrees are thus best viewed as (public) documents of political claims and should be analysed as such.⁴⁰⁰

The Bolsheviks also issued an important declaration regarding self-determination during this time. Published on the 15th of November (2nd November Old Style), just over a week after the coup, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was the first ‘post-power’ document explicitly pertaining to self-determination the Bolsheviks had produced for public consumption.⁴⁰¹ Lenin and

³⁹⁶ The name ‘revolutionary decree’ is also relatively common.

³⁹⁷ Lara Douds, *Inside Lenin’s Government: Ideology, Power and Practice in the Early Soviet State* (London, 2018), 1–2. This work also covers the evolution of early Soviet governance effectively; more on this below.

³⁹⁸ This was no accident. The Bolsheviks were conscious of the legacy of the French Revolution and drew explicit parallels to it on several occasions. Trotsky, for example, engaged with the legacy of the French revolutionary period (and accusations that the Bolsheviks were the twentieth century’s Jacobins) in his famous polemical response to Karl Kautsky’s *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Terrorism and Communism*, the latter of which Trotsky borrowed as a title.

³⁹⁹ Though of course, they were *de facto* retrospectively ‘legalised’ by the course of subsequent events.

⁴⁰⁰ As opposed to seeing both the Bolshevik seizure of power and its results as a definitive, almost static moment between X and Y. As the Bolsheviks did not control all of their claimed territory, one should be sceptical of imposing a universal ‘moment’ upon the wider region.

⁴⁰¹ *Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii* [Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia]. Available in *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1957) [Vol. 1], 39–41. Note that this document was not given the highest name of decree (*dekret*) but declaration (*deklaratsiia*), thus it technically was not one of the ‘Soviet decrees’ according to the letter, if not the spirit of that framing. For an English translation, see here.

Stalin had drafted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* together, and the two were its sole signatories.⁴⁰² In general, the substantive content of the document was not novel. The preamble of the declaration included a narrative in line with the authors' previous expressions of views on the 'National Question' – the 'pure' national oppression of the days of the Russian Empire, followed by the hollow words of the bourgeois Provisional Government, and so on, legitimising the Bolshevik seizure of power as a logical and necessary next emancipatory step.⁴⁰³

More pertinently, the document proclaimed the "Equality and sovereignty" (*Ravenstvo i suverennost'*) of the peoples of Russia, something that the next sentence made clear included "The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, up to and including separation and the formation of an independent state".⁴⁰⁴ That self-determination was again being conveyed as a *right* (*pravo*) is noteworthy given the publication of this document occurring after the Bolshevik seizure of power, but reading the text critically is nonetheless essential.⁴⁰⁵ As well as having no method of enforcement or mechanism for its enactment (i.e. an interlinked legal system with clearly defined constitutional processes), Lenin and Stalin did not provide any clarity on whether they would, in principle, accept only what they understood as proletarian claims to independent statehood, or bourgeois ones as well. This had already been a point of contention among Bolshevik figures on the theoretical level and, as will be seen, remained so in subsequent months.⁴⁰⁶ In any case, on the purely practical level, should this people, however defined, write an appeal to the new *de facto* rulers of Petrograd as in the days of old monarchy, simply turn up to the capital and start negotiations, or even declare independence unilaterally? The practical next steps for the 'peoples of Russia' were anything but clear, even if it was assumed that independent statehood was the desired result. This was a questionable assumption.⁴⁰⁷

Lenin and Stalin's use of the term Russia was also in line with their previous writings, and further highlighted their more conceptually static view of the state.

⁴⁰² Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii. As opposed to many of the other more canonical revolutionary decrees, usually issued in the name of Sovnarkom or VTsIK as an institution. Another result of the Bolshevik seizure of power was that Stalin took on the role of People's Commissar for Nationalities more 'officially' (the position and related body existed before, through the Petrograd Soviet, from the summer of 1917 onwards, but possessed no practical power nor legal force).

⁴⁰³ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii, 39–40.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 40. Here "free self-determination" was "*svobodnoe samoopredelenie*" while "independent state" was "*samostoiatel' nogo gosudarstva*". The declaration also reiterated the abolition of all national and religious privileges and restrictions, worded in an almost identical way to the Provisional Government's statement expressing the same sentiment in the latter's original guiding principles.

⁴⁰⁵ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii, 40.

⁴⁰⁶ Arguably, in fact, this point of contention became more of an issue following the coup and into the years of the Russian Civil War.

⁴⁰⁷ Though, in time, anti-Bolshevik sentiment would contribute in part to secessionist desires for some non-Russian groups.

This can be seen not only in the use of the word Russia in the genitive case (*Rossii* – ‘of Russia’) in the title of the document, but also provision four of the declaration, which stated that there was to be free development for national minorities and ethnographic groups “inhabiting the territory of Russia”.⁴⁰⁸ Certainly, this was a convenient shorthand for the historic political-legal space of ‘Russia’ under the Provisional Government and Russian Empire before it, but this similarly assumed its extension into the future. Whether they realised it or not, Lenin and Stalin were implying a conceptual continuity in ‘Russia’ while also proclaiming a right to self-determination up to and including secession. A generous reader might return to Stalin’s 1913 *Marxism and the National Question* article, in which the Bolshevik talked of nations as ‘historically constituted’ communities, but even within that text, Stalin stated clearly that all nations (and therefore territories) are “subject to the law of change”.⁴⁰⁹

Normatively speaking, whether the “territory of Russia” was in fact the territory of Russia was, as Ernest Renan famously wrote of nations in the late nineteenth century, “a daily plebiscite” – certainly given the polarising nature of the Bolsheviks.⁴¹⁰ Some Cossack groups, for example, took this daily plebiscite quite literally; the Don Cossack Ataman (leader) A. M. Kaledin denounced the Bolsheviks just one day after the coup, inviting others sympathetic to the Provisional Government (and their continuation of the war) to the Don Host.⁴¹¹

In its content, then, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was not novel, yet its importance should not be underestimated. As the first public message the Bolsheviks made on self-determination in power (ignoring for the time being the contested nature of this power), the declaration offered a reiteration of the basis upon which the Bolsheviks were proceeding from, as well as a *de facto* standard to which prospective and actual Bolshevik policies could be compared to.⁴¹² This, in time, would not be lost on the leaders of non-Russian national movements, even if the declaration itself did not significantly impact their decision-making process. *The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was not designed for electoral purposes – it was not a party programme or anything of the sort but constituted as a result of the group’s assumption of power. In this sense, however unclear the declaration’s technicalities were, Lenin and Stalin could utilise the document to suggest that the Bolsheviks were, without

⁴⁰⁸ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii, 39–40. The terms “national minorities” and “ethnographic groups”, and distinctions between the two, went undefined in the declaration.

⁴⁰⁹ Stalin, ‘Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros’, 296.

⁴¹⁰ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii, 40; Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ [transcribed lecture] in Ernest Renan; Calmann Lévy (ed.), *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?: conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris, 1882), 27.

⁴¹¹ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 370.

⁴¹² The November declaration also formalised the adjective use of free, implying that self-determination could also exist in an unfree way – and could therefore be depicted as such in propaganda if deemed necessary. Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii, 40.

hesitation or external pressure, realising their political platforms of earlier years. As with the Soviet decrees, the declaration was soon published in party presses.

The Bolsheviks were soon faced with an instance of what they identified as bourgeois secession. In early December 1917, Finland, via the-then Imperial Senate of Finland, declared independence just over a fortnight after the Bolsheviks had issued the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* in November.⁴¹³ The Bolsheviks soon legally accepted this in late December, with some confusion and even embarrassment, as it was not entirely anticipated by Sovnarkom.⁴¹⁴ As the Finnish Senate's declaration was issued shortly after the Bolsheviks' public statement declaring respect for self-determination to the point of secession, it would have been difficult to do anything other than accept the decision, even if, as mentioned, the Bolshevik declaration did not provide any clarity on the legitimate basis behind or mechanism(s) for secession.⁴¹⁵ It is nonetheless important to state that when the Finnish Civil War began in January 1918, the Bolsheviks intervened on the side of the Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic, particularly by providing arms to Finnish Reds.⁴¹⁶ Clearly, respecting the legitimacy of Finland's Declaration of Independence was different for the Bolsheviks than respecting the independence of Finland itself. This was entirely in line with their theoretically grounded support for 'the revolution' regardless of location and circumstance, as well as the Bolsheviks' commitment to (and belief in) ultimate reunification, according to what they read as ironclad economic laws.

Also in November 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada adopted the (primarily Hrushevskyi-drafted) *Third Universal*.⁴¹⁷ Most importantly for this dissertation's purposes, this document declared the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and intended to construct a clearer and stronger form for the Ukrainian Central Rada's campaign for greater political rights for Ukraine.⁴¹⁸ This campaign, as

⁴¹³ Suomen itsenäisyysjulistus [Declaration of the Independence of Finland], 4th of December 1917 [public domain]. Available in Finnish here. However, one should note that this was not a 'conventional' 'Declaration of Independence' in the sense that Armitage argues for (and I second) in *The Declaration of Independence* (when compared to, for example, the Estonian or Czechoslovak declarations of a similar period). Instead, it was part of a more complex legislative process, the substance of which cannot be addressed in detail here.

⁴¹⁴ See Dekret o gosudarstvennoi nezavisimosti Finliandii [Decree on the State Independence of Finland], 31st of December 1917. Available in *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti*, 250. Accounts of the meeting between Finnish representatives and Sovnarkom in December 1917, in which the latter agreed to recognise the legitimacy of Finland's declaration, depict this well. See Erkki Räikkönen, *Svinhufvud ja itsenäisyssenaatti* (Helsinki, 1935), in which Lenin, Trotsky, and other members of Sovnarkom all awkwardly suggested that each other should go and greet the Finns. Lenin's first alleged response to this suggestion, the phrase "What can I say to those bourgeoisie?!", is a good summation.

⁴¹⁵ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 230.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229–230.

⁴¹⁷ Tretii Universal Ukrayins'koyi Tsentral'noyi Rady [Third Universal of the Ukrainian Central Rada], 7th of November 1917 [public domain]. A Ukrainian version is available here.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

with other non-Russian national movements around the same time (throughout much of 1917), was now being supported through political territorial aims as a method to achieve national emancipation. In other words, non-Russian nationalists were reaffirming their desires for the formal, political, institutional construction of a 'Ukraine', a 'Georgia', an 'Estonia', and so on, as opposed to these being largely cultural-historic (but still 'real') conceptions of nations within a multi-national state. Given the timing of the *Third Universal*, it may first appear to have some relationship with the Bolsheviks' *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, being issued just five days after the Bolshevik document. However, the *Third Universal* clearly had far more of a causal relationship to the Kyiv-organised Congress of the Peoples of Russia.⁴¹⁹ On the first day of this Congress, Hrushevskiy had posited the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic in his opening speech. The *Third Universal*, and its establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic, was clearly an expression of continuity with the specifics of the Ukrainian national movement, and was not a response to this Bolshevik 'centre' issuing declarations of rights, however novel.

In the afternoon of the 18th of January 1918, the All-Russian Constituent Assembly finally met, its date and form having been a source of substantial political contestation during the Provisional Government period. Its sitting was not a success in this new context, however.⁴²⁰ The Bolsheviks had committed to and oversaw relatively free and fair elections to the Constituent Assembly (in which they were beaten in terms of total vote share by the SRs⁴²¹) and appeared initially willing to use the body to legitimise their rule in some way. Perhaps because of the results of the election, but citing largely technical reasons⁴²², the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly around thirteen hours after it opened, declaring that only the upcoming All-Russian Congress of Soviets was the legitimate governing body of the new regime.⁴²³

The long-promised and much hoped-for Constituent Assembly burned out quietly. Although there was profound upset at this move within some circles, there was no significant mass movement against the Bolsheviks' dissolution of the body.⁴²⁴ The reasons for this are hard to ascertain, especially from the point

⁴¹⁹ Reent and Andrusishin, *Z'izd ponevolenikh narodiv*, 1–71.

⁴²⁰ For an overview of the Constituent Assembly's sitting and dissolution, see Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 198–216.

⁴²¹ Though they expectedly performed well among active military personnel (with around two thirds of the cast votes) and in European Russia's urban centres.

⁴²² Including some arguably legitimate reasons based on the fact that the split within the SRs was not reflected on electoral lists that had been created months earlier.

⁴²³ Dekret o rospuske Uchreditel'nogo sobraniia [Decree on the Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly], 19th of January 1918. Available in *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti*, 335–336. This, too, was in line with the Bolsheviks' view of what democracy under socialism was, having followed Marx's critique of bourgeois parliamentary democracy as merely a decision on who oppresses you.

⁴²⁴ The only exception to this might be the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, an anti-Bolshevik government set up in summer 1918 by, as one might have guessed, political agents originally elected to the now-dissolved Constituent Assembly (primarily SRs). This

of view of a deliberative understanding of self-determination, since all constituent assemblies are by definition intended to be used to discuss the nature of the respective constitution (or the creation of one). That political agents and their supporters and electors did not throw their all behind this particular Constituent Assembly, after the experiences of the last years of the Russian Empire and some of the delays of the Provisional Government period, is puzzling. Perhaps some had no faith in the institution following the Bolshevik seizure of power. Others may have considered resisting the move difficult through purely civic means, and did not wish to exacerbate the position of the state during a period of wider conflict by utilising violent methods to express political discontent.⁴²⁵

Regardless, the Bolsheviks' insistence that only the Congress of Soviets was the legitimate representative body of the territory demonstrated a clear move away from the Provisional Government period, in the sense that there was now reduced scope for questioning the form, as well as the substance of governance.⁴²⁶ Where many groups previously had agency at least to make claims, and, in many instances, instigate political conflict over the nature and form of their representation in a to-be-defined system as well as debate specific policies in a conventional legislative fashion, the Bolsheviks now intended to restrict such processes. Only soviet⁴²⁷ forms of governance, and not other institutional representative forms, constituted legitimate bodies of self-determination and representation.

Following the secession of Finland, persistent rumblings of other nationalist discontent, and civic opposition to the Bolshevik-Left SR coup, the Bolsheviks took advantage of the new year to attempt to establish a firmer organisational basis for their new government. Therefore, also in January 1918, and just a few days after the Bolsheviks' dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, members of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies met. Following proposals from Y. M. Sverdlov, Lenin, and Stalin, the Congress' delegates adopted two important institutional resolutions.⁴²⁸ They were formulated as follows:

body will be discussed in a later chapter when more relevant, but regardless, there were several months between Lenin's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the establishment of the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, making it hard to see the latter as a *direct* response to the former, but rather an appeal to the idea, including the legal idea, of the Constituent Assembly in an abstract sense as the Russian state collapsed into civil conflict.

⁴²⁵ A calculation likely assisted by the knowledge of strong support for the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs among soldiers.

⁴²⁶ Engelstein reaches the same conclusion in *Russia in Flames* (198–216), though she is more certain that this was the inevitable result of Bolshevik ideology.

⁴²⁷ This non-capitalised form intends to refer to the generic form of government, as opposed to a '[Russian] Soviet Republic' for example. This viewpoint was also shared to some extent by Lenin – recall the Bolshevik leader's contrasting of soviet and 'Miliukov' republics discussed in the previous subchapter.

⁴²⁸ Held in Petrograd between the 23rd and the 31st of January 1918 (10–18th Old Style). The meeting was attended by just over 1000 delegates, and resolutions were discussed and passed concerning both the theory and practice of self-determination, autonomy, and federalism in Soviet Russia. These will be discussed presently.

- 1) Russia is hereby proclaimed a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. All power, centrally and locally, is vested in these Soviets.
- 2) The Russian Soviet Republic is established on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics.⁴²⁹

Thus the Russian Soviet Republic was declared. Although it was described as a federation, this characteristic was not yet reflected in the formal name of the state until a few months later, when these resolutions (and accompanying narratives) formed the basis for the preamble of *The Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic* – more commonly called the Soviet Constitution of 1918 in legal history. This constitution was adopted in July, and its content will be addressed in due course.

The statement that power, both “centrally and locally”, was placed under the authority of the soviets was in line with the Bolsheviks’ previous slogan of ‘all power to the soviets!’ proclaimed during the Provisional Government days, and their recent dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, but raised interesting theoretical contradictions in this new context.⁴³⁰ Following the Bolsheviks’ conception of democratic centralism, there was a question as to what would happen if a local soviet came to a different (but, under the principles of democratic centralism, still entirely valid) conclusion than the central government in Petrograd? If the self of self-determination was understood as the specific soviet in question, as in the above quotation, then this question was simply unresolvable. If the self of self-determination was a vaguer notion of ‘the proletariat’, then again this was question was unresolvable, since different representatives of this group could still nonetheless support significantly different policies on all manner of issues and reflect these through different soviets or by other means, depending on the institutional representation of this concept. Only if the self of self-determination was the Bolshevik *party* is there no contradiction in the adopted resolutions according to democratic centralist logic. If the party saw itself as the only legitimate representative of the proletariat, as senior Bolsheviks certainly seemed to imply, then the logic is clear, as there would have to be ultimate agreement after the period of discussion and adoption of a specific policy.

This, however, meant that power was in very a practical sense always going to be weighted heavily towards the ‘vanguard’ of senior party members, and therefore those in the higher-tiered central government soviets, and not either the wider party nor local institutions. Nor, even, with national selves, which then again does raise contradictions within the above resolutions, given that the Congress proclaimed the republic to be a “free union of free nations”.⁴³¹ If neither

⁴²⁹ See V. I. Lenin, ‘Deklaratsiia prav trudiashchegosia i ekspluatiruemogo naroda’ [‘Declaration on the Rights of Working and Exploited People’] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 35, 221.

⁴³⁰ Lenin, ‘Deklaratsiia prav trudiashchegosia i ekspluatiruemogo naroda’, 221.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

local soviets nor soviet national republics constituted genuine selves – collective agents capable of taking independent action – the determination would *de facto* not be performed by these selves.

During his attendance of the Congress in January 1918, Stalin made several important interventions, including on national self-determination. In a discussion framed through the lens of the ‘National Question’, Stalin appeared to significantly qualify the Bolshevik interpretation of self-determination.⁴³² He began his main speech on the topic with a narrative that set out his reading of the question’s history that was almost identical to the claims of *The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* from the previous November – the explicit national oppression of the Russian Empire and its ruthless campaigns of Russification, before the formal abolition of these restrictions by the Provisional Government and little else.⁴³³ Predictably, Stalin argued that, given its “class character”, the Provisional Government could never fully resolve the ‘National Question’, and had actively sought to “crush” the national movements of, for example, Finland and Ukraine.⁴³⁴

The Bolsheviks, by contrast, had declared not only the abolition of national restrictions but the right of all the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, up to and including secession.⁴³⁵ Mere months after its issuing, the declaration was already being effectively used by the Bolsheviks to legitimise both past and future action. As Stalin argued, in this regard the Bolsheviks had gone further than even some of the desires of nationalist leaders.⁴³⁶ This is certainly true – secessionist forms of self-determination were not the most common variety or goal of the non-Russian national groups at the time of the declaration’s issuing, as demonstrated above. However, as also already mentioned, this declaration was *declaratory* in the most literal meaning of the word. In practice, Soviet Russia’s response to secessionist demands was substantially different and overwhelmingly negative. Stalin admitted that conflict between the Bolsheviks and these movements had nonetheless arisen, but stated that this was not to do with questions of a national character, but with questions over power.⁴³⁷

In reality, it was both. This was the heart of the self-determination issue, as other Bolsheviks, such as Bukharin, Bosh, and Piatakov, had tried to make clear in previous years. If the self of self-determination was defined as ‘national’ (whether bourgeois or proletarian), then the next question was to establish what it was this self could and should determine and how. In the realm of hard politics, it is difficult to imagine a question that is more related to power than the determination of a self’s political status. How one did this, through what kind of

⁴³² See J. V. Stalin, ‘Doklad po natsional’nomu voprosu’ [‘Report on the National Question’] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 4, 30–37.

⁴³³ *Ibid*, 30–31.

⁴³⁴ Stalin, ‘Doklad po natsional’nomu voprosu’, 30–31.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

⁴³⁶ Stalin, ‘Doklad po natsional’nomu voprosu’, 31.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*.

elections, referenda, and so on, and guided by or through what institutions or representative bodies was a fiercely contested issue, especially by leaders of national movements who understood that this *was* a question of power as well as the rights of nations. The latter was already assumed. A solely Marxist, class-based reading of this situation meant that senior Bolsheviks such as Stalin could only assume bad faith interpretations of self-determination that did not place proletarian internationalism on a pedestal. For Stalin, this was a valuable prompt to reiterate the most important (if lesser-repeated) tenet of the Bolsheviks' reading of self-determination in his speech:

All this points to the necessity of interpreting the principle of self-determination as the right to self-determination not of the bourgeoisie, but of the labouring masses of the given nation. The principle of self-determination should be a means in the struggle for socialism and should be subordinated to the principles of socialism.⁴³⁸

Stalin was therefore sensitive to the possible difficulties of authorising what legal scholars would today call internal and external self-determination along national lines while also advocating for ultimate proletarian unity. Certainly, his arguments that advocating strongly for nationalist causes and policies would result in achieving socialism slipping down the new state's hierarchy of priorities are internally consistent from a Marxist perspective. For Stalin, a legitimate desire to reunite with Soviet Russia after an instance of secession could only come from a genuine soviet republic, both theoretically and practically. As such, an emphasis should be placed on analysing any demands from a class perspective ahead of a national one.⁴³⁹ While he understood the implications of the intensification of nationalism in and beyond Europe, Stalin was consistent and explicit in his class-based reading of national self-determination. It is perhaps important to note that this also meant that he and other senior Bolsheviks who supported this position could not conceive of a situation in which other left wing, socialist, and revolutionary groups might nonetheless wish to (permanently) secede.

In Kyiv, January 1918 saw the *Fourth Universal* of the Ukrainian Central Rada, which proclaimed independence for the People's Republic of Ukraine.⁴⁴⁰ The Central Rada's first actions as part of this new claim were in the realm of international relations, in peace negotiations with the Central Powers (the latter of whom had, naturally, supported the declaration of independent statehood).⁴⁴¹ After a series of disagreements between the Central Rada and the Bolsheviks, including military threats and a well-known ultimatum from the latter directed to the former, the Central Rada decided for its own security to make peace with the

⁴³⁸ Stalin, 'Doklad po natsional'nomu voprosu', 31–32.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ Chetvertyi Universal Ukrayins'koyi Tsentral'noyi Rady ['Fourth Universal of the Ukrainian Central Rada'], 22nd of January 1918 [public domain]. A Ukrainian version is available here.

⁴⁴¹ Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment', 369–387.

Central Powers.⁴⁴² This group soon accepted the offer alongside the Bolshevik proposal (addressed subsequently), and the parties met for the first time around two weeks later. In substance, the negotiations from (both) Ukrainian sides served as a question of representation, of agency. Who had the right to represent the Ukrainian nation, when its state status was both undefined and contested, in matters of war and peace?

The Central Powers were initially clear that they could and would recognise the People's Republic of Ukraine as the legitimate government of its claimed territory.⁴⁴³ Part of this was the result of a clear desire to break the Central Powers' main military opponent in the east into smaller pieces, alongside developing good relations with those who opposed Petrograd.⁴⁴⁴ It was also the result of desperation, at least on the part of the Habsburg Empire, which had a need for the foodstuffs of Ukraine's famously fertile soil in order, Vienna reasoned, to avoid a similar revolution at home as had befallen the Russian Empire.⁴⁴⁵ The first Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (9th of February 1918) therefore recognised a form of Ukrainian control over Ukraine for the first time, but at a heavy material cost for the Ukrainian People's Republic.⁴⁴⁶ Given these conditions of the peace, and the simultaneous recognition the treaty awarded the People's Republic of Ukraine, a broader conceptual, as well as terminological analysis of self-determination is warranted. In other words, it appeared as though the idea (and with it, hopefully, at some undetermined point in the future, the reality) of an externally-recognised Ukrainian state took priority for Ukrainian negotiators over their genuine capacity to make decisions independently, in this case regarding agriculture and trade. This was clearly as much to do with the context of active conflict as it was the theories and hopes of specific nationalists.

In the summer of 1918, Soviet Russia approved its first constitution, based largely on agreements made and narratives presented during the Bolsheviks' January Congress, discussed earlier.⁴⁴⁷ Despite its legalistic genre, much of the constitution's content reads, perhaps unsurprisingly, as a more polemical political declaration, similar to that of their immediate post-seizure-of-power decrees.⁴⁴⁸ Its general content will not be described or analysed here in detail. For the purposes of this dissertation, and particularly its subsequent argumentation, it is important only to mention that self-determination was explicitly referenced in the document, although not as a right possessed by all peoples or as a guiding

⁴⁴² Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 318–322.

⁴⁴³ Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment', 377.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 371–373.

⁴⁴⁵ Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment'.

⁴⁴⁶ In time, the Central Powers would also seek to impose a more compliant local government over the region, the Ukrainian State (sometimes referred to as the Second Hetmanate).

⁴⁴⁷ Konstitutsiia Rossiiskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Federativnoi Sovetskoi Respubliki [Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, hereafter Konstitutsiia RSFSR], 10th of July 1918 [public domain]. A Russian version is available here.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

principle of governance but via a more specific reference to Armenia possessing this as a right.⁴⁴⁹ The Soviet Constitution's Chapter 3, Article 6, praised Sovnarkom for proclaiming the independence of Finland⁴⁵⁰, for withdrawing military forces from Persia (Iran), and for "proclaiming the right of Armenia to self-determination".⁴⁵¹

This subchapter analysed self-determination in the (unknown) last months of the Provisional Government, and in the first few months of the new Bolshevik regime. It began by detailing the Ukrainian Central Rada's organisation of the Congress of the Peoples of Russia, and the type of federal reconfiguration that the majority of the meeting's delegates supported. Although further work between its participants was planned, this was interrupted by the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917. After their coup, the Bolsheviks soon issued the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, which stressed the equality and sovereignty of the peoples 'of Russia' and these peoples' right to self-determination, up to and including secession. At the same time, no institutional or formal mechanism was provided to suggest how this might work in practice. As some kind of result of this, but certainly not a causal one, the Bolsheviks accepted Finland's Declaration of Independence, but then intervened in the Finnish Civil War soon after on the side of the Finnish Reds. Around the same time, the Ukrainian Central Rada adopted the *Third Universal*, declaring the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic, but this body was also soon threatened by Petrograd, just as the Provisional Government had opposed the *First Universal* earlier that year. January 1918 saw more changes; the brief sitting of the long-awaited Constituent Assembly before its dissolution by the Bolsheviks, the *Fourth Universal* of the Ukrainian Central Rada (which formally declared Ukraine's independence) and the body's negotiations with the Central Powers; and a Congress of Soviets in which Stalin began to publicly qualify and restrict the Bolshevik interpretation of self-determination for the first time, as well as the Bolsheviks beginning to style their regime as a "free union of free nations".⁴⁵²

This subchapter also continued to demonstrate the explicit usages of genre conventions in political argumentation throughout 1917 and early 1918. This was evident within several non-Russian national movements, for example in the Ukrainian Central Rada's *Fourth Universal*, which effectively acted as and served the conventional function of a declaration of independence (that performed sovereignty), and could also be clearly identified in the Bolsheviks' political interventions following their seizure of power. Perhaps most revealingly for the purposes of this dissertation, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was issued as declaratory in the sense Lenin and Stalin had previously implied – it declared a right (to self-determination, in this case) but intentionally did not

⁴⁴⁹ Konstitutsiia RSFSR, Chapter 3, Article 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Which, as discussed, they did, but as a response to Finland's own declaration.

⁴⁵¹ Konstitutsiia RSFSR, Chapter 3, Article 6.

⁴⁵² Lenin, 'Deklaratsiia prav trudiashchegosia i ekspluatiruemogo naroda', 221.

seek to perform or execute this right. In the months that followed, Stalin began using this state of affairs in speeches that clearly aimed to legitimise the new regime by arguing that the Bolsheviks had gone further than many of the leaders of national movements had desired. Regardless of the veracity of this claim, it rested on the far more dubious premise that the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was intended as anything other than a literal declaration in the eyes of its authors.

2.3 Self-determination from the Margins

The Bolsheviks serve as the clearest example of the dissertation's main political agents appealing to audiences both within and beyond their claimed territory through intelligent usage of the genres of declarations, decrees, and international peace appeals. However, they were evidently not the only agents who performed such actions. On an entirely different continent, and speaking a different language⁴⁵³, was Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic President of the United States of America from 1913 to 1921. With regard to self-determination, Wilson is most well-known for a speech he gave to Congress on the 8th of January 1918, concerning the conduct and outcome of the First World War.⁴⁵⁴ Outlining his principles for lasting peace in a numbered list, the speech quickly became known with the denominative name of these 'Fourteen Points'.⁴⁵⁵ Six of Wilson's fourteen points were general in scope, and concerned matters of the ethics of diplomacy and international order, while the majority of the points (that is, the other eight) referred to particular issues that the US President saw as necessary to resolve in specific ways in order to achieve a wider and lasting cessation of conflict.⁴⁵⁶

Although many scholars and the general public have long associated the Fourteen Points with what has been called Wilsonian self-determination, it is important to note that the specific term self-determination cannot be found in either the points themselves or the speech that accompanied them, as Trygve Throntveit has noted.⁴⁵⁷ While Wilson certainly believed in the concept (and did occasionally use the exact term), what he understood by it was almost immediately misunderstood or misappropriated by others.⁴⁵⁸ Throntveit has gone as far as to call this the 'fable' of the Fourteen Points, arguing that "*national* self-determination – the

⁴⁵³ The significance of this should not be underestimated, and will be discussed presently.

⁴⁵⁴ For the entire speech, see Woodrow Wilson, *Address of the President of the United States, delivered at a joint session of the two houses of Congress, January 8, 1918* (Washington D. C., 1918) [hereafter 'Fourteen Points Address']. Available via the Library of Congress here.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Wilson, 'Fourteen Points Address', 3–8.

⁴⁵⁷ Trygve Throntveit, 'The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2011), 445–446.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*; Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

principle that groups bound by common language or lines of descent have a right to political and territorial independence – was not one of Wilson’s Fourteen Points and was never central to his peace program [emphasis original]’.⁴⁵⁹ Erez Manela, meanwhile, has highlighted the importance not so much of what Wilson said, nor what he did, but what *others* heard when he said and did things.⁴⁶⁰ Manela’s work, and a few other studies besides, have also made clear that the spread, reception, and even legacy of ‘Wilsonianism’ was also dependent on growing US power in the early twentieth century. These readings of Wilson, and the context in which he acted, should certainly be borne in mind for the subsequent discussion.

Before going further into the content of the Fourteen Points, we must first ask two more primary questions: what was Wilson’s general political philosophy, and, more precisely, what was his conception of self-determination (assuming its existence and coherence)? As is well established, Wilson’s overall political worldview, and consequently the Fourteen Points themselves, were more generally informed by two influences, namely, his unique Anglo-American reading of the history of democracy (combined with smatterings of German Enlightenment philosophy), and his devout Christian faith.⁴⁶¹ More specifically, Wilson took British political and constitutional thought and combined it with recent German works on effective public administration in a US context. As Allen Lynch describes, the US President’s most fundamental views therefore entailed a strong commitment to free trade; the necessity of good governance and public administration; and a general sense of humanity’s potential for progress.⁴⁶² For Wilson, leadership was an essential element in these processes of progress; ‘the people’, however conceived, must be guided by righteous and effective leadership for this outcome to be achieved. While all people were capable of self-government, this did not mean that they were all capable of it at the same time. This was an ‘evolutionary’ process, that, again, required guidance and leadership from advanced others, with advanced usually conceived of here as moral and political superiority. It was, in other words, a paternalistic view that, at least in the short term, would serve to reaffirm US political power and interests if realised beyond its borders, even if Wilson himself appeared to want to lead by example, rather than through significant international intervention. The First World War, and the US’ participation in the conflict, changed this, and soon Wilson was viewed by many in Europe as some kind of architect for international peace and reconstruction.

⁴⁵⁹ Throntveit, ‘The Fable of the Fourteen Points’, 445–446. In fact, what was central, at least according to Wilson himself at the very end of the Fourteen Points speech, was the notion of justice.

⁴⁶⁰ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁴⁶¹ Stephen A. Schuker, ‘Woodrow Wilson versus American Public Opinion: The Unconditional Surrender Movement of 1918’, in Guido Mueller (ed.), *Deutschland und der Westen. Internationale Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1998), 102.

⁴⁶² Allen Lynch, ‘Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of ‘National Self-Determination’: A Reconsideration’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2002), 423.

As just mentioned, Wilson *did* believe in a version of self-determination, but it is important to emphasise that his conception of it was as a general principle of good governance, rather than something that instrumented large scale political change or imperial reconfiguration on a global scale.⁴⁶³ In this sense, Wilsonian self-determination was an extension of his more general politics and worldview, particularly his religiosity and how this was fused with his political platform. As Lynch puts it, “Wilson’s political thought was characterized by a cluster of ideas embracing Christianity, self-government, democracy, nationality and the organic state, which together form the ingredients of what would eventually become Wilson’s concept of ‘national self-determination’”.⁴⁶⁴ To briefly retread the slightly tired comparison with the Bolsheviks – Wilsonian self-determination was evidently not the clear Leninist notion of *national* self-determination, expressed as a right, that necessarily included a right to secession. It was far more abstract in terms of both basis and outcome. Wilson appeared to synonymise self-determination with other phrases such as the ‘will of the people’ and ‘consent of the governed’. To the US President, self-determination was, in other words, a liberal-conservative idea that presumed or hoped for the existence and effective function of representative institutions and norms in a given society (implicitly, within a state).⁴⁶⁵ Wilson does not appear to have intentionally used the term self-determination at any point to justify wide ranging imperial reconfiguration. When Wilson did support instances of radical imperial reconfiguration, as in the cases of the reconstruction of an independent Poland and the creation of Czechoslovakia, these were expressions of the contradictions of Wilsonian self-determination, not their representation.⁴⁶⁶

In later years, and especially in the runup to the Paris Peace Conference as well as during the event itself, Wilson *did* move from a broader but coherent ‘principle’ understanding of self-determination to a narrower but more inconsistently applied idea of *national* self-determination.⁴⁶⁷ However, as this intellectual movement was occurring alongside the peace-making efforts of the victorious powers, the results of the former were influenced by the latter, and vice

⁴⁶³ Throntveit, ‘The Fable of the Fourteen Points’, 446.

⁴⁶⁴ Lynch, ‘Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of ‘National Self-Determination’’, 423.

⁴⁶⁵ As Throntveit describes in ‘The Fable of the Fourteen Points’, 451, this related to Wilson’s views of ‘the nation’ not as a narrow, ethnic character but “simply, the population over which a state maintained order”. For more on this ‘liberal-conservative’ characterisation, see Knudsen, *The Fight Over Freedom in 20th– and 21st–Century International Discourse*.

⁴⁶⁶ Other groups who sought their own state or greater rights saw this differently, however. To them, if Wilson had proclaimed self-determination in some way and subsequently ‘affirmed’ this with Poland and Czechoslovakia, it appeared hypocritical that he did not accept other comparable cases. Based on Wilson’s own writings, I would argue the hypocrisy was the other way around. This theme will reemerge later, when discussing the Paris Peace Conference explicitly.

⁴⁶⁷ Leonard V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford, 2018), 35.

versa.⁴⁶⁸ For the purposes of this dissertation, though, this movement itself is less important than this movement and Wilson in relation to the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire before and during the Paris Peace Conference, which will be discussed below.

While it is debatable how many of the more general points of Wilson's January 1918 speech concerned the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire, two of the Fourteen Points were explicitly targeted towards the region. Point VI called for the "evacuation" of all Russian territory (presumably at this point in time referring to the Central Powers⁴⁶⁹) and the opportunity for 'Russia' to pursue the "independent determination of her own political development".⁴⁷⁰ In a well-known phrase, Wilson concluded Point VI by stating that "The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy".⁴⁷¹ The results of this 'acid test' will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Point VI was immediately contradicted by Point XIII, which stated that an independent Polish state should be established with access to the sea, its territorial integrity bound by international covenant, and its territories "inhabited by indisputably Polish populations".⁴⁷² This was a particularly large contradiction because it contained within it many other, messier contradictions. Firstly, 'Russia' and Russian territory as in Point VI was in theory taken from the point of view of the Russian Empire's 1914, prewar borders. A re-established Poland, of whatever size and shape, would necessarily change this, given the history of the Partitions of Poland. Even more difficult was the qualifier of a new Polish state's inhabitants. What, numerically speaking, was 'indisputably Polish'?⁴⁷³ Surely it was not imagined as either a plurality or as a simple majority of fifty plus one percent in a given space. Even if indisputably Polish meant, for example, seventy percent of a given space, one could draw the borders of the space in which this was measured just slightly differently and receive an entirely different result. These, after all, were the heterogenous lands of central and eastern Europe. What of the Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Lithuanians, and Germans who made up the remainder of these territories' inhabitants? They might well dispute the Polishness of a given area.

⁴⁶⁸ See Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*; John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace* (New Jersey, 1966); Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (London, 2019).

⁴⁶⁹ Since the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War would not occur until the summer of 1918.

⁴⁷⁰ Wilson, 'Fourteen Points Address', 6. Interestingly, this was also the closest Wilson got in the entire Fourteen Points to terminologically referring to self-determination.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² Wilson, 'Fourteen Points Address', 7.

⁴⁷³ Assuming that there was already a measurable understanding of what Polishness was.

To briefly jump forward in time before returning to the beginning of the year and an analysis of the Fourteen Points at the time of their utterance, in October 1918, US peace planners began to unpack the practical implications of the Fourteen Points as they moved towards their hopeful realisation.⁴⁷⁴ To this end, they produced a detailed official commentary on each point, revealing their aims more precisely, as well as the assumptions they were proceeding from. To the credit of its authors (Edward House, Frank I. Cobb, and Walter Lippmann), the commentary on Point VI recognised these aforementioned contradictions, stating that it was clear that the term “Russian territory” could not be synonymous with that of the Russian Empire, given Point XIII’s stipulation of a new Polish state.⁴⁷⁵ The commentators argued that this would likely then also have to be recognised in the cases of the Finns, the Lithuanians, the Letts⁴⁷⁶, “and perhaps also for the Ukrainians”.⁴⁷⁷ This meant, they reasoned, the recognition of *de facto* governments by the peace conference, with their *de jure* recognition conditional on the establishment of “National Assemblies” that engendered greater governmental stability.⁴⁷⁸

The US’ official commentary on the Fourteen Points also intriguingly referred to some kind of federal arrangement as a potential final outcome for the region’s reconfiguration, stating that:

Provision should also be made by which Great Russia can federate with these states on the same terms...as for Great Russia and Siberia, the Peace Conference might well send a message asking for the creation of a government sufficiently representative to speak for these territories.⁴⁷⁹

Here, Great Russia presumably referred to either European Russia or ‘Russia proper’, understood as the parts of the former Russian Empire that were, to coin a phrase, indisputably Russian, in contrast to, for example, Finland or the Caucasus.⁴⁸⁰ The openness of US peace planners to a federal reconfiguration of the region is interesting; certainly, the US’ own constitution might well have been a model suggested for local adaptation further down the line. However, in the above wording, this was really a *confederalist* proposal, rather than a federalist one. By October 1918, many provisional governments had declared independence

⁴⁷⁴ Primarily Edward House (one of Wilson’s closest advisers), Frank I. Cobb (a newspaper editor for the *New York World* known for his support for Wilson), and Walter Lippmann (Secretary of The Inquiry, the US’ peace planning group of the time). Telegram from Edward House to Woodrow Wilson, 29th of October 1918. Available online via the US’ Office of the Historian archive [here](#).

⁴⁷⁵ Telegram from Edward House to Woodrow Wilson.

⁴⁷⁶ An archaic English term for Latvians.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ Telegram from Edward House to Woodrow Wilson.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Or even Siberia, given the distinction US peace planners made here at the very least implies they were aware of the difference and/or of the numerous non-Russian inhabitants of Siberia.

(discussed below), and therefore peace planners in Washington had to be open to these states' future existences, even if this was in serious doubt at the time, owing to ongoing conflict(s) in the region. It was, in other words, a note intentionally crafted as open-ended, while still stating explicit organisational results that would, in principle, be supported by the upcoming peace conference.⁴⁸¹ As will soon be seen, however, this was a response to the turmoil that had engulfed the region – in the former Provisional Government lands, the difference between January 1918, when Wilson first uttered the Fourteen Points, and October 1918, when US policymakers began to think through its provisions' implications, was profound.

In one sense, attempting to read Wilson's Fourteen Points through its genre is difficult, as upon first glance it appears quite removed from those already discussed. At the same time, the idea of a head of state producing a document for public consumption about their more general principles towards peace was, by early 1918, not novel. Firstly, as analysed above, the Provisional Government had made an explicit statement of its war aims soon after its establishment.⁴⁸² Moreover, as several scholars have noted for some time now, Wilson did produce his Fourteen Points in partial response to Lenin and the Bolsheviks – but not to their *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* (the document most concerned with the Bolsheviks' perspective on self-determination), but to their *Decree on Peace*, a document far more about wider principles and values underpinning the actual practical labour of peace-making efforts.⁴⁸³ Wilson gave his Fourteen Points speech rather late into the war⁴⁸⁴, and this allowed him to engage with and respond to a preexisting discourse surrounding the 'what happens after' of the conflict. This theme resonated with many, regardless of location, given the length and devastation of the conflict. To be provocative, we might say that in this context, Wilson's Fourteen Points aligned far more with the conventions of this subgenre of 'war aims documents' than with those of the polemics and declarations concerning self-determination addressed above.

Moreover, Wilson was not even unique among the Allied and Associated Powers in making such an explicit statement of the group's war aims and underlying political principles. David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of the-then United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the *de facto* leader (if not legal head of state) of the British Empire, had given a speech mere days before Wilson's Fourteen Points address, in which he not only spoke of justice, but specifically of self-determination. Speaking at the Trades Union Congress in Caxton Hall, London, Lloyd George concluded *his* January address with the following remarks:

⁴⁸¹ Telegram from Edward House to Woodrow Wilson.

⁴⁸² 'Vremennoe Pravitel'stvo o zadachakh voïny'.

⁴⁸³ Decret o mire [Decree on Peace]. Available in Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti, 12–16; Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe*, 7.

⁴⁸⁴ Which was both to be expected given the timing of his administration's decision to enter the war and also something of a moot point, given that no one knew how long the war would continue for.

If, then, we are asked what we are fighting for, we reply as we have often replied: we are fighting for a just and lasting peace, and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled; firstly, the sanctity of treaties must be established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured, based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed, and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organization to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.⁴⁸⁵

Lloyd George's wording towards the end of his address could hardly have been more 'Wilsonian', yet his utterances preceded the Fourteen Points. The British Prime Minister, in fact, made reference to Wilson in his speech, as well as to events in 'Russia', making a point of agreeing with Wilson's previous remarks from late 1917 on the necessary fundamentals for a lasting peace. By contrast to the Fourteen Points, however, self-determination *was* explicitly mentioned, no less than four times; twice alongside the phrase 'consent of the governed', once alongside the Prime Minister's arguments that the peoples of Imperial Germany's colonies were capable of representing themselves in any future political forum (so should not be assumed to be covered by Berlin's representation alone), and once to guard against the Central Powers' "Mere lip-service to the formula of no annexations and no indemnities or the right of self-determination".⁴⁸⁶

Upon reading a transcript of Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech, Wilson even debated changing the wording of his own address or abandoning it altogether.⁴⁸⁷ This again demonstrates that something of a subgenre of political interventions designed to inform wider populations (that is, not political elites) of one's war and peace aims was relatively common during this general period. Another similar example from the British Empire came as early as the autumn of 1916, when the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil, wrote and shared a document entitled *Memorandum on Proposals for Diminishing the Occasion of Future Wars* with the British Cabinet.⁴⁸⁸ This memorandum was

⁴⁸⁵ David Lloyd George, Address of the British Prime Minister (Lloyd George) before the Trade Union Conference at London, 5th of January 1918. Available online via the US' Office of the Historian archive here. Here it should also be noted that the phrase "the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed" was not meant as an 'X or Y' binary but as a necessary indication of a synonym, revealing not only Lloyd George's view of self-determination but also that he deemed it necessary to explain it in this way. In other words, it could suggest that use of these two phrases in the Anglophone world was frequent enough by the beginning of 1918 to warrant an explicit equation of the two.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.* This last phrase was clearly a response to the ongoing negotiations at Brest-Litovsk (see subchapter 3.1 below). Perhaps as the Prime Minister was addressing a crowd of organised workers, he was surprisingly neutral on Soviet Russia in this speech.

⁴⁸⁷ Alan Sharp, 'From Caxton Hall to Genoa via Fontainebleau and Cannes: David Lloyd George's Vision of Post-War Europe', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2019), 318.

⁴⁸⁸ Lord Robert Cecil, *Memorandum on Proposals for Diminishing the Occasion of Future Wars*. Not dated, but likely September 1916, given when it was discussed by the UK's War Cabinet. Available at the National Archives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland [hereafter UK National Archives], CAB 29/1. See more on Cecil and the

certainly designed more for private policy purposes than those already-discussed, but is otherwise strikingly similar in both style and substance.⁴⁸⁹ Wilson's idea of putting one's proposals for peace in one place as a specific form of political intervention was not, therefore, unique.

At the same time, while Wilson was not alone in making political interventions in this genre of peace proposals, the direct, tangible impact of the Fourteen Points specifically is difficult to ascertain. As Erez Manela has demonstrated, the language of Wilson's Fourteen Points and the (mis)appropriation, however intentional, of Wilsonian self-determination quickly found a home in the politics of many regions across the globe.⁴⁹⁰ The picture in Russia and northern and eastern Europe, however, was substantially different to Manela's cases (of China, India, Korea, and Egypt) precisely because there had already been widespread discussion of self-determination there, including debates over the precise term's meaning and usage. Perhaps if Wilson's Fourteen Points address appeared distant in this context, it is because to some extent in Russia and northern and eastern Europe, it was. Linguistically, the percentage of the population of the former Russian Empire who understood English to any degree was very low. As the man who was to become Wilson's personal translator at the Paris Peace Conference later reflected, "It has been well said that the voice of Wilson was the voice of freedom, but it should be admitted that he spoke a language which more than 99 per cent of the Russian people at that time did not understand".⁴⁹¹ Wilson, and whatever Wilsonianism was or was believed to be, was happening in translation.

In one sense, Wilson's version of the concept of self-determination was an example of what we could characterise as 'self-determination from the margins' – to most politically active and politically engaged individuals in what could still cautiously be referred to at this point as Russia, Wilson's words may well have been seen as important, but they were still nonetheless remote. Wilson's attempt to set a democratic example for others to follow could certainly be seen as a noble aim, yet he used specific language and appealed to concepts already under much discussion in the former Russian Empire. Moreover, when regions were experiencing or fearful of Central Powers or other military occupation, the ideals of someone some distance away were unlikely to have more impact on the realisation of self-determination ideals than the immediate context of existential threat, real or perceived.⁴⁹²

ideational and practical foundations of the League of Nations in Takamitsu Hadano, 'Lord Robert Cecil's Views on International Peace Organisations: State Sovereignty, Public Opinion and Peaceful Change', *International Relations*, Vol. 2018, No. 193 (2018), 12–28 [in Japanese].

⁴⁸⁹ Cecil would go on to become one of the architects of the League of Nations, particularly its logical underpinnings and conflict resolution processes.

⁴⁹⁰ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁴⁹¹ Stephen Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants: The Little Nations at Versailles* (New York City, 1946), 13.

⁴⁹² At the same time, such ideas would prove helpful later, in campaigns for diplomatic recognition. See Eva Piirimäe, 'Afterword: Self-Determination and Recognition in the Baltic States, 1917–1922', *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2022), 330–352.

As will be covered in the following chapter, this was most notable in the case of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, with many different political agents attempting to use the situation to their own ends. This led to what we might style as another form of ‘self-determination from the margins’, as many non-Russian national movements either collaborated with the Central Powers, or used the uncertainty of the situation to their own ends. Estonia was a case of the latter, with the Republic of Estonia’s Declaration of Independence, properly titled the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia* (*Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele* in the older Estonian spelling⁴⁹³), being proclaimed in its claimed capital Tallinn⁴⁹⁴ on the 24th of February 1918.⁴⁹⁵ In the document, Estonian nationalists invoked self-determination explicitly as the basis for the legitimacy of the declaration⁴⁹⁶, framing the concept as “the right of self-determination of peoples”.⁴⁹⁷ In a subsequent long list of general principles that the governance of the new state was to be based on was the following second point, recognising that the claimed territory also specified in the *Manifesto* was not nationally or culturally homogeneous:

The rights of national and cultural autonomy of the national minorities living within the borders of the republic – Russians, Germans, Swedes, Jews and others – are guaranteed.⁴⁹⁸

This plainly reveals that while the declaration proclaimed *Estonian* independence, the document’s authors were not intending to create an exclusively nationally or ethnically defined Estonian *state*. In fact, and as will be seen in more detail in Chapter 4, Estonian nationalists almost universally recognised the social (including national) diversity within the borders of their claimed territory during and immediately after their battle for independence.⁴⁹⁹ Hence the use of the word “peoples” in plural in the very title of the declaration, as well as the above

⁴⁹³ The modern spelling would be ‘Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele’.

⁴⁹⁴ Around this general period, this city could be identified with both the name Tallinn and the older, more Germanic name Reval.

⁴⁹⁵ The declaration was originally planned for the 21st of February but was pushed back by a couple of days by its authors, actually being printed and espoused in public first in Pärnu in the evening of the 23rd of February, before its more well-known reading in the capital the following day. Modern Estonia commemorates the event on the 24th of February each year. For one of the most effective works on the declaration, constituted as a sourcebook with a series of scholars’ commentaries, see Tõnu Tannberg and Ago Pajur (eds.), *Iseseisvusmanifest: artikleid, dokumente ja mälestusi* (Tartu, 2014).

⁴⁹⁶ Alongside what its authors argued for as its other legal basis, the (elected) Estonian Provincial Assembly, the Maapäev.

⁴⁹⁷ Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele [Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia], 24th of February 1918 [public domain]. An Estonian version is available here. Also available in *Riigi Teataja*, No. 1, 27th of November 1918, 1.

⁴⁹⁸ Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele.

⁴⁹⁹ Though some, unsurprisingly, remained suspicious of the German minority of the region.

assurances of national and cultural autonomy for non-Estonians.⁵⁰⁰ Not only were four specific groups explicitly mentioned, but the “and others” facilitated the potential inclusion of other groups that might emerge at some indeterminate point in the future.⁵⁰¹

Some scholars have seen this as a form of intellectual continuity from previous years. Hent Kalmo has recently argued that this was in fact a legacy of the Russian Empire, though not, of course, in the sense of that regime’s proud self-conception, but in its results in engendering a wide range of political theories on how to best move beyond this into a more equitable and democratic system: “One part of the imperial legacy was, paradoxically, the development of a set of views about a modern, democratic multinational state”.⁵⁰² As such, to make sense of the events during and beyond the late 1910s, Kalmo argues that we must “study the image of a Russia that never really existed: the idea of a democratic empire committed to the equality of nations”.⁵⁰³ The Republic of Estonia’s sensitivity to the precise demographics of its claimed population appear to be a case in point. In this reading, the declaration intended to establish Estonian statehood as a new republic that could now experiment (with the full force of government behind it) on how to best achieve and maintain a democratic multinational state. As will be seen, however, the new self-declared republic, as well as many other statehood bids from around the same period, would first have to engage in a military fight for their survival.

It is unlikely that Wilson’s utterances directly impacted the drafting of the declaration, especially since, as mentioned, the Fourteen Points did not explicitly mention self-determination. Certainly, it is conceivable that the authors of the declaration would have been content to see that another world leader, especially on the side of the Allies (if not technically a ‘full’ member of that group) appealed to similar concepts in relation to peace and the settlement of national, cultural, and political questions.⁵⁰⁴ Yet as demonstrated by this and previous chapters, there had already been expansive and consistent use of the term self-determination in the wider region, including in relation to national self-determination, the self-determination of peoples, and more specific policies such as federalism and non-territorial autonomy. As Joshua Sanborn writes, “Wilson borrowed the slogan of the self-determination of nations from Eastern Europeans rather than the other way around, and this fact deserves closer study”.⁵⁰⁵ This form of statehood, in this case, the proclamation of an Estonian state, appears more as a method to

⁵⁰⁰ Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² Hent Kalmo, ‘Estonia as a multinational nation-state: the imperial origins of post-independence political thought’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, early online version (2025), 4.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ And, indeed, did use the term self-determination shortly after the Fourteen Points speech, just not in the address itself.

⁵⁰⁵ Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*, 3.

achieve and protect this more accommodating vision of the self-determination of peoples, rather than a logical outcome of the concept.

After all, it is noteworthy that in general, with a few notable exceptions such as Finland, these declarations of independence did not occur either immediately after the February Revolution or even after the Bolshevik seizure of power. This tells us that the declarations were, therefore, generally a consequence and not a cause of state collapse.⁵⁰⁶ This cannot be emphasised enough; most provisional national governments issued declarations of independence as a result of tumult, rather than before it. The ‘wave’ of declarations in the late winter and early spring of 1918 was historically specific and contingent, and not the mere result of (genuinely existing) national oppression under the Russian Empire. It did not follow, without specific political interventions arguing to this end, that *national* self-determination or the self-determination of peoples meant independent statehood.

The timings of these declarations can nonetheless be read in multiple ways, of course, but one reading is that to these agents who eventually declared independence on behalf of specific nations, self-determination could quite easily be subordinated to wider concerns of equally conceptual issues. Principally, those of international order, of peace, and of (representative) democracy. Only when were these seriously threatened by military occupation from other nondemocratic forces did they re-apply self-determination towards independent statehood. In this sense, there was a forced re-territorialisation of self-determination. In the face of state collapse, political agents fell back on forms of governance they viewed as having a greater likelihood of being able to control or impose some kind of order on. Under this primarily military context, the result was explicable.

Self-determination meant different things to these different groups depending on the time and location of those who used it, of course. Nonetheless, it was beyond Petrograd (and later Moscow) where agents used it most consistently towards specific goals and objects in early 1918. Though its meaning could change, it *had* meaning, and was not a purely rhetorical slogan. When political agents used self-determination towards goals and objects, in other words, when they instrumentalised a view of the concept through institutions and tangible ‘things’, these agents most often came from the perceived periphery, not the conventional centre. This suggests that self-determination was not always mediated by conventional political power, but by other agents’ responses to and engagement with others and with conflict. For both those who offered self-determination and those who claimed it, early 1918 was an experience of ‘self-determination from the margins’. Spatially and ideationally, usages of self-determination in political interventions that legitimised specific political forms came from these margins (including, as will be seen, from rival empires), but we should not mistake the noun *margin* for the adjective *marginal*. These conceptions of self-determination, and their attempted realisation, would have profound consequences for those who offered self-determination, as well as those who had staked their claim to it.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

This subchapter outlined the US President Woodrow Wilson's conception of self-determination and overall political philosophy. In so doing, it dispelled some academic myths about Wilson and self-determination, in line with recent reappraisals of the US presidency and the Fourteen Points. This speech was therefore taken down from its intellectual pedestal and instead placed in the context of a series of other Allied war and peace aims addresses that ranged geographically from Petrograd to London, and temporally from 1916 to 1918. The subchapter established that unlike the Fourteen Points, these other documents, such as David Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech, *did* make terminological reference to self-determination. Importantly, however, Wilson (and 'Wilsonianism') was still distant to those in the former Provisional Government space, considering language/translation issues, geographic distance, and, most importantly, local contexts, given the speech's utterance during Brest-Litovsk negotiations. At the same time, as 1918 progressed, US peace planners became aware of some of the contradictions of the Fourteen Points, and attempted to craft workable (perhaps understood as open), proposals for the points' realisation. Beyond this, the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, Estonia's Declaration of Independence, was discussed, with an emphasis placed on the document's reference not only to the 'right' of the self-determination of peoples, but also to the multinational inhabitants of the regime's claimed territory. This, in some ways, was another attempt to realise a relational form of self-determination, albeit now in a more spatially restricted sense than the previously imagined reconfigured Russian Empire.

The subchapter also argued that some political interventions often seen as generically innovative and/or distinct, such as Wilson's Fourteen Points speech, can in fact be aligned with (still comparatively novel) genres and subgenres that were both unique for the period and yet simultaneously increasingly common. Wilson's Fourteen Points replicated all the emergent conventions of a 'war aims speech', from its 'why we fight' beginnings, its 'what real peace looks like' conclusions, and even, arguably, its public utterance and dissemination. Therefore, as with recent scholarship that has successfully reassessed the *content* of Wilson's political interventions during this time, this subchapter has also demonstrated the ability to reconsider these texts and speeches through their form and genre conventions, too. Later in the subchapter, the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia* was analysed. While the text performed all the typical conventions and functions of a declaration of independence in an Armitagean sense, its authors also clearly sought to use it to authorise the principles that underscored their claims in the declaration and the values of the new state they wished to create. In the case of the former, the idea of the self-determination of peoples as legitimising secession was one example, and in the case of the latter, representative democracy as a foundational philosophy of the republic. Arguably, the *Manifesto's* support for ideas such as national and cultural autonomy also suggested it appealed to a grounded and more immediate temporality as well as the expected lofty long term-ism of a typical declaration of independence. Both would prove to be important for Estonian nationalists in subsequent years.

3. SELF-DETERMINATION IN TURMOIL AND TREATIES (1917–1921)

3.1 From Self-determination to Secession?

Although there is a dispute as to when exactly the Russian Civil War began, it was certainly not later than the summer of 1918, and arguably no later than that year's spring. By August, conflict had both escalated and expanded to every edge of the vast territory of the former empire. Some, perhaps most, of the conflict revolved around whether one wanted the Bolsheviks or 'someone else' in power, although in early 1918 there were still existential struggles on many sides to do with the First World War, even despite the armistice between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers of late 1917. Several other groups continued to fight on, and it was not clear that the armistice would hold until peace terms were agreed upon (as will be seen, it did not). This chapter therefore develops an explanation as to how political agents used or did not use self-determination in their military-political endeavours during the Russian Civil War, especially through the genre of the international peace treaty. There is significant discussion of the usages of self-determination in such treaties to propagandistic ends, though all three sections of the chapter also discuss other genre forms political agents placed self-determination and related ideas in during the Russian Civil War, including political declarations and 'legal' acts of would-be governments.

The Bolsheviks, who had seized power towards the end of 1917 (with help from the Left SRs), were keen to pursue the substance of their famous 'Peace, Land, and Bread' slogan.⁵⁰⁷ Some of this work, such as that of land reform, had the backing of new Soviet decrees, the form of which was described above with reference to the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*. This was the case with peace, too, since there was a highly publicised Soviet *Decree on Peace*, but its implementation would necessarily have to rely on numerous other factors, including international ones.⁵⁰⁸ Although the Bolsheviks were keen to see, and indeed anticipated a wider revolutionary moment, they also did not wish to be passive and simply wait for this to occur. Instead, conscious of what they read as the political failure of the Provisional Government in this regard, they chose to pursue peace *regardless* of what they saw as inevitable.⁵⁰⁹ This was therefore a political decision, not a wholly ideological one.

Immediately after seizing power, then, the Bolsheviks publicly sued for peace with *all* the belligerent powers of the conflict, holding them all equally responsible for starting the war.⁵¹⁰ After the former allies of the two previous Russian regimes expressed both public and private distaste for this endeavour,

⁵⁰⁷ This slogan was originally associated with, and perhaps even conceived by, the SRs.

⁵⁰⁸ Decret o mire.

⁵⁰⁹ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 239–241.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, 240.

the Bolsheviks then turned to those with whom they *could* logically conclude peace – their military opponents, the Central Powers. In December 1917, the Bolsheviks concluded an armistice agreement with the Central Powers, with a view to negotiating a more final peace settlement through a treaty over the coming weeks and months.⁵¹¹ The Habsburg Foreign Minister, Ottokar Czernin, had been particularly effective in motivating his initially sceptical German counterparts to accept the Bolshevik offer of peace negotiations. Czernin believed that self-determination, and the Bolsheviks' declaration on the subject, could well be used to their advantage in any peace-making endeavours. Writing to the Chancellor of Germany, Czernin stated: "It would be our business to ensure that the desire for separation from Russia and for political and economic dependence on the Central Powers be voiced from within these nations".⁵¹² It is almost not worth expounding the obvious point here: there was nothing to stop empires also using the language of self-determination towards specific purposes and political ends.

Ultimately, the Central Powers did accept the Bolshevik offer of peace negotiations, with most of the peace conference taking place in the winter of 1917–1918, specifically in January and February 1918. One of the results of this negotiation period, the first Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, agreed between the Central Powers and the Ukrainian People's Republic, was discussed previously. That treaty awarded the Ukrainian People's Republic formal recognition from the Central Powers' constituent parts, but came at the cost of Ukraine's foodstuffs and, owing to the military-economic situation in the Habsburg Empire and Ukraine, practical military control over (now recognised) Ukrainian territory. The other constituent part of these discussions were the negotiations between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers, which resulted in the more well-known Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

In general, the Central Powers and the RSFSR struggled as much over the nature of, and justifications for, what they were agreeing as much as what they were agreeing itself. This was so within the respective delegations, as well as between them. It was clear, especially following L. D. Trotsky's political posturing (addressed below), where the *military* power lay, for the most part.⁵¹³ Regardless, the Bolsheviks were the group suing for peace: whatever their wider beliefs, to the Central Powers this appeared to be an acceptance of defeat. In the ensuing weeks, the delegates of both sides transformed the wooden tabletop of the negotiating table into the waxed floorboards of a political theatre, giving self-determination a starring role.

Early on in the negotiation period, there were a series of profound, theoretical, and philosophical discussions of self-determination between the two sides, most notably between the RSFSR's foreign plenipotentiary Trotsky and his Habsburg

⁵¹¹ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 242–243.

⁵¹² Extract from a letter from Count Ottokar Czernin to Georg von Hertling. Quoted in Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment', 372.

⁵¹³ Even if the Habsburg section of the Central Powers delegation was more desperate than others, as addressed above.

and German equivalents Czernin and Richard von Kühlmann respectively.⁵¹⁴ Interestingly, many of these discussions went well beyond the matters they were supposedly there to reach agreement on – borders, sovereignty, customs, and so on. As Borislav Chernev makes clear, there was a propagandistic element to this, as both sides “vied to become the leading authority on the application of the increasingly important concept of self-determination... This entailed a discursive power struggle over the various theoretical underpinnings, practical considerations, and procedural aspects of self-determination”.⁵¹⁵ Yet although the discussions *were* theoretical, they had practical implications, and were part of a process of ideational movement that further developed and internationalised how self-determination could be used with regard to imperial reconfiguration, international order, and peace. In other words, the conversations and seriousness with which these diplomats took the concept legitimised self-determination’s usage in precisely these kinds of political intervention.⁵¹⁶

Trotsky and his Soviet delegation had initially agreed, with some resentment, to accept the delegation from the Ukrainian Central Rada as the legitimate representatives of Ukraine.⁵¹⁷ They did so, however, with the knowledge that Bolshevik military forces were making some headway in several Ukrainian cities and regions in January 1918. The Central Rada, in fact, soon fled Kyiv and called for assistance from the Central Powers in resisting Bolshevik advances. This allowed Trotsky to make a show of things for his side, then inviting Ukrainian Bolsheviks to the peace conference.⁵¹⁸ The Soviet recognition of the Central Rada’s delegation was rescinded, with Trotsky now insisting that the Ukrainian Bolsheviks would represent Ukraine as part of the Soviet Russian delegation, via their own subcommittee.⁵¹⁹

The response of the Central Powers was discussed above. They continued to recognise the Ukrainian Central Rada as the legitimate government of Ukraine, and soon thereafter signed the first Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with its representatives. The delegates of the RSFSR were hardly surprised, but also chose to use the

⁵¹⁴ Chernev, ‘The Brest-Litovsk Moment’; Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 244–247.

⁵¹⁵ Chernev, ‘The Brest-Litovsk Moment’, 375.

⁵¹⁶ Even if the two sides were ‘using’ self-determination to their own ends – the usage of political concepts towards political goals means that there is not necessarily exclusivity between discussing self-determination ‘sincerely’ in this way and using it more ‘cynically’ in a public forum of sorts.

⁵¹⁷ Chernev, ‘The Brest-Litovsk Moment’, 377–378.

⁵¹⁸ These were representatives from what was first styled as the Ukrainian People’s Republic of Soviets in late 1917, a body co-founded by, among others, Bosh and Piatakov. Bosh served as its acting head as well taking charge of the internal affairs portfolio, and the republic eventually gained more formal RSFSR support and went through several name changes and reconfigurations over the coming months. It may also be interesting to note here that while Piatakov maintained his opposition to the Leninist line on self-determination during this time, Bosh had reconciled with the party leader’s strong support for the right to national self-determination following the party’s conference in April 1917.

⁵¹⁹ Chernev, ‘The Brest-Litovsk Moment’, 378.

opportunity to further their own goals. Aiming to make another theatrical demonstration of their commitment to peace and the folly of the First World War, they announced that they would now be adopting an intriguing policy. There was to be no war – the Bolsheviks would unilaterally remove themselves from the conflict if necessary – but the Bolsheviks would not sign a peace treaty either.⁵²⁰ To say this decision backfired would be an understatement of cosmic proportions. The Central Powers, unsurprisingly, took this as a free hand to continue military activities on their eastern fronts, since there was no state of peace to speak of nor negotiations to this end, and on they marched. Aside from some local, small-scale skirmishes, the Central Powers encountered no sustained organised resistance for almost a fortnight. They substantially increased the area under their military control, and, having learned the lessons of their early months of the conflict, began reinforcing their supply lines and engaging in relations with local political agents, most notably in Ukraine and Lithuania.

Reports of this soon reached the Bolsheviks back in the capital, and Sovnarkom and other bodies met to discuss their response to the events. Lenin's argument was consistent: return to the negotiating table, sign whatever peace terms were offered to them without question or risk further damage to the revolutionary struggle in the long run.⁵²¹ Others, such as Bukharin and Radek, believed that several of the Central Powers were on the verge of their own revolution, and therefore wanted to muster what troops they could⁵²² to hold the Central Powers back as much as possible until these prophesised events occurred. Ultimately, Lenin's pro-signing side won out. However, the disagreements over Brest-Litovsk caused lasting damage and unanticipated structural change to the Bolshevik regime.⁵²³ The Left SRs, for example, were so outraged they left Sovnarkom, the executive body of the RSFSR, with this dividing line widening over subsequent months to the point of their armed resistance to the Bolsheviks in summer 1918.⁵²⁴ The Bolsheviks also moved their capital from Petrograd to Moscow during this period, fearful of this almost two-week-long period in which the Central Powers advanced just a little *too* close towards the former. At the same time, the group had avoided the total destruction of their regime and catastrophe for their cause.

The terms the Bolsheviks eventually agreed to were extreme. Ukraine and its territory have already been addressed, but the treaty also ceded sovereignty of the territories of more than ten 'nationally distinct' (predominantly non-Russian) regions, including the lands of modern-day Belarus and the entire Baltic littoral to the Central Powers. The group had different plans for these areas. For example, Imperial Germany envisioned Estonia and part of Latvia as the United Baltic

⁵²⁰ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 251–254.

⁵²¹ Douds, *Inside Lenin's Government*, 34–35.

⁵²² The Red Army had been created legally by this time (in late January 1918), but was not the several million strong, well organised body it was to become under Trotsky during the Russian Civil War.

⁵²³ See Douds, *Inside Lenin's Government*, 34–37; 43–96.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

Duchy, something of a personal aristocratic backyard for German royals and high gentry.⁵²⁵ In so doing, the Central Powers sought to either create or lean on preexisting national movements and their institutional infrastructure to legitimise these entities through self-determination.⁵²⁶ This did permit a wide range of structures that ranged from *de facto* puppet states to more genuine, local, but restricted forms of self-government. However, because of the method through which these varying degrees of autonomy came into existence, some nationalists felt uneasy with the result.⁵²⁷

In the Baltic littoral, the Central Powers relied on the historic (and legal) role local Baltic Germans had played in the region, particularly when it came to the processes of postwar governance. Referring to the *Landersat*, an institution set up by Baltic German political agents in late 1917, the Central Powers argued that the Bolsheviks' *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* had been acknowledged, and now sought to be enacted, by these bodies.⁵²⁸ As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the Bolsheviks' declaration was clear on *what* it promoted, but did not specify *how* the right of self-determination up to and including secession was to be realised.⁵²⁹ This left open the possibility for others, in this case, the Central Powers, to argue for interpretations of self-hood that, at least in the Bolsheviks' eyes, were decidedly reactionary.⁵³⁰ In some ways, this was a legal argument; the Central Powers viewed these bodies as the only legitimate form of representation of the 'people' of the region, and therefore every decision concerning something's legality or otherwise must proceed from this basis. However, this can also clearly be seen as a class argument, since this 'people' were a numerically small but historically, politically, and economically powerful group of landowning and/or urban elites. This was the antithesis of the RSFSR's conception of the proletariat of a given nation being the source of ultimate local political authority. Institutionally, only the soviet form of government legitimately represented the workers, peasants, and soldiers the Bolsheviks claimed to be the vanguard party of.

Separately to this process, though naturally impacted by it, were other national movements – or other subsections of them, who sought to exploit this flux in great power momentum and use the chaos as an opportunity to advance their own desires (or, indeed, simply to manage this tumult). As mentioned above, it was a direct result of Brest-Litovsk negotiations that Estonian nationalists felt able (or even pressured) to declare independence and proclaim the Republic of Estonia in

⁵²⁵ Wojciech Materski, 'The Problem of the Demarcation of the Border between Estonia and Russia in 1917–1920', *Zapiski Historyczne*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2020), 99.

⁵²⁶ Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment'.

⁵²⁷ Whether such individuals would have been more tolerant of these outcomes if there had been more direct consent involved is an interesting but ultimately moot point.

⁵²⁸ Chernev, 'The Brest-Litovsk Moment', 376.

⁵²⁹ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii.

⁵³⁰ Though it was certainly not *only* the Bolsheviks who considered these interpretations woefully outdated.

late February 1918. This was not readily accepted by the RSFSR, nor the Central Powers, with the latter occupying the territory soon after, but is a necessary reminder of the claimants of self-determination of the same timeframe, when those who were offering self-determination tended to speak on behalf of others.

Nonetheless, the *de jure* terms of the resultant second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk were shameful from the point of view of the RSFSR, and knowingly so. The wider reaction was even more negative, especially from regions dealt with by the terms of the treaty but whose inhabitants' desires or even interests were never seriously taken into consideration. Perhaps the most profound and, in time, historically significant reaction to the treaty came from anti-Bolsheviks within Russian territory, giving a broad spectrum of previously disagreeable individuals and factions a *casus belli* against the Bolshevik regime. More on that, though, in the following subchapter.

Some Ukrainian Bolsheviks were, perhaps unsurprisingly, opposed to the significant territorial concessions the treaty made on their behalf. Bosh, for example, resigned from her position in Soviet Ukraine in protest, and immediately began militarily resisting the Central Powers. Others found it to be a watershed for other, more ideological reasons, with many Ukrainian Bolsheviks expressing discontent at the lack of unity between their republic and the RSFSR. Mark R. Beissinger has described this well, stating that "it was unclear [during the Russian Civil War] whether to incorporate territories of the former Tsarist Empire directly into the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic or simply to bind them to Moscow through party controls".⁵³¹ This certainly was up in the air at the time of Brest-Litovsk negotiations, but as already demonstrated, this was not a Moscow-centred, central party apparatus-dominated debate. Ukrainian and other Bolsheviks were asking each other the same question.

In this context, was it 'better' to be independent, sovereign, national states, tied together through essentially international legal arrangements and obligations when compared to existence either as a constituent part of some kind of federation, or even as a region of a unitary state as previously? What was the difference between a national republic and statehood? If it was the ability to conduct foreign relations, then why did the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets, an entity that was at this point in time legally attached to the RSFSR, have a People's Secretariat for International Affairs? There were all kinds of high-minded explanations of the differences between a truly proletarian national republic versus a bourgeois national state, but structurally, what was the difference? The precise institutional nature of soviet republics was frequently unclear, especially on the level of international representation. These questions would not be constitutionally answered until the 1920s, though not without further disquiet among some Russian and non-Russian Bolsheviks alike.

Over the spring and summer of 1918, several complex and in some cases overlapping events escalated into a full civil conflict within the regions formerly administered by the Provisional Government of Russia. These included the

⁵³¹ Beissinger, 'Self-Determination as a Technology of Imperialism', 482.

Revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion in May, the Left SR uprising against the Bolsheviks in July (as well as Right SR anti-Bolshevik activities in the same month), the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Lenin in August and subsequent Red Terror, and Allied intervention (initially) in relation to the First World War. I will, however, cover these months and some of these events in more detail in the following subchapter. For now, it is enough to take the conflict's existence as a given to contextualise the below.

Questions for the Bolsheviks over the differences or otherwise between the various forms of political existence proposed, as well as over self-determination itself, remained throughout the Russian Civil War. The Eighth Congress of what was now officially called the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was a typical example. Held in Moscow from the 18th to the 23rd of March 1919, hundreds of party members attended, debating and voting on party policy.⁵³² Piatakov and Bukharin were among the attendees and were keen to continue their fight against the official party line on self-determination.⁵³³ Bosh did not attend, remaining in Ukraine mainly for health reasons, though she also continued some work there at the same time.

Once again, the party tabled a discussion of the presence and prominence of self-determination in Bolshevik discourse.⁵³⁴ As was to be expected, Bukharin and Piatakov repeated their arguments regarding what they saw as the inefficacy of supporting self-determination in party policies, publications, and activities, effectively using the same argumentation as was present in their 1915 article draft. Compared to some of the previous and subsequent discussions and procedures of the meeting, where greater ideological harmony was present, the debate over self-determination sparked tension and passion. In one particular exchange on the 19th of March, Piatakov grew tired of what he saw as the pointlessness of the whole debate, arguing that:

...once we unite economically, create one administrative machinery, one Supreme Council for the National Economy, one railway administration, one bank, etc., then all this notorious "self-determination" is not worth a farthing. It is either simply a diplomatic game which has to be played in certain cases, or it is worse than a game if we take it seriously.⁵³⁵

Piatakov and Bukharin were heard out, but Lenin's repudiation of the two was ultimately victorious when it came to the final vote later that day. The pair did nonetheless receive some backing from some of the other Bolsheviks working in Ukraine and/or of Ukrainian national identity, as well as from other (admittedly

⁵³² See *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda: Protokoly* (Moscow, 1959) for the official minutes.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁴ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda*. Some speeches and decisions can also be found in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 38, 125–215.

⁵³⁵ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda*, 80–81.

less senior) party members with non-Russian backgrounds. Here, the Orthodox Marxist stance reappeared – why was *national* and not *proletarian* suddenly the most important adjective of the day for a group whose entire *raison d'être* was economic? Were the Bolsheviks not about greater and greater unity above and beyond national lines?

In his remarks on the 19th, Lenin directed considerable energy towards attempting to refute Piatakov in particular, most notably in his closing address of the day.⁵³⁶ Piatakov, Lenin argued, maintained an utterly “childish point of view”.⁵³⁷ At the same time, the Bolshevik leader acknowledged that his comrade’s end goal was identical to his own. His argumentation here seemed to imply that the pace of Bolshevik policies, and not the policies themselves, was their point of departure:

Comrade Piatakov is a thousand times right when he says that we need unity. But we must strive for it by means of propaganda, by Party influence, by forming united trade unions...If we do away with this point [the right of nations to self-determination], or formulate it differently, we shall be deleting the National Question from the programme. This might be done if there were people with no specific national features. But there are no such people, and we cannot build socialist society in any other way.⁵³⁸

Lenin’s argument that if the current Bolshevik formulation of the right of nations to self-determination was worded differently then the ‘National Question’ would itself be removed from the party’s programme is revealing. This point should also be recalled by the reader in a later chapter of this dissertation, in which the notion of self-determination *was* intentionally formulated differently by another senior Bolshevik, with explicit reference to the ‘National Question’ as a justification for the change.

In any case, Piatakov’s remarks on the nature and “game” of diplomacy implied an awareness of the image of the Bolsheviks’ own politics and language usage beyond their substance.⁵³⁹ Given his background, Piatakov would certainly be cognisant of the fact that the Bolsheviks might need (or be forced to seek) political compromises of different kinds that would then require ‘selling’ to a domestic audience. As discussed below, at same the time of this Eighth Party Congress in Moscow, the Paris Peace Conference was underway in western Europe. Regardless of the murkiness of ‘Wilsonian self-determination’, many national groups’ representatives believed that the US President supported the fundamental basis

⁵³⁶ Lenin, ‘Zakliuchitel’noe slovo po dokladu o partiinoi programme 19 marta’ [‘Final Word on the Report about the Party Programme, 19th of March’] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 38, 174–184.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid*, 182.

⁵³⁸ Lenin, ‘Zakliuchitel’noe slovo po dokladu o partiinoi programme 19 marta’, 184.

⁵³⁹ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda*, 80–81.

for their cases: nation-based imperial disintegration.⁵⁴⁰ On the whole, Wilson did not favour this kind utilisation of self-determination, but in any case, the Bolsheviks were aware of this, and were thus able to play Piatakov's diplomatic games when there was political advantage to doing so.

Certain members and former members of the RSFSR's foreign ministry, in particular Trotsky, as well as his successor as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, G. V. Chicherin, were highly effective in this performative, as well as substantive capacity.⁵⁴¹ It is important to remember that while Soviet Russia was not democratic in the sense of engendering an ideologically pluralistic society with free and fair elections, it was no less sensitive to its self-image and depictions of itself in the rest of the world than, for example, the Wilson administration was. Arguably, their awareness of what Lenin called the "means of propaganda" above, and the group's belief in its efficacy, let them to be *more* sensitive to the forms and genres in which their ideas were shared than many other political agents.⁵⁴² The word 'propaganda' in 1919 did not have the same connotations it does today in the Anglophone world, but was instead more literal; propaganda meant *to propagate*.

This subchapter analysed the Bolsheviks' approach to the peace negotiations of Brest-Litovsk and the party's continuing internal disagreements on self-determination into the Russian Civil War. It drew on studies of the (second) Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that examined the role of self-determination in the treaty's negotiation process, especially as used by both the Central Powers' and the Bolsheviks' delegations. It demonstrated that both delegations maintained a class-based understanding of self-determination during negotiations in both a theoretical and a practical sense, most notably when it came to the legitimacy or otherwise of the proposed institutions and referenda that were supposed to act as the guarantors of self-determination for those the terms of the treaty concerned. These terms were still nonetheless forced on the Bolsheviks, with well-known lasting consequences. The onset of the Russian Civil War then exacerbated the preexisting tensions among the Bolsheviks on self-determination, with Piatakov and Bukharin in particular continuing to attack the party's advocacy of including the right in the Bolsheviks' political platform. Lenin again argued against the two, seeing self-determination as a necessary part of the Bolsheviks' answer to the 'National

⁵⁴⁰ Interestingly, Lenin referred to Wilson during his closing address on the 19th of March (one of the few direct references Lenin made to the US President during this period). It is not quoted here because he says little of substance, only criticising Wilson's apparent use of the language of small nations to disguise capitalist-imperialist interests. See Lenin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu o partiinoi programme 19 marta', 184.

⁵⁴¹ In the case of Trotsky, this was so even after his rather woeful political failure during Brest-Litovsk negotiations. During the Russian Civil War he was among the most effective political communicators of the Bolsheviks' self-image, aims, and motivations. Given his successes in mobilising his own soldiers in the Red Army alongside his international audience-targeted literary works, a case could certainly be made to say that he was *the* most effective political communicator of the Bolsheviks at this time.

⁵⁴² Lenin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu o partiinoi programme 19 marta', 184.

Question'. Though Lenin's position was victorious during this time, it demonstrated that the experience of several existential conflicts did not in any way reduce internal disagreements on the concept but renew the seriousness with which these positions were taken by Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks alike.

The subchapter also continued its analysis of political interventions through their genre, focusing mainly on the international peace treaty between the Bolsheviks and the Central Powers. It argued that while possessing the conventions of the genre, both Bolshevik and Central Powers representatives were aware that an international peace treaty in this context was not *just* an international peace treaty, but also a potentially powerful statement for those who were not its signatories or directly impacted by its terms. Not least because of the military situation in the region, the Central Powers achieved more with the treaty in this sense than the Bolsheviks, at least in the short term. While the latter had attempted to reconfigure the very nature of international relations following their seizure of power – for example, by arguing against secret diplomacy and non-consensual annexations – they were ultimately forced to blend and attach these views with and into a peace treaty that otherwise fit the conventions of those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the negotiations behind the treaty, as well as its ultimate result, allowed Lenin, Trotsky, and other Bolsheviks to make their case for their own interpretation of self-determination and world revolution, they also exposed the difficulty of conducting this kind of revolutionary politics outside of the genre conventions of the international peace treaty. These necessitated compromises, mutual recognition of rights and obligations, basic cooperation around border regions, and so on, that were antithetical to the Bolsheviks' aims. Even if the Bolshevik regime saw these as temporary measures, Brest-Litovsk demonstrated that if it was to engage with the wider world, it would be subject to generic constraints when doing so.

3.2 The White Movement and Self-determination

Opposition to the Bolshevik seizure of power was widespread, but profoundly disorganised, and remained so for the remainder of 1917 and most of 1918. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, military resistance to the Bolsheviks began as early as the day after the coup in Petrograd and quickly became centred around what was known as 'South Russia'. The Don Cossack Ataman A. M. Kaledin had issued a call to members of the Provisional Government and those sympathetic to it to join him in the region in order to consolidate their remaining power and organise a counteroffensive.⁵⁴³ Implicit in this plan was a continuation of the Russian state's participation in the First World War. M. V. Alekseev, a general who had been an opponent of Kaledin's during the Provisional Government months (most notably during the Kornilov affair), now joined Kaledin in his anti-

⁵⁴³ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, 34–35.

Bolshevik efforts. L. G. Kornilov himself soon followed, and both Kornilov and Alekseev quickly established what became known as the Volunteer Army, the primary vehicle for anti-Bolshevik military activity in 1917 and early 1918.⁵⁴⁴

Although in terms of measurable military power the Volunteer Army of the south had significant advantages over the more geographically extensive and ideologically disparate civil opponents of the Bolsheviks (discussed presently), its position was hampered by two significant roadblocks. The first was simply the army's location – to the west was western Ukraine and the active conflict zones of the war with the Central Powers, and to the north and the east were the Bolsheviks. The new rulers of Petrograd did not have as tight a grip on the reigns of their claimed territory as the popular perception would suggest, at least at first, but they did importantly control many of European Russia's most industrialised and populous cities and regions. During the months of late 1917 and the early months of 1918 (roughly speaking, until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk), the Volunteer Army could be characterised as a significant inconvenience, rather than a necessarily existential threat to the Bolshevik regime. Regardless, that there was such ideological antipathy towards Petrograd suggested a political, as well as military threat to the nascent Soviet regime.

What, then, did the leaders of the Volunteer Army believe in and wish to support? The overwhelming majority of soldiers in the Volunteer Army had been loyal to the tsarist regime and had readily gone to war in defence of their *Patrie* in 1914. Most understood by the time of the Bolshevik seizure of power that there was to be no return to tsarist autocracy, even if they had differing attitudes towards the Provisional Government throughout its existence. Perhaps most importantly, several thousand of the initial cohort of soldiers of the Volunteer Army had been *officers* of varying seniority in the days of the Russian Empire and Provisional Government, rather than the largely conscripted rank and file.⁵⁴⁵ In other words, they had been socialised in the elite military academies of imperial Russia from a young age and for a considerable amount of time. They therefore both represented and often sympathised with the general values of their former institutions, even if they came from an atypical ethno-linguistic or regional background. In general, these values included Russian nationalism and patriotism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Germanophobia.⁵⁴⁶ Some placed the abstract concept of service for their country above fealty to specific individuals or institutions, accepting, for example, the legitimacy of the Provisional Government of Russia, while others were devout monarchists who wished in an ideal world for the reinstallation of tsarist authority.⁵⁴⁷

Anti-Bolshevism was nonetheless the fundamental point of accord among these individuals, by the first few months of 1918 increasingly being referred to

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, 35.

⁵⁴⁶ Peter Kenez, 'The Ideology of the White Movement', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 32 (January 1980), 58–83.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

as either the ‘Whites’ or the more pejorative ‘White Guards’, the latter of which was more typical from Bolshevik/pro-Soviet figures.⁵⁴⁸ Here, I use the wider term ‘White Movement’ because it is both more analytically neutral while also implying the multipolarity the loose coalition embodied. While those who initially made up the Volunteer Army tacitly accepted the legitimacy of the Provisional Government (though, in many cases, had wished the regime to be far more assured in its decision making), they viewed Bolshevism as the antithesis of their own world-view.⁵⁴⁹ Along with other moral crimes such as their socialism, atheism, and internationalism, the Bolsheviks’ instantaneous pursuit of peace at any cost was the most egregious offence on the charge sheet. As they were military figures socialised by the Russian Empire’s institutions of military training and tradition, this was entirely explicable. Their ultimate fear was that the Bolsheviks, as supposed German-sympathisers, would conclude a peace treaty with the Central Powers with utterly humiliating terms, surrendering substantial regions of what they viewed as indefatigably Russian territory to Imperial German puppet masters.

It is difficult, therefore, to overstate the impact of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on these individuals.⁵⁵⁰ Rumours abounded that Lenin and Trotsky were part of a complex web of spies and double-dealing diplomats (or, by some accounts, were themselves imperial German agents) even before the peace was officially signed in March 1918.⁵⁵¹ Although a thorough examination of senior Bolsheviks reveals that Lenin and Trotsky were not *direct* agents of a military intelligence project of Imperial Germany (though they were certainly assistants to the empire’s interests⁵⁵²), the terms of the treaty were nonetheless shocking to many in the former Provisional Government space. As described in the previous subchapter,

⁵⁴⁸ It is not fully understood from when and why these groups were referred to as ‘White’, a problem exacerbated by the fact that it is not known whether the name originated from the group(s) themselves, or if it was adopted by them after the fact. One theory is that the name originated from the Whites themselves, intentionally drawing comparisons with the counter-revolutionaries of the French Revolution, while another suggests a link to Russia’s first ‘Caesar’, Tsar Ivan III, who was occasionally formally styled *Albus Rex*, or the White King. An alternative theory posits that the name originated from the colour of the uniforms worn by some Russian imperial officers in pre-revolutionary days. Jonathan D. Smele, a historian of revolutionary Russia, acknowledges this lack of certainty, and hints at yet another possibility, that the Whites sought to claim spiritual succession to M. D. Skobelev, a noted general in the Russian Empire’s campaigns in Central Asia in the 1870s and 1880s, who frequently wore white when charging into battle on (white) horseback. Perhaps it is telling that in all of these wide-ranging possibilities, there was some kind of an appeal to past glories, a looking-back that was not reflected by the names of other contemporary groups or, for example, political parties such as the Party of People’s Freedom, better known as the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia (the Kadets). See Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 2.

⁵⁴⁹ Kenez, ‘The Ideology of the White Movement’; Christopher Lazarski, ‘White Propaganda Efforts in the South during the Russian Civil War, 1918–19 (The Alekseev-Denikin Period)’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (1992), 688–707.

⁵⁵⁰ Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars*, 54.

⁵⁵¹ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 148; 257.

⁵⁵² As well as financial beneficiaries of Berlin’s war effort, as is now more widely known.

this extended to Bolshevik figures too, albeit for different reasons. The treaty had a truly galvanising effect for anti-Bolshevik individuals, especially those with a history of national military service in which they took pride.⁵⁵³ As discussed, the terms of Brest-Litovsk served as the starkest message yet of the Bolsheviks' apparent 'un-Russianness', and Russian Army officers and Cossacks flocked in their droves to South Russia, or sought to establish their own equivalent organisations in other regions if traveling to the area was not possible.⁵⁵⁴

On a grander intellectual level, that the Central Powers had clearly used the concept of self-determination rather 'conveniently', as well as made effective use of the Bolshevik's *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* to contribute to their legitimisation of the peace terms had consequences. Many emergent White Movement figures were now at least *suspicious* of the term and concept, and had, in their eyes, a logical basis for seeing self-determination as a tool exclusively designed for the forced renouncement of sovereignty over Russian lands.⁵⁵⁵ Self-determination certainly had the capacity to be an instrument in the dismemberment of a greater Russian state, but these figures' more exclusive reading of the concept as such was a theme that would re-emerge later and beyond 1918.

Regardless, as implied, the military leaders of these 'Whites' – the emergent White Movement – did not therefore come from the broad social base that was, to some extent, represented in some of the political parties and civil society groups found elsewhere.⁵⁵⁶ Some White officers certainly came from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds, but all shared primarily military, rather than civic attitudes towards the fundamental problems of the state. This was perhaps the White Movement's greatest strength, as well as its greatest and most fatal flaw simultaneously. This was a period of mass conflict, and the ability to effectively mobilise large groups of people towards a single goal or platform through military-disciplinary means could yield positive results to this end *and* be theoretically supported by many beyond direct participation. However, as will be discussed below, at the same time, the White Movement's leaders were the intellectual equivalent of horses wearing restrictive blinders for race day, understanding conflict and its consequences only or primarily through this military lens. This meant that they consistently neglected other significant aspects of effective governance that could help rally still larger groups to their cause, as well as more

⁵⁵³ More, it seems, than the Bolshevik seizure of power itself had.

⁵⁵⁴ Brest-Litovsk appeared to demonstrate the nature of the Bolsheviks either as much as or more than it did the Central Powers. In this reading, 'no true Russian' would have consented to such terms.

⁵⁵⁵ Ignoring, of course, the questions as to how authentically 'Russian' some of these areas were.

⁵⁵⁶ Consider, for example, the complete absence of women among White leaders, in comparison to the prominent roles of women in other groups, such as M. A. Spiridonova of the SRs, A. M. Kollontai of the Bolsheviks, and A. V. Tyrkova-Williams of the Kadets and the All-Russian League for Women's Equality, to name but three examples. As the White Movement's leaders came from military backgrounds, this absence was perfectly explicable, but still nonetheless reflected the narrowness of the social group from which they drew most of their leaders, members, and support.

effectively maintain control and some semblance of order in the territories their forces occupied. In partial relation to this, it is also worth remembering what Anatol Shmelev wrote in more general terms about the anti-Bolshevik movement, the substance of which will be addressed below:

Drastic changes in the reality of a situation rarely produce equally drastic changes in people's perception of that reality, so that previous mentalities and forms of discourse often continue to function in traditional modes, even though the set of problems they deal with has become radically different. Thus, even as a country ceases to be a great power, the *concept* of it as a great power can continue to influence decision making and policy formulation.⁵⁵⁷

Over time, it became clear that regardless of the more moderate and left-wing figures within the grouping, the *leaders* of the White Movement (who, lest it be forgotten, were all military, rather than political figures) viewed what they understood as 'Russia' and its prewar boundaries as indivisible. This much is clear from multiple sources of White Movement propaganda and declarations.⁵⁵⁸ Certain aspects of the Whites' conception of Russia were shared by several liberal-reformist figures already discussed, most notably the underlying assumption that the Russian state included within it several smaller populations of non-Russian (ethnically, nationally, or linguistically) and/or non-Orthodox groups.⁵⁵⁹ Though rarely expanded upon, this assumption appeared to be based on ideas of long term development – this situation was 'natural' because it was historically constituted.⁵⁶⁰ Of course, that this should be used as an argument for why something should remain as such was open to critique.

The military (and military-governmental) leaders of the White Movement did not therefore possess a particularly unique view of Russia. Nonetheless, elements of this conception were far more pronounced and explicit than in earlier non- and anti-Bolshevik thought. Principally, White leaders emphasised the unitary form of the Russian state, alongside the great power status of Russia and Russians as

⁵⁵⁷ Anatol Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire: Anti-Bolshevik Russia in International Affairs, 1917–1920* (Stanford, 2021), 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Lazarski, 'White Propaganda Efforts in the South'.

⁵⁵⁹ Further development of this overlap between these liberal-reformist and more conservative conceptualisations of Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could be a fruitful path for scholarly research. A lot has been implied so far in this work, but an explicit study might be able to tease out more of the differences as well as the similarities.

⁵⁶⁰ It is nonetheless true that no state is ethnically or nationally homogenous (recall, for example, Witte's statements on this subject from his memoirs), but here I refer mainly to larger non-Russian groups under the former imperial state's jurisdiction, at a time when there were demonstrably changing justifications for political rule that required addressing by aspiring political leaders. In this sense, the White Movement's view of who and what constituted the Russian state was profoundly under-theorised.

they understood them.⁵⁶¹ When they gave their battle cry of “For a United Russia”, this was a direct appeal to these ideals.⁵⁶² One scholar of the White Movement in South Russia, Christopher Lazarski, has demonstrated that White resistance to secessionist ideologies and even different forms of regional autonomy hardened over time.⁵⁶³ The-then Kadet P. B. Struve was emblematic of this general trend, with his writings and correspondence becoming more intransigent in relation to unitary statism (as well as propagating a more ethnically exclusive form of Russian nationalism) during his time working for the White Movement in South Russia.⁵⁶⁴

By some contrast, civil opposition to the Bolsheviks was more geographically distributed, and was, at least for 1917 and the better part of 1918, more socially and ideologically diverse. During this time, for example, there were anti-Bolshevik strikes in several urban centres, and many SRs (of both factions) expended their political capital in fighting the Bolsheviks in the arena of conventional political deliberation. This was most pronounced with the Left SRs, the Bolsheviks’ ‘coalition’ partner, who had a series of intense exchanges over both parties’ principled convictions on land reform and the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk throughout these months.⁵⁶⁵ Eventually, these conflicts reached a breaking point (primarily as a result of Brest-Litovsk), and the Left SRs quit the government *en masse* in March 1918.⁵⁶⁶ Some joined with their old Right SR colleagues once again, many fled the capital, and some engaged in anti-Bolshevik activism, rebellion, and terrorism, most notably in the unsuccessful Left SR uprising in July, and the assassination attempt on Lenin in August 1918.⁵⁶⁷

Many of the SRs who fled headed for the eastern cities of European Russia over the course of the first six months of 1918, with Samara a particular focal point for the group. Some had been elected to the Constituent Assembly and had relocated to the city in the wake of Lenin’s dissolution of the body in January 1918.⁵⁶⁸ Others, including those from other parties such as the Mensheviks and the Kadets, soon followed. In June 1918 they formed an organisation that saw itself as the temporary government of the Russian state, and named the body the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (or KOMUCH, in the awkward shorthand).⁵⁶⁹ This body included Menshevik and Kadet individuals,

⁵⁶¹ Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*; Lazarski, ‘White Propaganda Efforts in the South’; Kenez, ‘The Ideology of the White Movement’; Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War* (Edmonton, 1995).

⁵⁶² For an example of this common White Movement refrain, refer to this well known propaganda poster the group produced at the height of the Russian Civil War, available via the New York Public Library here.

⁵⁶³ Lazarski, ‘White Propaganda Efforts in the South’, 689.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Douds, *Inside Lenin’s Government*, 34–40.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars*, 76.

⁵⁶⁸ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 413–414.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 414.

but was overwhelmingly dominated by SRs. Partly because of the successes of the Revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion of May 1918, and partly as a result of their own 'People's Army of KOMUCH', the regime was able to expand the territory it *de facto* controlled quite considerably over the subsequent months. KOMUCH's army was led for the most part by V. O. Kappel, a fervent monarchist who served the republican, SR-dominated KOMUCH purely pragmatically against what he perceived as the greater and entirely irredeemable evil of the Bolsheviks, demonstrating the plurality of anti-Bolshevik resistance at this time.

By the autumn of 1918, the Red Army had been able to reinforce its positions in central Russia, and make significant gains towards Samara. In the wake of these Red Army advances, tens of KOMUCH members travelled to the city of Ufa to negotiate with several other anti-Bolshevik governments, including one calling itself the Provisional Siberian Government of Omsk.⁵⁷⁰ The goal of this so-called 'state meeting in Ufa' was to unite all of these disparate governments under one authority, in theory enabling more coherent action against the advancing Bolsheviks. Although there were other anti-Bolshevik groups present, much of the dialogue and decision making was undertaken by KOMUCH and the Provisional Siberian Government. As mentioned, SRs and a handful of Kadets and Mensheviks formed the bulk of KOMUCH, while the Provisional Siberian Government was dominated by more right wing (in this context meaning more conservative and militaristic) figures, be they politicians or military personnel. Beyond this, many Cossack groups were also represented, and even the Provisional Government of Estonia enjoyed some informal recognition by the group with its three representatives, as did Muslim Tatars and several regional governments from Siberia.⁵⁷¹

The labour of the meeting's negotiations reflected this broad church of political leanings and backgrounds, but after around two weeks the representatives reached an accord, and produced a document to bind all parties to.⁵⁷² The group had chosen to establish what can only be described as the epitome of a *modus vivendi* government, the Provisional All-Russian Government (*Vremennoe Vserossiiskoe pravitel'stvo*; PA-RG)⁵⁷³. The document establishing the government was predictably rather confused, containing both classically liberal (i.e. Kadet; individualist; legalist) and socialist (SR; collectivist; land reformist) sentiments in combination with the existentialist language of strong statehood and militarism

⁵⁷⁰ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, 72–75.

⁵⁷¹ See the list of participants at the end of the following: 'Akt ob obrazovanii vserossiiskoi verkhovnoi vlasti, priniaty na gosudarstvennom soveshchani, imevshem mesto v gorode Ufa s 8 po 23 sentiabria 1918 g.' ['Act on the Formation of the All-Russian Supreme Authority, adopted at the state conference held in the city of Ufa from the 8th of September to the 23rd, 1918'], Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga [The Central State Archive of St. Petersburg], f. XXIX ("Akty Vserossiiskogo pravitel'stva"), d. 3, Document No. 279. A digital version of the Russian original can be found [here](#).

⁵⁷² Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, 73–74.

⁵⁷³ Sometimes referred to as the Directory or the Directorate.

closer to that of the tsarist regime between 1914 and 1917.⁵⁷⁴ In this final written agreement, taking the genre of a legal act and written in the style of a political declaration and constitution simultaneously, the following points were written under the ‘Civil Government’ heading:

1. The organisation of liberated Russia is to proceed on the basis of broad local autonomy for the various provinces, with recognition of geographical, economic, and ethnic differences, assuming the final establishment of a state organisation on federal principles by a sovereign Constituent Assembly.
2. National minorities that do not occupy separate territories are to be granted the right to national-cultural self-determination.⁵⁷⁵

These were revealing claims that highlight the intellectual trends of the time, even during the Russian Civil War. Firstly, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the assumption of a future federal Russian state remained strong and was presented explicitly in the government’s foundational act. This was both the result of some of the more recent reforms of the Provisional Government (the impetuses of many such reforms coming from non-Russian groups themselves, as discussed) and of longer term international thought on how best to resolve the ‘National Question’ within the-then Russian Empire.

Equally, the terminological reference to self-determination also stands out, alongside its adjectives specifying its national and cultural forms.⁵⁷⁶ Certainly, the explicit mention of the term is not surprising coming from the SRs, and generally explicable from Kadet representatives as well. It is more curious coming at least in part from figures associated with loyal service to the tsarist regime, including individuals known to be defenders of a ‘United Russia’, one and indivisible. Regardless, it is important to highlight that opponents of the Bolsheviks, in this case, including conservative and militaristic opponents, were capable of using the term self-determination in their forms of political resistance to the regime.

Nonetheless, the document also stressed the state unity of Russia (in more modern language, its territorial integrity), and wished for the “reunification” of the “scattered” regions “of Russia” that had been lost through secession, foreign occupation, or simply practical disunity as a result of the onset of the Russian Civil War.⁵⁷⁷ At this moment in time, in September 1918, the Provisional All-Russian Government underpinned these desires with a clear understanding that

⁵⁷⁴ ‘Akt ob obrazovanii vserossiiskoi verkhovnoi vlasti’.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ ‘Akt ob obrazovanii vserossiiskoi verkhovnoi vlasti’. The original Russian text uses these adjectives as hyphenated (as in my above translation), which could also suggest some kind of confused reference to ‘national-cultural autonomy’, the form of non-territorial autonomy popularised by the Austromarxist school. However, as I have not been able to find evidence of this, my analysis is based on understanding it as referring to national and cultural forms of self-determination as perceived by the document’s authors.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

for such a project to be successful, several and specific rights had to be guaranteed for a Russia that would be constituted as a federation. Beyond this, for those not provided protection nor agency within these governmental subunits, self-determination was explicitly permitted on national and cultural bases. Therefore, significant subsections of the White Movement were clearly capable of making reference to self-determination and related ideas of imperial reconfiguration, such as federalism, at least when the coalition was characterised by the coexistence of ideologically disparate groups.

The resultant Provisional All-Russian Government was undeniably weak. Politically, its members did not align towards a specific policy platform, only against that of the Bolsheviks.⁵⁷⁸ Its socialist and its conservative members disagreed fundamentally on some of the most pressing issues of the day – land reform perhaps most significantly and consistently.⁵⁷⁹ Militarily, the body comprised of several different armed groups (including ones that cannot seriously be called armies in any meaningful sense) that were now supposed to cohere with tactical precision against the Red Army while also being subordinate to the whims of this new fractious civilian government. Following further Red Army advances, the government was forced to relocate further east to the city of Omsk from the 9th of October 1918 onwards.

On 13th of October 1918, a stiff naval officer, Vice-Admiral A. V. Kolchak, arrived in Omsk, and was soon given a position in the executive body of this new government as the Minister for War and Naval Affairs.⁵⁸⁰ In many ways, Kolchak typified the sociological background of his colleagues and officer corps. Indeed, the new government minister's father had also been an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy, and Kolchak followed this same trajectory, quickly rising through the ranks of the organisation and participating in scientific exploratory trips to the Arctic as well as military campaigns during the Russo-Japanese War. In both this conflict and the early years of the First World War, Kolchak distinguished himself as one of the few naval officers in the Imperial Russian Navy who was at once militarily successful and well respected by his peers and subordinates.⁵⁸¹ At the time of the February (March) Revolution Kolchak oversaw the Black Sea Fleet, though he was soon removed from this post by the Provisional Government. After A. F. Kerensky heard murmurs that conservative circles were beginning to throw Kolchak's name around as a potential 'salvation' candidate for their military-autocracy desires, the officer was quietly sent away to the United States via the United Kingdom, where he met with military figures and discussed Allied naval strategy, before deciding to return to Russia after spending

⁵⁷⁸ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, 73–74.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 61.

⁵⁸¹ At a time when mutinies, especially in the Imperial Russian Navy, were common. Kolchak was also influential in the rebuilding (and institutional reorganisation) of the navy following the Russian Empire's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Regardless, as will be seen, being respected was not quite the same as being *liked* by these same individuals.

time in California. Kolchak was in Japan, *en route* to the Russian Far East, when the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917, and this only strengthened his resolve to return and participate in what he saw as the rescuing and reconstituting of a great Russian state, now against this threat from Moscow as well as Berlin.⁵⁸²

By late October 1918, the PA-RG had elected to further broaden its claimed sovereignty and acquire greater practical political and military power. It mainly attempted to do so by issuing a demand to the numerous other regional anti-Bolshevik governments to unite and submit their authority to the Omsk regime, alongside creating a new executive body for itself called the Council of Ministers.⁵⁸³ Therefore, at the time of Kolchak's arrival in Omsk, many members and supporters of the Provisional All-Russian Government were insistent that its power be further centralised, and ideally in one person. The austere and industrious Kolchak appealed to many as a potential candidate for such a project. Military figures respected him and his record, and political figures felt that Kolchak's avowed 'apolitical' sense of self allowed for political flexibility. Even foreign figures in the region, such as Alfred Knox, a general of the British Empire and head of the British Mission to Siberia, were particularly drawn to the supposed steel of the naval officer, were there to be any suggestion of a military-led government.⁵⁸⁴

Indeed, there were suggestions, and military figures including Cossacks as well as right wing political figures (as well as a handful of British military and intelligence officers) conspired to reconfigure the current form of the PA-RG into a *de facto* military dictatorship via a governmental coup.⁵⁸⁵ The precise nature and mechanisms of this coup are complex, and involved both the arrest of a number of SRs during a banquet honouring a French general, as well as further arrests of other SRs and politicians (many of them originally from KOMUCH) considered likely to oppose the coup.⁵⁸⁶ For our purposes it is enough just to state that the coup was a complete success. On the night of the 17th of November and into the early hours of the 18th, the SRs and others were arrested, while a hastily arranged meeting of the Council of Ministers agreed to place all authority in one person, with the latter body then holding an 'election' to this end in which Kolchak was chosen as their candidate.⁵⁸⁷ Soon after hearing this news, Kolchak accepted the result of this 'election', which also included a promotion to the rank

⁵⁸² For an excellent summary of Kolchak's career up until this point, see Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 65–76.

⁵⁸³ It was this body in which Kolchak first became Minister for War and Naval Affairs from its inception on the 4th of November 1918.

⁵⁸⁴ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 423.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 423–425. Though Engelstein herself rather wryly describes the event as less of a coup and "more like a hostile corporate takeover" (425).

⁵⁸⁶ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 423; Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 60–62.

⁵⁸⁷ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 104–107.

of Admiral, and assumed the post of Supreme Ruler of Russia (*Verkhovnyi Pravitel' Rossii*) that same day.⁵⁸⁸

Kolchak was not quick to issue public statements regarding his and his new government's precise aims. His clearest arrived in the form of a declaration in May 1919, not coincidentally when the Allies were seeking further clarity on the political platform and general outlook of Kolchak, at a time when the peace-makers were busying themselves in Paris and Omsk's military forces were seeing some success.⁵⁸⁹ In the declaration, Kolchak spoke of promises of universal suffrage and the formation of a Constituent Assembly, as well as abstract notions of justice, law and order, and what we would today call food security for the destitute and those existentially reliant on harvest qualities.⁵⁹⁰ Certainly, these aspects struck the right tone in line with at least the rhetoric coming out of western Europe. However, the new prince of Omsk also omitted a significant volume of politically important information in the May declaration. There was, for example, no discussion of the nature or form of the future Russian state were Kolchak's forces to be successful. Beyond the grand questions of the political system (a unitary versus a federal state, a unicameral versus a bicameral legislature, and so on), which would in theory be dealt with through a Constituent Assembly, there were very practical matters to consider. Upon military victory, would Kolchak surrender power to another civilian transitional government or attempt to oversee free and fair elections himself? Assuming there was to be mass disarmament of all combatants of the civil war, how would this be undertaken? Given that not every faction of the Russian Civil War that opposed Kolchak was Bolshevik or even Bolshevik-aligned (some of the non-Russian national movements, for example), was an amnesty envisioned once their *raison d'être* had been achieved? Moreover, the declaration failed to explicitly refer to any form of self-determination, as well as to the national movements in general.⁵⁹¹ While it should be noted that there is an absence of material that either explicitly explains or implicitly suggests any reason/s behind this, many of those within the national movements interpreted the 'non-discussion' of themselves, self-determination, or the future form of the state negatively. It is difficult to establish the degree to which the absence of a particular term was intentional.⁵⁹² At the same time, it is comparatively easier to establish the response of others to this declaration.

By contrast, Kolchak had almost immediately produced a declaration addressed 'to the Russian Army', that served as the beginning of Omsk's veneration of all

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁸⁹ A. V. Kolchak, 'Deklaratsiia Verkhovnogo Pravitelia' ['Declaration of the Supreme Ruler'], May 1919. Available in multiple languages in the British Public Record Office (UK National Archives, PRO), FO 371/4095/82400.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ Kolchak, 'Deklaratsiia Verkhovnogo Pravitelia'.

⁵⁹² Though it does admittedly bear the hallmarks of what historians of political thought call a 'significant absence'.

things military that lasted as long as the regime itself.⁵⁹³ It was a short but bold text. “The state is born, develops its power and perishes together with its army” Kolchak declared.⁵⁹⁴ “Without an army there is no independence, no freedom, and no state”.⁵⁹⁵ These may well be understandable claims on one level, and are certainly explicable in the specific circumstances and given Kolchak’s military background. However, there was little in the declaration about the world *beyond* these first principles – what was this independence, freedom, and statehood *for*? Elsewhere, Kolchak rambled rather predictably about the betrayal of Russia, a great state lost but not yet gone from the world, the upcoming Paris Peace Conference, “God almighty”, and the mortal fight against “our historic enemies, the German tribes”.⁵⁹⁶ While Kolchak made no mention of self-determination, he did make clear his attitude towards those who elected to serve the new regime in Moscow:

The blood-stained army led by German officers [the Red Army], which is based upon Germano-Bolshevism but has a dash of Germans, Magyars, Letts, Estonians, Finns and even Chinese, which has criminally and treacherously betrayed the Motherland, still occupies a large part of Russia.⁵⁹⁷

The timing of this declaration should not go unnoticed. The government that now called itself the Russian State (*Rossiiskoe Gosudarstvo*) published this declaration alongside its purging of figures considered problematic to the centralisation and militarisation of power in Omsk. The primary victims of the repressive measures were SRs, including those who had resisted Kolchak’s coup and paid the price of their lives for it, a small number of Kadets (typically exiled or assigned meaningless duties far from Omsk), and the very few Mensheviks still left in the region.⁵⁹⁸ While establishing precise numbers is a futile endeavour, the severity and consequences of the purge appear clear. If one had openly resisted the coup or, interestingly, expressed a more flexible view towards the national movements (a commonality among those purged), there was to be no place for them at the court of Kolchak.

Following these events, the White Movement therefore became more ideologically coherent but intellectually hollow. As Jonathan D. Smele has argued, based on both the purge and the notable absence of clear political statements in late 1918 and 1919 “the question of Kolchak’s aims was one which nobody either inside or outside of Siberia was qualified to answer”.⁵⁹⁹ It is difficult to state that the reconfigured White Movement simply replaced the language of self-

⁵⁹³ A. V. Kolchak, ‘Obrashchenie Rossiiskoi armii’ [‘Appeal to the Russian Army’], November 1918, published in K. S. Burevoi, *Kolchakovschina* (Moscow, 1919), 21–23.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ Kolchak, ‘Obrashchenie Rossiiskoi armii’.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ Kolchak, ‘Obrashchenie Rossiiskoi armii’.

⁵⁹⁸ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 425–426.

⁵⁹⁹ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 183.

determination with something perceived as more limited or easier to restrict – in truth it appears as though it was removed altogether. If it was replaced, it was with what this same scholar poetically described as the “White lexicon of non-predetermination...[which] avoided any concrete promises or immediate undertakings”.⁶⁰⁰ In the context of this political purge, the reconfigured White Movement’s attitude towards self-determination can certainly be inferred, if not empirically demonstrated at this time.

It may be tempting to treat the sudden rise of Kolchak and the brisk fall of self-determination in White Movement discourse with a sense a poetry, but the picture could still be altogether more complicated. Perhaps there simply is no significance to the absence. There is certainly no single source that explicitly explains why self-determination disappeared from the platform of the Omsk government once Kolchak had taken up the position of Supreme Ruler. However, this potentially innocuous oversight or nonappearance of self-determination from Kolchak’s governmental platform occurred in the immediate context of Omsk’s purge of socialist and left-of-centre figures. As detailed above, these individuals were those most likely to use the term prominently, consistently, and support the general principle. Moreover, this was only a few months after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the existence and terms of which were foundational, indeed, arguably the formative event for many White Movement figures in their desire to resist the Bolsheviks militarily – certainly this was true for Kolchak himself. In relation to this, those Omsk considered their greatest enemies, the Bolsheviks, and those Omsk considered ungrateful or misguided, the national movements such as those of the Baltics, had all employed the exact term and appealed to the concept publicly and prominently for several years now. In the case of the Bolsheviks, *The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was the most recent example, with the declarations of independence of the Baltic nationalist movements being the clearest recent example of their respective public use of the notion.⁶⁰¹

Despite the political purges and militarisation of governmental power undertaken by Kolchak and his cadres shortly after the coup that had brought the Supreme Ruler to his throne, the new authorities in Omsk were not ignorant of the more performative aspects of politics. P. V. Vologodskii, for example, a notable member of the SRs, escaped Kolchak’s crackdown on centre and left-of-centre figures and was soon given a unique role in the regime as a hostage disguised as a promotion, becoming the First Chairman of the Council of Ministers, effectively the Prime Minister of the Omsk regime.⁶⁰² One of Kolchak’s officers

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 185. The idea of ‘non-predetermination’ (*nepredreshenie*) first appeared during the days of the Provisional Government, serving as a seemingly legitimate and succinct synonym for the phrase ‘let us wait for the Constituent Assembly’. Its usage during a period of state collapse and civil war, however, deserves more scrutiny.

⁶⁰¹ Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii; Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele.

⁶⁰² Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 143. Though of course, Vologodskii and the civilian government he nominally led was never in any effective power in terms of the day to day running of the region.

was outraged to hear this news, and immediately complained to the Supreme Ruler about Vologodskii's deplorable socialism and significant position in the executive, to which Kolchak reportedly replied: "Yes, he is such an SR! He is old and he avoids all work...But remember, he is needed here as *le vieux drapeau* [the old flag]".⁶⁰³ Certainly, it appeared that Omsk was actively trying to avoid any substance or tangible objects behind what few proclamations the regime had made on the aims and nature of a future Russian state. At the same time, Kolchak's government had removed those who would have been seen as conceivably *problematic* individuals while also maintaining the outward appearance of a regime that was pluralistic. After all, with a famous SR as First Chairman, how could Omsk be seen as a martial government in the eyes of the world?

For Kolchak and those around him, self-determination was likely no different. The term could, indeed *was* interpreted, as simply too radical to be overtly supported by the Omsk regime. One historian of the White Movement describes this as follows: "They [Kolchak and his supporters] were clearly not prepared to renounce the old imperial vision of a greater Russia...White authorities never seriously considered the alternative of a territorially reduced...country".⁶⁰⁴ Moreover, the qualities of the Russia the White Movement under Kolchak chose to emphasise most were marked by a clear theoretical opposition to the notion of self-determination as understood by most of the previously discussed agents. Simultaneously, Kolchak did not explicitly state that the Omsk regime did *not* support self-determination. As believers in a Great Russia, however this was conceptualised, the reconfigured White Movement had long term domestic considerations in mind in this delicate balancing act. At the same time, Omsk also soon had to factor in more short term, international affairs. On the 11th of November 1918, Imperial Germany, by now the last actively warring contingent of the Central Powers, signed an armistice with the Allied and Associated Powers. As is now more well established, conflict in central and eastern Europe and, of course, in Russia, continued far beyond this point, but the armistice marked an important *political* change, as the Allied and Associated Powers switched practically overnight to thinking about the conditions of the resultant peace. Omsk knew it had to reckon with this fact.

This subchapter analysed the genesis of the White Movement, the main (primarily) Russian anti-Bolshevik force during the Russian Civil War, and outlined its evolution from the Volunteer Army of South Russia into a wider, big tent movement that initially included more moderate political agents and other

⁶⁰³ Quoted in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 143. See also K. V. Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich, 1923), 89. The presence of Vologodskii even allowed representatives of the White Movement abroad to refer to "*les socialistes à Omsk*" (Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 143–44). It is obvious why Kolchak would want an SR known for avoiding work at the centre of the intentionally weak Council of Ministers when seeking international support.

⁶⁰⁴ N. G. O. Pereira, 'White Power during the Civil War in Siberia (1918–1920): Dilemmas of Kolchak's 'War Anti-Communism,' *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vo. 29 (1987), 55.

anti-Bolshevik socialists within it. In particular, the chapter highlighted the group's evolving views, insofar as they cohered, on self-determination, demonstrating that in the early months of the White Movement's existence, terminological reference to both self-determination and federalism could be found. One government that appealed directly to these ideas, the Provisional All-Russian Government, did so largely as a result of its socialist and moderate Kadet members. This government, however, was soon overthrown in a coup and a *de facto* military dictatorship set up under the now-Admiral Kolchak. Kolchak's use of political language was different than the Provisional All-Russian Government's. On the one hand, the new Supreme Ruler of Russia spoke in more overtly statist, militaristic, and 'Great Power' terms than the previous government had, reflecting his socialisation in the Russian imperial military sphere. At the same time, Kolchak and his proclamations' drafters in Omsk became much less clear on what their precise goals were for the regime following a hypothetical victory than the regime they had overthrown was. Certain abstract notions were maintained by the reconfigured White Movement, but there was already an identifiable sense of the Omsk regime's political language becoming non-committal and, where necessary, performative. There was, for example, no single mention of self-determination from Kolchak following his accession to the position of Supreme Ruler, even despite the coming of peace talks further west, in which it was assumed the concept was to play a significant role.

Generically, the White Movement appeared less aware of its ability to make and tailor arguments through form and its conventions than others, certainly under Kolchak. Arguably, Omsk instead relied on the strength of the regime's convictions and arguments about the nature of the Bolsheviks and on general opposition to Brest-Litovsk to rally support. In other words, the White Movement's genre choice was more passive than active. This was explicable, if perhaps another flaw of the Supreme Ruler's vision, though it should also be stated that the government that was overthrown to bring Kolchak to power also did not greatly modify genre and genre conventions to suit their aims in a particularly intentional fashion. Instead, these political agents responded to their situation by engaging in a series of confused declarations, legal acts, and quasi-constitutions that seemed united only by one purpose; to state opposition to the Bolsheviks. Kolchak inherited these practices to some extent, and, as the next chapter will demonstrate, did come to recognise the utility of some genre conventions, but at this point in time relied on presenting language within texts as tailored to his goals, rather than seeing the potential of manipulating the forms of these texts themselves.

3.3 Paris, Omsk, Moscow – Kyiv, Tartu, Tbilisi

This subchapter continues the chronology into the height of the Russian Civil War. Regardless of whether one's conception of self-determination was territorially based, political interventions, conflict, and peace-making necessarily took place in different locales. The spatiality of self-determination remains largely secondary, tertiary, or absent altogether in most analyses, rather than being seen as a constituent part of self-determination's intellectual and political development. There have been exceptions, including in older works on the subject, but these have resulted in plainly oppositional, rather than complimentary or dialogical understandings of, for example, self-determination during the Paris Peace Conference. As the historian Ray Stannard Baker once wrote, the effect of "the Russian problem on the Paris Conference...was profound: Paris cannot be understood without Moscow".⁶⁰⁵ By the same token, this subchapter contends that Moscow cannot be understood without Omsk. Nor, indeed, without Kyiv, Tartu, Tbilisi, and a whole host of other 'centres of self-determination' which both promoted and contested self-determination and its different representations within and between each other.

January 1919 saw the long-awaited Paris Peace Conference get underway. Politicians (elected and otherwise), career diplomats, extralegal representatives, and a host of schemers and adventurers from the world over assembled in the French capital to argue for a future built upon their grand designs. Russia and Russians were no exception, although owing to the Russian Civil War and the contested nature of power in the region, no group or individual was granted official representation as 'Russia' during the conference. There was, in other words, no sturdy seat at the table for anyone claiming to represent any kind of Russian state.⁶⁰⁶ The Paris Peace Conference's host, Georges Clemenceau, was particularly outraged by the Bolsheviks, and categorically refused to have any dealings with those he regarded as anti-French thugs and international backstabbers; they were not to be invited under any circumstances. Beyond Allied and others' sympathy with this view of the Bolsheviks was the plain fact of diplomatic politeness – it would not be worth expending political capital to disagree with Clemenceau on such an issue, especially during this initial stage of negotiations with so many other issues occupying the minds of those in Paris. Moreover, although there were significant nuances discussed below, this negativity towards the Bolsheviks was widely shared at least by many of the other Allies, as less than two years earlier the Provisional Government of Russia, and the tsarist regime before it, had been a key ally of those opposing the Central Powers.

Equally, state leaders whose words carried the greatest weight in Paris – Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson, and, to a lesser but hardly inconsequential

⁶⁰⁵ Quoted in David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917–1920* (New York City, 1993), 191.

⁶⁰⁶ For an older but still effective work on this, see Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace*.

extent⁶⁰⁷, Vittorio Orlando (Italy) and Saionji Kinmochi (Japan) – did not send any formal invitation to Omsk to participate in the conference, nor, indeed, to any other host city of a White Movement government either.⁶⁰⁸ This was the direct result of scepticism towards the White Movement, in terms both of military success and political character.⁶⁰⁹ Wilson was deeply distrustful of the group and found Kolchak himself particularly repellent. These views were shared by the American delegation to the conference, as well as by some members of the British Empire’s delegation, Lloyd George perhaps most prominently, although the Prime Minister’s views were certainly less vitriolic towards Kolchak than the US President’s. That the Paris Peace Conference did not see any official version of ‘Russia’ attend the summit did not mean, however, that it was not something that the peacemakers reckoned with. As Herbert Hoover remarked in a memorable phrase, Russia “was the Banquo’s ghost sitting at every Council table”.⁶¹⁰

In the knowledge of the upcoming conference, anti-Bolshevik Russians in Paris had established the Russian Political Conference (RPC), a bold cocktail of tsarist, Provisional Government, and White Movement representatives.⁶¹¹ The RPC was intended to ‘fight the diplomatic war’ for Russia and what they perceived as the latter’s interests, both by furthering their own desires and by lobbying to keep the anti-Bolshevik flame alive, especially with regard to how the peacemakers dealt with the Russian Civil War and its overlapping conflicts. Maklakov, the lawyer and Kadet advocate for a Russian state governed by the rule of law and representative institutions, was a notable member of the RPC. Now in effective exile, Maklakov had been appointed as the Ambassador of the Provisional Government of Russia to the French Republic, but left for Paris shortly before the Bolshevik seizure of power. Upon this news, Maklakov then sought to assist in the organisation and coordination of what became the RPC, assisted by his official, if not genuinely practically powerful position.⁶¹² Maklakov also directly

⁶⁰⁷ I say this not in terms of conventional markers of state leaders’ ‘weight’ during such conferences, such as their military, economic, and cultural power, but rather because of the changes the Italian and Japanese empires underwent in their official representation during the sitting of the conference. Italy famously stormed out of the conference at one point, while the Japanese Empire’s delegation had to be effectively taken over by another elder statesman, Makino Nobuaki, owing to a deterioration in Saionji Kinmochi’s health. Wilson also suffered from health issues, including a severe stroke, but this occurred in October 1919, after these state leaders had already left Paris.

⁶⁰⁸ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 207.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.* See also William S. Graves, *America’s Siberian Adventure* (New York City, 1931).

⁶¹⁰ Quoted in Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace*, 2.

⁶¹¹ For the best recent work on the RPC (in the wider context of the White Movement’s foreign policy), see Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*.

⁶¹² Although as France had not yet recognised any other government of the region following the overthrow of the Provisional Government of Russia, Maklakov was able to continue residing in the Hôtel d’Estrées, the historic Russian embassy building of Paris, as the *de jure* Ambassador of Russia. The hotel consequently became a centre for both the RPC’s activities and émigré coordination as a whole.

corresponded with Kolchak back in Omsk, reminding the Supreme Ruler that despite the Vologodskii façade, it was important to note that the “spirit of democracy” was emerging as a common feature of Allied discourse.⁶¹³

In a general sense, the substance of this discourse clearly mattered less than the adoption of its language as a means to achieving one’s aims. As will be discussed, however, the RPC was ultimately unsuccessful in its main aims – to achieve some form of recognition for ‘Russia’ at the conference, and thus its participation in peace-making efforts; to significantly increase Allied and other foreign assistance to the White Movement cause, and; to unite the anti-Bolshevik groups further to a specific policy platform that could be presented to the Allies to help in the achievement of the former two aims. This was despite some individual members of the RPC having the ears of significant Allied figures – the former foreign minister of Tsar Nicolas II, S. D. Sazonov, and the SR and former terrorist-cum-junior-war-minister of the Provisional Government, B. V. Savinkov, for example, maintained good relationships with the British Empire’s Winston Churchill and the French Republic’s Ferdinand Foch. Nonetheless, collectively, the group was largely ineffective.

The failure of the RPC was not the result of a lack of trying on the group’s part, nor that of the peace conference’s organisers. In late January 1919, the Allied and Associated Powers had attempted to bring all of the warring parties of the Russian Civil War together (including the non-Russian national movements).⁶¹⁴ This failed, as Kolchak and the Omsk regime refused to engage with the process.⁶¹⁵ By contrast, the Bolsheviks toyed with the offer for political purposes before accepting, while some of the national movements, such as that of Estonia, accepted immediately. However, with no White Movement present, the hypothetical dialogue fell apart. Nonetheless, the RPC were still held in some regard by the peacemakers, even if it was clear that as individuals they were representatives of considerably different conceptions of the Russian state. Above all, this was due to the circumstances of the conflict, with the Allies seeing the RPC as an imperfect if accessible way of acquiring an idea of what could be acceptable, both to those engaged in the military activities in the region and the civilian population beyond.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹³ Quoted in Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 183.

⁶¹⁴ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 207–208.

⁶¹⁵ By at least a half-coincidence, the individual who informed the Americans, and thus the Allied and Associated Powers a whole, about the RPC’s and Kolchak’s refusal was Miliukov (see Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants*, 27–28). This was especially shocking to the members of the American delegation who were aware of who Miliukov was, and who had convinced themselves that he was ‘one of them’ ideologically speaking, rather than the outspoken liberal imperialist he had become by this point in time.

⁶¹⁶ Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants*, 27–28.

In general, the Allies were strongly resistant to the idea of recognising Kolchak's regime, and the RPC was cognisant of this.⁶¹⁷ As mentioned, the political leadership of the United States and the British Empire were most opposed to granting formal recognition to Omsk or another White regime, the former in particular. Among other anti-recognitionists in the French capital was A. F. Kerensky, the head of the Provisional Government of Russia at the time of the Bolshevik seizure of power, at the beginning of what was to become the remainder of his life in exile.⁶¹⁸ Though a well-known figure within international political circles, the Allies frequently ignored Kerensky's anti-Kolchak lobbying, despite their broad agreement with the former politician's assessment of Omsk's political platform and character, because they read him as an individual now devoid of agency.

The peacemakers were only capable of reckoning with a certain amount of information at once, especially considering their own perspectives on peace-making plans and domestic issues. They therefore generally relied on established or semi-established facts 'on the ground' when considering matters related to the Russian Civil War and the former imperial space. As such, for better or for worse, the Allies came to favour ad hoc negotiations with figures within the RPC who, as loose representatives of the White Movement's military campaigns, were far better situated to perform this task than even more marginal figures with no interpersonal connections with Omsk or elsewhere. However, as alluded to earlier, the RPC was not plenipotentiary. While some of its members were accredited by the Omsk regime (whatever that meant during a time of civil war), it was not received as any kind of official delegation by those in Paris. Most of the group were not in possession of any formal representative mandate that was mutually recognised, and those that did hold such official designations did so in the name of the Provisional Government and Russian Empire before it, not the military regime of Kolchak. Moreover, the RPC was not a politically coherent group, with disagreements and tension existing both within the group and between the RPC and Omsk. This was particularly noteworthy with peace-making ideas that concerned self-determination and related ideas, such as federalism and confederalism.

The Allies, too, talked frequently of federalism as a potential solution to what they saw as the 'Russian problem'. From the beginning of the conference in January 1919 all of the so-called Big Five, but especially the United States and the British Empire, explored the possibility and feasibility of some kind of federal structure in the region.⁶¹⁹ Wilson appeared particularly intrigued, because it aligned well with his general desire for the territorial integrity of Russia according

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 13–34; John Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War* (London, 1970).

⁶¹⁸ For his own account of this period, see Alexander Kerensky, *The Kerensky Memoirs: Russia and History's Turning Point* (London, 1966).

⁶¹⁹ Charlotte Alston, 'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic': Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919', *History*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (2006), 24–44.

to its former borders (with the exceptions of Poland and Finland) while also providing a framework for his own version of self-determination space to breathe. With regard to the Russian Civil War, this Wilsonian vision of self-determination was effectively that of the Russian constitutionalists from 1906–1917: what the Russian state needed, he believed, was effective representative institutions and the (or a new) Constituent Assembly. If a federal system was chosen through this official body, so be it – let the United States itself even be a model for such endeavours. It is clear from Wilson’s statements following the February Revolution that the US President greeted the news of the onset of the Provisional Government with great elation and optimism, and that, consequently, he felt a profound sense of dejection following the Bolshevik seizure of power.⁶²⁰ Nonetheless, as is also clear from his senior advisers’ commentary to his Fourteen Points speech, Wilson was clearly open to a federal reconfiguration of the Russian state, even after the coup d’état in Petrograd.

Clemenceau and the French Republic, by contrast, were more sceptical of the idea of Russian federalism, with the Prime Minister favouring full recognition of the Omsk regime – that is, as the affirmed authority over the entire region with the exception of Poland and Finland, and thus over others currently engaged in secessionist conflicts.⁶²¹ Simultaneously, and undeterred by *Le Tigre*’s stubbornness, the British Empire’s Political Intelligence Department – a research, policy, and peace-planning group established specifically to provide Whitehall with the information needed for effective (and, hopefully, somehow legitimate) peace-making – assigned one of its members to investigating the potential of a new federal Russian state.

The man, James Simpson, faced revealing forms of intellectual and practical resistance to the idea when he floated various draft proposals to different delegations in Paris, as Charlotte Alston has well observed.⁶²² Over the course of the conference, Simpson met with dozens of figures in the French capital who held some stake in the future and nature of the Russian state, including members of the RPC and the ‘equally uninvited’ delegations of non-Russian national movements⁶²³, to see if some *modus vivendi* could be achieved.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ See Woodrow Wilson, ‘Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Germany’, 2nd of April 1917. Available via the National Archives and Records Administration [the US’ state archives] [here](#). In the speech, Wilson stated, “Does not every American feel that assurance has been added to our hope for the future peace of the world by the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia [the February Revolution]? Russia was known by those who knew it best to have been always in fact democratic at heart...Here is a partner fit for a League of Honor.”

⁶²¹ Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 27.

⁶²² *Ibid*, 24–44.

⁶²³ Again, with the exceptions of Poland and Finland. The former are even present on the official seating plan of the conference, see [here](#).

⁶²⁴ Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 24–44.

When Simpson met with Ants Piip, a representative of the Republic of Estonia, he was greeted with some openness in principle alongside an intriguing counter-proposal.⁶²⁵ Piip's response was a largely hypothetical project for an 'Eastern European United States'.⁶²⁶ This name was a direct reference to the American republic, but Piip also chose it to avoid giving Russia any special treatment through reference to its historical status in the region, even by dint of the proposal's suggested name. Nonetheless, Piip's willingness to discuss the proposals demonstrated the appeal of such ideas in general – this was roughly one year after Estonia's declaration of independence, the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, and yet this did not appear to preclude an ultimate federal or confederal settlement of Estonia's War of Independence. In this sense, Piip represented an idea of decolonisation without secession, a form of self-determination that, while maintaining a territorial dimension, was *relational* to others, as opposed to purely oppositional. Simpson had many such meetings with non-Russian nationalists in the first months of 1919, with Ukrainian representatives also more than willing to hear out the proposal, provided conditions regarding the status of the Ukrainian language among other things were met before serious consideration could be given.⁶²⁷

The RPC was initially resistant to any discussion of federalism. Sazonov, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire (that is, the tsarist regime), and Struve, the well-known Kadet and political philosopher, were among the most openly opposed to a federal reconfiguration of the Russian state, but it is important to note that they were not outliers within the RPC as a whole. Sazonov and Struve were perhaps simply the loudest representatives of majority opinion. Simpson found himself consistently shocked by the vitriolic tone some members of the RPC used when talking of several non-Russian national groups, at a time when the organisation's members possessed a level of entitlement to still be making significant claims over their governance.⁶²⁸ During one conversation between Simpson and Sazonov, for example, the latter expressed his views on Latvian nationalism quite clearly, stating "I wish I could get you to hate these Letts". In another conversation, Struve questioned the existence and quality of Estonian culture, and the sustainability of Estonian higher education at the University of Dorpat (today's University of Tartu).⁶²⁹

Some members of the RPC were more accepting of the agency of non-Russian groups, and either supported their inclusion within a unitary Russian state with

⁶²⁵ *Ibid*, 33. Though the Estonian delegation was slightly less open to the idea of federalism by this point when compared to, for example, Latvian and Georgian representatives in Paris.

⁶²⁶ Alston, 'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic', 33.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

⁶²⁸ Alston, 'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic', 24–44.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, 41. This also revealed the plain ignorance of some members of the RPC of these non-Russian groups and their cultures – among the representatives that the Republic of Estonia sent to Paris in 1919 was the aforementioned Ants Piip, a professor of this very university that Struve believed would not be capable of surviving in predominantly Estonian hands.

(as-yet-unspecified) special rights or were willing to hear out discussions of a federal arrangement. In some cases, members of the RPC viewed the latter as the only way to maintain a Russian state that was a ‘great power’. It was, in other words, not based on any kind of political philosophy of reform or justice but was a purely pragmatic decision based on the importance of a strong Russia to these individuals. Others, meanwhile, had become largely fatalistic by this point, seeing events in their homeland not just as the collapse of the state accompanied by military catastrophe, but also as a literal apocalypse keenly felt in the religious, as well as political sense. Many self-critical intellectuals expressed these views in a collection of texts edited by Struve, very plainly called *Out of the Depths* (*Iz glubiny*), based on the phrase from the Book of Psalms (in Latin, *De Profundis*).⁶³⁰ Some in the White Movement and its loose representation in Paris through the RPC, felt these ideas spiritually and religiously, as well as, or even instead of politically.⁶³¹

Savinkov, one of the more controversial members of the RPC⁶³², had schemes of his own, based on separate conversations and correspondence the former Provisional Government official had with other Allied figures, as well as with political and military figures in Poland and Ukraine.⁶³³ A self-assured man of action, Savinkov was clearly tolerant of the idea of federalism on some theoretical level, but, owing to his theory of political change, most often expressed his support for the idea through practical actions in which federalism formed a constituent or resultant part.⁶³⁴ Of course, this was in contrast to Sazonov and Struve’s outright rejection of federalism, but it was also considerably different from the genre of political thought that Simpson had been suggesting to members of the RPC and beyond, including Savinkov. Above all else, Savinkov wished for a more coordinated anti-Bolshevik chain of armies and/or states, perhaps with Józef Piłsudski’s Poland at the helm, that would overthrow the Bolshevik regime, while also providing at least lip service to the desires of numerous non-Russian groups insofar as they were willing to help remove Lenin from power. As such, it was never entirely clear exactly when and how the military project would become an institutional one.

⁶³⁰ Originally written in the desperate months of April and August 1918, and first published in 1921. See P. B. Struve (ed.), *Out of the Depths: A Collection of Articles on the Russian Revolution* (Irvine, 1986 [1921]). This English edition was edited and translated by William F. Woehrlin.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² Due to his association with terrorist violence. See various ‘Letters of introduction for Boris Savinkov addressed to American and British military officials and political figures by the British Major-General Alfred Knox’, International Institute of Social History, ‘Boris Viktorovič Savinkov Papers’, Inventory No. 27. Available online here. In one of the letters, Knox, aware of others’ perception of his own political views, quips in a postscript, “I apologise being a “reactionary” for sending you a terrorist!”.

⁶³³ *Ibid*; Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 39.

⁶³⁴ Richard B. Spence, *Boris Savinkov: Renegade on the Left* (Boulder, 1991), 153; 243–249.

With regard to the non-Russian national movements, Savinkov did argue consistently in favour of substantial regional autonomy during the time of the Paris Peace Conference. In his discussions with Simpson, Savinkov made it quite clear that with the exceptions of foreign affairs, customs, and authority over key infrastructure such as the railways, he was prepared to accept local, ‘minority’ sovereignty over every aspect of governance.⁶³⁵ However, although there is evidence that Savinkov read, commented, and otherwise engaged with various draft constitutions for a hypothetically reconfigured Russian state during this time, his own ideas did not cohere into a single coherent federalist ideology.⁶³⁶ Understandably given both the situation he found himself in and his background in terrorism and insurgency campaigns, Savinkov prioritised anti-Bolshevik strategic concerns over Parisian diplomatic politics. He would support anything *practical* against the Bolsheviks, whether this came from Paris, Omsk or Warsaw.

Savinkov, in other words, was less concerned with the formal, institutional arrangements of federalism, and more concerned with the military arrangements that would make such designs possible. From a non-Russian nationalist’s point of view, this was more positive than the language of Sazonov and Struve. However, Savinkov’s correspondence with, among others, Winston Churchill, suggests that it was less that Savinkov had a positive attitude towards the non-Russian national movements and more that he simply did not *care* about their governance, so long as the bulk of them remained part of a (non-Bolshevik) Russian state.⁶³⁷ One of the greatest weaknesses of Savinkov’s political views at this time, and, indeed, one that was shared by steadfast opponents of federalism as well as Savinkov, was its implicit and sometimes explicit Russo-centrism.⁶³⁸

One cannot overly fault the individuals who possessed such a perspective, since it was clearly dominant within the RPC, within Omsk and the White Movement in general, and among the Allied and Associated Powers in Paris. Yet beyond the question of agency was a more profound failure of imagination – that the Russian state was a great (imperial) power *had* been true, and thus this abstract idea lingered in peoples’ minds beyond when that state had collapsed into civil war and was being torn apart by other state claimants, famine, and disease. Those who

⁶³⁵ Minute of conversation with M. Savinkov, 9th of June 1919, UK National Archives, GD40/17/844/3. See also Spence, *Boris Savinkov*, 243–249; Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 39.

⁶³⁶ Savinkov’s name appears on a list of people (mainly members or associates of the RPC in Paris) who read and commented on a draft constitution for a hypothetical federal Russian state. See Iosif Vladimirovich Gessen (ed.), *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1991 [1921]), Volumes 1–2, 263–87.

⁶³⁷ See ‘Boris Viktorovič Savinkov Papers’, Inventory Nos. 4–6; 151.

⁶³⁸ Another weakness was Savinkov’s romanticised view of nationhood, specifically a rose-tinted view of the Russian peasantry. This, in combination with his love for dynamic political movements and actions, ultimately led Savinkov to embrace Mussolini’s *il fascismo* in the 1920s. Fascist Italy was ‘democratic’, Savinkov argued, because it drew support from the peasant masses. See Spence, *Boris Savinkov*, 340–344. This, however, is a matter for another time.

did try to make sense of the confusion by acquiring more up-to-date information from the regions concerned were met with piecemeal and often contradictory updates, given the amount of time it took to pass correspondence across active conflict zones stretching across most of the former Russian Empire's territory. With Simpson finding incoherence in Paris, even if some members of the RPC and representatives from the non-Russian national movements were interested in federalism, the Allies were left in a near-constant state of confusion. Omsk, meanwhile, maintained its semi-public, semi-private position of opposition to federalism throughout the time of Simpson's informal meetings. Again, the issue of whose authority self-determination decisions actually was complicated matters, even when one had a relatively clear sense of the 'self' that constituted the agent doing the determining.

Although the Allies devoted much of the early months of 1919 to their primary peace-making concerns regarding the Central Powers and the settlement of postwar Europe and the former's overseas colonies, May once again brought the Russian Civil War to Paris. News had reached western Europe that Kolchak's forces were on the move and were making significant advances into western Siberia. The 'Council of Four' saw this as an opportunity to leverage both their and Kolchak's position to bring some form of Russia into formal peace-making. The Allies disagreed as to the nature and purpose of more direct correspondence with Kolchak, however, as the United States and the British Empire remained sceptical, both of the Supreme Ruler and of his government's true intentions and character. Many within Allied governments worked under the assumption that formal dialogue with Kolchak was a prelude to formal recognition of the Omsk regime, either as a regional (usually meaning Siberian) government or as the Russian state in totality. As such, there were disagreements. Ultimately, though, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson, and others agreed to send the following telegram to Kolchak:

The Allied and Associated Governments now wish to declare formally that the object of their policy is to restore peace within Russia by enabling the Russian people to resume control of their own affairs...and to restore peace along its frontiers by arranging for the settlement of disputes in regard to the boundaries of the Russian State and its relations with its neighbors through the peaceful arbitration of the League of Nations.⁶³⁹

To their credit, the Allies were also more specific in their message, asking Kolchak to confirm several desired policies, including: the immediate summoning of a Constituent Assembly elected by secret ballot as soon as was feasibly possible after a hypothetical White Movement victory; land reform; recognition of the independence of Poland and Finland; and a statement to the effect of agreeing in principle to negotiate with representatives from Baltic and Caucasian national

⁶³⁹ 'Allied Support for Kolchak: Exchange of Notes Between the Council of Four and the Russian Commander Leads to Pledge of Assistance', *Current History*, Vol. 10 (1919), 91.

movements as to their future state and status.⁶⁴⁰ The Allies also made clear that there should be some recognition of their practical autonomy in the meantime. In relation to this, the group emphasised that Kolchak's regime must respect the "relations which may exist between their de facto governments and the Allied and Associated Governments".⁶⁴¹

As can be seen, the Allies avoided using language that implied unconditional recognition or support, and almost always combined every positive message (from Omsk's point of view) with particular and often restrictive conditions that would also, or in some cases *mainly* serve Allied purposes. For example, if the new, post-Bolshevik Russian state that emerged following a Kolchakian victory was democratic, it would enjoy full membership of the League of Nations, with the proviso that Russia's debts in the international monetary system were also simultaneously recognised. The Bolshevik regime had previously unilaterally annulled these primarily tsarist-era debts for obvious reasons, causing further outrage within many establishment circles in many states whose financial interests were affected.

After a short period of discussion with his military, political, and legal advisers, Kolchak sent his response. The reply was similarly nuanced – although the tone was one of general agreement, the specifics were judiciously written enough to be non-committal, demonstrating the now-perfected Omsk strategy of 'non-predetermination'. A reconstituted Polish state, Kolchak declared, was surely one of the "just consequences" of the conflict, and the Supreme Ruler had no problem reaffirming the Provisional Government's recognition of this independence.⁶⁴² However, Kolchak was insistent that the final delineation of the Russo-Polish border could only be dealt with once the Constituent Assembly had met.⁶⁴³ Likewise, Omsk could recognise the *government* of Finland in a *de facto* sense, but deferred any state, official, or legal status of that body to the Constituent Assembly.⁶⁴⁴ Kolchak attempted to reassure the Allied and Associated Powers that if "difficulties should arise in regard to the solution of these various institutions", up to and including the establishment of international borders, this future Russia would welcome the contributions of the League of Nations in resolving such disputes.⁶⁴⁵

There was a fundamental paradox with all of Kolchak's proclamations and public statements during his time as Supreme Ruler that should be addressed before continuing. For all their personal disagreements, of which there were many, the majority of other White leaders recognised Kolchak as the Supreme

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 91–92.

⁶⁴¹ 'Allied Support for Kolchak', 91–92. This was likely a reference to the *de facto* recognition some of these governments had been awarded by the Allied and Associated Powers by this time.

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, 92.

⁶⁴³ 'Allied Support for Kolchak', 92–93.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴⁵ 'Allied Support for Kolchak', 93.

Ruler of Russia and *de facto* head of the anti-Bolshevik movement. This imbued Kolchak with tremendous authority, if not tangible power itself. However, in this capacity as Supreme Ruler, Kolchak deferred all the most urgent and/or contentious issues of the day to the reconvened or a wholly new Constituent Assembly.⁶⁴⁶ What did Kolchak believe the purpose of this role was, if not to use the authority of the office to make and enact political claims? Certainly, his public statements and private correspondence reveal that Kolchak appeared to despise ‘politics’ writ large, and saw himself as a primarily military figure with a military task. Kolchak, in other words, convinced himself he had political power, but not political responsibility. His failure to recognise that his leadership role necessitated both, whatever his personal views on the specific matters of the day were, was fatal to his campaign.

Regardless, the Allied and Associated Powers back in Paris soon received Kolchak’s reply, and attempted to decipher exactly what the message meant, according to both the letter and the spirit. The British Empire’s George Curzon, for example, was quickly corrected by the Foreign Office after the minister sent a letter to Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, in which he remarked upon the recognition of Kolchak’s regime. “Very well”, Curzon responded, “but if we have not recognised him I don’t know what it means. Everyone knows that it is recognition”.⁶⁴⁷ It was not recognition, and was intentionally not considered as such by Whitehall, let alone the wider peace-making group of the Allied and Associated Powers.

Contemporaries and later generations of scholars have made much of this exchange, but given that both sides were clearly unwilling to tether themselves to specific policies, nor employ language that pointed to direct objects, the dialogue was effectively worthless. Kolchak’s response tells us only that the Omsk regime could read between the lines of the original message, and dutifully returned the favour. Charles Eliot⁶⁴⁸, a British diplomat, was in Omsk at the time of this exchange of messages in his capacity as High Commissioner in Siberia, and confirmed this in a report back to the imperial capital. The “Omsk Government and Koltchak [sic] himself”, Eliot wrote, “are greatly disappointed”.⁶⁴⁹ In the same report, Eliot recounted a meeting with I. I. Sukin, the Foreign Minister of the Omsk regime, who noted in rather clipped tones that the Allied and Associated Powers had “studiously avoided the word ‘recognise’”.⁶⁵⁰ This was indisputable – the peacemakers in Paris had done exactly that. Insofar as the Allies followed a consistent line with regard to the Russian Civil War, the set of policies they pursued most frequently in response to it were largely diplomatic niceties designed to placate sections of their own populations; keep the physical conflict

⁶⁴⁶ Which, at this point, remained a hypothetical, abstract idea.

⁶⁴⁷ Silverlight, *The Victors’ Dilemma*, 245.

⁶⁴⁸ Eliot was currently serving as the British Empire’s Ambassador to Japan.

⁶⁴⁹ Quoted in Silverlight, *The Victors’ Dilemma*, 245. See also *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, First Series, Vol. 3 (London, 1949), 392.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of the struggle at arm's length; and provide some support to the anti-Bolshevik cause where possible.

When it came to self-determination, neither the Allied and Associated Powers nor Kolchak himself used the term when referring to the emergent states of the Baltic and Caucasus regions in their messages. Instead, Kolchak declared that "the Government is assuring at the present time the autonomy of the various nationalities".⁶⁵¹ What kind of assurance was this, though, when Kolchak possessed no military control nor political authority over these regions? Moreover, what did autonomy mean here, and why add a qualification about the "present time" unless significant changes were anticipated in the case of a White Movement victory?⁶⁵² This was not mere wordplay – unlike previous correspondence, this exchange of notes was public. Both those in Paris and in Omsk knew that their statements would be read by a wide group of people, including those referred to in the messages.

Although the Omsk regime had many political problems, it could not be described as ignorant of the language of diplomacy. In this regard, Kolchak and his colleagues were as astute as those in Paris. They knew that support was something tokenistic; hollow. Recognition, however, had a more precise meaning. Recognition of a specific *government* was more precise still as a distinct legal term and had tangible implications – especially for one's ability to claim succession of the Russian Empire's and Provisional Government's war effort during the time of the peace conference.

John Silverlight also highlighted this, stating, "The difference between 'supporting' and 'recognising' was cardinal; soon the support too would be ended".⁶⁵³ The Allied and Associated Powers had tired of the problem. Kolchak's impressive military advance had stalled, and been reversed in some small instances. In the home countries of the Allied and Associated Powers, there was little appetite for sending even greater numbers of young men and boys even further away from home for what was at best a complex conflict without a clear *casus belli* for foreign interventionist forces.⁶⁵⁴ The moral greyness of many civil wars, and particularly the Russian Civil War, lingered in Parisian minds – whatever the crimes of the Bolsheviks, was supporting those who acted lawlessly in their own territories and committed pogroms and ransacking with little care for civilian lives and livelihoods really the best alternative? Eventually, the interventionist forces accepted defeat. The Allied and Associated Powers did not, of course, frame their evacuations as such, but the fact remains that they failed in their objectives and militarily retreated from their campaigns. After turning initially

⁶⁵¹ 'Allied Support for Kolchak', 93. The final versions of these documents were originally written in French, the diplomatic language of the time. Here, then, "the autonomy" was the same as in English – "*l'autonomie*", with a corresponding broadness of meaning or potential meanings.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma*, 245.

⁶⁵⁴ By 1919, at least.

towards a policy of supporting specific ‘promising’ individuals and organisations that they could maintain greater connections with (or have more direct control over), the absence of results was clear by mid-1919.

Nonetheless, the common view found among Soviet historians and many Western scholars, that the White Movement was nothing more than a proxy for the Allied and Associated Powers, does not appear to hold water in this specific case. While it is true that the White Movement was reliant on Allied aid and support in many areas, its diplomatic struggles nuance this ‘dependency’ argument in important ways. Chiefly, it is clear that Kolchak was utilising his limited but significant political agency to play his own linguistic games, defending his reading of the situation through intentionally vague (but weighted) language, regardless of his unequal relationship with those in Paris and beyond.

Some members of the RPC in Paris, meanwhile, most notably (though unsurprisingly) Maklakov, and B. A. Bakhmetev, the former Provisional Government of Russia’s Ambassador to the US, were arguing more loudly and more consistently for a public commitment to a democratic, federal reconfiguration of the Russian state.⁶⁵⁵ As well as seeming to sincerely believe in it, with both their long term careers and short term correspondence taken into account, this was also a political strategy they hoped would finally put an end to the diplomatic limbo the RPC, and, by extension, the White Movement itself faced in Paris. However, Maklakov and Bakhmetev faced two problems in their calls for this public commitment. Firstly, members of the RPC also suffered from Omsk’s agreeable but imprecise use of language. While this was a helpful tool at times, Kolchak’s refusal to acknowledge any particular vision of the future Russian state, or even to rule certain ideas in or out of his current governance was an issue. Maklakov and Bakhmetev read the situation in Paris as requiring more clarity and commitment, not performative diplomatic fog.⁶⁵⁶

Secondly, and rather simply, the speed of events during the Russian Civil War outpaced the abilities of RPC-associated individuals, including the previously mentioned exchange of information timeframes. Perhaps more problematic from the Allied and Associated Powers side was the RPC’s persistent internal conflicts. When Simpson met with even small numbers of individual members of the group with a view to adding more detail to his own federal proposals, vitriolic arguments between individuals and various factions were frequent.⁶⁵⁷ As well as some members of the PRC being in effective conflict with those in Omsk, the RPC could also not agree on a position of compromise that all its members were willing to support in Paris. This was a significant flaw of the body, and made it easier for

⁶⁵⁵ Indeed, they said as much to Simpson. See Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 38–39; as well as a later Pis’mo V. A. Maklakov B. A. Bakhmet’evu [Letter from V. A. Maklakov to B. A. Bakhmetev], 21st of October 1920. Hoover Institution Library and Archives, ‘Collection of V. A. Maklakov’, Box 3, Folder 8. Available online here.

⁶⁵⁶ Pis’mo V. A. Maklakov B. A. Bakhmet’evu; Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 41–42.

⁶⁵⁷ Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, 38–39.

the Allied and Associated Powers to regard the group as an ineffective band of miscellaneous 'former notables' and Russian imperial hangers-on, rather than a proactive group of experienced diplomats and politicians campaigning for their government in existential times.

This was, without question, the result of the obstinance of the 'United Russia', unitary statist members of the RPC, who refused to even conceive of either a territorially reduced Russia or a more decentralised government as a price for maintaining a larger polity. While the loss of territory was an understandable assault on these figures' pride, it must be viewed in the context of the extremity of the given circumstances. That these individuals could not see that politically they risked losing *everything* if they did not change *something*, was a problem that, among others, Maklakov and Savinkov were furious about. The grand result of this was that the imperialistic elements of the RPC were overemphasised in discussions with the Allied and Associated Powers. Simpson at this point despaired, and soon completed a report for London with his suggestions on how to proceed.⁶⁵⁸ Importantly, Simpson did so in the context of the latest reports from Siberia – the White Movement's military fortunes were built on sand.

In his report, Simpson confirmed that he had significantly changed his opinion on the matter since beginning his work in Paris. Having originally supported the recognition of the Kolchak regime as a *de facto* government (in a rather 'open' spatial sense that was simply the area under its effective military control), Simpson now made clear that this policy was unrealistic. Instead, the diplomat advocated for the recognition of the new and re-established states in the so-called border regions at the earliest opportunity circumstances would allow for.⁶⁵⁹ Who the British Empire, and to some extent, the other Allied and Associated Powers would deal with vis-à-vis Russia would be the result of the Russian Civil War, not the ideals of Parisian peacemakers. Let the conflict play out, in other words, and then return to these questions.⁶⁶⁰ The RPC could not answer them in unison.

The British Empire began to adopt this strategy around the autumn of 1919, though some confusion remained. Ultimately, following many of the peace treaties between these new states and Soviet Russia, the British Empire felt more comfortable in *de jure* recognition, especially considering the conclusion of their intervention around the same time. British representatives were among the strongest advocates for League of Nations membership (and recognition) of, for example, the Baltic states in late 1920. The French Republic also came around to

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 42–44.

⁶⁵⁹ Alston, 'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic', 44; Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic, UK National Archives, GD40/17/861/3.

⁶⁶⁰ This did not fully close the door on federalism or confederalism as a potential ultimate settlement for the region, but was a policy designed to deal with the realities as they existed at the time.

this idea in 1920–1921, but the United States would take longer, leaving these recognitions to 1922 at the earliest.⁶⁶¹

The summer and autumn of 1919 saw the White Movement get arguably as close as it ever would to publicly committing to the concept of self-determination following Kolchak's coup in late 1918. A small number of (Omsk-aligned) White Movement leaders appeared to appeal more to their local populations via public commitments to specific policies and general values regarding what we might today refer to as 'minority rights'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these agents and the militaries they commanded were based in the western and southern areas of the former Russian Empire's and Provisional Government's territory; in other words, in areas where non-Russian groups tended to predominate. Although these individuals never explicitly framed their new proclamations as such, they could – generously – be read as an appeal to the concept of self-determination, if not its direct reference.

A. I. Denikin was one such figure. For most of the Russian Civil War, Denikin was the leader of the White Movement in South Russia and Ukraine.⁶⁶² Politically and militarily, Denikin maintained a contentious and frequently actively hostile relationship with the leaders of numerous Ukrainian nationalist movements throughout the conflict. Far more so than Kolchak himself, General Denikin was an open opponent of the non-Russian national movements, though this came from the same root of a more fundamental view of the necessity of a strong Russian state. Finally, in August 1919, Denikin relented, and published an appeal entitled *To the Population of Little Russia* [Ukraine].⁶⁶³ The declaration reads as a supreme backhanded compliment: Denikin assured the text's readers that he respected the Ukrainian language, and was willing to permit its use in certain settings, while simultaneously making clear that Russian was the "state language across the expanse of Russia".⁶⁶⁴ Denikin categorically viewed Ukraine as "the expanse of Russia", so his respect for Ukrainian clearly had limits.⁶⁶⁵ Likewise, the White Movement figure assured his audience that he was to place no formal restriction on the Ukrainian language in print either.⁶⁶⁶ While this was an attempt to distance himself from the Russian Empire's legacy of censorship, it can also easily be read as a reminder of the Russo-centrism of the White Movement, handing out negative liberties rather than positive rights.⁶⁶⁷ Even when attempting

⁶⁶¹ Though this was still admittedly more rapid recognition than the United States awarded Moscow – after the Provisional Government, Washington did not recognise any government of Russia *de jure* until its recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933.

⁶⁶² Denikin became head of the Volunteer Army in April 1918, after the anti-Bolshevik force's previous leader, L. G. Kornilov, was killed in action.

⁶⁶³ Appeal of the Commander-in-Chief [Gen. Denikin] to the Population of Little Russia, August 1919, UK National Archives (PRO), ORS/V 142f.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ Appeal of the Commander-in-Chief to the Population of Little Russia.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ As seen, this was true of Kolchak's regime in Omsk as well.

a positive, reassuring message, Denikin's words had an agency-denying subtext: it was his, the White Movement's, and Russia's decision to rule on what was allowed and what was not. The leaders of the Ukrainian national movement, and those living in Ukraine, Ukrainian or otherwise, had no status nor capacity in this regard, at least in any formal sense.

At one point in the text, Denikin referred to "ancient Kiev"⁶⁶⁸ as "the mother of Russian cities, filled with the resolute desire to return to the Russian people their lost unity".⁶⁶⁹ It was only this, in combination with a stronger Volunteer Army under his command, that could give all the peoples under the regime "the strength to preserve their independence".⁶⁷⁰ Denikin's conception of Russia was certainly clear from these remarks, and a wealth of other evidence supports the claim that he maintained, as well as a desire for the state unity of his version of Russia, a commitment to a 'purer', more ethno-cultural notion of the Russian nation. Anti-Semitic pogroms and anti-Masonic purges were common in the areas under his military control, and went largely unpunished.⁶⁷¹

Although Denikin on one occasion attempted to reprimand the group responsible (in this case, advancing Cossacks) for a large pogrom, his attempt was unconvincing, not least because of the work Denikin's regime had done in establishing a conspiratorial link between Judaism and Bolshevism in numerous pieces of propaganda.⁶⁷² Soldiers and Cossacks under Denikin's authority were among the most notorious of the White Movement's for immoral and disorderly conduct, with criminality, rape, and ransack of local civilian populations common, 'bested' only by the warlords of Central Asia, Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg and G. M. Semyonov.⁶⁷³ In this context, it is difficult to read Denikin's *To the Population of Little Russia* neutrally, as the lived experience of non-combatants (and combatants themselves) of non-Russian identity provided a significant contrast to even the White Movement General's indirect respect for Ukrainian.

Politically, Denikin's regime was of a similar composition as Kolchak's, and thus suffered from the same disadvantages. While it had some liberal-reformists at its centre, including notable members of the Kadets, such as Struve, the government's work was dictated by the Russian Civil War and related conflicts, ensuring its militaristic character. The region experienced far more military ebbs and flows than Kolchak's Siberia, however, and while the regime was based in a

⁶⁶⁸ In Russian, therefore using the Russian spelling of the city's name.

⁶⁶⁹ Appeal of the Commander-in-Chief to the Population of Little Russia.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ Richard Lockett, *The White Generals: An Account of the White Movement and the Russian Civil War* (London, 1971), 301.

⁶⁷² Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley, 1977), 174.

⁶⁷³ Even despite the fact that the so-called White Terror was hardly unique during the conflicts – Ukrainian nationalists and anarchists, as well as numerous other groups, also committed anti-Semitic pogroms and attacks against civilians.

strategic location, it was also vulnerable to attack from all sides because of this. As Anna Procyk has highlighted well in a monograph entitled *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War* (1995), Denikin's regime was something of a compromise between its military figures and these liberal-reformists.⁶⁷⁴ The onset of the civil war, however, had radicalised both. The military figures of the regime – who, as discussed previously, had skewed towards the officer class in the Volunteer Army – tended to romanticise Russia's participation in the First World War, and had participated in the February Revolution and supported the Provisional Government essentially on this condition. Even after the Bolshevik seizure of power and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, they did not (necessarily) want tsarism to return. The unity and *unitary* territorial structure of Russia, however, was of paramount importance. The Kadets and other liberal-reformists of the regime were not as militaristic, but nonetheless professed a heavily statist view of politics as a reaction to crisis. This led them, as in Omsk, to reject even more moderate ideas of federalism, in which there was still a strong central Russian government. As Anna Procyk writes:

For Denikin and the Kadets in the Special Council – the principal architects of the White nationality program – federation, especially 'federation from below' whereby each component of 'Russia' would be united with the center on the principle of full equality, signified the first step toward 'Russia's' disintegration.⁶⁷⁵

This, of course, was essentially identical to the position of Kolchak in Siberia. Although written after the fact, these views are also reaffirmed by a brief foray into the émigré literature of those who survived the conflicts and later wrote autobiographical works of their experiences of them. Denikin himself, for example, very clearly expressed cynicism towards self-determination in his postwar memoirs, though he did not conceptually unpack what it was about the term that was so offensive to him, outside of its apparent synonym of secession.⁶⁷⁶

Further north, another White Movement leader also appealed to non-Russians in a similar way. N. N. Iudenich, a veteran of the Russian Empire's campaigns in the Caucasus during the First World War, had joined with the White Movement

⁶⁷⁴ Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine*.

⁶⁷⁵ Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine*, 143.

⁶⁷⁶ In multiple volumes of his memoirs, Denikin makes explicit reference to self-determination. See A. I. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* [5 volumes] (Paris, 1921–1926). These are most prominent in his recollections of earlier periods, concerning the years of the First World War and the Provisional Government of Russia period. As mentioned, this latter body placed an emphasis on self-determination in relation to their war aims, so this is understandable. Interestingly, though, there are very few explicit mentions of self-determination following the Bolshevik seizure of power and onset of the Russian Civil War. Nonetheless, Denikin's perception of the term as a synonym for secession is very clear – sometimes he (presumably unintentionally) misquoted references to self-determination with references to 'independence', as when he discusses Brest-Litovsk. This is in line with more contemporaneous sources from the White Movement on both the term self-determination and their reaction to this specific event.

via stints in exile in Stockholm and Helsinki.⁶⁷⁷ Iudenich's military was based on territory claimed by the Republic of Estonia, and from at least mid-1919, it had become difficult for him to not reckon with 'Estonia' as an entity in some form.⁶⁷⁸ Beyond the Republic of Estonia's *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia* from February 1918, nationalist leaders and the wider population had been successful in mobilising individuals, building or coopting institutions, and consolidating political power, both internally and by building relations with the Allied and Associated Powers. Iudenich, then, was obligated to at least perform respect for the concept of self-determination, if only for practical reasons.⁶⁷⁹

Unsurprisingly, given Iudenich's personal history and known views, the leaders of emergent Estonia were suspicious of the White Movement leader's presence on land they considered under their sovereignty. While they were aligned in their anti-Bolshevism, this did not spark any great budding friendship between the two. Nonetheless, a military opportunity presented itself in the late summer and autumn of 1919 that forced the sides to reckon with one another for mutual benefit. Petrograd was significantly less defended by the Bolsheviks than previously – campaigns against Kolchak in Siberia and Denikin in South Russia and Ukraine had sent large contingents of the Red Army away from the region. The British Empire was also keen to exploit this opportunity, and applied pressure on Iudenich's representatives to work with Estonia to this end. Iudenich, who, it must be said, was in desperate need for a larger force, relented to some degree, and even declared that he would recognise the independence of Estonia in return for the Estonian Army's assistance in the advance towards Petrograd.⁶⁸⁰

As the assault was eventually stopped and reversed, we do not know what would have happened next had the force been successful. Uniting militarily for politically divergent aims is certainly questionable. In any case, the Republic of Estonia succeeded in removing the White Movement's footprints from their claimed territory soon after, arresting Iudenich and disbanding the remnants of his army once both groups were safely back in the region. While the provisional governmental organs of Estonia had not taken Iudenich's promises of recognition entirely seriously, they saw practical benefit in it if it came to fruition: the White Movement would be removed from Estonia and its independence recognised, the Bolsheviks significantly weakened and perhaps also removed from power, and the new republic would have evidence for international observers that Tallinn kept the promises it made.

⁶⁷⁷ During his time in these cities, Iudenich had attempted to obtain assistance from the Allied and Associated Powers in fighting the Bolsheviks. Prior to this, in the Provisional Government days, Kerensky had removed Iudenich from his position, and in later months the officer had sided against Kerensky during the Kornilov affair.

⁶⁷⁸ Especially considering Allied pressure placed on Iudenich.

⁶⁷⁹ For an older but still effective account of this, see Richard K. Debo, *Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918–1921* (Montreal, 1992), 119–147.

⁶⁸⁰ When so doing, Iudenich did not employ the term self-determination.

Both Iudenich and Denikin are helpful political agents for our purposes as they provide examples of when and where the White Movement did move in the direction of open toleration of state reconfiguration, and signal some degree of flexibility over groups that were, in their understanding, subordinate to both the anti-Bolshevik struggle and the future central government they presumed would follow the conflict. Nonetheless, neither Iudenich nor Denikin made a public commitment that referred explicitly to self-determination. We should not overplay the significance of this; terms are not identical to concepts, but consider the perspective of the Republic of Estonia in this case. In their declaration of independence, Estonian nationalists had used the term prominently and framed it as a right. Consequently, they sought, in other words, not vague statements of intent and promises of piecemeal policies from individuals they could not trust, but rather recognition of a right they already perceived to exist. Beyond this, and rather obviously, if the military leaders of the White Movement and their regimes could not provide meaningful stability, state or otherwise, how could they offer anything else without it sounding empty?

Worse still for the White Movement as a whole, this non-Omsk political shift occurred at an inconvenient time: it was too late for these sentiments to align with those in the RPC in Paris who had been arguing for similar commitments, and too late for the Allied and Associated Powers. These latter peacemakers no longer had captive interest in the Russian Civil War as they had maintained in the late winter and spring of the year. The 'main' peace treaty of the conference with Germany had been concluded, and with the obvious exception of Clemenceau, most of the state leaders who had dominated the decision-making processes in the first half of the year had left Paris. Scores of other political agents and diplomats remained, but prioritised work on the other resultant treaties of the Paris Peace Conference that concerned the other Central Powers.

For Parisian peacemakers, the Russian Civil War became psychologically distant, and its existence moved from being something the peace conference aimed to proactively deal with to being something accepted as a state of being to factor into *other* peace-making activities. As demonstrated by the timelines of respective recognitions, the Allied and Associated Powers were more willing to consider recognition of some of the new or re-established states that neighboured the Russian Civil War than any claimant of succession of the Provisional Government. For one thing, these other polities' statuses appeared more stable than those of governments within Russia, and secondly, the ground appeared to be crumbling under Kolchak's feet.⁶⁸¹ Without being reinforced by the tantalising likelihood of military success in the Russian Civil War, the honeyed words of some members of the RPC, whether these individuals had changed their opinions or not, felt altogether less impactful than previously.

⁶⁸¹ The logic at play here was rather simple, if curt: Russia, whether it would emerge in stark red or a paler complexion, was an unknown factor for Paris. These new or re-constructed states, however, were *really existing* in many cases by late 1919 and early 1920.

Most fascinatingly of all, this period is when we do have empirical evidence of Kolchak himself employing the term self-determination; naturally, though, only in private. In a series of messages in December 1919, Kolchak and Sazonov discussed the graveness of their situation in the context of the military and diplomatic chaos of the whole year. In one of these telegrams to Sazonov, Kolchak lamented:

1. The formation of self-determined republics in the form of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and the Caucasian socialistic formations, places Russia in the position of Muscovy after the Peace of Stolbovo...2. The support of the Allied powers for every self-determined republic gives cause to think that the dismemberment of Russia is part of the political program of at least some of these Allied powers, who consider the humiliation of Russia as being beneficial to them.⁶⁸²

A great deal of this telegram, as well as others within the same wider dialogue, concerned what we might call grand strategy.⁶⁸³ One of Kolchak's most consistent line of arguments for rejecting these states' independence focused on wider geopolitical factors informed by his reading of Russian and Russian imperial history. Access to the Baltic and Black seas, for example, was non-negotiable. For Russia to be Russia, it must have an unrestricted path to the high seas. This clearly came from Kolchak's more primary view of the greatness and status of Russia, and of the Russian state as a great power. Kolchak believed that the regime was entitled to some degree of sovereignty over the aforementioned regions because this was necessary for the maintenance and development of a strong Russia, and that was the end of the matter.

As seen, Kolchak, and those around him in Omsk and elsewhere, clung to this conception of Russia so firmly that they could not compromise on any aspect of it, even when this directly disadvantaged the White Movement's political and military struggles in the Russian Civil War. Indeed, Kolchak's tendency to see politics as separate from his military endeavours during a time of civil conflict (and in the context of the end of the First World War) was a severe failing. When he did express political opinions, his inability to synthesise the two became clearer still. Regardless, Kolchak clearly perceived self-determination as the conceptual force behind this "dismemberment", behind these secessions, and refused to accept both.⁶⁸⁴ The Supreme Leader did not engage in questions over whether this perception of self-determination as legitimising secession was accurate or not.

⁶⁸² Quoted in Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*, 316. See also Telegramma ot A. V. Kolchaka k S. D. Sazonovu [Telegram from A. V. Kolchak to S. D. Sazonov], December 1919, Gosudarstvennyiarkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation, hereafter GARF], f. 200, op. 1, d. 333, l. 52.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁴ Telegramma ot A. V. Kolchaka k S. D. Sazonovu; Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*, 316.

Shmelev has taken this further, arguing that Kolchak's views throughout the Russian Civil War, chiefly that the Bolshevik regime was unsustainable and on the verge of collapse, and that consequently his more conventional understanding of 'Russia' was to reemerge within the year was simply false. "The first step", Shmelev writes, "had to be victory, and for that it was necessary to negotiate, even if it meant reaching an agreement on unsatisfactory terms...this was something Kolchak's principles would not allow him to do".⁶⁸⁵ In this scholar's view, this demonstrated the 'out of their own time' flaws of the White Movement.⁶⁸⁶ Its leaders and supporters appeared unwilling or even incapable of reckoning with their new context, in which they occupied a weakened position when compared to the days of the Provisional Government and Russian Empire. The political language of the Allied and Associated Powers, and, arguably as relevant, of many of the non-Russian national movements as well, was that of democracy. At the very least, public lip service was consistently given to concepts or terms like representation, consent of the governed, autonomy, and, of course, self-determination. Nonetheless, Shmelev argues, "though Sazonov and the Omsk foreign ministry were to some degree prepared to meet with these new ideas, they were unprepared to accept the consequences".⁶⁸⁷

By late 1919 and early 1920, the most direct consequences of this appeared stark. Certainly, had the Omsk regime recognised what the Supreme Ruler termed the "self-determined republics" in some form, there would have been no material sea change in the military fortunes of Kolchak's army.⁶⁸⁸ However, if the White Movement had attempted to improve its relations with even some of these nationalist movements by even small margins, diplomacy between the White Movement, these nationalist groups, and the Allied and Associated Powers may have been more successful. This success may have facilitated greater coordination between these groups, lengthening the Russian Civil War and related conflicts, but also giving the White Movement greater likelihood of ultimate success. Success, here, in a political as well as military sense.

In relation to this, it was Kolchak and the White Movement's rejection of reconfiguring the Russian state along federal lines that helped to partially justify the continued existence of these new states for the non-Russian national movements themselves. This was not a central concern for, say, the Republic of Estonia at this time, but it ensured the effect of reaffirming the 'correctness' of declaring independence, since there was no longer any faith in either of the most likely victors of the Russian Civil War. It was not feasible to abandon a state-in-construction for either hollow or entirely non-existent promises, whether these came from the Bolsheviks or the White Movement. Here, we can say that "Omsk's theoretical rejection of federalism contributed to the realism of statism

⁶⁸⁵ Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*, 318.

⁶⁸⁶ Shmelev, *In the Wake of Empire*.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 317.

⁶⁸⁸ Telegramma ot A. V. Kolchaka k S. D. Sazonovu.

for non-Russian nationalists”.⁶⁸⁹ This coherent position was reinforced by the Allied and Associated Powers’ perspective in some way, as that group had made several attempts to engage in peace-making with some version of Russia and (some of) the national movements. These had failed, but not because of the non-Russian national movements: the White Movement had refused as a point of principle, and the Bolsheviks simply played with the offer to achieve the greatest propagandistic benefit for their cause.

Less than two months after sending the above telegram, Kolchak would be dead. A complex series of events, involving a betrayal on the part of Maurice Janin, the French Republic’s temporary commander of the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, as well as the Legion themselves⁶⁹⁰, led to Kolchak’s arrest in the city of Irkutsk during a wider retreat.⁶⁹¹ Soon after Kolchak’s arrest, the city came under Bolshevik control, and the new local authorities promptly sentenced the Supreme Ruler of Russia to death and carried out the sentence by firing squad on the 7th of February 1920.⁶⁹² The remaining leaders and supporters of the White Movement that weren’t based in the north and south of Russia, Ukraine, or the Baltic region continued their retreat eastwards. The ‘Great Siberian Ice March’ marked the effective end of meaningful White Movement activity in Siberia. The Omsk regime, and those associated with it, would never again be an existential threat to Moscow. Ongoing and subsequent such existential threats to Soviet Russia came from both nationalist groups such as the Republic of Poland, and from non-state agents and phenomena ranging from the Kronstadt and Tambov rebellions to the Basmachi movement. The White Movement’s call ‘For a United Russia’ effectively died with Kolchak.

Around the same time as Kolchak’s execution, the Bolsheviks began a process of signing peace treaties with the nationalist movements they had been in military conflict with over previous years.⁶⁹³ As these were most frequently peace treaties between the RSFSR and states seceding from ‘Russia’, they served as many of these states’ first international recognitions. Some of the most notable included the Treaty of Tartu with the Republic of Estonia (1920), the Treaty of Moscow with the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1920), the Treaty of Riga with the Republic of Latvia (1920), the *other* Treaty of Moscow with the Republic of Lithuania (1920), and the *other* Treaty of Riga with the Republic of Poland (1921).

The Treaty of Tartu is a revealing case to focus in on. For one thing, it was the earliest concluded of these agreements, and while this is in itself mere coincidence, it should be stated that the wording of the treaty, and the Bolsheviks’

⁶⁸⁹ Rowe, ‘For a United Russia?’, 592.

⁶⁹⁰ With whom Kolchak had a number of well-documented disagreements.

⁶⁹¹ Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars*, 119.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.* His body was thrown below the ice of the Angara River, and has never been recovered.

⁶⁹³ And, indeed, considered representations of ‘bourgeois nationalism’ rather than the proletariat of a given nation. More on this presently, but we may also recall at this point Piatakov’s points on self-determination and the mixing of political style and political substance when it came to international diplomacy.

approach to the more fundamental questions of the negotiation process, was used as a template of sorts for the RSFSR in all of these other documents. Beyond this, the treaty is known for being the first *de jure* recognition of the Republic of Estonia in international law, but is also considered by legal scholars and historians to mark the first *de jure* recognition of the RSFSR in international law as well.⁶⁹⁴ Most intriguingly for the purposes of this piece of research, the Treaty of Tartu was the first ever international treaty to explicitly refer to self-determination.⁶⁹⁵

Between this reference to self-determination and the Bolsheviks' usage of the peace process as a diplomatic learning experience, an analysis of the document and particularly of its language is warranted. After all, the two sides were clearly in conflict over whether Estonia should secede and exist as an independent state. In the final draft of the text that became the Treaty of Tartu, signed on the 2nd of February 1920, the second article makes clear that self-determination served as the basis for this secession:

Proceeding from the right of all peoples to free self-determination, up to complete separation from the state of which they are a part, proclaimed by the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, Russia unconditionally recognises the independence and sovereignty of the Estonian State, and renounces voluntarily and for ever all sovereign rights possessed by Russia over the Estonian people.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁴ Mäliksoo, 'The Soviet Approach to the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination', 200–218.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 217: "The right of peoples to self-determination as part of bilateral and regional international treaty law starts here".

⁶⁹⁶ Treaty of Tartu, 1920. *League of Nations Treaty Series* (Geneva, 1922), Vol. 11, 30–71. Available here. The page numbers for the above quotation are 30 (Estonian) and 31 (Russian). In Estonian (nominative case): *enesemääramine*. In Russian (nominative case): *samo-opredelenie*. For some unknown reason, when the Treaty of Tartu was translated by the League of Nations Secretariat in 1922 for entry into the *League of Nations Treaty Series*, neither the French nor the English editions used the exact term self-determination as in the original Estonian and Russian copies. When it came to this article, the French version stated "Partant du droit de tous les peuples à disposer librement d'eux-mêmes jusqu'à se séparer complètement de L'État dont ils font partie". At this time, though, this wording was some kind of linguistic equivalent to the other common French word for self-determination, *autodétermination*, which is of course much closer to the term in many other languages, including Estonian and Russian. This latter term *autodétermination* is more common in today's Francophone world, but was clearly in some process of overtaking this other phrase during this period. The English version used a very bizarre construction of "On the basis of the right of all peoples freely to decide their own destinies, and even to separate themselves completely from the State of which they form part...". I have no evidence for this, but my hypothesis would be that this is a translation from the French, not from the Estonian or Russian. The most common alternative to self-determination in English at this time, as discussed, was the phrase 'consent of the governed'. This is different to the English here. For the full *League of Nations Treaty Series*, see here.

This wording was the result of significant initial disagreements and heated dialogues between the two sides. As discussed in more detail above, the Bolsheviks' *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was specifically targeted towards those within 'Russia', however contestable that concept was at the time of its utterance there. The reference to this document in the Treaty of Tartu, however, depicted it as universal, with the right belonging to *all* peoples, not just those of Russia. One might suspect Bolshevik revisionism here, but, as Hent Kalmo has discovered, this was in fact due to pressure from the Estonian side of the table.⁶⁹⁷ The Estonian delegation, under the leadership of Jaan Poska, did not want to give the impression that their independence was tied to this document. Instead, they sought to frame the declaration as one example of a reference to universal rights, specifically their own reading of self-determination.⁶⁹⁸

The Bolshevik side, led by A. A. Ioffe, could accept this. On the one hand, some Bolsheviks were still believers in the impending world revolution, so such details mattered less in this context. Moreover, revolution elsewhere or not, self-determination clearly had *some* degree of propaganda value to the Bolsheviks, especially after the Paris Peace Conference. Tying this to an innovation of genre form, the international peace treaty, as well as to the Bolsheviks' previous declaration on the concept of self-determination, clearly served the group's ends as well as the Republic of Estonia's, especially considering the (novel) prominence of self-determination in the text of treaty. We should not overstate the Bolsheviks' usage of self-determination in political 'agitprop', but certainly, where the Treaty of Tartu did have political value for Moscow was in its wider implications for diplomacy. Upon hearing news of its signing, Lenin referred to the process and result as an "incomparable victory over Western imperialism".⁶⁹⁹ Two previously unrecognised states had bilaterally established peaceful relations with one another, and done so without (or, to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in spite of) Western imperialist interference. Jaan Poska and the Estonian delegation read this differently. To them, the Treaty of Tartu was plainly a blow to *Russian* imperialism, and they were happy to let these disagreements coexist.

Nonetheless, that there was any reference at all to the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* might give the appearance of a fundamental and theoretical challenge to the Estonian negotiators. Was giving at least the potential impression that part of Estonia's existence was the result of Bolshevik benevolence the 'price of admission' to statehood and membership of the international community? If so, was it considered a price worth paying? That the Red Army had spent the better part of two years militarily resisting this claim to independence might make this pill more bitter to swallow, even if the end result was one that Estonian nationalists had come to desire as the best representation

⁶⁹⁷ Hent Kalmo, 'Tartu rahulepingu artikkel II: ajalugu ja tänapäev', *Riigiõiguse aastaraamat*, Vol. 2 (2021), 187.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania: The Years of Independence, 1917–1940* (Berkeley, 1974), 73.

of self-determination for them at that time. However, Poska and the Estonian delegation were also insistent on their side that the text should include an explicit reference to self-determination. Again as Kalmo has demonstrated, this was not out of love and trust for the Bolshevik regime, but was one part of a wider calculated strategy by the Estonians to appeal to concepts they believed the Allied and Associated Powers (and other ‘Great Powers’) viewed as fundamental to the postwar order.⁷⁰⁰ It was, in other words, an Estonian attempt to reinforce the position of the Republic of Estonia beyond its material existence. Certainly, given the documented views of Estonian nationalists during this time, in combination with the invocation of a right to self-determination in Estonia’s *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, it is clear that the burgeoning republic wished to continue using the concept and specific term towards their political goals. However, Estonian political leaders did not want to do so *solely* on Bolshevik terms. In this context, they could accept the above wording in return for recognition of their independence, as it allowed for them to also claim ownership of the invocation based on their own recent history.⁷⁰¹ This is an important reminder, especially but not exclusively when looking at the genre of international treaties, that there are often multiple layers of agency operating simultaneously on both/all sides of such political interventions. That these may contradict each other theoretically does not matter as much as understanding their (perhaps surprising) compatibility in practice, particularly as used in specific genres of political interventions.

In all of the other treaties mentioned above, in which Ioffe was also the lead negotiator on the Bolshevik side (with the exception of the Treaty of Moscow with Georgia), the same general line regarding self-determination and the Bolsheviks’ declaration from 1917 as grounds for the secession and peace can be found.⁷⁰² In the case of Bolshevik negotiations with Lithuania, Ioffe had stuck to this policy so strictly that he had refused the Lithuanian delegation’s initial arguments that their state was the legal heir of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; only the self-determination of peoples could be the acceptable basis for secession, not historic claims.⁷⁰³ Satisfied with their recent modifications to the conventions of international peace treaties, the Bolsheviks could now group the documents together as expressions of their respect for the concept of self-determination if this would serve their political goals.

Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks did not adhere to many of the provisions of these treaties. This occurred in small ways with all of them (often around the exchange of cultural items), but in more obvious and blatant ways with the resumption of

⁷⁰⁰ Hent Kalmo, ‘Enesemääramise paleus ja pragmaatika: Tartu versus Pariis’, *Ajalooline Ajakiri The Estonian Historical Journal*, Vol. 173/174, No. 3/4 (2020), 243–301.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰² In *that* Treaty of Moscow, the Bolsheviks’ lead negotiator, L. M. Karakhan, pursued the same line as Ioffe had on self-determination.

⁷⁰³ Edvardas Tuskenis (ed.) *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918–1940* (New York City, 1997), 67–70.

conflict against these states in subsequent months and years. The Democratic Republic of Georgia, for example, was invaded by the Red Army less than a year after the conclusion of the Treaty of Moscow.⁷⁰⁴ The Bolsheviks thus employed self-determination in a spatially particular rather than universal sense, largely dictated by pragmatic need than revolutionary idealism. In this particular case, the agreement was a mere delaying tactic for the Bolsheviks, in order to assist their efforts in the Polish-Soviet War. As discussed above in the case of Ukraine, many of these new or re-established states were dominated by or otherwise maintained a large socialist political contingent within them, and the idea that there could be a socialist, nationalist, but anti-Bolshevik government was not something the Bolsheviks ever seriously reckoned with. Menshevik-dominated Georgia was a particularly egregious example of ideological error from Moscow's point of view, especially since it enjoyed some degree of international recognition and support (even for clearly imperialistic reasons) from, at different times, the Central Powers and the Allied and Associated Powers during its brief existence.

Alongside their policy of accepting peace with many states they clearly did not view as legitimate, the Bolsheviks increasingly utilised a tactic they had developed over the Russian Civil War: the creation or assistance of Bolshevik or Bolshevik-friendly soviets in different regions to uncertain, but hopefully pro-Moscow ends. When these efforts were militarily successful, they recognised these soviet republics as legitimate. When they were not, the Bolsheviks reluctantly agreed peace treaties with what they saw as these 'bourgeois' governments, despite, of course, these governments in many cases having broader appeal than the soviet republic of the same region. Theoretically, only these soviet republics could be valid representations of the proletariat, so the treaties were in some sense meaningless, but often served multiple other purposes for the Bolsheviks during existential conflict.

This subchapter analysed self-determination during the height of the Russian Civil War. It began with a discussion of the RPC, the Russian Political Conference, and detailed this organisation's internal dynamics and complexities as well as its relationships with the Allied and Associated Powers in Paris and the White Movement of Omsk it indirectly represented. Some within the RPC, such as Maklakov and Bakhmetev, believed in adopting firmer democratic language and political programmes, not only as believers in the policies in general but as savvy readers of the political environment they were operating in. Supporting the dominant political discourses of the day would be politically beneficial as well as just, the two theorised. Most members of the RPC, however, were in line with Omsk in their rejection, explicit or implicit, of ideas of federalism and self-determination. Though some argued from a position of non-predetermination, others, such as Struve, argued from an explicit position of deep dislike of the non-Russian national movements and peoples, disputing their ability to govern and create culture in their own languages. The White Movement's refusal to engage

⁷⁰⁴ For a highly readable (and highly partisan) account, see Eric Lee, *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918–1921* (London, 2017).

with such ideas, including in Ukraine and Estonia, led to distrust from both the Allied and Associated Powers and the non-Russian national movements themselves, and soon after these diplomatic struggles the coalition was militarily defeated, most notably in Siberia in early 1920, leading to the execution of Kolchak, and in South Russia and Ukraine later that year.

Alongside these victories, the Bolsheviks were forced to conclude separate peace treaties that recognised the existence and legitimacy of states such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, and Poland between 1920 and 1921. Although much of this formal recognition was hollow or did not last – the Bolsheviks attempted a coup in Estonia as early as 1924 – the wording of the treaties themselves is revealing of intellectual trends, with all of them referring in some way to self-determination as the ideational basis for secession. This subchapter made a particular case study of the Treaty of Tartu, not least because this was the earliest concluded of these treaties, but also because its wording was used as a template for the Bolsheviks' subsequent treaties with these other states. Importantly, however, the Estonian negotiating team had a significant role to play here in also arguing for the inclusion of self-determination as a right, with a view to appealing to other agents in their pursuit for wider state recognition.

Here, the subchapter's discussion of genre and genre conventions revealed a multi-layered and multi-agent process, both with the RPC and the Allied and Associated Powers during the Paris Peace Conference and with the Bolsheviks and the states they concluded peace treaties with between 1920 and 1921. In the case of the RPC (and the White Movement it loosely represented), it is clear that genre choice was again more passive than active. This was arguably a consequence of the severity of the events they were faced with – even the exchange of messages between the peace conference and Kolchak did little to demonstrate anything other than Omsk's non-predetermination. The notes' public nature and who they were addressed to implied that they were in some sense binding (perhaps reflected in their non-committal content, addressed above), and Kolchak allowed himself to be constrained by this form, rather than seek to modify it. Given his goals, this strategy was understandable. Similarly, discussions between members of the RPC and the Allied and Associated Powers that involved draft constitutions, federal proposals, and so on, were hampered by the potential seriousness the former saw in consenting to various proposals, even if they were conventionally non-binding. Many in the RPC did not wish to unwittingly authorise action (particularly decentralised action), and interpreted even deliberation through this framework.

In subsequent months, the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin and his lead negotiator during this time, A. A. Ioffe, seemed to possess a greater understanding of the potential of the genre of the international peace treaty when compared to the negotiation period of Brest-Litovsk. If the Bolsheviks had learned lessons from this experience in this way, it does help to provide an explanation as to why they were keen to restate their own attitude towards the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* in the treaties they concluded between 1920 and 1921. Scholars may debate whether the preambles, terms, and articles of peace treaties were always part of a more propagandistic convention of the genre or if this

changed over time, but it certainly appeared present with regard to the explicit mentions of self-determination in 1920 and 1921. Importantly, to take the Treaty of Tartu as an example again, both Estonian and Bolshevik political agents could seek to exploit the same textual form for different purposes. While they did not align on fundamental issues, both groups' reaffirmation of the usages of international peace treaties in subsequent political argumentation was similar.

4. SELF-DETERMINATION IN COVENANTS AND CONSTITUTIONS (1921–1924)

4.1 ‘Concerning the Presentation of the National Question’

The conclusion of the major engagements of the Russian Civil War resulted not only in a series of international peace treaties, but also the political space to consolidate and further organise power in various locales. This was done domestically via genre mechanisms such as the constitution, and internationally through multi-lateral treaties of various kinds, including the ‘covenants’ of new bodies such as that of the League of Nations.⁷⁰⁵ This chapter therefore develops an explanation of how political agents used or did not use self-determination in their efforts to politically consolidate their military, political, and diplomatic achievements of previous years. All three subsections depict events across roughly the same chronology of the first half of the 1920s but have different areas of focus within. The first two sections on the Bolsheviks and the emergent Soviet Union are ‘twins’ in some sense, separated rather artificially for the sake of the clarity of my analysis (as both cover the period between spring 1921 and winter 1924). This current subchapter, as its title suggests, concerns how the Bolsheviks moved in their *presentation* of the ‘National Question’ over this period, including terminologically. The following subchapter concerns more material questions over *what* happened and *how* between the end of the Russian Civil War and the formation of the Soviet Union, and provides an analysis of this that is greatly assisted by the content of this subchapter. The final section of the chapter moves beyond Soviet borders to the new and re-established states to its west, and assesses the conceptual and terminological presence of self-determination and related ideas in the constitutions, domestic legislation, and international activities of the political agents of the republics of Poland and Estonia.

Over the course of the Russian Civil War, Stalin appeared to have become firmer in his views on the necessity of qualification and restriction of the concept of self-determination. More specifically, the People’s Commissar for Nationalities reasoned that imperialistic and capitalistic powers elsewhere in Europe and North America had corrupted the supposed purity of the self-determination of peoples. Certainly, as discussed, there were substantial elements of hypocrisy and wilful misuse of the concept across these regions. At the same time, there was no single place in which this could not be found – this was, after all, a universal political concept, and its ‘corruption’⁷⁰⁶ could also be found within the RSFSR, as well as in regions recently seceded from the (or a) Russian state. Piatakov had, in fact, made exactly this argument a few years ago at the Eighth Party Congress.⁷⁰⁷ The

⁷⁰⁵ Though this happened earlier in the case of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

⁷⁰⁶ Which we could understand as simply its particular application in this sense.

⁷⁰⁷ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b) mart 1919 goda*, 80–81.

usage of the language of self-determination as a political tool was, by 1921, neither novel nor unique.

Regardless, in several political interventions over the course of the spring of 1921, Stalin made and repeated a single argument in relation to this which had significant consequences for how the Bolsheviks as a whole formulated their response to the 'National Question'. This argument, in essence, declared self-determination dead, and advocated for its removal and replacement with a new language more suiting of the current times. Indeed, in one of these political interventions, Stalin's own reading of the revolutionary and civil war period involved the tailoring of genre, as well as political content, to be of importance in the Bolsheviks' overall response to the 'National Question':

Comrades, the most characteristic feature of this congress as regards the discussion on the national question is that we have passed from declarations on the national question, through the administrative redivision of Russia, to the practical presentation of the question.⁷⁰⁸

Stalin therefore reasoned that there were three distinct phases of Bolshevik nationalities policy following the group's seizure of power in late 1917. Firstly, to clearly distinguish themselves from previous regimes, the party had produced the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* and proclaimed all of the former empire's peoples sovereign and equal.⁷⁰⁹ Secondly, throughout the Russian Civil War, the Bolsheviks attempted the "administrative redivision of Russia on national lines", with a view to bringing what Stalin characterised as the toiling masses of the "backward peoples" closer to the Russian proletariat.⁷¹⁰ Lastly, the regime was dealing with the current moment, and attempting to genuinely, practically answer the 'National Question' with a specific policy or set of policies.⁷¹¹ Self-determination from theory to practice, one might say.

This above-quoted speech of Stalin's occurred during the Tenth Party Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), held in Moscow between the 8th and the 16th of March 1921. On other days of the important annual event, several major decisions were made that pushed the regime in new directions, economically and politically.⁷¹² Perhaps most notably, this meeting saw the adoption of

⁷⁰⁸ J. V. Stalin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii i natsional'nom voprose na X s'ezde RKP(b) 10 marta 1921 g.' ['Concluding Remarks on the Report on the Immediate Tasks of the Party and the National Question at the 10th Congress of the RCP(B) 10th of March, 1921'] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 5, 45.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Stalin, for reasons about to become clear, styled this declaration as concerning a right to secession, more than a right to self-determination. It was both simultaneously, as addressed earlier in this dissertation.

⁷¹⁰ Stalin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii', 45.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² For a recent edited volume on this notable party meeting, see Clayton Black and Alexis Pogorelskin (eds.), *Congress of Contradictions: The Tenth Party Congress, March 1921* (London, 2026).

the New Economic Policy (NEP) and proclaimed an official ban on factions within the party, two policies that would remain central over the next few years in the Bolsheviks' consolidation of the Soviet regime. Although Lenin, as usual, directed much of the Congress' work, when it came to the item on the agenda regarding the Bolsheviks' current work with regard to the 'National Question', Lenin deferred to the People's Commissar for Nationalities, Stalin.

The 10th of March saw Stalin dominate the Congress with both a report on the Central Committee's views and plans for answering the 'National Question', and a response to meeting attendees after a period of discussion about this report.⁷¹³ Outlining the irrefutable premises that any concrete answer to the 'National Question' would need to take into consideration, Stalin began with a typical Marxist overview of the history of nations and statehood in Europe, contrasting western Europe with eastern Europe. Western Europe, Stalin claimed, saw the earlier rise of "purely national states...in which there was no national oppression".⁷¹⁴ By contrast, in eastern Europe "multi-national states arose headed by one, more developed, nation as the dominant nation", where this dominant nation subsequently subjected these other nations to political and economic inequality.⁷¹⁵ Continuing on from this basis, Stalin dictated the history of imperialism and national oppression, before introducing the Soviet period, where capitalism had been abolished and national oppression "relegated to the archives of history".⁷¹⁶

This was done, assuming the obvious basis of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', through developmental assistance from 'more developed' proletarian groups to lesser (or even undeveloped) proletarian groups. In this case, this assistance would come from Russians and those who had been successfully Russified, or those otherwise included in processes of 'Russian' 'development'. However, Stalin and other Bolsheviks were conscious of the imperial hangovers of the Russian Empire, and therefore sought to somehow increase these levels of 'development' without replicating previous imperial experiences of centre-local governance. Alongside this, they embarked upon a bold reconstruction and expansion of state power and state reach, including towards these developmental goals. In theory, the Bolsheviks would use the strength of their new state to root

⁷¹³ J. V. Stalin, 'Doklad ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii i natsional'nom voprose na X s"ezde RKP(b) 10 marta 1921 g.' ['Report on the immediate tasks of the party and the national question at the X Congress of the RCP(B) 10th of March, 1921'] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 5, 33–44; Stalin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo po dokladu ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii', 45–49.

⁷¹⁴ Stalin, 'Doklad ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii', 33–34. This is clearly false, as any reading of most statehoods would make clear, but for the time being, consider the United Kingdom, a polity very difficult to characterise as anything other than a multinational state.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid*, 34. This, too, is false: not all of the 'dominant' nations of these eastern European states were necessarily the most developed. Depending on what criteria one uses, there were numerous 'non-dominant' nations that possessed greater developmental markers than those of the 'dominant' nation of their respective state. Consider, for example, the literacy rate and parliamentary practices of Finns under the Russian Empire, or the rate and breadth of industrialisation in the predominantly Czech lands of the Habsburg Empire.

⁷¹⁶ Stalin, 'Doklad ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii', 35.

out the historical legacies of oppression.⁷¹⁷ This was therefore a profoundly paternalistic approach to the issue of the developmental legacies of imperialism, one that relied on the self-belief of the benevolence and ideological correctness of those with the greatest degree of political power.

At one point during his initial speech on the 10th, Stalin was handed a note⁷¹⁸, asking him to respond to a series of articles written by Chicherin, the RSFSR's People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, on Bolshevik self-determination and the resolution of the 'National Question'. Chicherin's interventions were the latest in a, or *the* series of internal disagreements among Bolshevik Party members on the interrelated issues of the 'National Question', Soviet nationalities policy, and self-determination. The general content of the articles is not worth analysing in detail, save for Chicherin's criticisms of the notion of self-determination. We may call the most revealing part of Stalin's response to this request 'The Third Mistake of Comrade Chicherin', after his public, systematic deconstruction of the diplomat's arguments.⁷¹⁹ The following is a long extract from Stalin's response to Chicherin, but, as seen, it is rich in content to subsequently unpack:

The third mistake of Comrade Chicherin is that he talks too much about national self-determination, which has indeed become an empty slogan conveniently used by the imperialists. Strangely enough, Comrade Chicherin has forgotten that we parted with that slogan two years ago. That slogan no longer figures in our programme. Our programme does not speak of national self-determination, which is a very vague slogan, but of the right of nations to secede, a slogan which is more precise and definite. These are two different things. Strangely enough, Comrade Chicherin fails to take this factor into account in his articles and, as a result, all his objections to the slogan which has become vague are like firing blank shot, for neither in my theses nor in the Party's programme is there a single word about "self-determination". The only thing that is mentioned is the right of nations to secede. At the present time, however, when the liberation movement is flaring up in the colonies, that is for us a revolutionary slogan. Since the Soviet states are united voluntarily in a federation, the nations constituting the R.S.F.S.R. voluntarily refrain from exercising the right to secede.⁷²⁰

Stalin now appeared to be echoing Rosa Luxemburg's much earlier (1909) dismissal of the term as a hollow, meaningless slogan. This was a significant move away from Lenin's consistent support for usage of the term. The idea that Soviet Russia was so pure a form of governance that its constituent parts would

⁷¹⁷ In its purest form, this is the central argument Lenin made in 1917 in *Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia* (*The State and Revolution*, Petrograd [St. Petersburg], 1917), his principal work on the nature and purpose of state power under the proletarian revolution.

⁷¹⁸ From an individual I have not been able to identify based on the sources I have access to. A minor detail, perhaps, but worth acknowledging.

⁷¹⁹ Stalin, 'Doklad ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii', 41–44.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid*, 42–43.

“voluntarily refrain” from seceding was, however, very Leninist.⁷²¹ As mentioned in a previous chapter, Lenin made an identical argument in the case of Ukraine at the party’s conference in 1917. Nonetheless, and especially as detailed below, Stalin was, by this point in time, also a firm opponent of Bolshevik usage of the term self-determination. Here, though, Stalin was able to criticise Chicherin for talking too much of a term he had not used in a certain document, therefore implying the latter’s arguments were in some sense irrelevant, while at the same time demonstrating that he was opposed to its usage on the grounds, it seemed, of vagueness.

Stalin’s assertion that the Bolsheviks had left behind the term of self-determination “two years ago” is intriguing.⁷²² On one level, it is simply false: it was used prominently in many Bolshevik documents beyond 1919, most notably in the aforementioned series of peace treaties concluded with the Baltic and Caucasian states.⁷²³ Moreover, Lenin’s position on the necessity of the term had emerged victorious at the 1919 Party Congress, almost two years to the day from this meeting. In addition to this, there was no explicit debate about the usage of the term self-determination at the Party Congress of 1920, so it may have been mere oversight that it was not included in the party programme at that time. Regardless, Stalin clearly wished to make this absence, real or perceived, an explicit and intentional removal.

Another change worth noting is Stalin’s assertion that self-determination and secession were now different and intellectually separate things. This, again, is rather different to Lenin’s earlier writings in which he explicitly and consistently tied the concept to a right to secede, the latter being the logical extension of the former. One might argue, indeed Stalin appeared to be doing so, that such a view was now outdated, given the corruption of self-determination by imperialist powers over the period of the First World War and beyond. Nonetheless, to claim that this justified the removal of the term from *Bolshevik* discourse is a politically understandable but philosophically questionable choice. Certainly, declaring a general right to secession (whether for ‘nations’, ‘peoples’, or another collective self) would distinguish the Bolsheviks from others who had the potential to ‘offer’ self-determination for others, even more than their previous declaration had done so. However, it is not clear that stopping Bolshevik usage of the term self-determination – removing it from their political programme most notably – was a necessary part of this process. Stalin seemed to imply a ‘guilt by association’,

⁷²¹ Stalin, ‘Doklad ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii’, 43.

⁷²² *Ibid*, 42.

⁷²³ In around a week’s time, self-determination was also to be mentioned prominently in the Treaty of Riga between the RSFSR, Soviet Ukraine, and the Republic of Poland. That text’s very first article proclaimed: “In accordance with the principle of the self-determination of peoples, the Contracting Parties recognise the independence of Ukraine and Belarus...”. See the Treaty of Riga, 1921. *League of Nations Treaty Series* (Geneva, 1922), Vol. 4, 18. Available here.

over a commitment to a more ‘valid’ expression of self-determination that would vindicate itself in the eyes of the world.

There are two ways of reading this. On the one hand, we might say that Stalin was sensitive to contemporary political trends in international discourse. By 1921, many nationalist leaders in the colonies of numerous empires were genuinely disillusioned by the failures of 1918 and 1919. To them, self-determination was now perceived as something of a hollow notion professed by imperialists, however much respect individual members of these regimes enjoyed. For the Bolsheviks, already the ideological opponents of imperialism, harnessing this sentiment provided great political benefits, bolstering the reputation of the RSFSR to these groups, thereby potentially increasing their political relationships, potential for wider revolutionary movements, and so on.

On the other hand, if we accept that Stalin’s arguments came from a place of sincerity, it could be argued that the senior Bolshevik genuinely believed that the term had been corrupted beyond efficacy. The combination of the situation beyond ‘imperialist’ discourse with the contemporary structure of the RSFSR, the latter of which Stalin declared had resolved the ‘National Question’, was the end of the matter. It was *because* the Bolsheviks now expressed this right to secession that meant that the RSFSR’s constituent parts would have no desire to exercise this right. These two readings are not necessarily contradictory (and, in some ways, could be mutually reinforcing). To answer which has more weight goes into wider discussions of Stalin’s sincerity as a Marxist or otherwise, something that many of his biographers, Stephen Kotkin perhaps most notably, have delved into.⁷²⁴

Trying to place Stalin’s interventions in early 1921 into wider academic discussions of Bolshevik self-determination is not easy. In Richard Pipes’ rather brusque summary of this period, it was declared that “The Bolsheviks...made determined efforts, throughout the Civil War, to exploit minority nationalism. The entire Bolshevik national program was designed to win nationalist sympathies through generous offers of self-determination”.⁷²⁵ Certainly, it is true that the Bolsheviks *appealed* to nationalism during this time, but ascertaining the level of exploitation is more difficult to do. In any case, it is certainly false to say that the “entire” programme of the Bolsheviks on the ‘National Question’ was designed to “win nationalist sympathies” – this programme changed over time, and was, whatever its responses to political trends, a consistently Marxist reading of the situation.⁷²⁶ Pipes’ arguments fall down most clearly, however, when he describes Lenin’s position at this time (detailed more in the following subchapter) as being

⁷²⁴ Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878–1928* (New York City, 2014). I will not enter into these debates here. As stated in my introductory chapter, I am more interested in the presence of terms and concepts and their potential purposes than sincerity or insincerity of a particular agent. I also believe it is methodologically difficult to ascertain the sincerity or otherwise of long-dead individuals (in most cases).

⁷²⁵ Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, 295.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

against the grain of majority Bolshevik opinion, while at the same time insisting upon this sceptical view of Bolshevik self-determination by describing the party as a more coherent group on the issue than he has demonstrated they were.⁷²⁷ If the Bolsheviks were in disagreement over the issue, how could they act in such unison to perform this exploitation? We might also question Pipes' view of Bolshevik nationalities policy, including its related short form slogans, as something purely functionary.

Here, one of Pipes' most effective critics, Jeremy Smith, seems to be on safer territory by emphasising the Marxist developmental logic of the Bolsheviks during this time.⁷²⁸ In his doctoral dissertation, Smith argued against the Pipesian view by taking the self-identified sequencing of Bolshevik nationalities policy more seriously:

The central policies pursued [by the Bolsheviks on the 'National Question'] were: the creation of formally independent or autonomous republics and regions; the maintenance, as far as was practicable, of the ethnic homogeneity of these territorial national units by means of rearranged borders and movements of population; the development of a cadre of national communist leaders including the incorporation of sympathetic nationalists into the republican communist parties; encouraging a flourishing national culture through the education system, the use of native languages in the press and administration, and the selective promotion of both historical and new "socialist" cultural traditions; and the development of industry and agriculture in non-Russian areas. The final objective of all these measures was to create and encourage a strong sense of national identity based mostly, but not exclusively, on national territorial units, and through that national identity a loyalty to the Soviet state.⁷²⁹

In other words, Smith viewed the Bolsheviks as having institutional-ideological, rather than short term political capital goals, with a raising of cultural and developmental levels across the new system, however perceived, as the guiding principle of the group's response to what they framed as the 'National Question'.⁷³⁰ As mentioned in this dissertation's earlier discussion of Pipes and Smith, it is also entirely possible to synthesise these approaches if one wanted to.

Regardless, in May 1921, Stalin reaffirmed his general attitude towards the specific term self-determination when he wrote the following in *Pravda*, providing the paper's readers with a now-typical overview of the Bolsheviks and the 'National Question' over the previous few years. Though functionally helpful at one time, for Stalin self-determination no longer served this purpose; the phrase should be left to the political games of the imperialists. Describing this significant change in Bolshevik discourse, Stalin stated:

⁷²⁷ Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*.

⁷²⁸ Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*.

⁷²⁹ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923* (University College London doctoral dissertation, 1996), 2.

⁷³⁰ Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*.

The vague slogan of the right of nations to self-determination has been replaced by the clear revolutionary slogan of the right of nations and colonies to secede, to form independent states...the imperialist war, the aim of which was to enslave peoples, was fought under the flag of self-determination. Thus the vague slogan of self-determination was converted from an instrument for the liberation of nations, for achieving equal rights for nations, into an instrument for taming nations, an instrument for keeping nations in subjection to imperialism.⁷³¹

From vagueness to clarity, so the argument went. It therefore made sense that much of the article focused on Africa and Asia, with Stalin recognising not only much of these regions' existences under imperial regimes, but also their respective national leaders' disappointment with the Allies in general and Wilson and the Paris Peace Conference in particular.⁷³² Misinterpretation or not – *intentionally* misinterpreted or not, Stalin recognised this reading of self-determination in international political discourse and these now-disappointed groups' attempts to achieve some measure of it. It is important to tie this not only to the pre-1914 discussions of (national) self-determination among a wide range of socialist and revolutionary groups, of which Stalin was a significant part, but also to the more recent past of self-determination in the region, in which self-determination was also invoked by anti-Bolshevik non-Russian nationalists. Many of these groups, largely due to the timing and outcome of the First World War, targeted their international diplomacy towards currying favour with the victorious powers, most of whom were formal empires.

Later in the same text, Stalin reaffirmed his conviction that it was *because* there were varying degrees of economic and cultural development among nations existing within the 'same' state that unity should remain essential.⁷³³ This, the Bolshevik reasoned, was the strongest argument in favour of continued "fraternal cooperation".⁷³⁴ What did Stalin then propose this state do next in relation to this, taking this position as read? The People's Commissar insisted upon the following five-point-plan:

- 1) the study of the economic conditions, manner of life and culture of the backward nations and nationalities;
- 2) the development of their culture;
- 3) their political education;

⁷³¹ J. V. Stalin, 'K postanovke natsional'nogo voprosa' ['Concerning the Presentation of the National Question'] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 5, 53–54. A more literal translation of this title would be 'Towards the Formulation of the National Question'.

⁷³² *Ibid*, 52–59.

⁷³³ Stalin, 'K postanovke natsional'nogo voprosa', 57–59. As in previous years, Stalin again spoke here of "Russia" with an implication that the latter's borders were far more static and stable than they were, especially in the first half of 1921.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

- 4) their gradual and painless introduction to the higher forms of economy;
- 5) the organisation of economic co-operation between the toilers of the backward and of the advanced nations.⁷³⁵

More generally, then, it can be surmised that if the Bolsheviks considered a respective nation ‘backward’ in this economic and/or cultural sense, they would be less likely to promote its secession than otherwise. Their Marxist dialectical reading of history suggested that the nation had not yet passed through the necessary stages to warrant this. Fortunately, the RSFSR was eager to offer their tutelage regardless, as the above quote suggests. By contrast, if the Bolsheviks saw a nation as more advanced along the same lines, its secession could be tolerated. This helps to at least partially explain the above-mentioned peace treaties and other forms of acceptance of the relinquishment of sovereignty over areas previously under the sovereignty of the Provisional Government. However, this acceptance was anticipated as a mere speed bump on the road to reunification – and was militarily resisted in most cases. Similarly, this helps us to at least partially explain the *de jure* independence of the founding republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The document that established this union, the intriguingly titled *Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, therefore expectedly carries no explicit reference to self-determination.⁷³⁶ Perhaps overshadowed by other events in 2022, the recent centenary of the *Declaration and Treaty* did not greatly increase the surprisingly minimal scholarly attention paid to the document. It is, however, a rich and revealing text, both in terms of its literal content and the historical context of its creation. This context will be discussed in the following subchapter – for now, we shall cover its content and language usage. Approved in late December 1922, the *Declaration and Treaty* was composed of two parts, the declarative preamble (the *Declaration* of its title) and the treaty itself (naturally, the *Treaty* part of its title).⁷³⁷ While styled as a treaty due to its nominally multilateral nature, the treaty section of the *Declaration and Treaty* reads more as a constitution. In most ways, though, the declaration is the more revealing part of the document, despite being significantly

⁷³⁵ Stalin, ‘K postanovke natsional’nogo voprosa’, 59.

⁷³⁶ Deklaratsiia i dogovor ob obrazovanii Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik [Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, hereafter Deklaratsiia i dogovor ob obrazovanii SSSR], 31st of December 1922 [public domain]. The original can be found in GARF, f. 3316, op. 1, d. 5, ll.1–3. In recent years (from around the middle of 2024), it seems concerted efforts have been made to reframe this document as only a declaration, by excluding the ‘and treaty’ in its title, and by removing or editing certain well known digital locations of the document, or at least the treaty part of the text. What this means and where this leads, I know not, but, for now, one can still find both on public domain repositories, albeit now as separate documents (which, I stress again, they were not, in their original form). For the ‘declaration’ part, see here. For the ‘treaty’ part, see here.

⁷³⁷ Deklaratsiia i dogovor ob obrazovanii SSSR.

shorter than the treaty provisions section. Boldly asserting a binary world of two rival camps, capitalism and socialism, the *Declaration and Treaty* stated:

There, in the camp of capitalism, there is national enmity and inequality, colonial slavery and chauvinism, national oppression and pogroms, imperialist atrocities and wars. Here, in the camp of socialism, there is mutual trust and peace, national freedom and equality, peaceful cohabitation and fraternal co-operation of peoples...Only in the camp of the soviets...was it possible to root out national oppression, create an atmosphere of mutual trust and lay the foundations for the fraternal cooperation of peoples.⁷³⁸

The full text of the admittedly short declaration is explicitly and entirely framed through this liberation of peoples/nations lens.⁷³⁹ Yet, as stated, there is no mention of self-determination in the document. Compared to the most closely related document in terms of genre and purpose from the Bolsheviks of previous years, the Soviet Constitution of 1918, this is a noticeable difference.⁷⁴⁰ As addressed above, the 1918 text did refer to self-determination (albeit in a rather particular sense), but in the *Declaration and Treaty*, produced after Stalin's interventions at the Party Congress, and after his related 'Concerning the Presentation of the National Question' article was published in *Pravda*, self-determination is absent.⁷⁴¹ Given its frequent and substantive appearances in Bolshevik discourse in previous years, as well as the prominence of national liberation language within the *Declaration and Treaty*, this is something of an identifiable shift.

Certainly, I am not arguing for a complete reassessment of Bolshevik nationalities policy based on this empirical discovery, but it is nonetheless a discovery of some note. Terms are not (necessarily) the same as concepts, but for all self-determination's earlier terminological prominence, and especially from Bolshevik agents themselves, that there is an absence of the exact term self-determination in the *Declaration and Treaty*, and that we have evidence for the intentionality of and reasoning behind this is noteworthy. Alongside Stalin's role in this discursive shift, we might also suggest that the approaches of Luxemburg, Piatakov, Bukharin, Bosh, and others were more influential in small ways over a longer time period than previously acknowledged. Stalin certainly seemed to have moved closer to their view of the hollow nature of the term for 'genuine' revolutionary socialists.

While the Bolsheviks taken as a whole had not entirely changed their reading of what they still consistently styled as the 'National Question', in terms of both diagnosis and prognosis, after the spring of 1921 they subsequently referred

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ Deklaratsiia i dogovor ob obrazovanii SSSR. This suggests both the importance of what the Bolsheviks still saw as the 'National Question', as well as its representation.

⁷⁴⁰ Konstitutsiia RSFSR.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid*; Deklaratsiia i dogovor ob obrazovanii SSSR.

exclusively to a right to secession rather than a right to self-determination in high level official documentation. We might say that this was welcome news from a practical (and an academic) perspective: secession is certainly a clearer concept in a legal and policy sense than self-determination. However, as will be seen in the following subchapter, Moscow was hardly willing to permit secession in practice, even for the constituent republics of the USSR. For all the length of the treaty provisions section of the *Declaration and Treaty*, no constitutional mechanism through which this right to secession could be exercised was elucidated.

With the central government of this new union not willing to allow secession (in combination with some of these individuals' views on the economic and developmental illogic of it), that this discursive decision was both made and seemingly committed to is something of a puzzle. This certainly implies that by spring 1921 senior Bolsheviks, Stalin most significantly, given his ministerial portfolio, saw self-determination either as an expired term because of its corruption by imperialist powers, or as a term with too much incendiary potential for a state attempting to bring all of its constituent parts to the same degree of economic development. While to some degree contradictory, it is conceivable that some Bolsheviks believed both simultaneously, and the following subchapter may provide food for thought to suggest that Stalin himself was one such individual.

This discursive change also cannot be seen, therefore, as refuting or greatly altering the general scholarly consensus on the practical processes of the consolidation of Soviet Russia and the formation of the Soviet Union.⁷⁴² Nor does it seem to have affected Bolshevik nationalities policy as practiced. Nonetheless, empirical evidence of this intentional removal, alongside detailed explanations from political agents performing this removal as to *why* they were doing what they were doing is both novel and insightful.⁷⁴³ This reveals very plainly the perception political agents had of self-determination at this point in time, especially those critical of it. This is stimulating for historians of political thought, but also for legal scholars, nuancing the discussions of the early Soviet regime's domestic law. Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation is the explanation it provides for the noticeable absence of self-determination from subsequent high level Bolshevik documents. Excluding Pipes' early scepticism and arguments about the Bolsheviks' supposed discarding of all of the slogans

⁷⁴² Again, this will be discussed in the following subchapter.

⁷⁴³ Though Daniel E. Schafer has written a very recently published chapter concerning Stalin's interventions on the 'National Question' during the Congress which addresses this to some degree. See Daniel E. Schafer, 'Stalin's Nationality Programme at the Tenth Party Congress', in Black and Pogorelskin, *Congress of Contradictions*, 59–87. However, in this chapter, Schafer argues that Stalin's speeches at the Congress contained "no great bombshells or major policy shifts" (59). This was the case in practical terms, as Schafer demonstrates, but can be nuanced when considering the removal of self-determination from Bolshevik discourse, which was an identifiable shift from previous years.

that assisted them in their fight *for* power, this absence has not previously been properly identified, and certainly not explained before, in the relevant literature. This is all the more noteworthy given the earlier prominence of the term, especially within Bolshevik discourse.

This subchapter analysed when, how, and why the Bolsheviks moved away from their strong advocacy of the concept of self-determination and towards a (textual) institutionalisation of a right to secession in the party's high-level discourse and documentation following the Russian Civil War. Stalin, the main Bolshevik responsible for arguing for this change, was successful in his reframing of self-determination as a now defunct term that, in his view, had been corrupted by its use beyond Soviet borders. By contrast, and in fact, *because* the Bolsheviks had previously so prominently argued for the right of nations to self-determination, national oppression was in the process of being rooted out, and not reaffirmed, as it was alleged was happening elsewhere. This discursive change was first seen in practice in the document that established the Soviet Union, the *Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* of December 1922. Terminologically, in contrast to previous Bolshevik proclamations, the peoples of the new regime were not granted self-determination, since, in Bolshevik theory, the national republics were the concept's best expression. In one sense, it was therefore logical that the only 'remaining' right to offer them was the right to secession, and this was the basis from which they would proceed institutionally from the spring of 1921 onwards.

With regards to genre, the subchapter demonstrated that Stalin, the main Bolshevik responsible for the party's replacement of the right of nations to self-determination with the right of nations and colonies to secede in high level discourse, was extremely effective in how this outcome was argued for through form. Most notably, Stalin called upon the recent history of Bolshevik political interventions, and utilised the implications of each of their forms, to ground his argument in a sequential, phased narrative. Whether these followed logically is less important than Stalin's ability to discuss, implicitly and explicitly, the conventions of each of these genres to support his argument about removing self-determination from the party programme. It was, after all, the Bolsheviks themselves, including Stalin, who had chosen to make these previous interventions in the ways in which they did. In the period of this dissertation's research, this was the most effective usage of genre by any political agent, since Stalin was not only using the forms (party conference speeches and newspaper articles) of his current political interventions effectively, but doing so to justify goals based on previous (active) genre choice.

4.2 The Bolsheviks, Federalism, and the Soviet Union

With the purely military struggles of the Bolsheviks pushed to the outer reaches of party members' thoughts, but with no clarity on what this meant for a group that still allegedly believed in world revolution, the form of the new socialist system became a focal point for strategies for revolutionary export and governmental perfectionism.⁷⁴⁴ However, party members from across the areas under Red Army control had different experiences of the Russian Civil War and therefore saw different next steps to be most logical. It is important to remember that many Bolsheviks, particularly those from non-Russian backgrounds, had led independent soviet republics during the previous four years. Even if many of these bodies did not last, or went through complicated stages of merging, separating, and/or foreign occupation, these local party leaders often had to self-direct the work of their regimes for some time. Not least because of the location of many of these primarily non-Russian soviet republics, which meant that they were active conflict zones for most if not all of the Russian Civil War and its related, often overlapping conflicts. Beyond pure distance, in some cases these soviets had been partially or fully cut off from the central government they professed allegiance to. Nonetheless, their leaders maintained ideological unity with the RSFSR.

Despite his ill health⁷⁴⁵, it must be said that Lenin understood this, and appeared willing to make compromises to, in his view, maintain the gains of the revolution. If that meant accepting a more limited role for Moscow's central government for the time being, then so be it. Stalin's approach was slightly different, at least on this specific point; he did not wish to placate what he saw as the directionless nationalistic feelings of the leaders and supporters of these republics. If these polities were not brought closer under the central government soon, they may question the purpose of unity altogether. This, in essence, was the root of a series of disagreements that occurred between 1921 and Lenin's death in early 1924. These disagreements were seldom discussed using the exact term self-determination, for reasons that the preceding subchapter has dealt with. Nor, as will be seen, were the discussions either as dramatic or as crucial to the supposed 'corruption of the revolution' under Stalin they are sometimes depicted as, most notably in Moshe Lewin's influential account, *Lenin's Last Struggles* (1968).⁷⁴⁶ Nonetheless, despite this and the terminological absence of self-determination, the debates clearly pertained to the latter concept's practical application, since

⁷⁴⁴ For an excellent work on the governmental apparatus of the new regime, especially its decision-making institutions, see Douds, *Inside Lenin's Government*.

⁷⁴⁵ Lenin suffered his first stroke in late spring 1922, and his second in December of the same year.

⁷⁴⁶ Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggles* (New York City, 1968). Arguably, Leon Trotsky's *Predannaia revoliutsiia: Chto takoe SSSR i kuda on idet?* [The Revolution Betrayed: What is the USSR and Where is it Going?] (Paris, 1936) also contributed to this narrative in important ways, at least for anti-Stalinist Soviet sympathisers.

Stalin's successful campaign to decouple the language of self-determination from the emergent Soviet regime did not resolve any of the more fundamental questions that the concept had come to represent, nor did it make the establishment of the constitutional form of the consolidating state any clearer.

By 1921, there were five republics that were tied to the RSFSR but not a legal part of it: Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, Soviet Georgia, Soviet Armenia, and Soviet Azerbaijan. Other republics existed *within* the RSFSR, and were described as autonomous, such as the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, but these were constituted as lesser-tiered political units than these other republics. As addressed previously, much of this was the result of the Bolsheviks' perception of the respective area's economic and cultural development. The validity of this, and, indeed, whether this became a self-fulfilling prophecy in some respects, is a discussion for another day, and one that would require a more theoretical discussion of Bolshevik conceptions of modernity and development. For now, we may take it as read that the Bolsheviks in Moscow (and in these other regions, too) tended to see these aforementioned five non-RSFSR republics as the most 'developed' of the former imperial space.

In August 1922, the Political Bureau (Politburo) agreed to set up a commission that would both examine the current relationship between Moscow and these other republics and propose broad structural changes if they were deemed necessary. A keen advocate for a swift and precise response to this issue, Stalin eagerly proposed his solution to a problem that had not yet been fully diagnosed. It was called 'autonomisation' and was a broad proposal, centred around the idea of these five republics becoming a more formal, legal part of the RSFSR, with much of the work of these non-Russian Soviet republics' governments being taken over by the RSFSR's institutions.⁷⁴⁷ Ministries that concerned foreign affairs, the economy, and infrastructure were to surrender their authority to Moscow, with the republics maintaining 'autonomy' over the others.⁷⁴⁸

It is worth stating that there was an element of genuine self-rule in Stalin's conception of autonomisation. These republics would remain in control of their own departments of education, agriculture, and justice, among others. From the point of view of, for example, the beginning of 1914, or even from the Provisional Government days, this was a clear move of authority away from the central government. If, however, there was a real, practical application of the plan proposed by Stalin. Some Bolsheviks from these non-RSFSR republics were not especially trusting that this was not unitary statism by a different name, especially since for all the constitutional differences signposted under this scheme, its enforcers were all members of the same party. This was a problem because of the Bolshevik Party's policy of democratic centralism, which would bind the hands of these Bolsheviks to enact policies their own republic may not have agreed with

⁷⁴⁷ Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London, 2005), 20.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–21. See also a wide selection of documentary sources on this in V. I. Vasil'ev, and P. P. Gureev (eds.), *Obrazovanie i razvitie SSSR kak soiuznogo gosudarstva* (Moscow, 1972), 125–200.

if they were outvoted in Central Committee and other senior meetings, since many responsibilities still rested with the legally supreme central government.⁷⁴⁹ This was a therefore clash between different models of representation, based on who or what constituted the highest authority over a given region.

Stalin justified his proposal of autonomisation with different arguments at different times over the coming months. One of the most consistent points Stalin made concerned political chaos, not only as irrefutably experienced during the Russian Civil War, but in the sense of the hypothetical chaos posed by any alternative form of rule than the one he proposed. While a self-reliant argument, the point Stalin intended to make was that under a more egalitarian constitutional model, every small detail or problem of common interest would require endless rounds of debate and negotiation between the relevant republics.⁷⁵⁰ Firstly, where did this end? This was simply a reworded version of the colloquial ‘give them an inch, and they will take a mile’, ‘slippery slope’ argument. Secondly, and more importantly for Stalin, where was the economy in all this? What had been the point of the revolutionary struggle and its existential crisis during the Russian Civil War if it was not to instigate greater economic unity through the Bolsheviks’ emancipatory vision? The Bolsheviks should not be afraid of their end goal just because of the transient politics of today’s nationalism:

In four years of Civil War, we were obliged to display liberalism towards the republics. As a result, we helped to form hard-line ‘social-independentists’ among them, who regard the Central Committee’s decisions as simply being Moscow’s. If we do not transform them into ‘autonomies’ immediately, the unity of the soviet republics is a lost cause.⁷⁵¹

Stalin’s proposal was not universally supported. Soon after its announcement and sending out for debate, the Central Committee of Soviet Georgia rejected the plan. Some Georgian Bolsheviks, however, sided with Stalin.⁷⁵² These Georgian Bolshevik supporters of autonomisation tended to see Georgian nationalism, especially as represented by the strong Georgian Menshevik contingent in Georgia, as replicating the inequities of Great Russian Chauvinism. This was because they argued that the dominant people of the geographic region of Georgia, Georgians, were at risk of oppressing other minorities in the region, principally Abkhazians and Ossetians, in the same ways as Russians had historically oppressed other minorities within Russia.⁷⁵³ Interestingly, they viewed rule from an RSFSR central committee as less likely to result in such oppression, since it was seen as a more ‘proletarian’ and less ‘national’ method to organise the further economic and cultural development of Georgia.

⁷⁴⁹ Here, basic arithmetic tells you the likelihood that this would occur.

⁷⁵⁰ Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, 269–276.

⁷⁵¹ Quoted in Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 22.

⁷⁵² Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, 269–293.

⁷⁵³ Jeremy Smith, ‘The Georgian Affair of 1922. Policy Failure, Personality Clash or Power Struggle?’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (1998), 519–544.

By contrast, anti-autonomisation Georgian Bolsheviks tended to wish for clearer rights for a more decentralised Georgian republic that recognised their work of previous years, as well as the simple reality of strong national sentiment ‘on the ground’, even among Bolshevik supporters in Georgia. To them, autonomisation was a backwards or sideways step in their desires to consolidate the gains of the Georgian revolution and *then* further pursue economic and developmental unity with their ideological allies further north. The result of these disagreements was further tension, as Stalin, Lenin, and other senior Bolsheviks such as Trotsky and L. B. Kamenev wrote a series of letters to one another and occasionally met with pro-autonomisation Georgian Bolsheviks (Sergo Ordzhonikidze most notably) as well as anti-autonomisation Georgian Bolsheviks (such as Filipp Makharadze and Polikarp ‘Budu’ Mdivani) to discuss paths forward.⁷⁵⁴ These negotiations extended the timelines both of the creation of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Socialist Republic (consisting of Soviet Georgia, Soviet Armenia, and Soviet Azerbaijan), which occurred in March 1922, and of the wider Soviet Union itself.⁷⁵⁵

Soviet Georgian resistance to Stalin’s autonomisation proposal was not unique, although it is the most often discussed from this period. In fact, some senior Ukrainian Bolsheviks also opposed Stalin’s proposal. Kristian Rakovsky, at this point in time the First Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, was one such figure. As Lewin describes, “While Rakovsky appreciated the need for a federal government that was in a position to act, he thought that this could be achieved provided republican interests were secured by clearly formulated rights. He saw in Stalin’s proposals not so much the project of a federation as the liquidation of the republics”.⁷⁵⁶ In a long note to Stalin responding to the project, Rakovsky spelled out his main point of opposition to the proposal: if the makeup of the new state was not defined by clear rights for the republics, the ability of these republics to deal with their vastly different local circumstances would be reduced, and, worse still, reduced at the further cost of replicating Russo-(or, at the very least, Moscow-)centric decision making, now perceived as archaic.⁷⁵⁷ As highlighted above, Stalin was aware of this perception, but neither this nor his own Georgian experiences impacted him enough to change his opinion on the necessity of the rapid incorporation of the republics into the RSFSR. Here, tension between the Bolsheviks’ views on the necessity of economic centralisation and the group’s earlier prominent recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, even if no longer textually supported, occupied a central role in how Russian and non-Russian Bolsheviks conceived of political power in their new revolutionary state. Unity, but on what terms?

⁷⁵⁴ Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, 269–293.

⁷⁵⁵ Smith, ‘The Georgian Affair’, 530.

⁷⁵⁶ Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 24.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

In December 1922, Lenin made his latest intervention in the debate; his last before the formal establishment of the Soviet Union at the end of the month. Unity, Lenin predictably argued, was something of a given, a prerequisite.⁷⁵⁸ However, the issue was one of the substantive nature of the governmental apparatus. Care should be taken to avoid simply replicating the structure and practices of the *ancien regime* they (or rather, the Provisional Government) had overthrown.⁷⁵⁹ In this way, Lenin, like Rakovsky, also sought to use the document to reframe the whole debate, asking not how the republics were to be integrated with the centre, but what measures were being suggested that would otherwise protect these groups from a larger and stronger central government? If there were none, as Lenin heavily implied, the system would be fatally flawed from its inception.⁷⁶⁰

Another important aspect of this December intervention was Lenin's attempt to divorce the resolution of the 'National Question' from the constitutional questions of what a new Soviet federal state was to be.⁷⁶¹ This was certainly a logical extension of his standpoint on the issue, but it was also plainly impractical and unrealistic in the context of the early 1920s. Lenin, and the Bolsheviks as a whole, had led the charge in the creation of and support for national soviet republics from 1917 onwards, so what followed? Were these national republics or their inhabitants to have any kind of special status in the new state super-structure? At this point in time, it seemed not, at least in a differentiated governance sense⁷⁶²; but if so, as Lenin well asked, what stopped the continued exploitation of these groups? Lenin's answer was to allow the republics greater autonomy; certainly greater than under Stalin's proposals, for an (undefined) number of years. As with Lenin's earlier writings and comments at party meetings discussed above, the issue appeared to be the pace of economic centralisation, and therefore its institutional setup, rather than the conflict being a disagreement over more primary ideas of governance. Whatever Lenin may have tried to argue, these ideas *were* expressions of their views on the resolution of the 'National Question' in the context of economic centralisation, and in this context it should be stressed that the Bolsheviks were not, on the whole, theorists of governance in their pre-power years but theorists of the connections between large scale economic changes and political power.⁷⁶³

⁷⁵⁸ V. I. Lenin, 'K voprosu o natsional'nostiakh ili ob «avtonomizatsii»' ['Concerning the Question of Nationalities, or, On 'Autonomisation' and its continuation] in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 45, 356–362.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁰ Lenin, 'K voprosu o natsional'nostiakh'.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² Beyond the legal status of being a soviet national republic, that is; here I mean their constitutional role.

⁷⁶³ Douds, *Inside Lenin's Government*, 2–3.

The creation of the Soviet Union in December 1922 was therefore a compromise between these and other positions, and significant constitutional reconfigurations of the different republics (especially sub-union-level republics) continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁶⁴ At the time of the union's founding, this was perhaps most visible in the case of the Caucasus, with the three former soviet national republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan becoming founding members of the USSR not individually but as the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Socialist Republic, a broader union republic that would exist until 1936. As discussed above, the accompanying document that established the Soviet Union textually reflected Stalin's successful advocacy of the replacement of the right of nations to self-determination with the right of nations to secede, in this text expressed through the national union-level republics.

Certainly, Moshe Lewin is correct to state that "It was utterly symptomatic that the 'national question' – i.e. the way in which the USSR and its government were to be constructed – should lead to a huge battle over the form and future of the Soviet state".⁷⁶⁵ It was the logical next step in the formal consolidation of the Bolshevik seizure of power and subsequent victory (for the most part) in the Russian Civil War. Discussion over the form of the state contained within it many other issues of both a conceptual and highly practical nature; those of party organisation, the role of the state, and central planning, among others. We may ask how "huge" this battle between Lenin and Stalin really was, however.⁷⁶⁶ It is true that Lewin's influential narrative of the noble but tragically ailing Lenin, who understood the 'National Question' (or, perhaps, the 'National Answer') and who fought in his final moments against the misguided, conniving Stalin remains the dominant view of how the USSR came into existence in 1922. However, as Erik van Ree has argued, this is not wholly accurate when considering more recently available sources.⁷⁶⁷

On one level, there appears to have been more intellectual disagreement in the second half of 1922 between *Trotsky* and Lenin than between Stalin and Lenin on the issues of the constitutional makeup of the state, the level of centralisation, the nature and role of Soviet bureaucracy, and so on.⁷⁶⁸ This suggests a far more complex picture of, in van Ree's reading, at least three distinct views on how to best consolidate victory and realise the Bolsheviks' wider goals through Soviet institutions. Moreover, as works such as Lara Douds' *Inside Lenin's Government: Power, Ideology and Practice in the Early Soviet State* (2018) have well demonstrated, the nature of Soviet power itself was far more contested in the early 1920s than is commonly assumed, and various democratic experiments took place during this time across all levels of government, many of which were the

⁷⁶⁴ Refer to Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

⁷⁶⁵ Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 30.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁷ Eric van Ree, "'Lenin's Last Struggle' Revisited', *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2001), 85–122.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 87–88.

result not of central party diktat but of a game of socialist trial and error.⁷⁶⁹ Styling the creation of the Soviet Union as a duel between two admittedly large personalities is therefore doomed to melodrama over this far more interesting patchwork process of constitutional development. Nevertheless, alongside this, it is accurate to state the Bolsheviks were generally clearer when expressing what kinds of governance they were against – what they saw as bourgeois parliamentary democratic practices, for example – rather than having a precise governmental system in mind themselves.⁷⁷⁰ Again, this meant that there were also significant experiences of improvisation and negotiation over Soviet power and its institutions between 1921 and 1924, years usually seen more simplistically as unidirectional consolidation. Even in the comparatively short account presented here, it is clear that other, formally less senior and/or non-Russian Bolsheviks played a significant role in negotiating and articulating alternative visions of the structure of the consolidating state.⁷⁷¹

In any case, personalities and specificities aside, one should remember the ultimate practical consequences of the more general Bolshevik form of self-government, the soviet republic, in relation to its wider international context. However unsurprising it may be to observers today, the Bolsheviks maintained an almost universal acceptance of ‘proletarian’ (that is, pro-Soviet) movements in other states while disregarding other successful national movements as bourgeois, even if they maintained widespread popular support. In general, the Bolsheviks did not accept the secession and subsequent independence of many states before, during, and after the Russian Civil War. Not, at least, without armed conflict against these emergent states.⁷⁷² Even other socialist states, such as independent (but *Menshevik*-dominated) Georgia was not seen as the right shade of red for Moscow to allow its continued existence.⁷⁷³ As well as the Red Army’s invasion of the Caucasus in the 1920s, around a year after signing accords recognising the independence of states within the latter region, the Soviet regime also continually breached their own agreements with the Baltic states, the Republic of Poland, and others over a longer period. The Soviet Union’s invasion and occupation of swathes of eastern Europe during and after the Second World War is well known, and to those for whom it remained living memory, this was

⁷⁶⁹ Douds, *Inside Lenin’s Government*. Lenin, for example, as the leader of Sovnarkom, received a surprising number of visitors on many days, who he listened to and engaged with for hours. This included curious international fellow travellers and journalists, but the main contingent of these guests were perfectly ‘ordinary’ citizens of the regime, who came to make a certain point about their livelihoods, plea for assistance, and so on. See Douds, *Inside Lenin’s Government*, 73–81.

⁷⁷⁰ Douds, *Inside Lenin’s Government*, 1–3.

⁷⁷¹ Many would continue to do so; perhaps we may read this as yet another flaw of the framing of ‘moments’ of intellectual development when considering political *practice* as well as political theory.

⁷⁷² Since even the recognition of Finland cannot be mentioned without also mentioning the Bolsheviks’ support for one side in the ensuing Finnish Civil War.

⁷⁷³ Again, this caused disquiet among Bolsheviks themselves, Russian and non-Russian alike.

exacerbated by the clear Bolshevik support for what they called a right in 1917; self-determination, and what appeared to be a reiteration of this support in the language of subsequent peace treaties. To see this in a more agent-passive, Marxist historical sense as the ‘natural’ movement from industrial, bourgeois nation-states to the large proletarian states Marx (and later Lenin) had written of is difficult to do without being a genuine doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist.⁷⁷⁴

In any case, around a year after the creation of the Soviet Union, in late January 1924, Lenin fell into a brief coma and died on the 21st. Later that same month, the founding republics of the USSR drafted and adopted the first union-wide constitution.⁷⁷⁵ Stalin’s previously discussed line of argument on the language of self-determination versus secession, with some compromises, was politically successful, and its success extended several years into the future. This much is clear from the Constitution of the USSR of 1924, as well as later similar documents.⁷⁷⁶ In the final text of the document, the Constitution’s fourth article proclaimed the right of its constituent republics to “freely withdraw from the union”.⁷⁷⁷ This right was still limited – regions, nations, and other sub-union-republic level collective selves did not enjoy even the ink on the page that the constituent republics of the USSR did. In any case, this right was not one that could be said to have existed practically at this point in time. Contemporary lawyers (and, as one might expect, current scholars) have described this article as having “merely declaratory and not legislative character”.⁷⁷⁸ Obvious questions on the value of such articles aside, again we see in this description a genre distinction as to the function of political language, despite the generally understood meaning of constitutionalism. This approach was maintained in later versions of the document⁷⁷⁹, as well as in its 1936 replacement.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁴ Certainly, in the eyes of the majority of these states’ populations, these invasions and occupations were a betrayal, not an affirmation, of self-determination.

⁷⁷⁵ *Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) soiuzu sovetских sotsialisticheskikh respublik* [Constitution (Basic Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], adopted on the 31st of January 1924 [public domain]. A Russian version can be found here.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Just to reiterate; that is, of the Soviet Union (rather than the RSFSR, which agreed an already-discussed constitution in 1918). See also Vasil’ev, Gureev, *Obrazovanie i razvitiie SSSR*, 125–200.

⁷⁷⁷ *Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) soiuzu sovetских sotsialisticheskikh respublik*.

⁷⁷⁸ Jane Henderson, *The Constitution of the Russian Federation: A Contextual Analysis* (Oxford, 2011), 39.

⁷⁷⁹ Which were, for the most part, editions to reflect the inclusion of new union-level republics.

⁷⁸⁰ Interestingly, the 1977 Soviet Constitution *does* refer explicitly to the “self-determination of nations” as the founding principle of the equality of the USSR’s constituent republics. See Chapter 8, Article 70 of *Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) soiuzu sovetских sotsialisticheskikh respublik* [Constitution (Basic Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], adopted on the 7th of October 1977 [public domain]. The Russian version is available here. Further research would be needed to confirm this, but my current hypothesis would be that in this Cold War context, self-determination was used alongside the language of decolonisation and human

By 1924, then, the Soviet Union had comfortably shed the language of self-determination when talking of national liberation within its own borders. The practical rejection of its replacement, this right to secession, perhaps does not tell us much about the nature of this nominally multilateral union. A noteworthy theoretical paradox at the heart of this change might reveal more: the Bolsheviks' commitment to the current form of Soviet republics alongside their Marxist theory of long term economic development. These current polities were *national* in form, and the Bolsheviks' articulation of the right to secession was presumed to refer to a national (or other large collective) subject self, given it was a right reserved for union-level national republics. This had the effect of locking these forms of governance into ones based on nationality, rather than class, or even other stratifying measures such as (natural) geography, level of economic development, urban/industrial versus rural/agricultural divides, and so on. This was recognised by some Bolsheviks and viewed as temporary as addressed, but perhaps in a purely political and pragmatic sense, the replacement of a right to self-determination with a right to secession became 'problematically precise', as it clearly defined a version of the nation as the legitimate agent capable of exercising this right. Yet, as the new constitution made clear, "a single union citizenship is established".⁷⁸¹

As is well known, around this time, conventionally in 1923 but in reality throughout the early 1920s, the Bolsheviks developed their main set of policies to address the 'National Question' within the borders of the Soviet Union, *korenizatsiia*, or 'indigenisation'.⁷⁸² Because much of the Soviet regime's work centred on language policies and enforced quotas for certain nationalities for senior party positions within soviet national republics, one scholar, Terry Martin, has styled this as the world's first mass affirmative action system in his classic study on the 'fall and rise' of Russian national dominance within the Soviet Union between 1923 and 1939.⁷⁸³ Certainly, this was the case, but it is also true, as Yuri

rights. As the USSR sought to position itself against imperialism, it once again reframed its arguments of having 'solved' questions of national oppression via the language of self-determination.

⁷⁸¹ Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) soiuzu sovetских sotsialisticheskikh respublik.

⁷⁸² Interestingly, in Stalin's 1923 speech at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), typically seen as the start date of *korenizatsiia*, the term self-determination was used. However, it was done so in the past tense, with Stalin referring to the Bolsheviks' support for the right to self-determination up to and immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power. This, he argued, was a matter of necessarily proclaiming the legal equality of the peoples of the new state but would not itself resolve the 'National Question'. In other words, this was entirely in line with his reading of the issue as discussed in the previous subchapter, in terms of the movement from declarations on the topic, through administrative reorganisation, to the practical work of the resolution of the question as asked. See J. V. Stalin, 'Doklad o natsional'nykh momentakh v partiinom i gosudarstvennom stroitel'stve na xii s"ezde rkp(b) 23 apreliia 1923 g.' ['Report on the National Factors in Party and State Affairs at the Twelfth Congress of the RCP(B), 23rd of April 1923'] in *Sochineniia*, Vol. 5, 236–263. The mention of self-determination is on page 242.

⁷⁸³ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

Slezkine and Francine Hirsch have demonstrated even more precisely, that the Bolsheviks were themselves active agents in the processes of nation-building as well as state consolidation.⁷⁸⁴ The group became zealous ethnophiles, and sought to reflect their sociological readings of the former tsarist lands by creating, developing, and protecting ethno-territorial units that corresponded to what they prescribed to be the most numerous national group of a given area.⁷⁸⁵

In this sense, seeing *korenizatsiia* as the logical result of Bolshevik discourse on self-determination and the 'National Question' is sound on many levels. However, we should also not lose sight of the fact that beyond this, the party's discussions and disagreements over self-determination reflected a protracted and oftentimes uncomfortable dialogue that highlighted a more fluid relationship with how different Bolsheviks approached the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire. In the above context of Stalin's successful replacement of self-determination with secession, *korenizatsiia* cannot solely be seen as the result of Lenin's consistent advocacy of the former, since in Stalin's eyes the Bolsheviks had moved beyond this period of declarations of vague rights to self-determination to practical action in the resolution of the 'National Question'. The necessary genre of political intervention had changed, and consequently the framing and resolution of the issues at hand. This reading was explicitly accepted in 1922 with the founding of the Soviet Union, *before* the beginning of *korenizatsiia*. In other words, *korenizatsiia* had much less of a linguistic relationship with self-determination than it did with the 'National Question'. The Bolshevik self-determination story, and Lenin's refusal to change his position on the matter, had framed the initial debate, and made an acceptance of national collective agents unquestionable. However, once the concept of self-determination was removed from their platform in 1921, the Bolsheviks' language on the 'National Question' became far more technical and scientific, whether in the sense of political institutions or ethnography.⁷⁸⁶ The linguistic link between self-determination and the 'National Question' had gone, but the question and assumption of national collective selves remained.

What can we say, then, about how self-determination functioned during these years? Certainly, framing the period around a single 'moment' does not hold up to scrutiny, nor really help us understand how self-determination was used more generally. As seen above, rapid and substantial changes in political power, military

⁷⁸⁴ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment'. Hirsch also points out that the Bolsheviks coopted a wide range of tsarist-era ethnographers to ascertain demographic information on the population of their new state, similar to the well-established case of Trotsky permitting tsarist officers to serve the emergent Red Army during and after the Russian Civil War.

⁷⁸⁵ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment'.

⁷⁸⁶ Yuri Slezkine essentially pointed this out in his aforementioned article, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment', 422–426. However, as he took a broader chronological approach and focused far less on the movement of the precise language of the Bolsheviks on self-determination during these years, he missed that the reason for this was Stalin's successful attempt to remove self-determination from Bolshevik discourse, from which this all followed.

control, and international discourse make narratives of a ‘defining’ experience of self-determination difficult in a general sense when compared to particular analyses. Certainly, following the Russian Civil War, it is hard to characterise self-determination as a philosophical principle for the Bolsheviks. Self-determination was not the primary goal or ‘moral motivator’ in their call to action. Equally, the Bolsheviks did not view self-determination as a legal principle. For one thing, the Bolshevik attitude towards the notion of ‘legality’ was generally functional, rather than constraining; it was less about the processual rule of law than about the use of legal methods to serve other ends. Secondly, although self-determination appeared in Bolshevik- or co-Bolshevik international legal agreements in 1920 and 1921, such as in the peace treaties covered in the previous chapter, the Bolsheviks never argued for a general right to self-determination to be instilled in some kind of legal structure of international law.⁷⁸⁷ Nor, indeed, should we forget the desires of these other political agents to employ the term self-determination in these international legal agreements. The Bolsheviks’ conception of self-determination was therefore a *political* principle most of all. More precisely, it was a *reactive* political principle, the consequence of the rise of mass nationalism alongside the rise of the international labour movement at the turn of the century.

We should not, however, interpret the adjective ‘political’ here as pointing largely or even mostly to insincerity. Methodologically, as discussed, sincerity or otherwise is difficult to establish in such cases. Nonetheless, I would also remind those who see the Bolsheviks’ proclamations on self-determination as wholly empty and rhetorical that numerous Bolsheviks had been actively engaged in (at that time, purely theoretical) debates about self-determination in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and specifically before the First World War.⁷⁸⁸ This alone suggests that the Bolsheviks, while reacting to a rise in national popular sentiment among many, were attempting to address, rather than exploit this sentiment. One cannot seriously argue that self-determination’s inclusion in the 1896 RSDLP’s programme was an attempt to galvanise support from non-Russian national groups at a time when the political system of the Russian Empire ensured no political benefit for such an appeal.

All this suggests that for the Bolsheviks, self-determination was not purely a tool for propaganda and political theatre, but rather a concept that engendered passion within the group, including from those who had significant issues with the articulation and promotion of the concept within their political programme. Those who consistently supported usage of the term, Lenin most of all, appear to have done so from a Marxist point of view. In this Marxist dialectical reading of politics and history, self-determination was a tool, but one that mobilised rather than exploited groups – if it had short term political benefits as well, this was an

⁷⁸⁷ Not least because they did not believe that such a framework *could* exist with capitalist, imperialistic powers, who, the Bolsheviks believed, had already hollowed out all of the substance of previous efforts of an egalitarian international society.

⁷⁸⁸ Though not formally as the Bolsheviks for all of this period, but as part of the RSDLP.

advantage, but was not the purpose of the term. Threats from within and without the emergent RSFSR before and during the Russian Civil War forced more emphasis on the ‘political’ than the ‘principle’ part of this description, however. Lenin maintained his belief in self-determination to his death, but perhaps also due to the deterioration in his health, the Bolshevik leader nonetheless *de facto* consented to Stalin’s alteration of the Bolshevik’s ‘Presentation of the National Question’.

In any case, the result of these internal disagreements between 1921 and 1924 on self-determination, the ‘National Question’, and the constitutional makeup of their new union are reminders of the Bolsheviks’ fluidity during this time, especially with regard to political language. The Bolsheviks decoupled self-determination both from their new state as well as from the notion of federalism. Even *korenizatsiia* was justified by the Bolsheviks on grounds other than self-determination. Despite the terminological removal of self-determination from the new union, tension over the *rate* of centralisation, if not the concept itself, persisted. This reflected the broader concept of self-determination beyond its terminological removal.

This subchapter analysed the creation of the Soviet Union, paying particular attention to the views of senior Bolsheviks on the level of central or local agency necessary for both a successful resolution of the ‘National Question’ and an equally necessary commitment to the economic and cultural development of all of the new regime’s territories and peoples to an equal level. While Lenin and Stalin’s disagreements were significant and seemingly sincerely Marxist in character (again, the rate of change seemed to be the greatest point of divergence among Bolsheviks), the conflict was not as existential as has sometimes been implied. Rather, the debate reflected different, and not *necessarily* conflicting, ideas on the best methods the Bolsheviks could use to achieve their goals. In relation to this, the Bolsheviks’ main set of policies relating to the ‘National Question’, *korenizatsiia*, was described, and placed in the context of the creation of new Soviet institutions. In other words, because Stalin had been successful in arguing for removing self-determination from the Bolsheviks’ framing of (and therefore response to) the ‘National Question’ in previous years, debate over the precise structure of the Soviet Union became focused on these institutional questions, and the relationships between Soviet democracy and economic development. These ideas were now perceived as more practical than those of self-determination.

The subchapter also further demonstrated the generic consequences of Stalin’s successful political interventions in 1921. The first Constitution of the USSR maintained effectively the same provisions on secession as the *Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* from 1922 but was still of a different genre that carried with it different implications. While the *Declaration and Treaty*, especially its latter part, reads as a kind of ‘first draft’ of a constitution, it was explicitly styled as a treaty; a multilateral agreement, and followed the conventions of this form in important ways too. The 1924 Constitution, however, was envisaged as a *constitution*, suggesting it could be taken more seriously as a document that constituted and regulated Soviet

governance. Yet many of the text's provisions, including the article that concerned the right of the union-level republics to withdraw from the union, were executed (or not executed) in ways that contradicted their conveyance in the 1924 Constitution. Understandings of how the Bolsheviks conceptualised 'revolution' in an abstract sense do assist us in explaining why the group did not view the 1924 Constitution as a vital method of governance in the sense that constitutions are typically seen as, with a set of clearly defined rights, constraints, and principles. However, this does not explain why there was such disagreement over the substance of these provisions in the runup to both the 1922 and the 1924 texts' adoption. This suggests that regardless of the nature, conventions, and implications of the specific genres of the *Declaration and Treaty* and the 1924 Constitution, the Bolsheviks still viewed the establishment of provisions 'on the page' as a distinct act of its own with implications about subsequent action.

4.3 New States, New Minorities

The new or re-established states and forms of political rule that were in place by the end of 1922 settled many military, ideological, and institutional questions that much of the region had posed, debated, and fought over throughout the previous years and decades. However, this new relative stability did not, and, on a conceptual level simply could not, settle the questions around self-determination, since the concept pertains far more to processes than to outcomes. As discussed, even if, for example, statehood was perceived as the necessary outcome of self-determination invocations from political agents, this does not mean that once statehood had been achieved that self-determination either 'stopped' conceptually or was no longer relevant. If political agents had been successful in achieving a form of self-determination through statehood or other political structures, they were now faced with the realities of things such as border commissions, relations with one's neighbours, and the governance of their own citizens, regardless of background, now their citizenry was confirmed.⁷⁸⁹ Moreover, as will be seen, the issues of self-determination, and the perceived failures of some of its proponents, led many political agents to reemphasise the more inclusionary, relational aspects of the concept they had theorised of previously, even if their international position was now, at least in some ways, more stable. This led them to a kind of paradox on one level, but one that was entirely in line with pre-Russian Civil War views

⁷⁸⁹ For an excellent and methodologically innovative account of one of these border commissions, see Catherine Gibson, 'Attuning to Emotions in the History of Border-Making: The Estonian-Latvian Boundary Commission in 1920', *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2024), 40–54.

of self-determination: support for various forms of internationalism alongside support for these new, more spatially restricted political institutions.⁷⁹⁰

The notion of many of these new states as being ‘empires writ small’ is commonplace. In conventional narratives, the eventual state successors of the Russian Empire became not just nation-states, but aggressively *nationalising* states, aiming to more closely align the now-dominant nation with the recently created state.⁷⁹¹ More recent and nuanced studies have argued that this had some relationship with the double commitment nationalist leaders made to develop and protect the nation and to democratise.⁷⁹² When pushed by the pressures of governance and the management of societal difference, these authors argue, state leaders prioritised (more exclusive forms of) nationalism over democratic values.⁷⁹³ In some versions of this argument, this was a logical extension of nationalism itself as expressed through the architecture of a modern state. Others have argued that this was not predestined but rather the result of state leaders dealing with (often genuine) homegrown threats to democracy, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁹⁴ In many of the more general nationalising state accounts, the re-established Polish state, the Republic of Poland (its borders finalised as of 1922) is often cited as the archetypal case in point.⁷⁹⁵ Certainly, the experiences of many Ukrainian and Jewish citizens of the new Poland would serve as examples for this reading. However, given self-determination’s earlier prominence from nationalist political agents, where was the concept in this and other locales? If these states really were nationalising states, did this then imply that any ‘true’ reading of *national* self-determination would necessarily move in the direction of population transfers, forced assimilation, and border skirmishes?

Let us first consider the basis upon which these states and their leaders were acting. Helpfully, as many of these states were new or re-established in some form, many of them drafted and approved constitutions in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Surveying the language of these recently adopted constitutions therefore serves as an effective starting point for our purposes here, given the main function

⁷⁹⁰ For one example, see Marko Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe: Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt, 1999).

⁷⁹¹ This was in line with older wider views on the politics of interwar Europe. See, among others, Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, 1983); Cobban, *National Self-Determination*.

⁷⁹² Heidi Hein-Kircher and Steffen Kailitz, “Double transformations:” nation formation and democratization in interwar East Central Europe’, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 46, No. 5 (2018), 745–758.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ Liisi Veski, ‘Towards stronger national unity: statist ideas in Estonian nationalism during the “Era of Silence” (1934–1940)’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2024), 173–195.

⁷⁹⁵ Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Interwar East Central Europe, 1918–1941: The Failure of Democracy-building, the Fate of Minorities* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2020); Peter D. Stachura (ed.), *Poland between the Wars, 1918–1939* (London, 1998); Jerzy Borzecki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven, 2008).

of the genre of the domestic constitution. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in a form sense, the most common genre in which self-determination appeared (whether explicitly or implicitly) during these years was in the constitutions of these new states. For example, one provision of the new constitution of the Republic of Latvia, first adopted in early 1922, stated that “Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity”.⁷⁹⁶ While the document regulating the new state to Latvia’s north and east, the Republic of Estonia’s constitution (1920), did not make terminological invocation of self-determination explicitly, it was arguably present *in spirit* throughout, with extensive descriptions of (and a whole section on) self-government of various kinds, as well as provisions for cultural rights for non-Estonian citizens of Estonia, primarily expressed through linguistic tolerance.⁷⁹⁷

Further west, the Republic of Poland’s constitution (1921) was also considered highly democratic at the time, alongside those just mentioned. As was common for constitutional designs of the period, the document placed significant power in the hands of the legislature, rather than the executive.⁷⁹⁸ The constitution’s democratic provisions reached beyond formal institutions, though, extending in important ways to citizens of the new state as well as their representative institutions. In particular, the text specified rights available for a wide range of minority groups in the new Poland.⁷⁹⁹ Most notably for our discussion, the 1921 constitution contained the following two provisions:

Article 110.

Polish citizens belonging to national, religious, or linguistic minorities have the right, equal to other citizens, to establish, supervise, and manage at their own expense charitable, religious, and social institutions, schools, and other educational institutions, and to freely use their language and observe the rules of their religion within them.

Article 111.

All citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion. No citizen may be limited in the rights of other citizens on the basis of their religion or religious beliefs.

All residents of the Polish State have the right to freely profess their faith, both publicly and privately, and to observe the rules of their religion or rite, provided this does not conflict with public order or public decency.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁶ Latvijas Republikas Satversme [Constitution of the Republic of Latvia], 15th of February 1922 [public domain]. For the Latvian original, see here.

⁷⁹⁷ Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadus [Constitution of the Republic of Estonia], 15th of June 1920 [public domain]. For the Estonian original, see here.

⁷⁹⁸ Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [Constitution of the Republic of Poland], 17th of March 1921 [public domain]. For the Polish original, see here.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej.

We can read much of the above critically, of course, but its theoretical democratic basis is clear. To be sure, the text also had some intriguing representations of the contradictions of Polish society (in relation to the above, Article 114, for example, referred to the Roman Catholic Church as occupying “a leading position among equal denominations in the State”).⁸⁰¹ Some religions, perhaps, are more equal than others. Nonetheless, the constitution was clearly democratic in character, and contained within it numerous provisions for protection against forms of discrimination as well as the above positive rights.⁸⁰²

Much of this was the result of the work of Poland’s large socialist movement, which generally emphasised liberation from different forms of oppression (national, linguistic, economic) as well as supporting democratic reforms along legally positivist lines. The most well-known such socialist of this period, Poland’s Chief of State, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, was particularly keen to see his idea of a socialist multinational Polish state realised, after a series of setbacks with regard to his original aims had disappointed him over previous years.⁸⁰³ Piłsudski played a key role in the political and military activities of the Polish state from 1918 until 1922, and was responsible for commanding Polish forces to victory in several strategically important engagements during the Polish-Soviet War.⁸⁰⁴ As a fervently anti-Bolshevik socialist, Piłsudski believed that the greatest hope for the liberation of the peoples of eastern and central Europe was through their mutual cooperation.⁸⁰⁵

This was especially the case for Piłsudski during the First World War and the Polish-Soviet War, and though he frequently expressed federalist desires to this end, his conception of federalism evolved during this time from support for a reborn Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of sorts; an ‘Intermarium’ between the Baltic and Black seas (that included Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine), to being an even more tactical alliance of states against the Bolsheviks.⁸⁰⁶ At times, this was a ‘genuine’ Warsaw-centred federal idea, and at others, it was a confederal project. Piłsudski was not, therefore, wedded to a particular institutional ideal but to a generally relational conception of national liberation, one that we might loosely

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰² Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej.

⁸⁰³ For an engaging recent biography of Piłsudski, see Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Jozef Pilsudski: Founding Father of Modern Poland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022).

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Piłsudski would also operate as the *de facto* leader of Poland from 1926 until his death in 1935, as a far less democratic figure than in this period.

⁸⁰⁵ During the Polish-Soviet War, and mainly in 1920, Piłsudski found an ally in the former SR terrorist and Provisional Government minister Savinkov, with the latter sharing the Polish Marshal’s view of the need for a united, international front against the Bolsheviks. Savinkov’s rather vague conception of federalism or confederalism was discussed above in relation to the sitting of the Paris Peace Conference. The conclusion of the Treaty of Riga between Poland and the Bolsheviks in 1921 did not stop the continued exploitation of this relationship by Moscow. See a Soviet (public domain) propaganda piece by the V. N. Denisov (Viktor Deni) from 1922 here.

⁸⁰⁶ Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*, 29; 39; 44; 117–120.

characterise as a combination of national self-determination on the one hand and democratisation on the other.⁸⁰⁷ Throughout these years, Piłsudski therefore attempted to mobilise different nationalist currents against the Russian Imperial Army, the Central Powers' militaries, and the Red Army depending on the circumstances.

In general, Piłsudski's attempts to realise either the 'Intermarium' project or even to coordinate wider united anti-Bolshevik activities were not successful (with the exception of his effective but ephemeral working relationship with the Ukrainian nationalist Symon Petliura), not least because many non-Polish nationalist political agents perceived them as a precursor to Polish dominance in regions they claimed for their own.⁸⁰⁸ Lithuanian political leaders, for example, had good reason to see the Polish Army, just as much as the Red Army, as an existential threat to their statehood during their wars of independence, fighting border conflicts with Warsaw (most obviously over today's Vilnius) as well as Moscow.

Piłsudski also had political opponents within Poland, most obviously the conservative National Democrats, who were ideologically opposed to the idea of a multinational Polish state, certainly of the kind Poland's Chief of State advocated for. As such, during the negotiations that eventually resulted in the Treaty of Riga, National Democrats (who did not lead the Polish delegation but were a significant contingent of the group) argued for an eastern border significantly to the west of where the Polish Army had driven the Red Army back to⁸⁰⁹, precisely because they did not want to substantially increase the non-Polish population of Poland by bringing in millions of Belarusians and Ukrainians into the republic overnight.⁸¹⁰ Both the Polish socialist movement and the National Democrats had widespread support across Poland, but their conceptions of Polishness and of a Polish state were profoundly different. The National Democrats were particularly offended by Ukrainians and Jews, with their public views frequently being explicitly Ukrainophobic and anti-Semitic.⁸¹¹

Indeed, though the Constitution of the Republic of Poland was democratic in character, and its language with regard to the state's minorities expressed clear rights, this represented only the *de jure* situation. In reality, as many scholars have demonstrated, many of the peoples Piłsudski believed would be part of this large, reconstituted Polish state did not necessarily want Varsovian claims realised. As Garboś describes, "Piłsudski and his allies from the PPS [Polish Socialist Party] identified themselves in earnest as proponents of a "federation" encompassing the peoples of the [Polish-Lithuanian] Commonwealth, yet the political structures that they briefly managed to erect were widely condemned as "imperialist" not

⁸⁰⁷ With anti-Bolshevism being an implicit third pillar of this, at least after November 1917.

⁸⁰⁸ Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*; Zimmerman, *Józef Piłsudski*.

⁸⁰⁹ Though still east of the so-called 'Curzon line' the Allied and Associated Powers had suggested as Poland's eastern border.

⁸¹⁰ Borzecki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921*.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*

only by Bolshevik propagandists, but first and foremost by the self-proclaimed representatives of the non-Poles forcibly integrated into them".⁸¹² The experiences of Ukrainians during the years of conflict and immediately afterwards, especially, though not exclusively, in Eastern Galicia, were a case in point. According to most accounts, military and strategic priorities (not coincidentally, against the 'greater evil' of the Bolshevik regime) trumped Poland's otherwise warm words on self-determination and respect for non-Polish groups in a consolidated Polish socialist state.⁸¹³

Beyond the establishment of borders between the Republic of Poland and the republics that would go on to become founding members of the Soviet Union, political agents socialised in the late Russian Empire, but now living beyond its former borders, continued to reimagine the political geography of the same regions. This was arguably most pronounced with several groups of non-Russian refugees who chose to continue their struggle against the Bolsheviks by other means. Although this group in the broadest sense are sometimes referred to as *Russian émigrés*, many of those who fled the former Russian imperial space were not, and their public criticisms of the Bolsheviks helped popularise particular narratives of the Russian Revolution and Civil War in their countries of resettlement (along with émigrés who *were* mostly Russian, such as White exiles and Menshevik figures).⁸¹⁴ It was in this context that the idea of Prometheism emerged and gained traction among a wide variety of anti-Bolshevik exiles.

Prometheism, named after the Greek mythological figure who 'stole fire from the gods' and came to be associated with the enlightenment and noble rebellion of humankind, was an expectedly complex movement created in this context. Nonetheless, it can be boiled down to a single idea; the dismantling of a Russian empire (in whatever form) and the liberation of its constituent national parts. Nonetheless, there was an important general distinction between 'Prometheans' based in Paris and those based in Warsaw. Poland-based Prometheans, whether Polish or otherwise, tended to essentialise Warsaw's role in the dismantling of Russian imperialism, and were the closest, ideologically speaking, to Piłsudski's earlier attempts to increase, and then mobilise non-Russian nationalism against the Russian Empire during the First World War. In Garboś' recent doctoral dissertation, in which an in-depth history of the movement is offered, the scholar argued that the Warsaw Prometheans' personal experiences of the Russian Empire, and therefore supposedly unique specialist knowledge of the region, allowed them a certain prestige within international intellectual circles in the 1920s and beyond.⁸¹⁵ This, Garboś argues, allowed them to turn Prometheism into "a far

⁸¹² Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*, 118.

⁸¹³ Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton, 1995).

⁸¹⁴ In fact, as André Liebich has demonstrated, the popular 'Western' conception of the Soviet Union comes largely from Menshevik critiques of the regime. See André Liebich, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy After 1921* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997).

⁸¹⁵ Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*, 278–279.

broad enterprise concerned with the history, economics, politics, and geography of Eurasia, creating an applied “Orientalism” meant to serve the interests of the Polish state and assist in the eventual creation of a Warsaw-backed bloc of countries between the Baltic and Black Seas”.⁸¹⁶

By some contrast, the movement’s (mostly Caucasian) Parisian theorists saw in Prometheism not a goal in its own right but rather a means to achieve other, even wider international goals. In particular, they saw Prometheism as a path towards a ‘liberal internationalist’ community of nations and nation-states that would likely be grouped together in different forms of federation and confederation and be welcomed into the League of Nations in their own right. As much of the genesis of Prometheism from both ‘schools’ came from grand narratives and studies of the cultures, religions, and history of Eurasia, these France-based Prometheans were keen to continue their work in Paris, and not further east.⁸¹⁷ This, they reasoned, would itself hold greater weight when lobbying for support outside of their movement. In one plain sense, since they were in closer proximity to the governments of France and the United Kingdom, two of the former Allied and Associated Powers these agents most wished to find common cause with. More than this, though, was the Prometheans’ desire to make their case of their entitlement to, but betrayed opportunity to become fully accepted into, the ‘civilised world’, which they now saw as embodied by the League of Nations.⁸¹⁸ They reasoned that Paris and western Europe in general represented this civilised world in which they sought membership, and believed it therefore more effective to argue this point while in the French capital.

Prometheism was ultimately unsuccessful in its aims in the 1920s and 1930s (though it certainly helped to crystallise some of the common points of international criticism of the Soviet Union over time). Nonetheless, it was as much the result of these earlier discourses of reconfiguration of the Russian Empire as the emergent Soviet Union was, with its emphasis on the liberation of nations and (con)federalism after conflict. One problem for Prometheism’s advocates was its spatiality and financial backers; to many observers, it was a plain tool of Polish imperialism, a nicely dressed narrative that justified revanchism. This was not just the case with those who had previously supported Poland in its efforts to achieve independence. Further to the south and the east, in the Soviet Union, an awareness of these lines of argument and the experiences of many Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews in Poland led to the promotion of the successes of *korenizatsiia* (both actual and supposed), targeted for audiences beyond the USSR itself. In 1924, for example, Soviet Belarus made Yiddish an official language, a policy that lasted until 1938.⁸¹⁹ This was sold through propaganda to Jews in Poland, as many had found that anti-Semitism transcended many geographic and

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁷ Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*, 275–279.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸¹⁹ Alla Andreyevna Kozhinova, ‘Yazyki i graficheskie sistemy Belarusi v period ot Oktyabr’skoi revoliutsii do Vtoroi mirovoi voiny’, *Studi Slavistici*, Vol. 14 (2017), 134.

ideational borders, even considering the protections they were legally entitled to under the new constitution.

A little after the formal chronology of this dissertation, the legislature of the Republic of Estonia, the *Riigikogu*, approved a landmark bill that became the Law on Cultural Self-Government for National Minorities. Although this occurred in 1925, and the law's adoption and practices extended well beyond the periodisation of this dissertation's research, a brief discussion of the law is necessary here, since it was also the culmination of many pre- and immediately-post-independence debates. Indeed, as mentioned above, Estonia's declaration of independence, the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, had promised national and cultural autonomy for the minorities of Estonia.⁸²⁰ To make good on this statement, various Estonian lawmakers (and, of course, many non-Estonian theorists and minority rights advocates) began drafting and redrafting bills and other proposals for how the law would work in practice.⁸²¹ Much of this debate concerned whether and how the bill would be territorial; were minority rights to language usage in schools, for example, to be subsumed under the respective local municipal government, or was the model a clearer descendant of the non-territorial autonomy ideas of prewar Vienna, and proposed as less territorially restricted? What would the role of the state be, in between desires to allow choices for minorities, ensure a fair distribution of available assistance for different groups, and the maintenance of effective governance for all its citizens?

Timo Aava has demonstrated that in the first half of the 1920s, when the bill was being outlined and discussed by members of parliament and activists, a conceptual change occurred that in some ways reflected a more general genre transition from declarations to legislation. More specifically, theoretically abstract political language acquired a precise meaning through its discussion and refinement, at least in a governmental administrative context. As Aava writes, "In the practical implementation process, and political compromise-making, a broader political concept such as autonomy can be gradually superseded with a more specific administrative term such as self-government".⁸²² This, in essence, is what the debates in the *Riigikogu* facilitated in the early 1920s, serving as a conceptual meeting place between different political agents of different political parties and their conceptions of, in this case, different versions of minority rights, not as *abstract* theory but as responses to reality in combination with theory.⁸²³ Contemporaries still continued to use both autonomy and self-government (and

⁸²⁰ Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahwastele. Again, this included specific mentions of four groups that would be immediately offered such autonomy: Russians, Germans, Swedes, and Jews.

⁸²¹ See Aava, *Minorities and the State*, 197–234.

⁸²² *Ibid*, 198–199.

⁸²³ Aava, *Minorities and the State*, 197–234. Some Estonian legislators were concerned about the predominant view of the term autonomy in domestic law, a view that came from German legal theory and could easily imply that autonomy meant the right to issue laws 'oneself', whoever the *auto* was defined as. Self-government had fewer such implications for these Estonian lawmakers.

similar terms) beyond when the official wording of the bill was confirmed, of course, but this terminological movement signalled a kind of administrative professionalisation of broader concepts for the purposes of governance. This was an arguably similar kind of terminological restriction as discussed above in the case of the Bolsheviks, though it served a different function, since the Estonian state intended to (and did) permit the more precise ‘self-government’.⁸²⁴

The bill was passed into law by the *Riigikogu* at the beginning of 1925, and in its final form permitted the creation and maintenance of cultural and educational institutions for minorities numbering over three thousand.⁸²⁵ Minorities were defined through self-identification rather than external classification, and said groups were permitted to collect voluntary taxes to fund their pursuits alongside receiving more general funds for, as an example, non-Estonian language schools. The law was also non-territorial; there was no such formation of ‘national territorial units’ to administer minority rights for specific regions but a far more decentralised approach that generally placed more agency in the hands of minorities than in central or local government. These had been points of contention during the bill’s drafting and debate stages (including from representatives of the least geographically extended minority of Estonian territory, Swedes).⁸²⁶

Regardless, and despite the explicit identification of four groups who would immediately qualify for ‘autonomy’ as worded in the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, only two minority groups of the Republic of Estonia’s population, Germans and Jews, took up the offer of establishing self-government institutions. A variety of scholarly opinions exists as to why these two groups did, and why the other two referred to in 1918, Russians and Swedes, did not.⁸²⁷ The German minority was largely that of the Baltic Germans, the historic landowning elite of what was now the territory of the Republic of Estonia, and as such the group found themselves in the 1920s as citizens imbued with no special status nor accompanying rights. Many of them were aware of a wide range of legal and political theories concerning minority rights in the Habsburg Empire and beyond⁸²⁸, and as Aava, Eiler, Housden, and others have identified, this contributed to wider efforts to support pan-European movements towards greater rights (to autonomy) for minorities in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸²⁹ This was most pronounced

⁸²⁴ The same cannot be said of Stalin’s replacement of self-determination with secession, since the USSR did not ultimately permit the latter.

⁸²⁵ The best (and most thorough) treatment of the law’s passing is Aava, *Minorities and the State*.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, 224–225.

⁸²⁷ See the discussion in Aava, *Minorities and the State*. These are interesting works, but are of less value to my work here, so I will not discuss them further.

⁸²⁸ As many Baltic Germans with advanced education had trained as lawyers either at German language universities or in what was then St. Petersburg.

⁸²⁹ Martyn Housden, ‘Ambiguous Activists. Estonia’s Model of Cultural Autonomy as Interpreted by Two of Its Founders: Werner Hasselblatt and Ewald Ammende’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2004), 231–253; Ferenc Eiler, ‘The Congress of European Nationalities and the International Protection of Minority Rights, 1925–1938’ in Anna-Mária Bíró

in the founding of the Congress of European Nationalities, with its founder (Ewald Emmende) and one of its key theorists and employees (Werner Hasselblatt) both being Baltic Germans from Estonia.⁸³⁰ The Congress of European Nationalities advocated internationally for non-territorial autonomy for Europe's 'new' minorities, generally seeing the nation-state, or rather a nationalising version of such a political form, as ill-fitted to the basic heterogeneity of Europe.

Jews in Estonia also succeeded in pursuing self-government under the new law. However, this was an arduous process, and reflected differences in the general makeup between this group and the aforementioned German minority.⁸³¹ Particularly compared to the general financial situation of Baltic German self-government advocates, the ability of Jews in Estonia to raise funds across the regions in which they lived was noticeably less effective. Some lived in poverty in places like Narva, while others were wealthier but more socially or geographically isolated, and so on. The relative size of the two groups was also a factor; Baltic Germans were far more numerous and, at least politically, more coherently organised. Jews in Estonia were not only less numerous but maintained internal disagreements over, for example, the role of Yiddish and Hebrew in self-government pursuits. Despite these difficulties, the group was successful in establishing and maintaining self-government institutions, including encouraging high turnouts in the respective elections to the bodies.⁸³² While this also frequently exacerbated disagreements within the Jewish population of Estonia, it was also seen as a worthwhile pursuit that improved the status and prospects of Jews in the region prior to the prewar period. While recent literature has suggested that interwar Estonia did become a nationalising state to some degree in the 1930s, this does not appear to have been the case in the first years of the new republic, with the self-government law serving as the best example of this.⁸³³

More generally, then, terminological references to self-determination – and formulations seen as loosely synonymous to the concept – can be found in many of these new states' consolidatory documents, as well as in some of their realisations in different (primarily legislative) forms, though not in every case, as one might expect. Certainly, self-determination and related ideas remained conceptually across-case, even if we can be critical of its practical application. Regardless, by the early 1920s, references to self-determination, self-government, and, for example, religious rights, were certainly more generally noticeable in these legal-consolidatory documents than in the new Soviet Union, in which use of the specific term self-determination was explicitly phased out over a short timeframe, as discussed above. This seems to reinforce the idea that to many of

(ed.) *Populism, Memory and Minority Rights* (Leiden, 2019), 235–282; Aava, *Minorities and the State*.

⁸³⁰ Eiler, 'The Congress of European Nationalities'; Aava, *Minorities and the State*, 233.

⁸³¹ Aava, *Minorities and the State*, 235–267.

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ Aava, *Minorities and the State*; Veski, 'Towards stronger national unity'; Kalmu, 'Estonia as a multinational nation-state'.

the non-Russian national movements and their leaders, self-determination was less about the achievement of a specific political outcome, but the achievement of that outcome alongside a wider shift in norms in which self-determination was either one of these norms, or a shorthand for the process of deliberation itself. Self-determination was not only a desired goal as a process, but was conceived as a relational, rather than abstract goal within this desire. Statehood would not matter without security; validation of one's national identity would not matter without a method for its political representation. These former objects were not 'nothing', far from it, but were considered most fulfilled when they came alongside these other objects.

Some of these consolidatory documents that were most acknowledging of the new states' new minorities (whether these were national, linguistic, religious, or other) came from the same authors and from the same places as non-Russian nationalists and national movements from the Russian imperial period. They reflected, in other words, a kind of continuity with early twentieth century debates, albeit in a now significantly modified form, given the drastically different circumstances of the postwar(s) period. Elsewhere, and certainly earlier than the events depicted in this subchapter, Wilson lost his battle to get self-determination explicitly enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations in early 1919.⁸³⁴ The Bolsheviks abandoned their formal usage of the term shortly before the founding of the USSR, and the White Movement (under Kolchak) made no explicit mention of the term and was privately scathing of it. Others, like the rulers of the British Empire, were now dealing with their own issues in relation to self-determination claims and claimants, from India to Ireland, that the war and peace had accelerated, engendered, and modified.⁸³⁵

Terminological inclusion of self-determination in many of these new states' constitutions and other documents is in some ways a bit of a misnomer, however, since in most cases its invocation in these texts pertained to issues of domestic governance, rather than the broader notion of self-determination popularised in previous years. Many of these political agents, as discussed, did not initially want, and therefore did not plan for the realisation of self-determination to be that of primarily nationally or ethnically constituted nation-states.

A better analytical distinction for our purposes, therefore, might be to ask whether these new regimes' conceptions of self-determination and the concept's now more firmly related ideas of national liberation, self-government, language

⁸³⁴ Scott L. Malcomson, 'The Disappearance of Self-Determination from the League of Nations Covenant, January–February 1919', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2025), 813–836. This article also serves as an interesting new reappraisal of Wilson and Wilsonianism, particularly but not exclusively with regard to self-determination.

⁸³⁵ For example, a brief search for the terms "self-determination" and "Ireland" during the years of this dissertation's chronology using Hansard, the official record of the British Parliament, returns thousands of individual invocations of the two terms used together in the same speech, question, or response. This is before one even travels further into the more specific local conceptual language – in this case, something like 'Home Rule' and other ideas soon emerge and build on each other.

rights, etc. stopped at their new borders. Internationalism had clearly become prominent in the 1910s and 1920s, but we are mistaken if we see all the various proposed or realised internationalisms during this period as the same simply because they transcended the borders of a single political form. Internationalism could be ‘liberal’ internationalism, embodied by the League of Nations. Internationalism could be revolutionary Marxist internationalism, embodied by the Third International. Internationalism could be anti-Soviet (and anti-Russian) internationalism, embodied by Prometheism. Complicating matters further is the overlap between these internationalisms. As Garboś has shown, many of Prometheism’s theorists, especially émigrés based outside of Poland, did not necessarily want to tie their visions to the city of Warsaw.⁸³⁶ Many of these exiles believed they could be more effective in arguing for their civilisational narrative in Paris, closer to both Allied capitals and the League of Nations in Switzerland. They reasoned that better physical representation in urban centres seen as part of this ‘civilised world’ would assist their arguments, rather than risk being viewed as an offshoot of an imperialist Poland. They sought, in other words, to use one internationalism to permit admission to another. This demonstrates that different conceptions of self-determination, international order, and internationalism could overlap or otherwise live alongside one another rather easily, again emphasising a more relational, rather than binary view of self-determination.

This subchapter analysed the consolidation of some of the new or re-established states of the region, primarily from 1921/1922 to 1924, but with some extension beyond this in both directions where relevant. Firstly, it briefly covered the general *de jure* situation in these states, with an emphasis on the language of their new constitutions and the legal provisions they or other legislation enshrined. Many, indeed, most of these constitutions were notably democratic in character. Some conceptually implied self-determination through cultural and language rights (Latvia), others referred to extensive self-government for minority groups (Estonia), and some enshrined legal protections for these same groups (Poland). However, the *de facto* situation in many of these regions was considerably different, with the situation for non-Polish minorities in Poland frequently criticised by domestic and international observers. The Republic of Estonia was something of an exception, at least in the years of this dissertation’s chronology, implementing a bold new law on self-government for national minorities after years of discussion. Of equal import was the continuation of relational, international conceptions of self-determination and a reconfigured international order. Not all of these continued self-determination’s previous associations with democracy; indeed, some associated with White Russian émigré organisations were plainly imperialist. However, through this subchapter’s discussion of recent studies on Prometheism, it is clear that this form of internationalism, rather than being solely the result of a revanchist Poland, was also the result of many of the period and regions’ political agents reckoning with their new reality while maintaining the ideas of their earlier intellectual development.

⁸³⁶ Garboś, *The Clash of Internationalisms*, 306–307.

This subchapter also analysed the above events with the respective form of political intervention in mind. Primarily, this meant understanding these actions through the genres of constitutions and laws. In most ways, the main purposes of these texts were those one would expect from their conventions, as the documents correspondingly aimed to be constitutive and legislative. While an analysis of their specific language revealed continuity with pre-independence thought, a case can be made that this was also present in the reasons behind political agents' genre choices. This can be seen in the constitutions of the republics of Poland, Estonia, and Latvia, all of which sought to establish their states on the bases of national, cultural, and/or linguistic rights for numerous groups. As almost all of these constitutions were adopted by representative institutions of various kinds, they therefore served a state-consolidatory function at the same time as seeking to regulate the basic laws and principles of a new polity. More strongly, Estonia's Law on Cultural Self-Government for National Minorities was clearly designed to serve the function of realising some of the rights and principles declared in the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*. Doing so legislatively, in a state in which there was now a socially legitimised representative government, signalled not only the action permitted in the law itself but also its renewed authorisation. It was not 'just' a declaration issued by a small number of nationalist leaders, but a law drafted and approved by a representative body in consultation with various interest groups. This, along with the law's enforcement and realisation, suggests a usage of the genre that was in close alignment with both its typical conventions and the purposes Estonian political agents aimed to achieve with it.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this work, let us first return to the dissertation's three main research questions. Naturally, their answers will be difficult to summarise while remaining fair to the empirical and analytical detail covered throughout, but their focus will allow us to distil broader patterns, identify key similarities, and highlight the most significant differences emerging from the above analysis. Beyond this, and taking this into account, this conclusion will then cover the dissertation's main contributions to the field, as well as highlight paths for further research.

The first research question of this dissertation was a primarily descriptive one: “**Who** were the political agents offering (and claiming) self-determination in ‘Russia’ between 1914 and 1924, **what** were their theoretical understandings of and practical policies regarding the concept, and **how** did these change throughout the period?”. To answer it, I will summarise the views and political courses of the main political agents of this dissertation on self-determination: the Russian liberal-reformists, the Bolsheviks, the White Movement, the non-Russian national movements, and the Allies.

The Russian liberal-reformists. In this dissertation, I focused on the ‘liberal-reformists’ of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia – the Kadets, and in particular P. N. Miliukov and V. A. Maklakov. The Kadet Party professed a ‘classical liberalism’, centred around the equal civic rights of the individual, basic protections and rights under a constitution, and a strong but constrained-by-the-rule-of-law central government. From their founding, and again in 1917, the Kadets combined a commitment to what they called ‘free cultural self-determination’ (by which they primarily meant linguistic rights and freedom of religion) with a heavily top-down, statist, legalistic view of reform. This, in essence, meant that the Kadets were highly tolerant of non-Russians (however defined) within the population on a theoretical level, but subordinated this and their understanding of self-determination to their primary goals of establishing the rule of law and empowering the legislature within the regime.

Following the revolutionary events that brought the Provisional Government of Russia to power, in which the Kadets played a significant part and became the dominant force of the new executive for several months, the party reaffirmed these views with a series of decisions and practices throughout 1917. The declaration establishing the Provisional Government, for example, espoused such views, and they were realised in practice through the democratisation of, and civilian control over, the Russian Army. The Provisional Government also (reactively rather than proactively) approved provincial border changes along ‘national’, ethno-linguistic lines for the first time. Crucially, however, these liberal-reformist figures categorically denied any form of non-central agency, largely on the same legalistic grounds as they had previously expressed. Representing an explicitly temporary body, the *Provisional* Government, they did not see themselves as imbued with the authority to permit local self-government,

most notably in the case of Ukraine. Many Kadets resigned over this issue in 1917, demonstrating this hierarchy of ideas.

Following the Bolshevik seizure of power, many Kadets began working with the anti-Bolshevik groups that would become the White Movement, including working in the governments of A. V. Kolchak and A. I. Denikin, as well as serving as the representatives of anti-Bolshevik Russia during the Paris Peace Conference. Some, such as Miliukov, underwent a (further) ideological radicalisation during this time, landing firmly on Russian imperialism. Others, Maklakov most notably, held steadfastly to their ideals of balancing a strong central state authority with rights for Russians and non-Russians alike and the firm establishment of the rule of law. These latter individuals unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the leaders of the White Movement of the *political* benefits of pursuing such policies rather than the philosophical grounds behind them, but nonetheless fell on deaf ears. Given the outcome of the conflict, the Russian Civil War ultimately destroyed the Kadets as a political force.

The Bolsheviks. Despite the popular and wider academic conception of the party in this area, the Bolsheviks maintained significant internal disagreements on self-determination throughout this period. V. I. Lenin was a consistent supporter of the concept of national self-determination, both theoretically and in terms of advocating for its usage as a political slogan in party programmes during these years. Others, such as G. L. Piatakov, E. B. Bosh, and N. I. Bukharin, were more sceptical, asking why *national* self-determination, and not the proletarian revolution, was being prioritised. Under the Leninist view, self-determination was viewed as a right to be exercised by nations, especially *oppressed* nations, up to and including secession and the formation of an independent state. This, Lenin argued, was based on the Marxist view of the development of capitalism and ‘bourgeois national states’. It was a necessary step on the road to communism; a step that would, eventually, lead to reunification.

Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks never reached real consensus on the issue – not during the First World War, not during the months of the Provisional Government, and not following their seizure of power in late 1917. After this latter event, they published the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*, which reaffirmed the Leninist line, declaring ‘free self-determination’ for the ‘peoples of Russia’ up to and including the formation of an independent state. This was exploited during the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, where the Central Powers claimed that their occupation of several territories was based not (solely) on military advances but on the rights that the Bolsheviks had themselves proclaimed. The philosophical differences between the interpretations of self-determination expressed by the Bolsheviks and the Central Powers (which did exist, were substantial, and were discussed during the negotiation process) became muddled with wider inter- and intra-imperial conflicts. The practice of self-determination during conflict did not provide or force clarity on the abstract concept but rather realise theoretical issues in a new way, and/or militarise (that is, make physically violent) previously political questions, answers, and practices.

Throughout the Russian Civil War, however, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was clearly applied inconsistently, as the Bolsheviks militarily resisted numerous non-Bolshevik claims of self-determination and independent statehood. The party's internal disagreements were a particular problem during these years, as it was unclear whether and how the more stable centre of the Bolshevik regime, the RSFSR, was to maintain the borders of the former regime. The Provisional Government, and the Russian Empire before it, did not have stable borders owing to the First World War, a situation now exacerbated by both the Russian Civil War and non-Russian Bolsheviks working in active conflict zones. These latter individuals were also conflicted on whether they wanted greater unity and coordination with Moscow or if they were coming round to the idea of their currently-operationally-independent national soviet republics, another issue that remained unresolved during the Russian Civil War.

The Bolsheviks' People's Commissar for Nationalities, J. V. Stalin, had initially supported the Leninist line on national self-determination, but expressed public doubts about the concept in 1918. These doubts, centred on the delineation of the proletariat of a given nation alongside unequal economic development, strengthened over the course of the Russian Civil War. In the first half of 1921, following the conclusion of the major engagements of the Russian Civil War, Stalin was more forceful in his public criticisms of the concept, and successfully argued for self-determination's terminological removal from Bolshevik discourse, replacing this with a more direct right to secession. This political victory was reaffirmed in later years documentarily and politically, assisted by Lenin's increasingly poor health. The document that established the Soviet Union in 1922 did not therefore refer to self-determination, only the right of its constituent republics to withdraw from the union (which was *de facto* prohibited). Similarly, the first Constitution of the USSR, agreed upon in 1924, also made no explicit reference to self-determination. Stalin's attempt to replace the Bolsheviks' usage of 'the right of nations to self-determination' with 'the right of nations and colonies to secede' was successful. Conceptually, versions of self-determination remained, most notably in *korenizatsiia*, but the specific term, so prominent in Bolshevik discourse throughout the 1900s and 1910s, including beyond their seizure of power, did not return until much later in the Soviet Union's history. This, I hypothesise, was the result of changes in international discourse following the Second World War, placing more of an emphasis on decolonisation and human rights, but this is a matter for another doctoral dissertation.

The White Movement. This group of political agents came into existence as a result of the Bolshevik seizure of power, and was initially politically diverse and geographically expansive. Both left- and right-wing groups and individuals resisted the Bolshevik and Left-SR coup in late 1917, but their scale and military activities greatly increased following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. During 1918, some 'White' (anti-Bolshevik) attempts at *modus vivendi* governments appealed to ideas of imperial reconfiguration up to and including a federal reconstruction of the Russian state. One based in Siberia, the Provisional All-Russian Government,

even did so alongside explicit mentions of the term self-determination, specifically 'national-cultural self-determination'.

However, this particular government (that included significant numbers of non-Bolshevik socialists) was overthrown in a coup and a *de facto* military dictatorship established under the new 'Supreme Ruler of Russia', A. V. Kolchak. This also marked a change in the White Movement's general attitude towards self-determination – no anti-Bolshevik who swore allegiance to the Supreme Ruler, nor Kolchak himself, used the term publicly in any political proclamation or discussion of their precise aims throughout the Russian Civil War. Private records of White Movement figures from the same period do see mentions of the term, in which it was seen negatively as an effective synonym for secession, and associated with the intentional disintegration of the Russian state.

Politically, the White Movement's resistance to a public declaration or even private support for the ideas both of self-determination and of federalism proved a fatal flaw for the anti-Bolshevik struggle as a whole, especially, though by no means exclusively, during the Paris Peace Conference. At the very least, the political *rhetoric* of the peacemakers was that of what is today called liberal internationalism – democracy, popular sovereignty, self-determination, etc.; the wide range of inconsistently-applied and definitionally difficult concepts that the Allied and Associated Powers believed would serve as the basis for a lasting peace. Kolchak's regime made occasionally positive steps towards these ideas, but ultimately remained non-committal.

The White Movement's refusal to engage seriously with ideas of a reconfigured Russian state also alienated many of the non-Russian national movements, with whom the White Movement could otherwise have worked with in some way, given their generally shared anti-Bolshevik tendencies. This was a problem for the Omsk regime of Kolchak, but was even more pronounced in the so-called borderlands of the old Russian Empire, where many White Movement militaries existed alongside strong non-Russian national movements. This led some figures, such as A. I. Denikin, based in South Russia and Ukraine, and N. N. Iudenich, based in Estonia and northwestern Russia, to appeal *conceptually* (but not terminologically) to self-determination in attempts to rally greater numbers of non-Russians to their cause. These appeals were treated with obvious scepticism, despite the now strong anti-Bolshevik sentiment among both Russian and non-Russian nationalists. These hollow appeals also occurred too late for them to hold weight, and soon after their issuance the White Movement was defeated; Kolchak and many others were executed, and those who could fled, becoming the famed white *émigrés* who settled in various cities across Europe, Asia, and North America.

The non-Russian national movements. For the sake of the length of this conclusion, I will focus here on two specific non-Russian national movements and their similarities or otherwise to wider trends; those of Estonia and Ukraine. By the beginning of 1914, Estonians, more generally literate than many other non-Russian national groups (and Russians themselves), had an expanding wealth of nationalist and other literature in the Estonian language, and significant

national and cultural markers and achievements, particularly in the arts, that contributed to the consolidation of the more general rise in Estonian nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contrast, Ukrainians were less generally literate but numerically large – indeed, in 1914 they were the most populous non-Russian group of the Russian Empire. Ukrainian nationalism was also growing, particularly through cultural activities and especially among both educational elites and revolutionary socialists, but faced problems such as the number of Ukrainians who inhabited other empires, the dominance of Russian within Ukrainian urban spaces, and the perceived ‘special relationship’ and connection between the Russian and Ukrainian nations.

Formal political censorship and informal institutional pressure during this time provided Estonian and Ukrainian political nationalism and its leaders with difficult territory to navigate, however, despite some effective political representation in the State Duma of the Russian Empire. The First World War then again changed the aims and realities Estonian, Ukrainian, and other nationalist leaders reckoned with. The threat or experience of occupation loomed large for many non-Russian national movements, given basic geographic and demographic realities – Lithuania, for example, was occupied by the Central Powers from 1915. Here, nationalists had to balance delicate and largely unpredictable considerations: should they throw their lot in with the Central Powers and exploit the position they currently occupied as a result of the conflict, or support their ‘own’ regime wholeheartedly and anticipate rewards and fight for their cause following a hopeful ultimate victory?

The establishment of the Provisional Government of Russia in 1917 temporarily made this conundrum easier for most non-Russian nationalists, as its professed sympathies appeared closer to these groups’ general desires for greater rights and wider bases for legislative representation. However, despite some early Estonian successes in arguing for a reconfiguration of local governmental borders along ethno-linguistic lines, non-Russian nationalists quickly became disillusioned by the slow rate of progress in this area, and the obstinacy they saw in the Provisional Government’s refusal to consider genuine non-central governance in any form. Ukrainian nationalists’ unilateral declaration of autonomy, for example, was quickly rejected by Petrograd. The Provisional Government did not see itself as possessing the authority for this and suggested its impracticality during the First World War. To non-Russian nationalists, however, this simply appeared to be a delaying tactic or, at worst, a *de facto* denial of these requests.

Many nationalist groups then turned to each other to strengthen their political voice. This was most apparent in the summer and autumn of 1917, with the Ukrainian Central Rada of Kyiv more than happy to play the role of champion of the non-Russian national movements. With some notable exceptions (Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Zionist Jews), most non-Russian nationalists expressed support for continued membership of the Russian state. Crucially, though, this state would need to be reconfigured on a firmly federal basis, with real political powers for these new sub-state units and wider democratic reforms implemented. At a meeting organised by Ukrainian nationalists in September 1917, many of

these non-Russian groups agreed on the broad terms for an ethno-linguistic federative reconfiguration of the Russian state. Attendees of this meeting planned further collaboration, but all such efforts were dashed by the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917.

Non-Russian nationalist groups reacted generally negatively towards the new rulers of Petrograd, with some (revolutionary socialist) exceptions. *The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* was not a significant impetus for these groups' actions, and the Estonian Provincial Assembly declared its own sovereignty on the 28th of November 1917, now seeing itself as the only legitimately constituted authority in the region (because of its electoral basis from that year's spring). This was not recognised by the Bolsheviks, who engaged in campaigns to establish Soviet Russian authority over Estonia and other regions over subsequent months. Alongside this, anti-Bolshevik Russians within Russia itself also began militarily and politically resisting Petrograd, soon leading to the Russian Civil War.

It was the first months of 1918, however, that marked the turning point for most non-Russian nationalists, including those of Estonia and Ukraine. With the effective collapse of the state beyond European Russia's urban centres and Soviet Russia's negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, Estonian nationalist leaders saw no alternative but to further develop their statement of autonomy. Aware of the risks on all sides, they issued their declaration of independence, the *Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia*, in February 1918, before being occupied by the Central Powers immediately afterwards. Estonia's struggle for self-determination then became a primarily military campaign, eventually won by the newly created Estonian Army, assisted in small but significant ways by the British Empire's Royal Navy and foreign (mainly Finnish) volunteers.

By contrast, the Ukrainian Central Rada sought to use the Central Powers to legitimise their *Fourth Universal* that had declared the independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Ukraine's geographic location meant that the republic's claimed territory was already under occupation by several groups, and as such Ukrainian nationalists chose to align themselves with the Central Powers as a clear trade-off. This compromised the Ukrainian People's Republic's effective sovereignty (especially in economic terms) but granted it external recognition and military 'support'. Ultimately, though, Ukrainian nationalists lost their lukewarm Central Powers backing in late 1918, and continued to battle the invading militaries of the Bolsheviks, the White Movement, and others for several years before the struggle became unsustainable. Assisted by Ukrainian Bolsheviks and pro-Bolshevik revolutionaries, most of the republic's claimed territory came under Red Army control in time for Soviet Ukraine's reunification with Soviet Russia, first through a federative agreement and then as a founding union-level republic of the USSR in late 1922).

While Estonian nationalist agents were victorious in their military endeavours, the peace negotiations between Soviet Russia and the Republic of Estonia that took place over the winter of 1919–1920 were arduous. The result was the Treaty of Tartu, which entailed many 'firsts': the first *de jure* recognition of Estonia in

international law, the first *de jure* recognition of the RSFSR in international law, and the first ever international treaty to explicitly refer to self-determination. Both sides of the negotiating table wished to include a reference to the concept, framed in the text as a right. For the Jaan Poska-led Estonian delegation, this was an attempt to give the new republic a greater chance of international acceptance, as the Estonian group believed referring to a concept supposedly well supported by the Allied and Associated Powers would deliver them political benefits.

In the immediate postwar period, Estonian nationalist figures and soldiers became full time politicians engaged in the building of the Estonian state and the consolidation of the republic's position regionally and globally. In early 1921, for example, the Republic of Estonia was admitted to the League of Nations. Domestically, Estonia continued to pursue policies that reflected nationalist leaders' understanding of self-determination as a relational process rather than an individual act that was satisfied by the achievement of statehood. The most well-known example of this was the drafting and adoption of the Law on Cultural Self-Government for National Minorities in 1925. This law permitted said minorities (numbering over three thousand individuals) to establish bodies of self-government for cultural and educational purposes and came to be seen internationally as a high watermark for postwar national minority rights legislation.

Elsewhere, forms of internationalism persisted, including in the anti-Soviet form of Prometheism. While Prometheism as a practical proposal was the result of Polish military intelligence, recent scholarship has well demonstrated that the project's theorists were also representative of a kind of intellectual continuity with pre-First World War, Russian Revolution, and Russian Civil War ideas of remaking central and eastern Europe and beyond. However, these processes naturally interrupted some of these ideas and forced changes on others. Regardless, it is interesting to note that the successes, in other words, of certain cases of statehood did not mean the abandonment of the beyond – self-determination and related ideas of reconfiguration continued to be relational and internationally dependent in important ways.

The Allies. Although in many narratives of self-determination during and after the First World War the US President Woodrow Wilson is a key protagonist, he did not feature significantly in most of the empirical chapters of this work. In Russian language sources, there are few direct references to Wilson, Wilsonianism, and Wilsonian self-determination, especially before the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. On the one hand, this is somewhat surprising – Wilson was a globally significant figure in international relations during his presidency, and his association with self-determination, however misunderstood or misappropriated, shaped how many political agents at the time conceived of and reacted to the concept. However, in other ways, this is entirely explicable. Beyond the absence of English speakers in the region (as pointed out in the dissertation, whatever Wilsonianism was, it reached many audiences through translation), the White House was physically and in some ways ideationally distant to most of this dissertation's political agents. Wilson appeared to be most consistently read as the main representative of the Allied and Associated Powers as a group, rather

than as an individual. The US President was, therefore, a factor taken largely at face value from 1918 onwards, particularly late 1918, when news of the Paris Peace Conference's sitting was confirmed for the beginning of the following year.

Insofar as the Allies were considered by this dissertation's political agents, different groups had understandably different views that were largely dependent on the period in which they engaged with them, and to what end. During the First World War, and especially during the time of the Provisional Government, most liberal-reformist Kadets saw the Allies as kindred spirits and loyal partners to be supported in the struggle against what they characterised as the old, autocratic world. The Bolsheviks treated the Allies publicly as belligerent powers who were just as responsible for the First World War as the Central Powers were, but could be more accommodating in private, particularly with regard to anti-Central Powers military activity and to trade policy. In general, however, and especially following the Allies' support for the anti-Bolshevik cause during the Russian Civil War, the Bolsheviks maintained an expected ideological opposition to the Allies, including distrust of any diplomatic endeavours between the two. The White Movement was initially close to the general Kadet view of the Allied and Associated Powers, given the group's desire for military victory against the Central Powers, but then became dependent on some of these Allies during the Russian Civil War. Political disagreements between both groups, combined with this dependency, slowly eroded any good faith the White Movement had of the Allies. Most (but not all) of the non-Russian national movements were initially positive towards the Allies, seeing them as representing the ideals of the new world and as militarily strong friends to court favour with, though this changed over time with specific national movements.

As for the group themselves, the Allies as a whole, unsurprisingly, could find no agreement on either what self-determination meant nor how to apply it, beyond supporting it as a general liberal-conservative principle that implied basic representation of or consent from those governed. In some instances, there was clear tension between the 'right of the victors' the Allies believed they were entitled to and the wider ideals they sought to appeal to in order to appear just, as well as strong. Nonetheless, the Allied and Associated Powers *in general* regarded self-determination, in this meaning of 'consent of the governed', as a principle that could correct the errors of the old system, largely seen as causing the First World War. They applied it, however, in inconsistent ways, that appeared to many others as blatant hypocrisy; if Poland and Czechoslovakia were supported in their statehood desires, why were others not? As argued in this dissertation, this was the result of the unfortunate perspective of nationalist leaders reading these *exceptions* to the Allied and Associated Powers' reading of self-determination as the *rule* of the peacemakers' understanding of self-determination. In fact, it was the other way around, and the Allied and Associated Powers' inability to communicate this deeply damaged how they and their peace-making efforts were perceived during and after the Paris Peace Conference.

What conclusions can we then draw from the above discussion in more general terms? While there was significant discussion of self-determination in Russian

language discourse throughout this period, including in the 1900s and early 1910s (for revolutionary and other socialists most consistently), the concept nonetheless underwent significant popularisation and transition during the First World War, especially in 1917 and the first half of 1918. Specifically, political agents moved from debating the differences between theoretical formulations of ‘free’, ‘cultural’, and ‘national’ self-determination (and, indeed, whether to use any version of the concept at all) as an answer to the problems of empire to declaring versions of it, particularly the ‘self-determination of peoples’, as part of imperial reconfiguration *in the context of peace-making*. This comparatively more complex version of self-determination, that contained within it ideas both of imperial state reconfiguration along different theoretical lines (which might include secession) *and* of international order (which might also include secession), was the first to be officially proclaimed by successive Russian governments.

The Provisional Government of Russia, the first such government to explicitly declare the self-determination of peoples in this way, did so largely as a result of pressure from Menshevik members of the Petrograd Soviet. Therefore, the first group of political agents who offered self-determination for others in the Russian language context while in power did so in this form, as an appeal to external as well as internal reconfiguration. Following their seizure of power, the Bolsheviks were the second group to offer self-determination in this way, and quickly followed this up with peace negotiations with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk, in which the actual practicalities of this conception were thrashed out.

While the dissertation has been sceptical of the idea of ‘moments’ of self-determination, in line with its methodological approach and recognition of the nature of wide scale conflict, we may nonetheless be able to remark further upon those who have used such frames. Perhaps Chernev’s ‘Brest-Litovsk moment’ was in fact not a starting point but rather a consequence of this earlier ‘moment’ of transformation in the meaning and usages of self-determination by this dissertation’s political agents. Once this international order-related usage of self-determination had been institutionalised via the Provisional Government and, later, the Bolsheviks, it would have been difficult to then return it to its more ‘limited’, less relational, less internationalised version (if one wanted to). As such, political agents, including those of empires themselves such as the Central Powers, had little choice but to attempt to argue that their actions were representations of this ‘new world order’ understanding of self-determination. Already by the spring of 1917, self-determination in Russian language discourse was tied to international imperial reconfiguration, rather than (or as well as) solely ‘domestic’ reconfiguration of the Russian imperial space. In this context, the Bolsheviks’ later replacement of self-determination with secession might be seen as a successful re-limitation of self-determination back into a more domestic-oriented idea, while a maintenance of internationalism was continued through, of course, the Third International.

The second research question of this dissertation was more analytical, and concerned both the substance of political interventions and the style of them: “**How** did these political agents formulate and employ self-determination towards

their goals?”. This dissertation has looked at political interventions through their genre as well as attempting to decrypt their meaning as speech acts. This, I argue, has led to greater understanding of their purposes, since political agents tailored the genres of their interventions based at least partly on what they wanted to achieve through them. Generally, political agents performed this tailoring via the conventions of the respective genre and any modifications or subversions of them. In one sense, this is a simple answer to the dissertation’s second research question. Political agents invoked and utilised self-determination through identifiable and traceable literary-political genres. These genres included political polemics, legislative or other debates, declarations of autonomy and/or of independence, constitutions, and international treaties. While a clear answer to the question, this was also essentially a methodological assumption/frame of mine. We can also discuss the more precise language used by political agents in these genres, as well the implications of self-determination as used in these same textual forms.

Within Russian language discourse, and especially from those who offered self-determination for others rather than claimed it for ‘themselves’, there was a general rise and fall of self-determination in political interventions during this time, ending with the relatively surprising Bolshevik removal of the term from their political language (and now consolidating state) in 1921. More specifically, between 1914 and 1917 (and earlier, during the previous revolutionary period of 1905–1906), those who offered self-determination usually articulated the concept with the adjectives ‘free’, meaning loosely democratic or free from central state interference, and/or ‘cultural’, in the sense of language and religious practice rights. These conceptions of self-determination were supportive of a or even multiple different forms of imperial reconfiguration, but were ultimately subsumed under the current framework of empire – certainly in the sense of territorial integrity. It was revolutionary socialists, however, who were the most consistent users of the adjective ‘national’ alongside self-determination (at least considering those who *offered* it), with some, Lenin most notably, tying this to secession explicitly and, in this comparative sense, very early on, though not without resistance from many within the same group.

Differences between these two main adjectival forms of self-determination (cultural and national) persisted beyond the establishment of the Provisional Government of Russia among representatives of these two articulations of the concept, including from those who claimed self-determination for ‘themselves’ – the nation of their own national identity. However, it was not until the Bolshevik seizure of power (1917), Brest-Litovsk negotiations (1917–1918), and state collapse (1917–1918) that national self-determination became so firmly associated with secession more generally. Before this time, political agents had invoked both national self-determination and cultural self-determination to legitimise, for example, federal visions of a reconfigured Russian Empire. Use of the adjective ‘free’ alongside self-determination was also common across ideologically disparate political agents by 1917.

Following this and into the Russian Civil War, the main group offering national self-determination in the region, the Bolsheviks, militarily resisted different expressions of this concept in most cases if they did not align with the party's interpretation of the idea. This was especially the case with the Bolsheviks' support for various kinds of soviet republics – that is, the specific form of government based on the concept of the revolutionary council – versus other national administrative units. Many of these latter units had broader support among many non-Russian nationalists and, crucially, were often expressed as relational expressions of self-determination. They spoke frequently of respect for rights for *all* nationalities (regardless also of class differences within a given nation) and international order, where the Bolsheviks tended to dismiss the institutions of these groups as not 'free' self-determination because they viewed them as bourgeois national states. The main Russian anti-Bolshevik grouping of the White Movement, who were also in a theoretical position to offer self-determination for others, did not invoke the concept at all after the movement had become more united under the Supreme Ruler of Russia, A. V. Kolchak.

Non-Russian nationalists generally continued to view their emergent states as the custodian of national self-determination once achieved. Russian nationalists, as expressed through the White Movement, were overwhelmingly hostile to the concept and usage of the exact term, due precisely to this very recent interpretation of national self-determination as secession and foreign dismemberment. The states successfully established by non-Russian nationalists continued to use both the language of self-determination and ideas they had synonymised with it throughout their years of consolidation, even if it was clearly applied inconsistently in some cases. By contrast, the Bolsheviks now spoke only of a right to secession, and, especially following *korenizatsiia*, declared the 'National Question' solved by the USSR. This chimes well with recent literature, in which evidence has been provided to suggest that there was greater continuity and sensitivity to self-determination beyond the 'postwar moment' among claimants of self-determination, rather than from those who offered it.⁸³⁷ Certainly, this seems to be the case here.

The dissertation has demonstrated that the study of political interventions through their genres is essential for understanding the usages of self-determination in the reconfiguration of the Russian Empire. The work has contended that, for its main political agents, genre served as a vehicle for mediating different versions of self-determination at different times. These mediations could be between theory and practice – ideals versus realities, universalist and particularist models of the world, individualist and collectivist ideas, and so on. In the dissertation, I provide evidence to suggest that political agents were often able to successfully mediate their own issues (and even contradictions) with self-determination through effective genre usage as well as language usage within these forms. Some members of the Provisional Government, for example, argued in favour of the

⁸³⁷ Piirimäe, Seixas, and Smith, 'Introduction. States, Nations, and the Quest for Self-Determination'.

Ukrainian Central Rada's *Second Universal* precisely because it was constituted as a *declaration* and not a law. In other words, political agents (in this case, I. G. Tseretili and M. I. Tereshchenko) consciously used genre choices to frame their political arguments. In this specific example, Tseretili and Tereshchenko's argument rested on the claim that the genre of the political intervention of the *Second Universal* as a declaration was *more* important than its actual content. Such emphasis on the importance of the form of political interventions from political agents themselves is noteworthy.

As a general group, however, it was the Bolsheviks who were the most consistently innovative in their usages of different genres of political intervention between 1914 and 1924. The Bolsheviks were, by far, the most successful group of this dissertation's political agents at mediating their well-established desires with the external exigencies they faced through genre during this time. Several senior Bolsheviks, most notably A. A. Ioffe, L. D. Trotsky, Stalin, and, of course, Lenin, were remarkably intelligent tailors of genre conventions. This was made first apparent with the group's 'Soviet decrees' following their seizure of power in late 1917. While these documents clearly had a relationship with the revolutionary declarations of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century, they were also texts designed to appeal to mass audiences (within and beyond Russia) and affront diplomatic norms. As the Bolsheviks did not cleanly distinguish between domestic and international politics, their usages of genre followed suit, being targeted towards different types of audiences across spaces. In the concluding months of the Russian Civil War, Lenin and Ioffe pioneered the usage of international law as a form of propaganda, insisting on certain formulations of self-determination in the Bolsheviks' peace treaties with the Baltic and Caucasian states, and later with Poland.

Most importantly, the Bolsheviks' successes and innovations in this genre usage later allowed Stalin to explicitly cast versions of documents they had produced during the revolutionary and Russian Civil War periods as part of their broader developmental narrative by the early 1920s. This assisted Stalin in his arguments in favour of removing self-determination from Bolshevik discourse, since he reasoned the regime had now moved beyond an age of declarations into the 'practical presentation' of the 'National Question'. Yet it was the senior Bolsheviks of Sovnarkom and VTsIK who had elected to issue such declarations in the first place! The Bolsheviks continued to be effective manipulators of genre during and after their seizure of power because they framed their political interventions as part of a developmental narrative for their audiences. In this sense, they were certainly assisted by the general logic of Marxism, which also stressed various 'phases' of political and economic structures in a broad sense. Nonetheless, we should not discount the agency and innovations of specific Bolsheviks, who reinvented several genre forms, most notably the revolutionary declaration and the international peace treaty, throughout this period. That they then used their own genre choices in subsequent political interventions to continue this work demonstrates their political efficacy. For all their internal disagreement

about the concept of self-determination itself, the Bolsheviks' thoughtful usages of genre ultimately proved highly compatible with their political goals.

The final research question of this dissertation was part analytical, part exploratory: “**Why** did these political agents employ self-determination in the ways in which they did in their attempts to achieve their objectives, in the context both of imperial collapse and Allied attempts to create a new international order from crisis?”. If the above reading of my first two research questions is valid, then it follows that self-determination could just as easily be employed to support integrative as well as disintegrative projects. Indeed, this tended to be the case up until late 1917 (though support for secession did not necessarily mean an equal abandonment of self-determination's international potential). As a concept, self-determination served as the theoretical basis for validation of the self, with political action the last consequential element of this. It seems that self-determination provided its invokers with something half-abstract, half-tangible that represented a form of desired *order*. This order might be the result of upheaval and radical change, and it might not, but self-determination appeared instrumental in this process, connected to political agents' respective theories of a just world. This was a little paradoxical: self-determination could be employed to justify large scale political changes, but it appears to have done so with the ultimate end of order – usually, a significantly reconfigured order.

Proceeding to a deeper level beyond this general *why* becomes shakier ground, at least upon first glance. Political agents' underlying motives have been difficult to establish (and especially to verify) throughout this dissertation, given the aforementioned issues concerning sincerity.⁸³⁸ However, the more general status of self-determination in these political agents' normative views and visions of the world can and has been traced throughout this work. As such, we can establish, for example, why different Bolsheviks supported or resisted the employment of the term in relation to their commitment to internationalism and/or national liberation. Similarly, we can at least infer why the White Movement under Kolchak did not make such commitments to the concept of self-determination during the Russian Civil War – its prominent association with secession following the Bolshevik seizure of power and Brest-Litovsk negotiations. Here, the *why* can be understood with reference to the normative views of political agents. Self-determination's place within political agents' hierarchies of ideas, and its relationship to other ideas such as democracy and statehood, provides these answers. To this end, while the dissertation has found that political agents frequently and intentionally used specific genres as part of their political argumentation, making the *how* self-determination was used more worthy of

⁸³⁸ As well as the potential for ‘insincere sincerity’; in other words, situations in which a political agent may have sincerely believed a course of action to be the most correct in a given circumstance alongside the specifics of the situation providing political benefits to arguing for such a position as well. In such instances, the line between sincerely held views and performative politics is rather porous, and clearly difficult to delineate.

significant comment here, this finding in turn facilitates greater understanding of why the concept was or was not used in specific contexts.

This dissertation chiefly contributes to the literature on the history of political thought of self-determination in the twentieth century, particularly that of the regional and temporal focuses of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Its two main contributions to this body of work are empirical and methodological in nature. On the empirical front, the dissertation has marked the first in-depth study of the specific term ‘self-determination’ in Russophone political discourse during this time, with a primary focus on those who offered, rather than claimed, self-determination. While many works on the history of nations, nationalism, the ‘National Question’, empires, and statehood during this period exist, there has not been any systematic study of the concept of self-determination in the region for the same period, despite some highly effective and developmental work on specific events within this dissertation’s timeframe. One clear result of this study has been the nuancing of Bolshevik nationalities policy – this dissertation has empirically identified for the first time the intentional removal of self-determination from Bolshevik discourse in 1921, from an initial position of some prominence. In this way, it develops the classic works of, among others, Francine Hirsch and Terry Martin, given the minimal focus on specific terms and conceptual reflection in both *Empire of Nations* and *The Affirmative Action Empire*.⁸³⁹ In short, this contribution pushes such scholarship more towards understanding *how* political agents such as the Bolsheviks performed actions conceptually and generically, as well as what actions were being taken. At the same time, this study has clear potential to be developed and refined subsequently, especially if scholars with knowledge of other languages and sources wish to take up this task where this dissertation has left it.

This dissertation has also made a methodological contribution to the field. This work developed and adapted the well-known methodological approach to the history of political thought advanced by Quentin Skinner by combining its basic assumptions and emphasis on contextualised speech acts with a focus on the genre of these political interventions, including textual materials. The attention paid to genre was a direct development of David Armitage’s work on the form and meaning of declarations of independence, and has, I believe, proven a fruitful lens through which to view and analyse other political interventions. As discussed above, for the political agents of the dissertation, genre served as a vehicle for mediating different versions of self-determination at different times. Effective political agents could adapt their political language within texts, as well as modify the form of texts themselves, to accelerate or critique certain conceptions of self-determination (or, indeed, to disguise their contradictions). Genres were clearly meeting places for conceptual movement, but they were not neutral technologies. Instead, like the language they contained, they were tools political agents picked up, sharpened, and utilised for specific purposes. The methodological contribution of the dissertation is clearly the most transferable to

⁸³⁹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

other areas of focus – what might a study of other concepts through the genre(s) of their invocation reveal that develops our knowledge of the history of political thought?

I see three major paths forward for further research beyond this dissertation. Firstly, as referred to in this work's introduction, scholars could develop research designs to understand how people who were *not* consistent political agents thought about self-determination, including any interactions they had with the documents that made up the bulk of the sources for this dissertation. Private and personal archives (including sources such as diaries and letters) as well as regional (as opposed to national/state), religious, and organisational archives might have a significant role to play here. This would further develop this and other work in the sense of providing a more comparative dimension between political agents and those they represented or purported to, as well as likely nuancing how scholars think about political agency more broadly. Such work would assist scholars in understanding not only who the audiences political agents attempted to appeal to were, and how they did so, but ultimately whether these attempts were successful, and in what ways.

Secondly, and in some relation to this, still more needs to be done to reflect the experiences of this tumultuous period from the perspective of the numerous non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire. There are currently many excellent histories of the First World War and of statehood in these regions, but more still needs to be done to bring these into wider studies that correctly identify the latter as only one contingent outcome in the context of conflict and imperial reconfiguration. In other words, I do not believe that the answer to this still prevalent Russo-centrist paradigm is an uncritical and spatially restrictive history of non-Russian 'others' and their quests for statehood. Instead, such studies would have to be more complex, and accommodate these ideas alongside Russian (including Russian imperial and other 'great power politics') ones, that genuinely reflects the intellectual entanglements of the chosen periodisation of one's research. To do otherwise when looking at the non-Russians of the late Russian Empire and beyond risks essentialising broad groups, something any 'decolonising' of academia narrative should be aiming to avoid.

A third pathway lies in an even broader chronology, tying one's research to innovative methodological approaches in the developing fields of comparative intellectual history and digital humanities.⁸⁴⁰ A successful attempt in this direction would allow for a fuller integration of the Russian revolutionary part of

⁸⁴⁰ Here, there have been some notable trailblazers, with Pasi Ihalainen an obvious name to single out; see Ihalainen, *The Springs Of Democracy, 1917–1919* (Helsinki, 2017); Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism*; Pasi Ihalainen and Jani Marjanen (eds.), *Writing Conceptual Histories* (London, 2025). Software that is able to read vast amounts of text quickly can already greatly improve the efficiency of certain research processes, such as scanning for key terms through time/specific documents, such as newspapers or journals. However, it is important to stress that this is only one part of any meaningful research method and contribution, given the need to also go beyond purely statistical data collection. That, alone, is limited in its potential for developing knowledge.

the self-determination story into the wider history of political thought of the concept across space and time. It would be important to take into account the significant methodological implications of this, particularly when comparing and quantifying translations of terms and the differences in linguistic meaning over time, but preexisting scholarship has so far demonstrated an ability to perform this task adequately. Indeed, any differences may themselves contribute to our knowledge over the concept of self-determination through time. Many of this dissertation's political agents readily made such international comparisons themselves – perhaps we too should look beyond our different borders.

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KOKKUVÕTE EESTI KEELES

Enesemääramine teoorias ja praktikas: „Vene” impeeriumi ümberkujundamine 1914–1924

Käesolev doktoritöö käsitleb enesemääramise mõiste poliitilist kasutust. Töö vaatab, kuidas erinevad poliitilised tegutsejad (eelkõige intellektuaalid, organisatsioonid ja parteid) 20. sajandi alguse Vene impeeriumis ja mõndel sellest eraldunud aladel (ennekõike Eestis ja Ukrainas) enesemääramist mõistsid ja kuidas nad seda mõistet erinevate konkreetsete eesmärkide saavutamiseks rakendasid. Töö keskendub perioodile Esimese maailmasõja algusest 1914. aastal kuni Nõukogude Liidu etableerumiseni 1924. aastal.

Senine teaduskirjandus on veenvalt näidanud, et enesemääramise mõiste (ja konkreetne termin) omandasid vaatlusalusel ajavahemikul üleilmse kõlapinna. Siiski ei ole seni suudetud seletada, kuidas enesemääramise mõiste tolle aja poliitilises diskursuses täpsemalt toimis. Lühidalt öeldes: mis siis sellest, et seda mõistet laialdaselt kasutati? Ainuüksi teadmine, et teatud poliitikategelased enesemääramisele viitasid, ei ütle tingimata midagi ei enesemääramise ega selle mõiste poliitilise kasutuse kohta vastavas kontekstis. Seetõttu on vaja täpsemat uurimist selle kohta, kuidas enesemääramist määratleti ning milliseid eesmärke eri toimijad selle mõiste kaudu saavutada püüdsid. Ehkki enesemääramise mõiste strateegilist kasutust antud perioodil on juba varem esile tõstetud, ei ole senises teaduskirjanduses piisavalt põhjalikult selgitatud, kuidas ja miks konkureerivad poliitilised jõud Venemaal aastatel 1914–1924 kasutasid (või jätsid kasutamata) enesemääramise mõiste oma püüdlustes luua uusi või ümberkujundatud riike, sealhulgas impeeriume, samuti kuidas selle kaudu püüti rajada uut rahvusvahelist korda.

Doktoritöö kasutab metoodikat, mis seostub eeskätt poliitilise mõtte ajaloo uurimisega ning mis tugineb kõneaktide teooriale ja selle edasiarendusele, teiste seas Quentin Skinneri poolt. Selle lähenemise keskseks ideeks on, et kõnelemise ja kirjutamise kaudu mitte ainult ei *öelda*, vaid ka *teha* midagi – ning seda mingil kindlal eesmärgil. Metoodika täiendavaks uuendamiseks ammutab doktoritöö ainet ka David Armitage'i žanride ja poliitiliste deklaratsioonide alasest teadustööst. Doktoritöö väidab, et poliitilisi väiteid ja kõnetegusid saab täpsemini mõista mitte ainult nende sisu, vaid ka nende žanri (st tüüpiliste otsustavate ja tavade, aga ka nende mõlema õõnestamise) kaudu.

Doktoritöö olulisemate uuenduslike tulemuste hulka kuulub esiteks ulatuslik empiiriline tõendusmaterjali selle kohta, et bolševikud hakkasid J. V. Stalini eestvedamisel pärast Vene kodusõda ja NSV Liidu moodustamise käigus teadlikult eemaldama kõrgetasemelisest bolševike diskursusest terminoloogilisi viiteid enesemääramisele. See erines teravalt sellest, kuidas bolševikud seda mõistet varasemalt olid häälekalt ja järjekindlalt poliitilises diskursuses kaitsnud, nt iseäranis rahvaste ”õigusena”. Seda muutust ei ole varasemas kirjanduses selgelt tuvastatud ega seletatud ning selle järelmid lisavad olulisi nüansse tavapärastele

käsitustele Nõukogude Liidu varasest rahvuspoliitikast. Teiseks annab töö olulise metodoloogilise panuse, näidates, mida annab meile tähelepanu poliitiliste sekkumiste žanrile. Kuigi paljud poliitilised toimijad kasutasid, kohandasid ja manipuleerisid erinevaid žanre oma eesmärkide saavutamiseks, olid bolševikud selles kõige edukamad. Doktoritöös kirjeldatakse näiteks, kuidas Stalin õigustas 1921. aastal enesemääramise termini eemaldamist parteidiskursusest, kasutades teadlikult žanrilisi tavaid oma argumentatsiooni tugevdamiseks (sellest lähemalt allpool). Teiste sõnadega: doktoritöös käsitletud poliitilised toimijad rõhutasid ise konkreetsete seisukohtade võtmisel erinevate žanrite kasutust. Doktoritöö näitab, et laias vaates võib poliitiliste sekkumiste üheaegne žanri- ja sisupõhine uurimine olla edukas ning ülekantav ka teistesse uurimisvaldkondadesse.

Töö sissejuhatuses käsitletakse üksikasjalikumalt doktoritöö teemat, uurimisdisaini, meetodikat, senise teaduskirjanduse arengut jne, millele järgnevad neli empiirilist peatükki ning kokkuvõte. Esimene peatükk „Enesemääramine pamflettides ja poleemikas (1914–1917)” annab ülevaate ülejäänud töö jaoks vajalikust empiirilisest kontekstist. Peatükk algab ülevaatega 19. sajandi lõpu ja 20. sajandi alguse Vene impeeriumist, rõhutades selle suurust, mitmekesisust ja suhestumist laias tähenduses modernsuse eri tahkudega, mida valitsejad püüdsid kas tõrjuda, enda kasuks pöörata või soodustada. Peatüki teises alajaotuses vaadeldakse, kuidas enesemääramise mõistet käsitlesid toonase perioodi peamised poliitilised toimijad liberaalreformistid, keda esindas Venemaa Konstitutsiooniliste Demokraatide Partei (kadetid). Töö kirjeldab silmapaistvate kadettide arusaamu nn kultuurilisest enesemääramisest ning näitab, kuidas partei kasutas seda mõistet (konkreetselt selle omadussõnaga) oma 1917. aasta parteiprogrammis. Kolmas alajaotus pöördub 1910. aastate otseselt revolutsiooniliste poliitiliste jõudude juurde, kelleks olid kõige järjekindlamalt bolševikud, ning käsitleb nende seisukohti seoses enesemääramise ja nn rahvusküsimusega. Doktoritöös väidetakse, et kuigi rahvusvaheline sotsialistlik liikumine kasutas neil aastatel agitatsiooniks mõeldud poleemilistes artiklites ja pamflettides sageli nii enesemääramise kui ka rahvusliku enesemääramise mõistet, polnud nende sisu osas üksmeelt. Kuigi sotsialistliku liikumise laialdane enesemääramisdiskursus ajendas V. I. Leninit oma kirjutistes selle mõiste tähendust täpsemalt määratlema (mida alajaotuses ka näidatakse), oli bolševike juhi sõnastatud selge ja kindel seos rahvusliku enesemääramise ja lahkulöömise mõistete vahel omas ajas erandlik. Ehkki see osutus mõjukaks, ei teinud see lõppu enesemääramise mõiste kriitikale ei partei seest ega väljastpoolt nii aastatel 1914–1917 kui ka pärast seda.

Teine peatükk „Enesemääramine deklaratsioonides ja aruteludes (1917–1918)” analüüsib Venemaa Ajutise Valitsuse suhtumist enesemääramisse alates selle moodustamisest kuni bolševike võimuaaramise ja uue režiimi esimeste kuudeni. Peatükk väidab, et Ajutine Valitsus tegutses enesemääramise ja sellega seotud küsimustes nagu halduslikud ümberkorraldused enamasti reageerivalt, mitte proaktiivselt. Seda seisukohta näitlikustavad mitu juhtumit, millest märkimisväärsim oli režiimi negatiivne reaktsioon Ukraina Keskraada ühepoolsele autonoomiadeklaratsioonile, I universaalile. Samas püüdis Ajutine

Valitsus kasutada enesemääramist ka selleks, et siduda oma sisepoliitilised reformid kujuteldava tulevase võiduga Esimeses maailmasõjas. Mõned Ajutise Valitsuse liikmed üritasid samuti legitimeerida Ukraina Keskraadaga toimunud läbirääkimistel saavutatud tulemusi (II universaal), rõhutades, et tegemist oli deklaratsiooniga, mitte seadusega. Teisisõnu võimaldas teksti žanr valitsusel suhtuda selle täpsesse sõnastusse märksa paindlikumalt kui juhul, kui tegu oleks olnud seadusandliku aktiga. Ometi osutus ka see lähenemine vastuvõetamatuks osale Ajutise Valitsuse kadettidest ministritest, kes astusid protestiks ametist tagasi.

Peatüki teine alajaotus käsitleb Ukraina Keskraada rolli Venemaa Rahvaste Kongressi korraldamisel ning kongressi saadikute enamuse toetatud föderaalse ümberkorralduse tüüpi. Kuigi kongressi töö oli kavandatud jätkuma, katkestas selle bolševike võimuhaaramine 1917. aasta novembris. Pärast riigipööret avaldasid bolševikud peatselt „Venemaa Rahvaste Õiguste Deklaratsiooni“, milles rõhutati „Venemaa“ rahvaste võrdsust ja suveräänsust ning nende õigust enesemääramisele kuni lahkulöömiseni välja. Alajaotuses analüüsitakse seda teksti koos teiste bolševike ja nende poliitiliste vastaste deklaratsioonidega. Samuti tõstetakse esile 1918. aasta alguses toimunud Nõukogude Kongressi, kus Stalin hakkas esmakordselt avalikult senist enesemääramiskäsitlust kitsendama.

Peatüki kolmas alajaotus käsitleb Ameerika Ühendriikide presidendi Woodrow Wilsoni enesemääramiskäsitlust ning tema laiemat poliitilist maailmavaadet. Selle kaudu lükatakse ümber mitu akadeemilist müüti Wilsoni ja enesemääramise kohta, kooskõlas tema ametiaja ja neljateistkümnne teesi hiljutise ümberhindamisega teaduskirjanduses. Eeskätt vaieldakse vastu arusaamale, justkui oleks rahvuslik enesemääramine olnud Wilsoni „Neljateistkümnne teesi“ keskne teema, ehkki seda mõistet kõnes otsesõnu isegi ei mainitud. Selle asemel paigutatakse neljateistkümnne teesi kõne laiemasse konteksti kui üks mitmest „püsiva rahu põhimõtetest“ käsitlevast poliitilisest sekkumisest, mida esitasid Esimese maailmasõja kõik sõdivad osapooled. Teisisõnu kuulus neljateistkümnne teesi kõne ajastutüüpilisse poliitilise sekkumise žanrisse. „Neljateistkümnne teesi“ kontekstipõhise tõlgendusega seoses käsitletakse alajaotuses ka „Manifesti kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele“ (Eesti iseseisvusmanifesti), pöörates erilist tähelepanu asjaolule, et dokument rõhutab lisaks Eesti rahva enesemääramisõigusele ka Eesti territooriumi mitmerahvuselist elanikkonda.

Kolmas peatükk „Enesemääramine tormilistes oludes ja rahulepingutes (1918–1921)“ analüüsib bolševike lähenemist Brest-Litovski rahuläbirääkimistele, parteiseste erimeelsuste jätkumist enesemääramise üle Vene kodusõja ajal ning selle konflikti regionaalseid ja rahvusvahelisi mõõtmegi. Peatüki esimene alajaotus näitab, kuidas Brest-Litovski läbirääkimised ja neile järgnenud Vene kodusõja puhkemine teravdasid bolševike seas juba varasemaid pingeid enesemääramise küsimuses. Eelkõige jätkasid G. L. Pjatakovi ja N. I. Buhharini kriitikat partei enesemääramispoliitika suhtes, rünnates selle püsimist bolševike poliitilises programmis ka konflikti tingimustes. Kuigi need seisukohad ei osutunud poliitiliselt edukaks, näitavad need, et endise Ajutise Valitsuse kontrollitud ala

valitsemisele pretendeerivate jõudude seas polnud endiselt üksmeelt ei enesemääramise teooria ega praktika osas.

Peatüki teine alajaotus käsitleb valgete liikumise, Vene kodusõja peamise ja valdavalt vene päritolu bolševikevastase jõu kujunemist. Peatükis keskendutakse iseäranis liikumise enesemääramise teemaliste seisukohtade järkjärgulisele muutumisele, kuivõrd need omavahel seostusid. Doktoritöö näitab, et pärast de facto sõjalise diktatuuri kehtestamist A. V. Koltšaki juhtimisel muutusid tulevase Vene riigi ülesehitust ja põhiseadust puudutavad seisukohad valgete liikumise avaldustes ebamäärasemaks. Doktoritöö keskse mõiste seisukohast on näiteks tähenduslik, et Koltšak ei viidanud pärast Venemaa Ülemvalitseja positsioonile asumist enam üldse enesemääramisele ning seda isegi vaatamata lähenevatele rahuläbirääkimistele läänes, milles eeldati, et see mõiste mängib märkimisväärt rolli. See erines teravalt valitsusest, mille kukutamiseks Koltšak võimule tuli ja mis oli kuulutanud enesemääramise õiguseks. Doktoritöö väidab, et põhjus peitus tõenäoliselt selles, et Koltšak ja tema režiimi esindajad samastasid enesemääramist lahkulöömisega, eriti Brest-Litovski rahulepingule järgnenud kuude jooksul.

Peatüki kolmas alajaotus analüüsib enesemääramise rolli Vene kodusõja kõrgfaasis. Eeskätt käsitletakse konflikti seost enesemääramise ja Pariisi rahukonverentsiga ning kirjeldatakse Vene kodusõja lõpptulemust, mis väljendus eeskätt kahe- ja mitmepoolsetes rahulepingutes bolševike ja teiste riikide vahel. Alajaotus algab Venemaa Poliitilise Konverentsi (Russian Political Conference, RPC) käsitlemisega, kirjeldades nii selle organisatsiooni sisemisi pingeid ja keerukusi kui ka suhteid Pariisis viibinud liitlaste ja neid toetavate jõudude delegatsioonidega ning Omski valgete liikumisega, mida RPC kaudselt esindas. Kuigi organisatsiooni sees leidis neid, kes pooldasid kindlamat pühendumist demokraatia ja esindusinstituutidega seotud ideedele, oli suurem osa RPC liikmetest kas avalikult või vaikimisi Omskiga samasugusel föderalismi- ja enesemääramise ideede vastasel seisukohal. Valgete liikumise keeldumine selliste ideedega sisuliselt tegelemast tekitas umbusku nii liitlas- ja neid toetavate jõudude kui ka mittevene rahvuslike liikumiste seas. Peagi järgnes neile diplomaatilistele heitlustele koalitsiooni sõjaline lüüasaamine: kõige märgatavamalt Siberis 1920. aasta alguses, mis viis Koltšaki hukkamiseni, ning sama aasta jooksul ka Lõuna-Venemaal ja Ukrainas. Alajaotus käsitleb ka rahulepinguid, mille bolševikud olid samal ajal sunnitud sõlmima ning mis tunnustasid aastatel 1920–1921 selliste riikide nagu Eesti, Läti, Leedu, Gruusia ja Poola olemasolu ja legitiimsust. Ehkki suur osa sellest ametlikust tunnustusest osutus hiljem näiliseks või ajutiseks – näiteks toimus bolševike poolt toetatud riigipöördekatse Eestis juba 1924. aastal –, on lepingute sõnastus mõtteliste suundumuste vaatepunktist kõnekas, kuna need kõik viitasid ühel või teisel viisil enesemääramisele kui lahkulöömise ideelisele alusele. Alajaotus käsitleb eraldi juhtumina Tartu rahulepingut, mis ei olnud nendest lepingutest mitte ainult varaseim, vaid oli oma sõnastuses bolševike jaoks aluseks hilisematele rahulepingutele teiste riikidega. Siinpuhul mängis Eesti läbirääkimisdelegatsioon olulist rolli selles, et nõuda enesemääramise lisamist rahulepingusse õigusena, pidades silmas vajadust

apelleerida teistele rahvusvahelistele osapooltele oma püüdlustes saavutada laiem riiklik tunnustus.

Neljas peatükk „Enesemääramine paktides ja põhiseadustes (1921–1924)” kirjeldab ja analüüsib enesemääramise kasutamist (või mõnikord ka mittekasutamist) vahetult pärast Vene kodusõja lõppu, eeskätt Nõukogude Liidu moodustamise perioodil. Lisaks esitab peatükk lühikese võrdluse nende uute või taastatud riikidega, mis olid kuulunud endise Vene impeeriumi koosseisu. Peatüki esimene alajaotus analüüsib, millal, kuidas ja miks eemaldusid bolševikud Vene kodusõja järel senisest jõulisest toest enesemääramise mõttele ning asendasid selle partei kõrgetasemelises diskursuses ja dokumentatsioonis lahkloomisõiguse (tekstilise) institutsionaliseerimisega. Selle muutuse peamiseks eestvedajaks oli Stalin, kellel õnnestus enesemääramine ümber raamistada ajale jalgu jäänud ja tema hinnangul väljaspool Nõukogude Liitu moonutatult kasutatud mõisteks. Just seetõttu, et bolševikud olid rahvaste enesemääramisõiguse vajadust varasemalt sedavõrd tugevalt rõhutanud, oli parasjagu käimas rahvusliku rõhumise väljajuurimine, mitte kinnistumine, nagu väidetavasti toimus mujal. Huvitaval kombel kasutas Stalin oma argumentide toetamiseks ära žanrilisi tavasid, esitades vaadet, et bolševikud on „rahvusküsimuse” lahendamisel näiliselt loogiliselt liikunud poliitilistest deklaratsioonidest halduslike ümberkorralduste ja sealt edasi praktilise tegevuseni. See diskursiivne nihe ilmnes esmakordselt dokumendis, millega loodi Nõukogude Liit, 1922. aasta detsembri „Nõukogude Sotsialistlike Vabariikide Liidu Moodustamise Deklaratsioonis ja Lepingus”. Terminoloogiliselt erines see varasematest bolševike proklamatsioonidest selle poolest, et uue režiimi rahvastele ei omistatud enam otsesõnu enesemääramisõigust, kuna bolševistliku teooria kohaselt kehastasid liiduvabariigid ise selle mõiste parimat väljendust. Sellest vaatenurgast lähtudes oli loogiline, et ainsaks „allesjäänud” õiguseks, mida vabariikidele pakkuda sai, oli õigus liidust lahkuda, ning just sellele rajati edasine institutsionaalne areng alates 1921. aasta kevadest.

Peatüki teine alajaotus analüüsib Nõukogude Liidu loomist lähemalt, pöörates erilist tähelepanu juhtivate bolševike seisukohtadele kesk- või kohaliku tasandi otsustusõiguse vahekorra kohta, mis oleks vajalik rahvusküsimuse edukaks lahendamiseks. Samavõrd vajalik oli see ka püüdlustes saavutada võrdne majanduslik ja kultuuriline arengutase kõigi uue režiimi territooriumite ja rahvaste vahel. Kuigi Lenini ja Stalini vahelised erimeelsused olid märkimisväärsed ja pealtnäha marksistliku loomuga (bolševike seas tundus suurimaks lahkkeliks olevat muutuste tempo küsimus), ei olnud tegemist eksistentsiaalse vastasseisuga, nagu vahel on mõista antud. Pigem peegeldasid need vaidlused erinevaid, kuid mitte ilmtingimata vastuolulisi arusaamu parimatest meetoditest, mille abil bolševikud oma poliitilisi eesmärke saavutada võiksid. Sellega seoses käsitletakse doktoritöös ka bolševike peamist rahvusküsimusega seotud programmi *korenizatsiia*’t, asetades selle uute Nõukogude institutsioonide loomise konteksti. Teisisõnu, kuna Stalin oli eelnevatel aastatel bolševikke edukalt veennud eemaldama enesemääramise mõistet „rahvusküsimuse” käsitusest (ja seega vastusest sellele), nihkus arutelu Nõukogude Liidu täpse ülesehituse üle

nendele institutsionaalsetele küsimustele ning seostele Nõukogude demokraatia ja majandusliku arengu vahel. Neid ideid peeti nüüd enesemääramisest otsustavaks.

Peatüki kolmas alajaotus analüüsib regiooni mõnede uute või taastatud riikide konsolideerumist peamiselt ajavahemikus 1921/1922–1924, vajaduse korral ka veidi laiemas ajalisel perspektiivis. Esiteks antakse lühülevaade nende riikide õiguslikust olukorrast, pöörates tähelepanu uute põhiseaduste keelekasutusele ning neis või muudes seadustes sätestatud õigusnormidele. Enamik neist põhiseadustest olid selgelt demokraatliku iseloomuga. Mõned neist viitasid enesemääramise ideele kaudselt kultuuri- ja keeleõiguste kaudu (Läti), teised otse ulatuslikule vähemusrahvuste õigusele omavalitsusele (Eesti) ja mõned sätestasid lihtsalt viimaste õigusliku kaitse (Poola). Samas erines tegelik olukord paljudes neist riikidest märkimisväärselt. Näiteks Poolas sattus mittepoola vähemusrahvuste olukord sageli nii sise- kui ka välisvaatlejate kriitika alla. Eesti Vabariik kujutas endast selles võrdluses teatud erandit, vähemalt käesoleva töö käsitletaval perioodil, kuna siin rakendati pärast aastatepikkuseid arutelusid uut ulatuslikku vähemusrahvuste kulturomavalitsuse seadust. Samavõrd oluline oli, et jätkusid senised relatsioonilised rahvusvahelised enesemääramise ning ümberkujundatud rahvusvahelise korra käsitused. Mitte kõik neist käsitustest ei jäänud seotuks demokraatiaga; näiteks mõned valgete liikumisega seotud vene emigrantide organisatsioonid olid selgelt imperialistlikult meelestatud. Samas nagu ilmneb doktoritöö analüüsist hiljutise prometheismi-alase teaduskirjanduse valguses, on selge, et sellisel kujul oli internatsionalism mitte ainuüksi Poola revanšismi tulemus, vaid paljude tolle ajajärgu ja regiooni poliitiliste toimijate katse tulla toime uue tegelikkusega, säilitades mitmel moel ideid oma varasemast mõttelisest arengust.

Lõpetuseks pakub doktoritöö kokkuvõtte eelkirjeldatust lühema ülevaate, pöördudes tagasi töö uurimisküsimuste juurde ja vastates neile üksikasjalikult. Samuti korratakse selles üle töö peamine empiiriline ja metodoloogiline panus ning pakutakse välja kolm võimalust selle edasiarendamiseks ja täiustamiseks. Esiteks oleks hea edaspidi täpsemalt uurida, kuidas mõtestasid enesemääramist inimesed, kes polnud järjepidevad poliitilised toimijad, sealhulgas nende kokkupuudet valdava osa doktoritöö allikmaterjalist moodustanud dokumentidega. Allikates nagu päevikud ja isiklik kirjavahetus võib peituda nii kvalitatiivset kui ka kvantitatiivset laadi leide. Teiseks tuleb enam teha selleks, et võrdlevalt käsitleda selle äärmiselt olulise perioodi kogemusi Vene impeeriumi arvukate mittevene rahvaste vaatest. Sedasorti uurimistööd saaksid jätkata teiste keelte oskustega teadlased ja selles valdkonnas on viimase kümnendi jooksul juba mõningaid edusamme tehtud. Kolmas võimalus oleks märkimisväärselt laiendada uurimistööd ajavahemikku ning siduda teadustöö uuenduslike metodoloogiliste lähenemistega võrdleva mõtteloo ja digihumanitaaria arenevates valdkondades. Teadvustades sellega kaasnevaid epistemoloogilisi ja metodoloogilisi riske, võimaldaks sellesuunaline uurimistöö lõimida enesemääramise loo Vene revolutsioonilise perioodi senisest täielikumalt selle mõiste laiemasse poliitilisse mõttelukku.

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Academic Publications

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Oliver Rowe, ‘*From Self-determination to Secession? The Bolsheviks and National Self-determination, 1914–1924*’, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2024), 16–38. DOI: 10.1080/09546545.2024.2356964
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Teaching Experience

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Selected Conference and Workshop Presentations

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- ‘Self-determination and the ‘People Problem’ in Contemporary European History’, co-presentation with Sevanna Poghosyan, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, July 2025
- ‘Self-determination in Theory and Practice: The Reconfiguration of the ‘Russian’ Empire, 1914–1924’, Lithuanian Institute of History, March 2025
- “‘There is no Russia’: Self-determination and State Recognition during the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917–1922’, European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) General Conference Presentation, Charles University, September 2023
- ‘For a United Russia? The White Movement and National Self-determination, 1918–1920’, University of Tartu, August 2023

Project Work

- Estonian Research Council funded project (PRG3027), ‘The Nation-State as a Transnational Idea: Entangled Perspectives of Great and Small Nations in the Baltic Region’, 2026. See [here](#).
- Estonian Research Council funded project (PRG942), ‘Self-Determination of Peoples in Historical Perspective’, 2022–2024. See [here](#).

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Õpetamiskogemus

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Valitud konverentsi- ja töötubade ettekanded

'After Godot Arrives: The Idea of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly after its Dissolution, 1918–1921', Varssavi Ülikool, juuni 2026

- ‘Self-determination and the ‘People Problem’ in Contemporary European History’, kaasettekanne Sevanna Poghosyaniga Münchener Ludwig Maximilian ülikoolist, juuli 2025
- ‘Self-determination in Theory and Practice: The Reconfiguration of the ‘Russian’ Empire, 1914–1924’, Leedu Ajaloo Instituut, märts 2025
- “‘There is no Russia’: Self-determination and State Recognition during the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917–1922”, Euroopa poliitikauuringute konsortsiumi (ECPR) üldkonverentsi ettekanne, Charles University, september 2023
- ‘For a United Russia? The White Movement and National Self-determination, 1918–1920’, Tartu Ülikool, august 2023

Projektitöö

- Eesti Teadusagentuuri rahastatud projekt (PRG3027), ‘Rahvusriik kui rahvus-ülene idee: suur- ja väikerahvaste põimunud perspektiivid Balti regioonis’, 2026. Vaata siit.
- Eesti Teadusagentuuri rahastatud projekt (PRG942), ‘Rahvaste enesemääramine ajaloolises perspektiivis’, 2022–2024. Vaata siit.

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