Loci of political power: The 1917 Russian Revolution from regional perspectives.

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Introduction.

When I began my graduate studies in 1996, one eminent professor in the field suggested that I abandon my ambitions to study specific regions of Russia in 1917, and do something more tangible, like a political biography. His final words encapsulated something of the old attitudes to the revolution: 'When the bell tolls in Petersburg, the bell tolls all over Russia.' This idea suggested that the course of the revolution was absolutely defined in the capitals (Petrograd, and to a lesser extent Moscow), and that the revolutionary path percolated evenly from the centre to the peripheries. I ignored his advice, and my subsequent research has fitted into a growing body of regional studies that have sought to complicate and reconceptualise our understandings of the revolutionary period by moving their focus away from Russia's capital. Regional histories of Russia's

revolutionary period have intersected with broader historiographical trends. Scholars exploring themes in social history from the 1960s sought to emphasise the experiences of workers, soldiers, and peasants, but Soviet restrictions on travel and access to archives limited the source base for research.[1] The opening of access to archives after the collapse of the Soviet Union enabled a new wave of scholarship to emerge which followed the tradition of Russian regional studies, but is grounded in deep local archival research. Historians have used specific case studies in the provinces to examine how state practices devised in the center were implemented, and to show how provincial politics and experience influenced decisions in the center and the pace of the revolution.[2] This work on revolution in Russia's provinces fits into a broader scholarship that focuses on the provinces in a broader temporal frame.[3] Regional studies incorporate a range

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

[2] Orlando Figes and Donald Raleigh were pioneers in the Western scholarship. Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War; The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford 1989); Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (New York 1986), *A Russian Civil War Diary* (Durham 1988), *Experiencing Russia's Civil War* (Princeton 2002). Among recent regional studies, see Mark Baker, *Peasants, Power, and Place: Revolution in the Villages of Kharkiv Province, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the People: A provincial History* (Cambridge 2007); Sarah Badcock, A. Retish, and L. G. Novikova (eds.) *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective*, (Bloomsburg 2015); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA 2002); Michael Hickey, ""Local Government and State Authority in the Provinces: Smolensk, February-June 1917," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 863-881; and "Paper, Memory, and a Good Story: How Smolensk Got Its 'October.'" *Revolutionary Russia* 13, no. 1 (Dec. 2000): 1-19; I. V. Narskii, *Zhizn' v katastrofe: Budni naseleniia Urala v 1917-1922 gg.* (Moscow 2006); L. N. Novikova *Provintsial'naia kontrrevoliutsiia: Beloe dvizhenie i Grazhdanskaia voina na Russkom Severe, 1917-1920* (Moscow 2011). Tanja Penter, *Odessa 1917: Revolution an der Peripherie* (Vienna 2000); Matthew Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland: The Tsarist Elite in Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford 2010); Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922* (Cambridge 2008);

[3] See, for example Mollie Cavender, *Nests of the Gentry: Family, Estate and Local Loyalties in Provincial Russia* (Neward, DE 2007); Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian province: Economy,*

of approaches, including national, rural and lower class emphases. The insights that they have offered on the shape and course of Russia's revolution have percolated into more general understandings of the revolutionary period. They have done this both by providing new Empirical evidence about the ways in which the revolution was experienced and interpreted, and by offering some challenges to the notion that the outcomes of the revolution were decided primarily at the centre. This is reflected in the ways that regional perspectives on the revolution have been explicitly incorporated into the excellent scholarly syntheses of the revolutionary period published for the 2017 centenary.[4]

What have regional studies of the revolution taught us so far? First, they emphasise the Russian Empire's diversity of local experience, and the importance of local context and local actors. Second, they challenge the notion that political power was held exclusively in the capital, and that the course of the revolution was defined by a handful of elite actors. Local studies show us that the options open to Russia's political elites in 1917 were in part defined by the behaviour of local people in the peripheries. Finally, regional studies have rehabilitated Russia's rural population, for so long utterly marginalised in the scholarship as passive bystanders or irrational actors in the revolution. Local studies go some way towards unravelling the diversity and complexity of rural

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society, and civilization in nineteenth-century Nizhnii Novgorod (Pittsburgh, Pa, 2011); Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca 2001): Larry Holmes, *Grand Theater: Regional Governance in Stalin's Russia, 1931-1941* (Lanham 2009): Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village: The Riazan' Countryside under Soviet Rule, 1921-1930* (Toronto 2011); Donald J. Raleigh ed., *Provincial landscapes: Local dimensions of Soviet power, 1917-1953,* (Pittsburgh 2001); Rex Wade and Scott J. Seregny, eds. on Saratov, *Politics and Society in Provincial Russia, Saratov, 1590-1917* (Columbus 1989); Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca 2001)

[4] See for example, Laura Engelstein, *Russia in flames : war, revolution, civil war, 1914-1921* (Oxford 2018); Steve Smith, *Russia in revolution : an empire in crisis, 1890 to 1928* (Oxford 2017); Steinberg, Mark D. *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921* (Oxford 2017); Swain, Geoffrey. *A short history of the Russian Revolution* (London 2017)

dwellers, and demonstrate that rural people engaged with the state and were rational political actors.[5] Rational, in this context, is understood as political behaviours that related to rural people's own perceptions of their best interests and their own world view, rather than driven by inchoate furies. This notion of rationality is presented as a counter to the notion fostered by Russia's educated elites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of rural people as irrationally violent, anarchic and destructive.[6]

Scholars no longer study 1917 in a temporal wilderness. The chronology of the revolutions has been subject to intense scrutiny, and many scholars have adopted the rationale, presented by Peter Holquist, that Russia's revolutions can be better understood by integrating the First World War and the Russian civil wars intro Russia's revolutionary experience.[7] This broader framework allows Russia to be placed in a comparative context with other European powers, by exploring the ways in which Russian state power was shaped and constructed in response to the requirements of total war. At the same time, however, a number of scholars recognise the importance of focusing on 1917 distinctly as well as placing it in a broader chronology.[8]

This article will retain a focus on the period February to October 1917, and will tell the story of the locations of power in 1917, based on the case studies

[5] See in particular Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922* (Cambridge, 2008).
[6] For a discussion of elite perceptions of rural people as 'backward' and irrational, see Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ; Y. Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Co-Operatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).
[7] Peter Holquist, *Making war, forging revolution: Russia's continuum of crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).
[8] See for example this recent special issue: Semion Lyandres, (ed) (2016), *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography. Russia's Failed Democratic Revolution, February-October 1917: A centennial reappraisal*(Leiden, 2016).

of Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan provinces. It will focus on three key areas – structures of power in 1917, people on the margins of power, and aspects of the food crisis.

Structures of power in the regions.

When talking about the location of political power in 1917, historians have often focused on power within Petrograd, and in particular on the relative power and authority of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. The model of so-called 'dual power' articulated for Petrograd has dominated scholarly understandings of revolutionary power structures. 'Dual power' is generally seen to have undermined the legitimacy and authority of the Provisional Government, and contributed to the Provisional Government's inability to govern effectively. [9] This axis has been used as shorthand to describe the loci of political power in a more abstract sense- the division between fading 'bourgeois' authority, as manifested in the Provisional Government and its inability to govern effectively, and 'democratic' authority, as manifested in the Petrograd Soviet specifically, but in soviets more broadly as well. Evidence from Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan' supports the findings of other studies from Russia's regions, which indicate that the dual power model was not evident away from the capital.[10] Rather than

[9] For treatments of dual power in Petrograd, see Christopher Read, *From tsar to soviets: The Russian people and their revolution* (New York 1996), 47; Rex A. Wade, *The Russian revolution 1917* (Cambridge 2000), 56ff.

[10] Donald Raleigh's study of Saratov found that despite the formation of a local organ of the Provisional Government and a soviet in Saratov, the soviets not only cooperated with but actually participated in the new executive committees that were formed to govern the region. (Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, 92ff.) Michael Hickey's work on Smolensk's local government explored the relationship between local government and the centre, and presented a picture of administration forming as hybrid institutions, under pressure from local popular organisations. (Michael C. Hickey, "Local government and state authority in the provinces: Smolensk, February-June 1917" *Slavic Review* 55, 4 [1996]).

conceptualizing power relationships as dualistic between 'bourgeois' and 'democratic' bodies, it is more illuminating to frame the loci of power in multiple and shifting spaces. Indeed, the regions were often characterized by an absence of central or State influence over politics and events.

The Provisional Government devolved power and authority to newly elected local government bodies in a process often referred to as democratization. Multiple and overlapping seats of power developed in the regions. Democratization described the attempts of local and central government bodies to bring ordinary people, who had previously had little or no popular representation, into local government. This process drew the population into conscious engagement with the state and provided mechanisms for interactions between grassroots and the political elite. Individuals selected their representatives to speak for them at regional and national levels, through multiple different organizations including committees, soviets and individual delegations. Political power, if we are to define it as the institutions that have the authority to govern, and the ability to govern effectively, was difficult to define, to shape and to exercise, at the local level. Multiple institutions with some perceived authority to govern emerged, and these institutions made attempts to exercise that political power through a range of conduits, some built and approved by the State, and some developing organically at local level. All the different competing sources of political power struggled to exercise power in practice, that is, to enforce their decrees and decisions.

Democratisation enabled local people to be represented politically, but it drastically limited the central State's ability to dictate or dominate the shape and

terms of political discourse. The new networks of democratization varied from province to province. In Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan, the committee structures put in place by the Provisional Government sat alongside alternative structures of power, in particular soviets, which developed according to local personnel and demands. Power did not move fluidly from center to periphery through the new administrative networks. The center was unable to dictate policy, and the desires and directions of the grassroots did not often make substantive impact on the direction of policy making. Ordinary people sought to be involved in the polity and to engage in their communities' political decision making but in so doing, they drew power away from the center.

We can look at the example of land use to see how power was drawn centrifugally away from the centre and towards the regions. The vast majority of Russia's population in 1917 made their living in agriculture as small farmers. For many rural dwellers, the 1917 revolution offered the opportunity to resolve perceived injustices in local land use and ownership. All over Russia, the norms of private ownership were transgressed, as the rural population took local power into their own hands. They grazed their cattle in privately owned fields, took their carts and axes to the forests to harvest timber for building and fuel, seized arable land and in some places forcibly removed gentry landowners. Every locality across the great expanse of the Empire experienced its rural revolution differently. A broad range of locally defined features determined land relations, including the types of agriculture that were practiced there and personal antagonisms between local landowners and rural communities.

Both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet appealed repeatedly to peasants to wait calmly for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly before the land question could be resolved. These appeals were ignored. The norms of private ownership were repeatedly transgressed in the countryside during 1917, as peasants seized land and wood. The rural population was not a random and arbitrary violent force in 1917. Where local communities infringed on private owners, they often sought to couch their actions in the new revolutionary language and appealed to revolutionary justice. The rural revolution is not easily categorized- forms of action depended on local factors, including the historic relationship between landowner and peasants and the forms of agriculture in the region. In some regions, like Viatka, there was neither significant land hunger nor high levels of non-peasant land ownership, so there the land question was less prominent in national discourse. Much of the rural revolution concerned disputes among peasants. Wealthier individuals who had separated from communal landholding were reintegrated, sometimes forcibly, into communal structures. Neighbouring villages disputed the fair use of common and noble land. Violence was often threatened but less often deployed. Rather than resort to violence, rural people sought to validate their actions with the support of the new revolutionary norms, and avoided actions that brought them into open conflict with local, regional and national authorities. Provisional Government mandated land committees and provincial commissars, regional and local committees of Public Safety, and regional and local Soviets variously represented these authorities.[11]

[11] For a detailed discussion of the ways in which rural people responded to the land question in 1917, see Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia : A Provincial History* (Cambridge: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 181-210.

Political elites represented the actions of the rural population as 'disorder' and 'misunderstandings'. The political elites were unable to grasp that the rural population were rational and empowered actors. The political elite did not recognise that the nexus of power had slipped away from its traditional home, the capitals and established political forums, and towards those who were able to enact policy decisions. Control of land was determined by local communities in the course of 1917, and not by political elites. In the first months of revolution, the political elite faithfully repeated the mantra that representative local government was fundamental to the establishment of rural order, and that "peasant disorders" could be resolved through transforming the system of local government on democratic bases. The statement issued by the Kazan soviet of workers and soldiers' deputies in April, for example, declared that 'it was necessary to liquidate peasant lawlessness by means of changing the system of local self-government and *zemstva* on a democratic basis.'[12] This belief was supplemented by the idea that peasant actions against state decrees were founded on misunderstanding and ignorance, and could therefore be resolved through education. In March and April in Nizhnyi Novgorod province, the political elite frequently noted peasant incomprehension at the meanings and limitations of their newfound revolutionary freedom.[13]

Peasants flexed their newfound political muscle in the course of 1917 and increasingly directed their affairs in wilful transgression of central policy.[14] Peasant "disorder" was often based on well-informed interpretations of the new

[12] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 5, 14 April 1917, p.3

[13] 'Protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorod province', 10-11 April 1917; Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Nizhegorodskoi oblasti (GANO), f. 1882, Nizhegorod provincial commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 13, pp.155-9.

[14] There were a series of national peasant congresses in the summer of 1917 that offered peasants opportunities to engage with the polity and to articulate their demands.

order. Land relations illustrate the ways in which the rural population sought both to engage with the state, and to form a nexus of power in their own localities. The patterns of peasant action both in Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan provinces share characteristics shown in other regional and national studies of peasant direct action, which included seizure of land and wood, attacks on peasant separators, and enthusiasm to 'validate' peasant actions and infractions.[15] These general trends, when explored more closely, reflected local conditions, and varied from *uezd* to *uezd* within each province.

The Kazan land law issued in May 1917 illustrates the disjoint between national, regional and local priorities, and the impotence of the centre in implementing decisions. Kazan had an exceptionally radical and proactive soviet of peasants' deputies. The Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies was influential in shaping and legitimising land relations in the region. The May 1917 land law issued by the Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies was used as a basis for land seizure across the province.[16] The soviet issued a decree on 13 May that pre-empted the Provisional Government's prognostications and transferred all land, privately held and otherwise, into the hands of the local *volost* committees prior to the decision on land by the Constituent Assembly.[17] The Kazan provincial land committee supported this decree. In many respects the May land decree validated and confirmed statements already made by local land committees who

[15] See for example Mark Baker, *Peasants, Power, and Place: Revolution in the Villages of Kharkiv Province, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research institute, 2016), ; Michael C. Hickey, "Urban Zemliachestva and Rural Revolution; Petrograd and the Smolensk Countryside in 1917," *Soviet and Post Soviet Review*, no. 3 (1996).; Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008),

[16] For example in Marasinsk *volost*, Spassk *uezd*, as reported in *Izvestiia Kazanskago gubernskago soveta krestianskikh deputatov* 20, 7 October 1917, pp.2-3.

[17] 'Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies decree on land, 13 May 1917', Natsionalnyi Arkhiv Respublika Tatarstana (NART), f. 1246, Chancery of the Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 51, pp.275-277.

sought to regulate land seizure through regional control.[18] The move enraged local landowners and drove a rift between the soviet and the infuriated Provisional Government authorities, but also had the effect of ameliorating the violence and irregularity of land seizure. All local reports from Kazan province point to diminished rural unrest as a result of orderly transfer of land to peasant hands.[19] This contradicts statistics for peasant unrest in 1917, which indicate that Kazan saw among the highest levels of agrarian unrest in the country, topped only by Saratov and Astrakhan on the lower Volga.[20] In Kazan, the high levels of reported unrest in fact indicates however that the figures reflected the number of complaints from disgruntled landowners, rather than levels of 'disorder' in terms of land use and public unrest. The evidence presented here from local administrators indicates that while transgression of private landownership was high in Kazan province, land use was relatively orderly and efficient, and levels of violence and disorder were low.

The extent to which land seizures constituted 'anarchy' is very much a matter of perspective. For the victims of the seizures, the loss of their private property constituted anarchy. The Kazan regional administration, on the other hand, argued that the law enabled controlled and systematic utilisation of land stocks, and regulated land seizures, reducing the risk of violence. An undated report from the provincial commissar to the minister for land declared that the soviet

[18] 'telegram from Trekh ozera village, declaring that all land was to be transferred to land committees prior to the decision of the Constituent Assembly', 15 April 1917, NART f. 1246, Chancery for the provincial commissar of the Provisional Government , op. 1, d. 41, p.52.
[19] See for example 'The journal of the meeting of the Kazan provincial land committee', 23-24 September 1917, NART f. 1246, Chancery for the provincial commissar of the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 183, pp.34-46. See also 'Meeting of Kazan provincial land committee, 22 June 1917', NART, f. 174, Kazan provincial land administration, op. 1, d. 9, l. 9. For an example of exceptionally orderly and equitable decisions about land use see also 'Report of Chistopol *uezd* committee of Public Safety, 15 June 1917', NART, f. 1351, Chistopol uezd committee of Public Safety, op. 1, d. 10, p.38.
[20] Maliavskii, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, pp.374-380.

decree had spread across the province very rapidly, and there had been a swell of land seizures, woodcutting and violence against landlords as a result.[21] A meeting of the Kazan provincial land committee on 15 June noted that there was no anarchy in the province, and that this vindicated their decision to go along with the peasant soviet's land decree.[22] The main land committee wrote to protest about events in Kazan on 16 October, but the Kazan land committee stood by its actions, again pointing to the much improved land relations in the region.[23] The Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies sent a telegram to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Land and the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies in an attempt to justify their actions to central authority. The telegram reiterated that the land law had produced calm in land relations, and had averted rural anarchy.[24] In some *volost*s there had been 'misunderstandings' between commune peasants and separators, but these had been resolved.[25] These positive reports do not of course reflect the experiences of landowners, who were no doubt forced to relinquish their property. Overall, the picture was one of controlled and economical land use, and total transgression of the norms of private land ownership.[26] This example of land use in Kazan demonstrates that

[21] 'Telegram from Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies to the minister of land, undated', NART f. 983, Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies, op. 1, d. 23, p.209.
[22] 'Journal of the meeting of the Kazan provincial land committee', 23-24 September 1917, NART f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 183, pp.34-46. See also 'Meeting of Kazan provincial land committee', 22 June 1917, NART f. 174, Kazan provincial land administration, op. 1, d. 9, p. 9. For an example of exceptionally orderly and equitable decisions about land use, see 'Report of Chistopol *uezd* committee of public safety', 15 June 1917, NART f. 1351, Chistopol uezd committee of public safety, op. 1, d. 10, p. 38.
[23] 'Journal of the meeting of Kazan provincial land committee', 16 October 1917, NART f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 183, pp. 47-50.
[24] 'Telegram from Kolegaev, president of Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies, to the All Russian soviet of peasants' deputies, Chernov, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs', undated, NART f. 983, Kazan soviet of peasants' deputies, op. 1, d. 21, pp. 121-122.
[25] 'Journal of the meeting of general meeting of members of Cheboksar *uezd* land committee', 1 August 1917, NART f. 174, Kazan provincial land administration op. 1, d. 55, pp. 50-52.
[26] 'Journal of the meeting of the Kazan province land committee', 22-23 July 1917, NART f. 174, Kazan provincial land administration op. 1, d. 9, pp. 23-28.

practical political power lay in the ability to enact policy decisions, and the Provisional Government lacked this power. It also shows that where local administration was responsive to popular needs, it retained support and authority.

The margins of political power.

The democratic process diffused power from the centre to the peripheries, and from the urban political elites to local working people. This process was however incomplete and imperfect. The nominal power structures that emerged, under the aegis of both Provisional Government and soviets, were unable to represent and speak for all their constituents effectively. Though Russia's political leaders proudly advertised that Russia was the 'freest country in the world', ethnically Russian urban males dominated regional power structures. The soviet structures that formed alongside Provisional Government bodies evolved predominantly from workers and soldiers, and only affiliated with the always later forming peasant soviets as an afterthought. The vast majority of the provincial population was rural based and was decidedly under-represented in regional power structures. Factories and garrisons, already organised into tightly functioning units, were quick to form their own committees, which could then feed representatives into the regional power structures. The network of committees that could provide delegates for regional power structures was much thinner in rural than in urban areas. The formation of revolutionary organisations in the countryside went on patchily, and rural dwellers were sometimes left isolated from the revolution's new political structures.

Ethnic minority populations in the provinces often lived predominantly in rural areas, which left them disproportionately under-represented in formal power structures. Kazan province incorporated large non-Russian populations, but ethnic Russians dominated local administration. Russians made up 38% of Kazan province's population, but 77% of the province's urban population. The three largest non-Russian groups in Kazan province were the Tatars, the Chuvash and the Cheremis (Marii). Tatars made up 31% of Kazan province's population, but only 19% of its urban population. Chuvash and Cheremis peoples were almost entirely absent from the province's urban spaces. Chuvash made up 23% of Kazan province's population, but less than 1% of its urban population. Cheremis made up 5.7% of the province's population, but just 0.3% of the urban population.[27]

If we drill down to a specific uezd, we can illustrate this disparity between urban and rural populations further. The population of Kozmodem'iansk uezd in the north of Kazan province was dominated by Cheremis and Chuvash peoples, who together made up 84% of the population, but only 5% of Kozmodem'iansk town's population. Russians accounted for 16% of the county's population, but 94% of Kozmodem'iansk town's population.[28] This meant that Russians dominated the administration of the uezd. This pattern of under-representation of non-Russians in urban space is replicated in other provinces around the Empire. In Odessa for example, Ukrainian peasants were the majority in the

[27] *Pervaia Obshchaia Perepis' Naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897g. Tom XIV. Kazanskaia Guberniia*, ed. N.A. Troinitskii (St. Petersburg: Izdnanie Tsentral'nago Statiticheskago Komiteta Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del', 1904), pp. 1-2.
[28] Ibid. pp. 1-2.

province, but a minority in the urban space.[29] Non-Russian communities' lack of connection to urban culture was to have important implications for them in 1917, when formal power structures crystallised around towns, leaving non-Russian groups effectively isolated from the political elite centred in the towns. The diversity of languages and letters seen among Kazan's non-Russian community incidentally meant that communication of central and regional policies to non-Russian communities was impaired by shortages of native language print material. As the revolutionary tides swirled around Kazan, non-Russian communities were left to some extent isolated because of the difficulties the political elite faced in communicating with them.

The Provisional Government incorporated women into universal franchise, and passed laws on gender equality. Women, despite these concrete gains in political and personal rights and freedoms, did not except in exceptional circumstances participate in formal power structures. Women were mostly absent from all levels of administration, from the village assembly up to delegates for the Constituent Assembly. Of the ninety-two Socialist Revolutionary party candidates to the Constituent Assembly from the provinces of Nizhnyi Novgorod, Tambov, Penza, Kazan and Simbirsk, only three were women. Uezd and volost executive committees in Nizhegorod province were almost exclusively male.[30]

[29] Tanya Penter, "The Unemployed Movement in Odessa in 1917: Social and National Revolutions between Petrograd and Kiev," in *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective*, ed. Sarah Badcock, A. Retish, and L. G. Novikova, *Russia's Great War and Revolution* (Bloomsburg: Slavica, 2015)

[30] For an illustration of this phenomenon, see GANO, f. 815, Semenov uezd commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 16, 'Protocols of the volost zemstvo meetings and electoral commissions, list of elected representatives. 30 June- 12 December 1917 (155ll.)' This delo lists names for those elected onto volost committees, and they are almost exclusively male. The electoral lists are included in this delo, and they are also absolutely dominated by men. To take a single example, on p. 100, 'General list of volost representatives of Viniak- Smolkov volost, Semenov uezd, Nizhegorod guberniia. Elected 27th April and 3rd September 1917' Of the 35 representatives elected, only one, Elizaveta Kashitonova Iablonskaia, aged 30, was a woman.

While some women played leading roles in their communities and even in political life, they did not usually figure among those who stood as candidates or were elected to local administrative posts. Women were very rarely elected as deputies to the soviet, and correspondingly very rarely participated in the soviet's higher committees. Local working men and soldiers dominated electoral politics, particularly at grassroots level. The course of democratisation appealed explicitly to the electorate in 1917, and the electorate responded by returning almost entirely male representation on the democratised bodies of 1917. Despite the fact that women made up around forty-seven percent of the total factory workforce, men dominated the factory committees and soviets in 1917. Shop floor culture was inherently masculine, and women were regarded as 'intruders into the male club.'[31] Even the labour activists who paid lip service to gender equality made little effort to include women in labour organisations.[32]

Peasant committees at every level from village to province in Kazan and Nizhnyi Novgorod province*s* were almost exclusively male. Where there was any female participation in *volost* and *uezd* level committees, it was always a teacher's representative. So for example, of the eleven members of Palets *volost* executive committee, the only woman was Lydia Snezhevskaia, a teacher's representative[33] Of the thirty-seven members of the Simbileisk *volost* provisional administration, Nizhnyi Novgorod *uezd*, there was only one woman. At thirty-five, she was also by far the youngest member of the committee, which was dominated by men in

[31] Diane P. Koenker, 'Men against women on the shop floor in early Soviet Russia: Gender and class in the socialist workplace', *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 1438-1464., p.1439, p.1497
[32] R. L. Glickman, *Russian factory women* (Berkeley, 1984), p.203, pp.276-77
[33] 'List of individuals elected to Palets volost Executive Committee', undated, GANO, f. 830, Nizhegorod uezd commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 5, p.39.

their late forties and fifties.[34] Bogoiavlensk *volost* provisional executive committee had one woman of its twenty-one members, and she was the representative from the regional teachers.[35] The Iurasovo *volost* executive committee, Semenov *uezd*, had fifty-two members, all of whom were men working in agriculture except two female teachers, Natal'ia Andreeva Ul'ianicheva and Natalia Alekseevna Nishchenuova. A third woman, Olga Krylova, was in the unusual position of being vice-president of the committee, and a male teacher, Ivan Kulakov, served as secretary.[36] Since guidelines issued from the centre specified the need to include a teacher's representative, these women's presence in the committees does not indicate that their standing in the village was established. Indeed, Ben Eklof's work indicates that women teachers enjoyed very low status in the villages, based on their youth, unmarried status and lack of established household.[37]

How are we to explain the absence of women from positions of power? While the baggage of patriarchal society offers some explanation for the lack of ordinary peasant women among local leaders, it does not explain the low participation even of women who had been very active in the pre-revolutionary political underground. One possible explanation is that women activists moved to support and non-elected roles in 1917. Barbara Clements Evans' study of

[34] 'List of individuals forming the provisional administration of Simbileisk volost, Nizhegorod uezd', undated, GANO, f. 830, Nizhegorod uezd commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 5, p.97.
[35] 'List of members of the Bogoiavlensk volost provisional Executive Committee', undated, GANO, f. 815, Semenov uezd commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 18, p.8.
[36] 'List of members of the Iurasov volost Executive Committee', undated, GANO, f. 815, Semenov uezd commissar for the Provisional Government,op. 1, d. 17, p.35.
[37] Eklof, *Russian peasant schools*, p.188ff.

Bolshevik women showed that they took on the technical and propaganda roles they had fulfilled prior to the revolution, as well as engaging in public speaking.[38]

Before the February revolution, the revolutionary underground provided a relatively welcoming and egalitarian space for women socialist activists. This sheltered environment allowed women to take up the prominent positions within party organisations that their varied talents deserved. The February revolution significantly altered the climate and membership of radical political parties. The realities of Russian political life in 1917 showed that the electorate largely speaking voted for local working men, and not women, to be their political representatives in 1917. Men dominated the documented political life of factories, even though women made up an absolute majority of the workforce in 1917..[39]

Maria Kashmenskaia is an example of the sort of woman that one might have expected to participate in the administrative structures of 1917, but did not. Kashmenskaia, twenty-three years old in 1917, worked as a clerk, but was an initiator and founder member of the influential Sormovo Socialist Revolutiaonry Party (PSR) group, and the only woman on its Central Committee.[40] She initiated the creation of a workers' circle in Nizhnii Novgorod town, and was entrusted by the group to arrange the purchase of typography. Kashmenskaia's opinions and judgements were clearly valued by her male comrades, and she was able to speak out on a range of issues. At a mass meeting in September 1916, she gave a report on the attitude of German Social Democrats toward the war that

[38] Barbara Clements Evans, *Bolshevik women* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.125-30
[39] Koenker, *Moscow workers,* p.207
[40] 'List of candidates to Nizhegorod Town Duma', undated, GANO, f. 27, Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma, op. 638a, d. 94, p.11.

according to one of the listeners, Zinovii Magergut, was 'interesting and rich in content'.[41] The Sormovo group sent Kashmenskaia, along with the group's most experienced member, Dmitrii Tiurikov, to Voronezh to establish links with other PSR organisations in the Volga region in December 1916, and to discuss the formation of a party conference. This was a delicate and dangerous commission, and the hopes of the Sormovo group rested on her.[42] Forced to leave Sormovo in January 1917 as a result of police surveillance, Kashmenskaia returned to Sormovo in April 1917. Kashmenskaia's record in the Sormovo PSR group may be exceptional, but is testament to the active and full role women could play in party organisations prior to 1917.

How did Maria Kashmenskaia respond to the climate of the PSR after the February revolution? She was put forward as a candidate for Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma, but she was placed right down the list, at number forty-eight out of fifty candidates, and subsequently withdrew her candidacy. The only other trace of her existence to be found in the local press was a letter she wrote to the PSR newspaper *Narod*, published in December 1917, in which she denounced one of the SR Town Duma deputies, whom she accused of disloyalty to the party.[43]Based on this letter, we can infer that Kashmenskaia continued to be active in the party, and to take a passionate interest in the politics of the moment, as one would have expected her to based on what is known of her underground activities. Kashmenskaia's conspicuous absence, however, from

[41] 'Writings-recollections of a member of the Sormovo organisation of the PSR, April 1916-April 1917', Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsialnoi i Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), f. 274, Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1891-1923, op. 1, d. 26, p.93.
[42] 'Writings-recollections of a member of the Sormovo organisation of the PSR, April 1916-April 1917', RGASPI, f. 274, Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1891-1923, op. 1, d. 26, p.97.
[43] *Narod* 114, 1 December 1917.

reports of party activity in the local press, and indeed in the lists of contributors to the local paper, suggests that she did not play the role her political experience and ability merited. This is in contrast to the other main protagonists of the Sormovo PSR group of which she was a part, many of whom were regularly mentioned by the party press in various party and public capacities. The non-participation of women in the elected bodies of 1917 cannot be pinned on a lack of politically committed and experienced women who could become involved in these organisations. Kashmenskaia had exactly the sort of skills that were so sorely required in 1917's administration, and yet she did not play an active public role. Despite their abilities and experience in the political and organisational spheres, women were relegated to backroom positions. They did not serve on elected committees and institutions, either because the electorate rejected them, or because their party organisations did not select them. This was to deprive the new administration of some if its most experienced workers, and only accentuated the shortage of personnel that was faced.

The partial exclusion of women, ethnic minorities and rural people from formal power structures did not however exclude them from political voice and influence. The example of soldiers' wives (*soldatki)* shows how power could operate outside the constraints of formal power structures. Despite relatively low levels of formal organisation, soldiers' wives made a significant mark on revolutionary politics at local level across the Empire.[44] Soldiers' wives, like the

[44] For other work on soldiers' wives, see Sarah Badcock, "Women, Protest, and Revolution: Soldiers' Wives in Russia During 1917," *International Review of Social History* (2004).;E. E. Pyle, "Village Social Relations and the Reception of Soldiers' Family Aid Policies in Russia, 1912-1921" (University of Chicago, 1997); Barbara A. Engel, "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia During World War 1," *Journal of Modern History*, no. 4 (1997).; Mark Baker, "Rampaging Soldatki, Cowering Police, Bazaar Riots and Moral Economy: The Social Impact of the Great War in Kharkiv Province," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, no. 2-3 (2001).; Beatrice Farnsworth, "The Soldatka

vast majority of women, did not secure much direct representation in the formal structures of power. This did not prevent them from engaging with revolutionary discourse, and seeking to secure their own 'rights and freedoms'. Their lack of direct participation in the administration meant that they placed pressure on, rather than acting within, existing organisations. They marched, organized, petitioned and protested to have their political demands heard. Such challenges to local and national authority were endemic in 1917, and an important part of the ways in which power was shaped and challenged by popular actions.

The soldiers' wives of Kazan presented their demands directly to the provincial administration, sometimes in violent or threatening forms. The direct action of soldiers' wives during 1917 was in some respects a continuation of wartime food riots, which were often led by women.[45] In Kazan there was an atmosphere of open hostility, as soldiers' wives consistently undermined and challenged decisions made by both town committees and the soviet. Soldiers' wives demanded more state support, in the form of increased allowances of money, food and fuel, and assistance working their land. They demonstrated publicly and vociferously to have these needs met, and succeeded in having their plight acknowledged, and material support offered by regional authorities. Their demonstrations of dissatisfaction with the soviet's actions in defending the working people, however, were potentially damaging to the soviet's reputation. The plight of the Kazan soldiers' wives was a real public issue, and their marches

: Folklore and Court Record," *Slavic Review*, no. 1 (1990).; Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.121-3, discusses soldiers' wives activities in Petrograd.

[45] See Engel, "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia During World War 1,"; Baker, "Rampaging Soldatki, Cowering Police, Bazaar Riots and Moral Economy: The Social Impact of the Great War in Kharkiv Province,", esp. p.150ff.

and noisy participation in meetings contributed to their prominent public profile. Authorities, be they central, regional or party political, struggled and ultimately failed to define revolutionary discourse and control political power. Recognising the blurred lines and ambiguity of locations of power helps us move towards a more nuanced understanding of 1917.

FOOD SUPPLY

The challenge of food distribution is one of the defining features of the revolutionary period. By looking at this problem from regional perspectives as well as from national ones, a series of issues are exposed- the dominance of localism and economic interests in shaping the problem, the failure of the central state to define the discourse, and the potential for both power, from local communities, and powerlessness, from regional and national authorities.

Russia was not fundamentally short of foodstuffs, but problems of administration and transport conspired to produce food shortages and threats of famine in some areas. Provisions problems steadily worsened through 1917. Russia followed nineteenth century trends in famines, in that human and institutional factors were more significant than natural scarcity in causing distress and starvation.[46] The government faced concerted resistance from peasant producers in implementing the grain monopoly, and hostility from consumers who were threatened by famine. The split between consumers and producers was between surplus and deficit regions among the peasantry, as well as between town and country. The food crisis also accentuated vertical and

[46] Martin Ravallion, *Markets and Famines* (Oxford, 1987), p.6

horizontal tensions in regional administration, and was the issue that provoked most hostility and violence against administrators.

Peter Gatrell's work provides a valuable synthesis of Russia's provisions situation during World War One, while Lars Lih's study of the provisions crisis during 1917 lucidly explained why and in what form the crisis manifested itself.[47] Democratisation, or as Lih calls it the 'enlistment of the population', was the means utilised by the Provisional Government to administer the grain monopoly. This faith in the population relied on the presumption that the population would choose to strengthen central power over defending local interests, the decision Lih aptly described as 'Hobbes' choice'. This study of provisions questions confirms that centrifugal forces overwhelmed reconstituting forces, as the population rationally chose to protect their own interests in so far as was possible, and refused the many sacrifices asked of them by the fledgling state.

The provisions crisis was one of supply and distribution rather than production. National figures on Russia's grain output are misleading. They indicate that though food production reduced steadily from 1914 to 1917, it was still only thirty percent below the pre war average by 1917.[48] As Russia was one of the world's biggest grain exporters at the turn of the century, a drop of thirty percent in production should not have left Russia in shortfall for domestic consumption. These figures are misleading however, not least because local

[47] Gatrell, *Russia's first world war*, ch. 7; Lars. T. Lih, *Bread and authority in Russia, 1914-1921* (Berkeley, 1990)

[48] S. S. Demosthenov, 'Food prices and the market in foodstuffs' in Peter. Struve (eds), *Food supply in Russia during the World War* (New Haven, 1930), pp. 268-411., p.311. N. Kondratev, *Rynok khlebov i ego regulirovanie vo vremia voiny i revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1991), pp.124-5; figures cited here differ from Demosthenov's, suggesting that 1914 and 1917 were rather weak years, 1915 and 1916 were well above the average from the period 1909-1913.

conditions in terms of geography, population and forms of agriculture, defined the problems that were faced from region to region. There are three fundamental explanations for the food crisis, all of which were intimately connected to Russia's involvement in the First World War. First, the needs of providing for the army increased demand for food products and other goods compared to the pre-war period. Second, transport of provisions around Russia, from her surplus provinces, and to her deficit provinces and the front, proved to be a serious logistical problem. Most of Russia's consuming provinces were situated in northwest European Russia, and most of the producing provinces were in southeast Russia. It is less generally understood that even in the parts of surplus provinces that needed to import grain, supply and transport of provisions were a serious problem. Finally, perhaps most significant in driving Russia's provisions crisis was the disruption of trade, because of government intervention in grain prices and movement, and because of a shortage of consumer goods available for producers to buy.

Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan provinces illustrate these problems. Nizhnyi Novgorod was an importer of grain, and Kazan an exporter, though both were on small scale. Based on averages between 1909 and 1913, Nizhnyi Novgorod province needed to import 5.82 *puds* of grain per person to satisfy consumer needs, while Kazan province exported 5.79 *puds* per person. Nizhnyi Novgorod was one of the smallest importers of grain of the consuming provinces, thirteenth out of sixteen, and Kazan was in the lower ranks of Russia's exporting provinces, twenty-first out of thirty-three. Nizhnyi Novgorod was in a strong geographical position to acquire grain, as most of its neighbouring provinces,

with the exception of Astrakhan and Viatka, were big exporters of grain.[49] Some *uezds* in Nizhnyi Novgorod province were exporters of grain, which offered another important source of grain for the province as a whole. Despite these advantages, Nizhnyi Novgorod province faced serious shortages and extreme difficulties in acquiring food products. Kazan province, meanwhile, was expected to export significant quantities of grain for the army, as well as feeding itself. In fact its towns, especially the capital Kazan, faced serious shortages throughout 1917. Provisions shortages had been a problem in Kazan town before the revolution. Police reports in January 1917 stated that the provisions crisis in Kazan town was 'critical', and that there were widespread fears of famine.[50]

The tsarist regime had restricted its involvement in wartime food supply to supplying the army, and fixed grain prices only on army supplies.[51] The Provisional Government took over the tsarist government's provisioning structures, but vastly expanded their scope and superseded the needs of supplying the army with the needs of supplying the country at large. There had been consensus for a grain monopoly, with fixed prices on all grain, not just that supplied to the army, before the February revolution.[52] A comparison of the government's fixed grain prices with market values, however, immediately reveals the problems such a system faced. The Provisional Government established its first fixed price on 25 March 1917, which at 235 kopeks per *pud* was forty-eight kopeks lower than market price in Kazan. The increase of fixed

[49] Kondratev, *Rynok khlebov*, pp.95-6.
[50] 'Report of reasons for strike at Alafuzov factory', 30 January 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 140, p.106; 'Report on the state of Kazan', 20 January 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 140, p.107.
[51] K. I. Zaitsev and N. V. Dolinsky, 'Organisation and policy' in Peter. Struve (eds), *Food supply in Russia during the World War* (New Haven, 1930), pp. , pp.5-17.
[52] Lih, *Bread and authority*, p.84

prices on 27 August to 470 kopeks did not keep pace with market prices, which by the end of August were 847 kopeks above the fixed price.[53] Prices were higher in the mid Volga region, which included Kazan and Nizhnyi Novgorod, and increased more rapidly in the course of 1917 than almost anywhere outside the industrial region and Belorussian lands.[54] These figures show the chronological dynamic of the food crisis, which became progressively worse in the course of 1917.

The Volga region's spiralling prices came in part from the intermingling of surplus and deficit regions. Kazan, with its unrealisable surpluses, and Nizhnyi Novgorod, with its unfulfilled wants, were located alongside one another. The movement of walkers and 'sack men' between province*s* and *uezds* was identified as a feature of 1917 by Lars Lih, and characterised relations between the two provinces.[55] Alongside formal requests from one provincial commissar to another to provide grain, and personal letters from starving Nizhnyi Novgorod citizens printed in the local press appealing to the Kazan peasants to release their grain, Kazan was inundated with individuals seeking to buy grain.[56] Administrators in Iadrinsk *uezd*, Kazan province, were unable to prevent speculation on grain, as Nizhnyi Novgorod citizens were 'ready to pay any prices so that they can receive grain. The fixed prices seem too low.'[57] Despite one hundred soldiers sent, and permanent watches being set on all roads leaving the *uezd*, the administration was unable to prevent 'leakage' of grain into Nizhnyi

[53] Kondratev, *Rynok khlebov*, p.400
[54] Demosthenov, 'Food prices', pp.269, 271, 275, 278.
[55] Lih, *Bread and authority*, p.77-81.
[56] An example of such letters can be found in *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 137, 30 September 1917, p.3; *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 77, 15 July 1917, p.3
[57] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 75, 13 July 1917, p.3

Novgorod province.[58] Chistopol town, the capital of Chistopol *uezd* in Kazan was 'flooded by more than a thousand walkers from hungry provinces every day.' All these walkers had permissions from their *volost* administration to seek grain, as they were hungry, but instead of approaching the Chistopol authorities, they bought from illicit traders at high prices, preventing any grain from reaching army supplies or the hungry parts of Kazan province.[59] Kazan's provincial commissar complained to Nizhnyi Novgorod provincial commissar in September about Nizhnyi Novgorod citizens coming to Kazan to try to buy grain, which threatened to cause civil disturbance.[60] The provincial provisions committee in September blamed speculators explicitly for Kazan's failure to fulfil its grain quotas.[61]

Nizhnyi Novgorod blamed the problem on Kazan's refusal to supply provisions.[62] Vladimir Ganchel, Nizhnii Novgorod's town mayor, gloomily reported in September that attempts to purchase grain from Kazan had been fruitless.

Even within Nizhnyi Novgorod province, *volost* and *uezd* provisions committees did not work to ease hunger in the province generally, but protected the interests of their own local citizens. Makariev *uezd* commissar complained

[58] 'Letter from Yadrin *uezd* commissar to provincial commissar', 12 August 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p.111; 'Telegram from Kazan provisions administration to provincial commissar', 14 July 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p.16.
[59] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 146, 11 October 1917, p.4
[60] 'Report from Kazan about the provisions crisis, with a note written by Nizhegorod provincial commissar on the reverse', 26 September 1917, GANO, f. 1882, Nizhegorod provincial commissar for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 22, p.87.
[61] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 143, 7 October 1917, p.3
[62] 'Letter from Nizhegorod provincial commissar to the Ministry of Internal Affairs', undated but probably September 1917, GANO, f. 1882, Nizhegorod provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 28, p.305.

bitterly in a report to the provincial commissar in September about the selfishness of the *uezds* surrounding the dangerously Makariev *uezd*.[63]

Where regional administrations did not meet popular needs and demands, the population directly challenged them with responses ranging from disobedience, through open hostility, to outright violence. Allegations of incompetence and corruption followed *uezd* and *volost'* provisions committees, especially in the areas most seriously threatened with hunger. The problem was not widespread incompetence on the part of these committees, but rather a complex interaction between the population's high expectations of their new administration to deliver, and the newly elected representatives' accountability. The peasants of Sotnur *volost'*, Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd*, told their village provisions commissar, "We elected you, you must listen to us."[64] Minutes from Lukoianov *uezd* provisions committee meeting in May exposed the extreme mistrust and hostility the *uezd* provisions committee provoked.[65] Peasants accused them of inactivity and corruption, and threatened with violence. They denied the charges against them, blaming the provisioning problems in the area on the national situation and the policies of the provincial provisions committee. The committee struggled to obtain grain, even though they had funds available, and waited for deliveries from neighboring regions.

[63] 'Makar'ev *uezd* commissar report', 23 September 1917, GANO, f. 1882, Nizhegorod provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 45, p.170; *uezduezd*
[64] 'Note to Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd* provisions committee from Sotnursk *volost* provisions administration', 1 September 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 146.
[65] 'General meeting of Lukoianovsk *uezd* executive committee', 27 May 1917, GANO, f. 1887, Nizhegorod province Executive Committee for the Provisional Government, op. 1, d. 18, pp. 27-33.

Reports came in from all over Nizhnyi Novgorod province of attacks on the provisions administration. In Gorbatov *uezd*, provisions provoked open public disorder by July 1917,[66] which persisted through August and September. The geographical location of the *uezd* meant that after the river navigation season closed at the onset of autumn, there were no effective means of getting grain into the *uezd*.[67] Orchestrated demonstrations against the provisions administration in Gorbatov town went on for four days in August, and culminated in the crowd demanding the resignation of the provisions administration.[68] Individuals came from different *volost's* in the *uezd* to participate in the protest, and the crowd met at ten o'clock in the morning for four consecutive mornings.

The demands of the crowd were "Give us grain. You will make us starve." The crowd would not accept explanations from members of the administration. A voice was heard from the crowd, cursing foully, and threatening members of the administration with murder. At that moment several members of the administration ran away. The crowd seized the president of the administration, intending to lynch him, but the commissar and armed soldiers persuaded the crowd to leave him untouched. He was then arrested by the militia, together with another administration member, Sokolov, who, on the way to the guardhouse, had his beard pulled by the crowd, and the key of the provisions warehouse taken.[69]

Popular resistance to census taking and the grain monopoly was fearsome in Kazan' province. Of all Russia's surplus provinces, Kazan' was one of the worst providers of grain for the front in 1917. For February and March 1917, Kazan

[66] *Izvestiia soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov* 30, 16 July 1917, 4.
[67] *Izvestiia soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov* 42, 27 July 1917, p.4.
[68] *Narod* 61, 3 September 1917, p. 4.
[69] *Narod* 61, 3 September 1917, p. 4.

provided 12 percent of its grain quota to the army. Only the Don region performed worse.[70] Kazan province offered virulent and often violent resistance to the grain monopoly. Surplus areas with non-Russian populations were more likely to come into conflict with the provisions administration, and were more likely to be violent.[71] A meeting of Kazan province's provisions committee on 5 July offered detailed reports on the provisions situation in eight of Kazan's twelve *uezds*. In many areas provisions committees had not been organized at all, and all accounts reported fierce resistance to the grain monopoly. Some *volost'*s in Kozmodem'iansk *uezd* destroyed the whole provisions administration.[72] Cheboksary, Kozmodem'iansk and Tsarevokokshaisk *uezds* in the north-west of the province were the most unruly of all, and "there was in practice no grain monopoly."[73] These three *uezds* had a significantly lower sown area than the rest of the province.[74]

The Provisional Government did not have the wherewithal or the practical authority to administer the grain monopoly. The Provisional Government's decision to claim all grain above subsistence norms as state property relied on local food supply organs to take successful inventories and establish sound links with producers. Data collection problems were central to the subsequent crises in food collection. A survey from the Moscow soviet of workers and soldiers' deputies revealed that only two of thirty-eight provinces had completed a

[70] N. D. Kondratev, *Rynok khlebov i ego regulirovanie vo vremia voiny i revoliutsii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 419-21.
[71] This correlates with Retish's findings for Viatka. (Retish, *Russia's peasants*, 103.)
[72] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 75, 13 July 1917, 3.
[73] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 77, 15 July 1917, 3.
[74] For details, see Badcock, *Politics and the people,* 185, table 7.ii.

census.[75] There is strong evidence that the rural population openly resisted the collection of data. In Kazan, census taking, sometimes undertaken alongside the updating of electoral registers, met with fierce resistance. A *volost'* provisions committee in Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd* noted that the population refused to abide by its decrees, and was unwilling to give any information about the number of residents and quantity of grain. The report noted the refusal of villagers there to consider national interests: "Russia is forgotten: the word *rodina* (motherland) is understood only as their village."[76] The evidence presented here suggests that Russia was not forgotten, but was denied; peasants chose to refuse national government requests.

In Mamadysh *uezd*, the explanation for refusals of census taking in a number of *volost'*s was that the population, many of whom were *soldatki*, lived solely on black bread and were being asked to give more than they had.[77] The *uezd* committee responded by increasing the allowance of retained grain.[78] Some peasant resistance shown to census-takers demonstrated their consciousness and awareness. Paperwork was targeted in attacks on administration, which reflected a neat awareness of the importance of being counted. In Sandyrskii *volost'*, the provisions administration had its paperwork, with details of the census, particularly targeted by crowds of rioters who broke into buildings and

[75] K. I. Zaitsev, N. V. Dolinsky, "Organisation and Policy" in Petr Struve (ed.) *Food supply in Russia during the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 105.
[76] 'Note from *volost* provisions committee to Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd* provisions administration, September 1917', NART f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 145.
[77] 'Report of outside agitator brought to Mamadysh *uezd* to resolve conflict in Kabyk-Kupersk *volost*, 16 July 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 43, l. 77.
[78] 'Letter from Mamadysh *uezd* commissar to provincial commissar', 18 July 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 43, l. 30.

destroyed all books, papers and documentation on 18 September.[79] Destruction of paperwork was a common feature of peasant attacks on provisions administration in surplus areas. The captain of the soldiers sent to carry out the census in Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd* reported that in one *volost'*, Arbany, not a single resident would give any information, even their names. They threw stones at soldiers, burnt all the paperwork of the *volost'* provisions administration, and threatened to murder those who defended the grain monopoly.[80] In the Chuvash village of Bolshoi Sundyr, Kozmodem'iansk *uezd*, the president of the provisions administration, a fellow called Zapolskii, was murdered on 14 August. Peasants had gathered outside the administration building and demanded the destruction of land and provisions census listings. When Zapolskii refused, the crowd dragged him out onto the street and beat him to death with sticks and stakes.[81] In Toraevo *volost*, Yadrin *uezd*, Kazan, soldiers were sent in September to protect the beleaguered provisions administration and carry out censuses. Despite soldier presence, however, on 28 September crowds dispersed the provisions committee, and destroyed all its paperwork. A further eighty soldiers were sent to quell the disorder.[82]

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[79] 'Letter from Sandyr *volost* provisions administration to provincial provisions administration', 18 September 1917. NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 148.

[80] 'Report of military command regarding resistance to grain monopoly', 27 September, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 176.

[81] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 128, 19 September 1917, 4.

[82] 'telefonogram from captain of militia to Iadrin *uezd* commissar, 19 September', NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p. 167; 'telegram from Provincial Commissar to *uezd* commissar', 20 September, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p.169; 'telegram from Provincial Commissar to *uezd* commissar', 21 September, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p.171; 'Telefonogram from Provincial Commissar to *uezd* commissar', 28 September, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p. 188; 'Telegram to Provincial Commissar from captain of militia', 7 October 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 44, p. 211.

Contemporaries' explanations for this heated resistance tended to emphasize that peasants "misunderstood" or were "ignorant" of the grain monopoly, or were led astray by "dark" forces operating in the villages, or wealthy peasants.[83] The non-Russians were singled out in the regional press as being particularly "dark" and especially hostile to the imposition of the grain monopoly. Complaints were also made of excessive demands for grain being made on villagers, who were not left enough to feed themselves and their livestock.[84] The political elite claimed that the solution to these problems was education and understanding, the Soviet government blaming ignorance rather than willful resistance for failure to meet provisions targets. As 1917 progressed, peasant communities repeatedly rebuffed attempts at educating villagers on provisions matters, and peasants made increasingly "conscious" statements of resistance to the grain monopoly. From summer onwards, we correspondingly see explanations for provisions disorder being given as the evils of market forces and of dark counter-revolutionary force in the villages, and the solution was seen increasingly to be the use of armed force. The peasants' titular leaders became increasingly disillusioned with the people they had looked towards to help the country out of provisions crisis. In Tsarevokokshaisk *uezd*, reports initially talked of "misunderstandings." These so-called misunderstandings escalated into "open risings against the provisions and land committees and against the militia

[83] *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 75, 13 July 1917, 3; see also *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 128, 19 September 1917, 4.
[84] See for example *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 67, 2 June 1917, 4; *Kazanskaia rabochaia gazeta* 87, 27 July 1917, p. 4; 'Report from volost in Mamadysh *uezd* about village response to delegate from Provincial provisions administration, 18th July 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 43, l. 77.

captain" by mid September. The only solution open to the provincial commissar was to send in more soldiers.[85]

CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the loci of power during the 1917 Russian revolution by looking at case studies from Nizhnyi Novgorod and Kazan' provinces. The examples developed here, of power structures, land use, food supply, and the participation of marginalized groups in political developments, together support a series of key theses. Study of the provinces enhances and sophisticates our understandings of how political power operated in 1917. By drawing focus away from the capitals and the well recognised political elites, both 'bourgeois' and 'democratic', we are able to discern the limitations of formal political power. The inability of the State to impose policy directives on the population empowered local people to take initiative and make the revolution in their own model. We see this in the ways that rural people directed land and forestry use in 1917. They transgressed the norms of private property and ignored appeals from the centre, but their actions should not be seen as anarchic or irrational. Rather, the revolution in land use was locally and sometimes regionally directed and managed in ways that sought to meet local needs and expectations, even though these local needs were in conflict with national directives and agendas. In their responses to the food crisis, ordinary people in the provinces proved mostly

[85] 'Note from Provincial Provisions Administration to Provincial Commissar requesting 25 soldiers to be sent to assist in the requisition of cattle and grain in Tsarevokokshaisk uezd', September 1917, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 90; 'Note from Tsarevokokshaisk uezd commissar to Provincial Commissar', 16th September, NART, f. 1246, Chancery of Kazan provincial commissar for the Provisional Government op. 1, d. 73, l. 137.

unwilling to conform to State policy. Instead, they acted pragmatically to defend their community's best interests. In so doing, they undermined both Provisonal Government and Soviet attempts to govern Russia. Finally, ordinary people participated in the new political world through a range of conduits. Some, particularly urban, ethnically Russian men, were empowered to participate in newly democratized structures of local government. Others participated in political power from the margins, using direct action, protest and resistance to make their voices heard.