

Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922. By *Donald J. Raleigh*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002. Pp. xviii + 438. \$65.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

Donald Raleigh, by his own reckoning, made ten trips to the city of Saratov (and a couple more to Moscow and St. Petersburg) over the space of fifteen years in order to research this book. At the end of this period, he was informed by the staff of Saratov's state archive that he had seen everything relating to the Civil War in their collections (418). Raleigh relates this tale of archival immersion with no small amount of pride, as well he should. His prodigious exertions put him in a position to write a substantial and important book on the experience of one crucial province in the midst of the awful tribulations of the Russian Civil War. Though it is an overstatement to claim, as Raleigh does, that he is entering a "virtual terra incognita" (4) by conducting a case study of the events in one locality during the war, he is able to provide an impressive depth and level of detail about life outside the capitals during the Civil War.

This is, indeed, a virtual encyclopedia of the ways that civilians experienced the war years. By my count, Raleigh subdivided his twelve chapters (not including the introduction and conclusion) into 111 separate sections. The average length of these sections is about four pages, but they range in size depending on the amount of material that Raleigh was able to glean on each subject. Thus, the section entitled "Party Activities among Women, Youth, Ethnic Minorities, and Foreign Nationals" occupies about eight pages of text, while "The Clergy: 'An Anti-Soviet Force of Ignorance and Superstition'" gets a bit more than a page. The range of topics touched here is laudable, and some of the chapters hang together quite well. Take, for example, chapter 6 ("A Community in Disarray, a Community in the Making"), in which Raleigh describes a series of social traumas during the war. The consecutive sections on population changes, refugees flows, housing dilemmas, the rotting away of the economic infrastructure, and the impact of epidemic disease build cumulatively to provide a painful panorama of the nastiness experienced by the residents of Saratov province. Over the course of the book as a whole, nearly all of the important historiographical and experiential aspects of the war are discussed, ranging from the struggles between local soviets and the centralized party to the cultural meaning of revolutionary festivals.

Still, encyclopedias are not to everyone's taste. Given the large number of topics that Raleigh wanted to address, it was probably necessary to abandon a chronological framework. In doing so, however, he also forsook the coherence that temporally structured books have and the dramatic energy that inheres in narratives that unfold over historical time. The structural mechanism Raleigh uses to replace this temporal coherence and energy is to make constant reference to the superstars of the "cultural turn." In this he is certainly following the intellectual trajectory traveled by many members of his generation of Russian historians, who wrote social history in the 1980s and then "turned" toward Pierre Bourdieu, James Scott, et al. There is a special logic in play in this case, for if you like being "decentered," or seek indeterminacy, contestation, and resistance, you've come to the right place in the Russian Civil War. Raleigh hints at this connection in his introduction, when he defends his decision to abandon narrative by noting that the "Civil War saw no logic or structure to it" and that "a strict chronological approach would impose a false order on a chaotic chapter in the country's history" (5). On occasion, Raleigh uses the theorists of the cultural turn in a clever and appealing way, as when he observes in a Geertzian riff that memoir writing by the local intelligentsia was a project of "thick prescription" (253).

As a whole, though, structuring the book around cultural theory just doesn't work, particularly since the theoretical references are mostly forced. For instance, Raleigh claims to have been surprised that the public and private languages of the Bolsheviks differed and seeks to make use of James Scott's notion of "hidden transcripts" to elucidate this phenomenon (44). But we really don't need Scott to inform us that people in general, politicians in particular, and the Bolsheviks above all use different "languages" for different audiences. Adepts in cultural theory will find most of what Raleigh has to say on theory fairly mundane, while those who are unfamiliar with these theories or hostile to them will find the constant references either incomprehensible or annoying. The result is a book in need of greater direction and greater drive.

There is, in addition, a significant entry missing from this encyclopedia, and that is the war itself. Saratov province was a key battleground in both the literal and figurative sense during the Civil War, and Raleigh duly notes the impact of martial law, White occupation of parts of the province, roving army groups, and requisitions of men and materials. Still, for all that, armed forces and armed engagements appear here as outsiders and disruptions rather than as organic parts of Saratov in civil war. Two examples may suffice. First, Raleigh spends a lot of fruitful energy fleshing out the disputes between local leaders and the "center" in both the party and state apparatuses but fails to address the same phenomenon in the military sphere, what we might call "warlordism," familiar to many historians of the war and, for that matter, to those acquainted with *Doctor Zhivago*. Second, given the great number of people from nearly all walks of life who fought in the various armies of the war, it is not sufficient to spend less than four pages of the book on a single section devoted to soldiers and then to spend most of that space defining enlisted men simply as peasants prone to desertion. This reluctance to deal with military issues may have to do with the fact that the military records housed in Saratov were destroyed in a fire or with Raleigh's own definition of his historical project as one that is not concerned with "military operations, diplomacy, and politics at the top" (3). But there are in fact local military records housed in Moscow archives; more important still, one should not set out to write a "comprehensive" history of a war without being willing to study armies and combat.

Given the loving attention to bureaucratic detail and the assumption of the audience's theoretical and factual knowledge of Civil War events (Raleigh assumes his readers know, for instance, who murdered Count Mirbach, the German ambassador, and why), this is not an easy book for a nonspecialist. Still, there is an audience for this book beyond the coterie of Civil War historians; I am thinking in particular of scholars of the Stalin era. One of Raleigh's most important points is that much that currently occupies the attention of historians of Stalinism found earlier iteration in the years of the Civil War: food requisitions that led to famine, terror, deportations, forced labor, rationing, and the remaking of the self, to name just a few. It is not just that these precedents exist that is of note, but that for some reason the Stalin coterie took them as model policies to be emulated rather than as disasters to be avoided. Why were people who did know their history still doomed to repeat it?

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