Introduction
Mobilizing a Nation
Patriotism and Citizenship in Russia’s Great War, 1914–1918

On the morning of July 20, 1914, Russians learned that Germany had declared war on their country. Mobilization had been announced several days before and hundreds of thousands of men were already en route to join their units. Railroad stations were mobbed with crowds who had come to see them off. People wept, people wondered what the war might bring, and many people joined their communities in large patriotic demonstrations and prayer services. A few have left records of what they felt. The 33-year-old Baron Nikolai N. Vrangel’, a writer and son of a wealthy and prominent family, wrote in his diary, “It is impossible to describe the emotion and enthusiasm that have seized Petersburg since the declaration of war. I have never seen such excitement, delight, and acceptance of the will of Fate.” Like a number of intellectuals in other European capitals that day, he was swept up in the sense of unity: “Only in such exalted moments, when people are joined together by their every thought and feeling, do you understand all the grandeur and necessity of war.”

Longing to aid his country in some meaningful way, he threw himself into the work of war relief.

More than 3,000 miles away, in the Yakut village of Amga in Siberia, a semi-literate peasant woman was also stirred by the call-up for war: “There was something holy about the nation’s response to it . . . It was an elevating, glorious, unforgettable moment.” Mariia Bochkareva was 24 years old; having fled a drunken, abusive husband, she then followed a common-law husband into unhappy political exile. Now, she was gripped by the idea of becoming a soldier and heading for the front – as

1 Baron N. N. Vrangel’, Dni skorbi. Dnevnik 1914–1915 godov, ed. A. A. Murashev (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal “Neva,” 2001), 19. Vrangel’s reaction immediately calls to mind that of Stefan Zweig as he joined enthusiastic crowds in Vienna at the outbreak of war: “I should not have liked to miss the memory of those first days. As never before, thousands and hundreds of thousands felt what they should have felt in peace time, that they belonged together . . . All differences of class, rank, and language were flooded over at that moment by the rushing feeling of fraternity”: Zweig, The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 223.
she recalled it, an inner voice called to her, “Go to war to help save thy country!” Doggedly overcoming opposition and ridicule from almost every corner, she successfully petitioned the tsar to enter the active army as a combat soldier.2

Neither of these individuals – the literary baron and the barely literate woman soldier – can be considered, by any measure, “typical.” They also differed from each other in almost every respect. Yet the two characterized their response to the outbreak of war in very similar terms. Both were moved by the patriotism and unity of those around them, and both acted decisively on their desire to assist their country. In this they were not so different from millions of their compatriots. When Russians learned they were at war with Germany, an enormous wave of patriotism swept across the landscape. As we shall see, these patriotic manifestations of national unity, and the corresponding outpouring of voluntarism and donations, impressed contemporaries profoundly.

Yet three and a half years later, Russia’s war had ended disastrously. Trying to make sense of humiliating defeat, many Russians concluded that the patriotic outpouring of the early war was illusory, that in fact the people had not loved their country enough to sustain the fight to the end. Often, this deficiency was represented as a consequence of the common people’s inability to think of themselves as constituting a nation. Such were the views of a number of prominent and oft-cited generals.3 In the 1920s General Anton Denikin claimed that the “illiterate masses of the population” went to war without a perception of the necessity to sacrifice: they simply could not understand “abstract national principles.” General Aleksei Brusilov blamed this state of affairs on an inept imperial government, which had failed to teach the people to know their own country: “How could they acquire that patriotism which would inspire them with love for their great Russia?”4 Generals Nikolai Golovin and Iurii Danilov also argued along these lines, as did prominent ex-tsarist officials.5

3 A rare example that predates Russia’s defeat is General N. Ianushkevich’s assertion that the masses could not grasp the idea of fighting for Russia: a person from Tambov “is ready to stand to the death for Tambov province, but the war in Poland seems strange and unnecessary to him” (in Michael Cherniavsky, ed., Prologue to Revolution: Notes of A. N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915 [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967], “The Meeting of 24 July 1915,” 22–23).
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Many scholars have similarly contended—though not always on the same grounds—that the mass of the population did not think of itself as a nation. The government is said to have conceived of Russia in traditional, imperial terms, while the common people’s imagined community, to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, was decidedly local. According to one scholar, for example, “In the three centuries preceding the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, a critical mass consciousness based on nation or nationality did not develop in Russia.”6 Noting the importance of heroic narratives of the past for consolidating modern national communities, some historians suggest that prior to the 1930s Russians lacked “a sense of a common heritage and an awareness of a glorious history.”7 Others believe that because print was still primarily an urban phenomenon in 1914, patriotic culture did not extend to the peasantry. Some discern a lack of positive content in wartime patriotic culture, alleging that Russians knew what they were fighting against, “but not for whom and for what.”8 Scholars who argue that Russians did come to think of themselves as belonging to a national community, thanks in part to the impact of the war, are in a minority.9

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There were, admittedly, problems in promoting patriotism and national cohesion in Russia’s Great War. For many citizens, uniting in support of the country’s war effort was complicated by distrust of a repressive government, ideological divisions, deeply felt class antagonisms, or religious tensions and prejudices. The transitional nature of the period following the 1905 revolution further complicated questions of national identity: while Russia had ceased to be an absolutist regime, one in which the person of the tsar embodied the nation, it had not yet worked out its new basis of “nationhood.” And, since some 50 percent of the population was not ethnically Great Russian (russkii), constructing a shared “all-Russian” (rossiiskii) national identity could be highly problematic.

Yet, until 1917, contemporaries were struck more by the perseverance of Russian patriotism than they were by its deficiencies. Preoccupied by Russia’s defeat, we have not examined this love of country. It is thus simply asserted that the July 1914 wave of patriotism soon dissipated, when in fact we know very little about the nature, types, or evolution of patriotism in the war. We have more or less taken on trust the claim that the authorities were reluctant to mobilize the masses, and that relatively little was done to create and disseminate popular patriotic narratives. Similarly, in taking a weak sense of nationhood to be a critical weakness of the Russian war effort, most scholars have not considered how the crucible of the war might have forged a new or stronger sense of the broad Russian nation, as Mark von Hagen persuasively argues was the case for Ukrainian national consciousness.  

Certainly Russians themselves commonly regarded this gigantic conflict as “transformative,” though they could differ as to what, precisely, was being transformed, and the changes they expected it to produce. For example, religious thinkers and philosophers spoke of spiritual rebirth and “moral renewal,” political reformers talked about the transformation of subjects into citizens and anticipated postwar democratization, and the business community looked forward to the unleashing of Russian entrepreneurial talents. Peasants perhaps had the greatest expectations, including more equality of rights with other social estates, expanded access to education, and land. In fact, all these mobilized expectations would prove problematic in 1917.  

We have largely overlooked a related dimension of this question, which is how various sectors of the population expected to advance their collective interests through shaping and buying into the narrative of the

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11 A good summary of educated society’s expectations is the collection *Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny. Sbornik statei* (Petrograd: Kn-vo “Prometei,” 1915).
national patriotic “sacred union”: patriotism can have its rewards.\textsuperscript{12}

Such groups included political parties, social estates, national minorities, and also Russian women, who bore the greatest share of the burden on the home front and played a disproportionately large role in war relief. Finally, in Russia as in all the belligerent states, no entity had a monopoly on patriotic discourse. Governmental, civic, and private organizations engaged in efforts to define and appeal to the patriotic national community, as did individual citizens. The diversity of voices and values precluded the possibility of a single master narrative. But contestations over the meaning and content of patriotism, and efforts to rethink who was included in the national community, should not be mistaken for the absence of certain powerful, shared themes and myths. By exploring different efforts to define and mobilize patriotism, citizenship, and Russian national identity over the course of the Great War, I hope to contribute to our understanding of the ways the war influenced these critical concepts.

\textbf{Origins and Structure}

This study is in part an outgrowth of my first monograph, a biography of liberal leader Pavel N. Miliukov, who played a prominent part in Russia’s war effort and was also a champion of Russia’s national minorities.\textsuperscript{13} When I began looking into the scholarly literature on the war years for that study, I was surprised to discover how little had been written on Russia, particularly in comparison to the vast literature on other Entente countries and on Germany. Delving deeper into the primary sources, and poring over the wartime press, I was still more surprised. They told stories of inclusive patriotism, civic activism, and voluntarism, on the one hand, and radical policies of persecution and exclusion, on the other, that were missing or undeveloped in the scholarly literature. This wartime Russia was unrecognizable and unknown, and I wanted to explore it.

Happily, the scholarly landscape has changed since I began this project. This book builds on an exciting new generation of work on wartime political culture, military mobilization, and the expanding powers of the

\textsuperscript{12} Linda Colley, \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 54–56, 93–94, makes this important point in talking about how a British nation was created, noting that different classes and interest groups came to see this new national amalgam as “a usable resource, as a focus of loyalty which would also cater to their own needs and ambitions” (55).

\textsuperscript{13} Melissa Kirschke Stockdale, \textit{Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a Liberal Russia, 1880–1918} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
I am also indebted to the superb work on refugees, the war in the village, and memory of the Great War by Peter Gatrell, Aaron Retish, Scott Seregny, and Karen Petrone, to name but a few. These studies were made possible by two critical developments: the opening of Russian archives, and the post-Cold War rethinking of the relationship between Russia’s Great War and the revolution that it precipitated. Now, instead of regarding February 1917 as a great divide, the point where scholarly studies end or begin, many scholars share a conceptualization of the war, revolution, and civil war as a period, a “continuum of crisis” or “seven years’ war,” as Holquist and Igor Narskii have influentially argued.

I begin by exploring Russia’s “sacred union,” a grand patriotic narrative of unity, service, generosity, and sacrifice assembled at the start of Russia’s Great War. I analyze representations of the patriotic demonstrations of the first weeks of war, the historic July 26 session of the State Duma, and the popular responses to the general mobilization. I then turn to efforts to connect this “Second Fatherland War” (a name we forget was initially applied to this conflict) with the heroic Russian efforts against invaders in the Fatherland War of 1812. The chapter ends with a brief look at several events that were not included in this master narrative, such as riots by reservists and by soldiers’ wives, and the authorities’ preemptive suppression of potentially dissenting views on the war.


Chapter 2, “National Mobilization,” explores governmental and public efforts to define and promote patriotism and an inclusive national identity after the outbreak of war. I examine efforts to promote unity by inciting hatred of the enemy, but my main focus is positive means, such as the content and nature of surprisingly large and sophisticated propaganda campaigns, publishing ventures, and massive war-loan drives.

Chapter 3, “On the Altar of the Fatherland,” examines the church’s role in shaping and sustaining patriotism. We know how important the legitimizing function of the Orthodox Church was for the Soviet regime in 1941, when the church promptly declared the fight against the German invaders a “holy war,” but we know very little about its far more extensive activities in the Great War. Here, I look at new prayers and public rituals to unify the people and memorialize the fallen; the new nationally distributed parish newspaper that apprised the population of war relief, war needs, and the holy nature of Russia’s cause; and clerical writings and sermons on the meaning of the war and the necessity of sacrifice.

Chapter 4, “All for the War,” explores how various groups involved themselves in war relief, and the meanings assigned to these efforts. This wartime outpouring of aid and labor, from all across the empire and from every social class, helped generate a positive image of a compassionate, generous, and inclusive “all-Russian” national community. Many people believed that this unprecedented national self-mobilization would transform passive, parochial subjects into conscious and active citizens. And many members of population groups subject to restricted rights hoped their patriotic service and sacrifice would earn them fuller access to citizenship at war’s end.

Chapter 5, “United in Gratitude,” looks at efforts to sidestep vexing class, ethnic, and confessional differences by uniting a diverse population around the figure of the soldier. I do this by exploring three innovative wartime projects: the campaign to properly bury and memorialize every fallen soldier, to publicly celebrate and reward heroes, and to create a new national holiday honoring “Those Who Have Shed Their Blood for Russia.” These efforts helped enmesh the duty of military service to the state with full membership in the national community, and the modern notion of rights owed citizens for that service.

The next chapter, “Fantasies of Treason,” takes up the obverse side of unifying the national community: efforts to identify and exclude individuals or groups that did not belong within it. One long-suspect population group, the Poles, managed to win an honorable new place in the national community through their suffering and sacrifice. But for two other groups, Russia’s Jews and Germans, patriotic service and
sacrifice did not save them from identification as enemies within. As the war dragged on, speculators, profiteers, and an array of nebulously defined traitors and spies thought to have infiltrated the army and the court were added to the list of internal enemies. Widespread fantasies of treason eroded public confidence in the dynasty and government, as well as the very idea of a sacred union of the nation.

Chapter 7, “For Freedom and the Fatherland,” maps the altered political landscape of patriotic discourse and action after February 1917. The end of the monarchy, and proclamation of democracy and equal rights, greatly influenced conceptions of patriotism, citizenship, and the national community. So, too, did war-weariness, growing social tensions, and an imploding economy. I examine the voluminous public debate over patriotism and citizenship – issues that could now be freely contested thanks to the near absence of censorship – and efforts of the Provisional Government to remobilize public support for the war. I also analyze the mass phenomenon of volunteering for combat, especially by women, as a most concrete expression of love of country and the duty of the citizen.

Sources and Definitions

The source base for this study is vast. Nonmilitary archival materials include data on patriotic organizations and commemorative projects; the papers of political parties and wartime patriotic societies; materials from a wide variety of propaganda campaigns, including all kinds of photos and graphic images; and secret police reports based on intercepted private correspondence. The papers of prominent Russians – most particularly the 5,000 files contained in liberal leader Pavel N. Miliukov’s collection in Moscow – are another important source for wartime views and activities.17 The enormous synodal records for the war include material on church publishing and on clerical efforts to support the morale of the troops and the home front; monthly reports on parish war relief activities; and dossiers on several unique investigations into rural clergy accused of unpatriotic activities. Military archives provide

17 Most of the material in Miliukov’s vast personal collection (lichnyi fond) is not of a personal nature: as both a historian and one of the most prominent politicians of the era, Miliukov collected – or had given to him – thousands of politically relevant documents, newspaper clippings, communiqués, and secret reports; he also kept hundreds of letters and telegrams sent by constituents, colleagues, and political opponents. (There are an additional 1,500 files in the Miliukov collection – dating from 1919 on – acquired at the end of the Second World War and held in a different part of the archive.)
illuminating digests of soldiers’ correspondence with the home front, made by military censors in 1916; material on projects for identifying and publicizing national popular heroes; information on operations to cleanse active military zones of Jews and other “suspect” groups in 1914 and 1915; and data on men and women volunteering for the regular army and the revolutionary battalions of death.

A particularly important source for a study of patriotic discourse and activities is the periodical press. Some 871 new periodicals came into being in 1914 and 1915, many of them war-related. Newspapers and magazines allow us to follow patriotic narratives of the nation being disseminated to various audiences, citizens’ efforts to organize war relief and philanthropy, and outcomes of mobilizing campaigns. For the period 1914–16, I make use of eighteen daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals, including high-brow “thick journals,” the political press, mass-circulation dailies and tabloids, rural and church papers, and illustrated magazines. For 1917, I add new revolutionary and patriotic publications to the mix. Finally, I use other publications that were relatively short-lived or which have been only incompletely preserved (many periodicals directed at women and at rank-and-file soldiers fall into this category).

The stenographic reports of sessions of the State Duma are a valuable source for mapping the political discourse of sacred union, policy debates on who should be included in—or excluded from—the patriotic national community, and debates over how citizens’ wartime service should be recognized and rewarded. (Equal rights for minorities? Land for peasants? The franchise for women?) Another fascinating source is wartime diaries and correspondence, many of them located in archives or only recently published. Particularly revealing is the marvelously detailed diary of the capital’s wartime mayor, Count Ivan Tol’stoi. At the opposite end of the social spectrum is another rare and valuable source, the laconic diary of a middle-aged peasant, A. A. Zamaraev, from the northern province of Vologda. Valuable insights also come from nurses, medics, or others working for major war-relief organizations, such as Vrangel’ at the Red Cross and Jewish activist S. Ansky, for the Union of Cities; these were people who typically traveled along the various

18 T. A. Belogurova, *Russkaia periodicheskaia pechat’ i problemy vnestrannoi zhizni strany v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny (1914–fevral’ 1917)* (Smolensk: Gody, 2005), 41–42; while a large number of these periodicals were published in the two capitals, periodicals were published in a total of 1,808 Russian cities and towns.

fronts or between front and rear, and recorded their immediate impres-
sions in letters or diaries.

The rich scholarship on nationalism, citizenship, and patriotism, as
well as on the European experience of the Great War, has informed this
study in a variety of ways. Benedict Anderson’s work on the nation as
imagined political community has not only profoundly influenced my
approach, but at times seems almost to have influenced the culture.
I study, so closely does wartime Russian national imagining follow his
strictures on the importance of disseminating – via print culture, through
“empty homogeneous time” – national maps, unifying rituals, and a
sense of a glorious shared past. Also important is the work of Eric
Hobsbawm – particularly on appreciating the gap between national ideas
that elites propagate and what ordinary people choose to make of those
ideas – as well as that of Jay Winter, George Mosse, Linda Colley, Aviel
Roshwald, John Horne, and other scholars.

Because I pay particular attention in this study to words and their use –
the languages of patriotism, citizenship, and exclusion – it is important to
define some key terms. I understand the term “patriotism” fairly broadly.
At its most basic, it connotes love of and loyalty to one’s country or
patria – that is, traditional, state-based patriotism. But alongside it there
can be patriotism that is local, chauvinistic, pacificist, or social, in the
sense of making one’s compatriots the fundamental object of concern
and loyalty. A strong current of aspirational patriotism emphasized

20 Besides Vrangel’s long-unpublished diary, Dni skorbi, see S. Ansky, The Enemy at His
Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement in World War I, ed. and trans.
woman doctor and prominent socialist who worked on a medical evacuation train must
be used with caution, since it was published during wartime and therefore subject to
censorship constraints: Tatiana Alexinsky, With the Russian Wounded, trans. Gilbert

21 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of

22 E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11, and Hobsbawm, “Mass-
Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914,” in Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds.,
Aviel Roshwald writes incisively on the function of “violation and volition” in national
myths: Aviel Roshwald, The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern
Dilemmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

23 In addition to Colley, Britons, helpful discussions of patriotism include Rogers Brubaker,
“In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism,” in Philip
37–51; Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780, 86–93; Eugen Weber, Peasants
into Frenchmen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 95–114; and Hugh
(1981), 8–33.