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Russia's Regional Identities

The Power of the Provinces

Edited by Edith W. Clowes, Gisela Erbslöh and Ani Kokobobo

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1 The six waves of Russian regionalism in European context, 1830–2000

Susan Smith-Peter

Russia is an idea as well as a territory. The idea of Russia has played an especially important role in the symbolic geography of Western Europe; during the Enlightenment, the idea of Western Europe arose through comparisons with Russia: Western Europe was said to be enlightened, tolerant, and well governed, while Russia was presented as benighted, intolerant, and tyrannical.¹ Partly in response to this view and partly in continuation of older models of Byzantine-style rulership, the Russian autocracy developed an ideology that the power of the enlightened center would transform the darkness of the vast lands of Russia. Peter the Great was especially important for establishing a scenario of power in which the emperor was presented as a transcendent European force that would bring Russia into the community of nations.² In the 1830s, as Anne Lounsbury notes in the next chapter, Aleksandr Pushkin and others drew what would become an enduring contrast between the sparkling sophistication of the capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg and the dark dullness of the provinces. These symbolic geographies interlock with each other and obscure what was actually happening outside the capitals. For this reason, it is important to put Russian regional experiences in the context of regionalism in specific European countries rather than “the West.” When we do the former, we find that, until the era of Joseph Stalin, Russia was not behind, but in step, with Western Europe in what was happening outside the center, and sometimes even in advance of it.

Before proceeding, it is important to define our terms, as there are many ways to refer to the lands beyond the city limits of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Generally speaking, the term “regions” includes the larger spaces of Siberia and the Russian North, which is a territory north of St. Petersburg up to the White Sea, as well as the borderlands. Although these regions are and were administratively divided into provinces, they are not usually meant when “the provinces” are being discussed. Instead, people usually envisioned the Russian heartland, also called European Russia, to distinguish it from Siberia, when they referred to the provinces. The terms used for provinces and regions also differed. Region (*oblast'*) is derived from the words “of power” (*ob vlast'*) and referred to “a region under special administration . . . newly settled country.”³ In the Russian Empire, these territorial units tended to be in or near the borderlands, while in the Soviet Union, most territorial units were referred to with the term “oblast.”

The Romans called recently conquered lands provinces (*provincia* in Latin), and many of the Western European countries that had once been Roman provinces used the term for their own major territorial subunits, thus displaying their sovereignty. Russia joined this symbolic post-Roman space in 1698, when Peter the Great substituted the term “Kazan province” (*Kazanskaia provintsia*) for “Kazan kingdom” (*Kazanskoe tsarstvo*).⁴ The Russian word for province came from the Polish *provincja*, ultimately deriving from the Roman practice.⁵ After the 1830s, “the provinces” meant the Russian heartland, but the term itself carries within it a sense of separation and subjection that was reflected in its lower position within the symbolic geography of the capitals versus the provinces.

While regional identities can be noted from antiquity on, the concept of regionalism developed in the nineteenth century and is the proposal or practice of dividing up a state into regions in order to achieve cultural or political goals. Culturally, regionalism advocates the recognition of diverse practices within the nation-state by encouraging, for example, a regional literature or the collection of regional folkways. Modern cultural regionalism is linked to Romanticism. Such movements originated in the 1830s and spread throughout Europe by the late nineteenth century. Only some of these cultural movements led to the rise of political regionalism, which calls for political representation of the regions and consideration of regional needs within the governmental decision-making structure. Some went further and became examples of peripheral nationalism, with the creation of a new nation-state from what had once been a region. Other regional cultural movements developed in a conservative vein and were associated with the political right.⁶

Here I will argue that there were six waves of regionalism in Western Europe and Russia in the decades of the 1830s, the 1860s, the 1890s, the 1920s, the 1970s, and the 1990s. Russian regions were not behind Western European ones but rather went through the same stages of development at the same time or sometimes even earlier, until after the Stalin era, when they did fall behind developments in Western Europe. In the 1990s, there was an upsurge of regionalism in Russia, though by this time Western European regions had pulled ahead in terms of political rights and regional institutions.

This chapter defines as regions those subnational areas that have not yet attained independence, even if, as with the examples of Catalonia and Siberia, they have made attempts to that effect. Here I pay particular attention to the regions of France, as well as to Siberia and Catalonia, as they both have strong regional identities and a parallel development until the 1930s, when they diverge. Areas that later became independent countries, such as Ukraine, will not receive detailed consideration here, even though there are parallel developments in Ukrainian and Siberian identities, for example. In general, this chapter provides a framework for further study and makes no claim to putting forward an exhaustive history of all regions in Russia, let alone Western Europe. In addition, within Russia, the focus here is on Russian speakers and on authors who saw themselves as primarily Russian, either ethnically or culturally speaking. Comparison of Tatar, Dagestani, and other nationalities will be the subject of chapters in this book by Ani Kokobobo, Yulia Gradszkova, and John Romero.

The historiography on regions in Russia has included works on the history of regional studies and its Russian counterpart *kraevedenie*,⁷ as well as on the symbolic geography of the provinces,⁸ and on the social and cultural history of the provinces.⁹ Overviews of Russian regionalism, although important, have not systematically compared the Russian regions with their European counterparts.¹⁰ The present chapter is the first overview of the history of regionalism, comparing Russia and Western Europe from the 1830s to the present, which is a vital step for the historiography of both.

Because many works on European comparative regionalisms have omitted Russia, it is particularly important to note that Siberia was the first political regionalist movement in a European country, thus showing the importance of including Russia in the European story. A recent survey of the historiography on regionalism notes that such a comparison is lacking, as well as greatly needed, since typologies of Eastern and Western European regionalism often refer to ideal types rather than to historical narratives.¹¹ Work on comparative regionalisms has tended to reproduce the division between the civic nationalism of Western Europe and the supposed ethnic nationalism of Eastern Europe – a dualism that one scholar has convincingly connected to the creation of a “Western Europe” during the Enlightenment by inventing the “Eastern Europe” as its Other.¹² The article also contributes to a lively debate about the origins of regionalism. Scholars working within the modernization theory framework emphasize the role of democratization and the rise of market economies, while others argue that regional symbols and ideas were more important.¹³ The Russian case provides important evidence on the side of regional symbols and ideas, as democratization and market economies were not more developed in Siberia in the 1860s than in Western Europe.

In Russian, the term regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) comes from the term *oblast'*, discussed earlier. Kazan University history professor Afanasii Shchapov first used the Russian word for regional feeling (*oblastnost'*) in the 1860s to describe and celebrate pre-Muscovite regional distinctiveness. In Siberia, however, this term was not used; instead, from the 1830s, the idea of local patriotism was stressed.¹⁴ During the 1860s, the term “Siberian patriots” (*sibirskie patrioty*) was most often used.¹⁵ Some local patriots argued that Siberia should be its own country and therefore had the right to secede from Russia. While some authors have deemphasized the separatist aspects of Siberian regionalism in the 1860s, Dimitri von Mohrenschildt argues that there were three types of separatists in the 1860s in Siberia and that, although it was not universally accepted, separatism was an important element in Siberian regionalist thought.¹⁶ An important new work also argues that in 1863, Siberian patriots, later called regionalists, experienced a separatist moment due to the influence of the Polish uprising of 1863 and the realization that the Great Reforms would not be extended to Siberia.¹⁷

It was not until the 1890s that the Siberian regionalist N. M. Iadrintsev began to adopt the terms regional (*oblastnoi*) and regionalist (*oblastnik*).¹⁸ As early as the 1880s, though, regionalist G. N. Potanin, writing about Siberian capitalists, remarked, “Regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) does not delight them, although they agree that Siberian autonomy would be to their benefit.”¹⁹ Ideas of autonomy and

the need to develop the region, rather than economic development, drove Siberian regionalism. In fact, it was precisely the lack of economic development, not its presence, which led to this early movement for political autonomy.

Not all regional ideas are the same, however, as Miroslav Hroch's classification of regions shows. The first type, according to Hroch, are those that were once their own political units; the second are administratively bounded territories such as provinces without a history of independent political existence; the third, areas without defined political boundaries yet united by geographic or ethnographic specificities; the fourth, newly invented regions where elites actively create regional identity to bolster their own power.²⁰ Siberia is an example of the first, as it had an earlier existence as the Khanate of Sibir'; Vladimir Province and other central European Russian provinces established by Catherine the Great and other rulers are examples of the second; the Russian North provides an example of the third type, as it has not had its own separate boundaries, but it still has a strong sense of regional identity.²¹ The fourth type has been created more recently for reasons of economics or tourism. A key to studying regionalism is to examine the interplay between the ideas of the region, which differ depending on its type, and lived experience within it. This exercise helps to move us beyond the problems of the nontheoretical use of the concept of region that have been noted.²²

The state in Russia aimed at greater control of society than in most Western European countries. It was often more capable of imposing its will on the nobility because the nobles derived their status from serving the state. Because the Russian state was strong, it instituted more uniform governance earlier than most European states and subordinated all state structures to the center. In comparison, many Western European countries kept older feudal forms of local governance until the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. The Russian government was able to reorganize the regions into more rational units at an earlier date. Peter the Great began this process as early as 1699, while in France, a similar process had to wait until 1790, nearly a century later.²³ One historian of France, Vivian Schmidt, terms the prerevolutionary administrative units as "varied and incoherent," and goes on to argue, "France was highly centralized in name, but quite decentralized in fact."²⁴ In Spain, the new Bourbon kings attempted to break the power of the old nobility and centralize the state's power during the mid-1710s, almost two decades after Peter the Great's territorial reorganization.²⁵ This chronology is interesting, as Spain later followed Russia in the development of political regionalism with a gap of two decades in the nineteenth century. While the Romanovs kept the economic system of serfdom, they did not allow the nobles to govern the entirety of the regions through their own regionally based corporative structures. Nonetheless, from the reign of Catherine the Great, the nobility was given limited self-government in matters primarily concerning the nobility.²⁶ In Siberia and the Russian North, there was no local nobility at all, a condition that was highly significant for the rise of political regionalism, as it created a space for other political groups to frame their demands. While the limited local political rights of nobles in Russia has generally been seen as a hindrance to the development of a native

tradition of democracy, the lens of regionalism suggests that other interpretations are possible.

Federalist ideas also were important to the development of regionalism in Siberia, Germany, and elsewhere.²⁷ While cultural and political regionalisms were products of the nineteenth century, federalism as a practice was much older. As it developed in medieval states such as the Holy Roman Empire, federalism consisted of the association of a conglomeration of states maintaining many of their preexisting traditions and political powers. Federalism in practice tended to discourage the development of political regionalism and secessionism, as the regions in a federal system had more access to political power than in a highly centralized system. Cultural regionalism coexisted with federalism and could even be fostered by it, as was the case in the German states.²⁸ Political regionalists often were inspired by federalist ideas. In the case of Russia, American federalist ideas were highly influential to the development of Siberian regionalism. For example, in the circle of Count N. M. Muraviev-Amurskii, governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Siberian patriots discussed the applicability of American-style federalism to Siberia and the possibility of Siberia entering into a federation with the United States.²⁹ The federalist works of Alexis de Tocqueville found a ready audience in Russia, more so than in France, where liberal regionalism, or the argument for a broad-based decentralization, was weaker than the more elitist provincialism that promoted a return to noble rule in the provincial-level institutions of the old regime.³⁰

Thus political regionalism could not develop everywhere in Europe. Political regionalism can arise and flourish within strong states. In weak states, such a movement tends to develop into peripheral nationalism. And so the best comparisons with the Russian case are not the states of Eastern Europe but France and Spain, which are strong centralized states with weakened noble classes, a wide range of regional institutions, and an interest in the practice of regionalism and federalism.³¹

Russia had a long history of regional distinctiveness. Before Peter the Great's reign (1682–1725), the seventeenth century was an era of mystical regional identity in which sacred groves and springs, and the regional lives of saints, provided a sense of attachment to region and to God.³² Regional chronicles of the seventeenth century also highlighted the special status of regions such as Siberia and the Russian North by providing a separate regional chronology.³³ In Siberia, Semen Ul'ianovich Remezov, the seventeenth-century cartographer, chronicler, and architect in Tobol'sk believed that his city was an especially holy city and in fact was at the center of the universe.³⁴ Peter the Great cut short Remezov's activities; there were rumors of plans for Siberian independence during the Great Northern War against Sweden. Peter carried out reprisals, ending a grand building project in Tobol'sk that Remezov had headed.³⁵

Under Catherine the Great, Russian Enlightenment thinkers rejected the idea of regional distinctiveness as a result of the bureaucratization of the region during Catherine's provincial reforms of 1775. These reforms established governorships and smaller provinces that could be more intensively governed. Provincial

and central authors began to celebrate Catherine's reign by erasing the previous specificity of Russian regions and imagining Russian space outside the capitals as empty and waiting to be filled by the autocrat and her governors.³⁶ This Enlightenment sense of Russian space as empty and meaningless was adopted in nineteenth-century Russian literary culture, as Anne Lounsbury argues in the next chapter.

Even before the first wave of regionalism in the 1830s, Siberia underwent certain developments in the 1820s that established the preconditions for it. In 1822, government reformer Mikhail Speranskii reformed the Siberian administration, dividing Siberia into two, creating a regional council in each Siberian city, and allowing for some decentralization.³⁷ In December 1825, a group of idealistic young Russian nobles, known as the Decembrists, attempted to reform the autocracy; some had developed plans that would have transformed Russia into a federative constitutional monarchy.³⁸ The leaders of the Decembrists were hanged, and most of the others were exiled to Siberia, where they contributed to the intellectual and social development of such cities as Irkutsk. Many Decembrists were especially impressed with the lack of serfdom in Siberia and compared Siberia to the New World, emphasizing its freedom.³⁹ In the 1830s, a sense of local Siberian patriotism began to emerge. Siberia's "first home-grown historian" Petr Slovtsov (1767–1843) was particularly important in establishing this attitude.⁴⁰ Siberia took part in the larger intellectual currents of Romanticism, with the popular novels of Ivan Kalashnikov featuring Siberia itself as a sort of hero.⁴¹ Siberia thus was at once a separate territorial subdivision and a distinctive administrative, cultural, and intellectual system.

During the first wave of cultural regionalism in 1830s Europe, Romantic beliefs and the gathering of statistics combined to stimulate interest in the region. Romanticism encouraged the study of traditions at the local level with its valorization of the specific, the ancient, and the authentic. Statistics at the time involved the study of society as a whole and had more a qualitative than a strictly quantitative approach. Throughout Western and Eastern Europe, statistical societies were founded in the hopes that the entire nation would become visible to the center and to its parts. In the Russian Empire, statistical committees were founded in all provinces in European Russia by late 1834, the same year the Royal Statistical Society was established in London, with provincial branches following soon after.⁴²

In 1837, the Russian government carried out a significant reform of local government in European Russia that gave more power to the governor and sought to revitalize the economy of the provinces by encouraging the exchange of information.⁴³ This reform reflected an interest in Adam Smith among high governmental officials such as Nikolai Mordvinov.⁴⁴ The 1837 law on local administration was immediately followed by the law establishing provincial newspapers in all European provinces, suggesting that the government wanted the provincial public to be engaged through the newspapers, mainly for economic reasons. The regulations governing the topics of the newspapers focused mostly on market-related topics such as prices of goods, descriptions of factories, and so on, but they also included material on the history of the region, almost as an afterthought.⁴⁵ The hope was that greater knowledge of the local would stimulate the economy. The main focus

of the newspapers, however, tended to be on the history of towns, villages, and churches, along with descriptions of town life such as concerts and balls. After the creation of a new program in 1845, articles on ethnographic topics began to appear.⁴⁶ The newspapers became a new town chronicle that drew upon the older tradition of manuscript chronicles of regional events, which in some places had continued through the 1830s.⁴⁷ Although newspapers reached a wide spectrum of groups, including nobles, merchants, and some state peasants, the core of their editors, local authors, and readers were a nonelite group of priests and priests' sons who had become bureaucrats. This practice was a continuation of the role of the clerical estate as keepers of the village archive.⁴⁸

In addition, the 1830s was the decade in which the idea of the provincial was formulated in literary culture, as Anne Lounsbury's chapter shows. Aleksandr Pushkin led the way, introducing the term "provincialism" as a state of being rather than just a place.⁴⁹ His description of the heroine of *Eugene Onegin*, Tatiana Larina, as "provincial" gendered the province as female, as simpler, and more authentic, and yet less powerful than the center, which was gendered male.⁵⁰ He himself wrote several times as if he were a provincial author and was also concerned about the need to reach provincial readers.⁵¹ Also in the 1830s, women writers began to claim a role for themselves as provincial authors.⁵² Their choice suggests that the idea of the province as female opened up an opportunity for women writers, while at the same time ensuring that their works would not be considered of primary importance.

In Western Europe, the 1830s were also a time of increased interest in the local and the creation of institutions to study these areas. In France, the July Monarchy established the Comité des Travaux Historiques (CTH) in 1834 to study local history in the provinces.⁵³ Like the Russian provincial statistical committees, the French CTH provided an institutional base for the mobilization of local intellectuals to define the nature and contributions of their provinces; in both cases, the government sent out questionnaires for locals to fill out and sought to delineate the scope of local activity by turning it toward scholarship and away from politics.⁵⁴ The July Monarchy was just as unwilling as was the Russian government to allow local elites free rein over the interpretation of their history.⁵⁵ Similarly, in 1844, the Spanish government created historical monuments commissions in all provinces to study local life, which later became the focal point for regionalism.⁵⁶ In the German lands, the process was necessarily more decentralized and began a bit earlier, by the late 1810s, when periodicals and associations began to be established for the study of the region – a trend that accelerated by the 1830s.⁵⁷ In all these cases, the governments were not willing to allow locals either to ignore their history or to write it entirely on their own terms; instead, they were to be directed toward the production of knowledge useful for the government and conducive to social stability. The local institutions of the 1830s had not been established in Siberia. Although there is no direct evidence, it is likely that officials feared that they would encourage separatism. Indeed, when provincial newspapers were expanded to Siberia in 1857, Siberian regionalists soon took key editorial posts and used the paper to spread a sense of regional distinctiveness.⁵⁸

While the regional institutions of the 1830s tended to be governmental, by the second wave of the 1860s, new socially based associations were founded, some with a political program. The Siberian regionalists of the 1860s are central to this story. The regionalists took to heart the works of A. P. Shchapov who, in turn, was influenced by the federalist views of Ukrainian historian Mykola Kostomarov. Shchapov argued that regionalism was not a new idea but a return to the correct path of Russian development, lost by the turn toward Muscovite centralization.⁵⁹ In this way, history was used to give an ancient and honorable pedigree to the new demands of regionalism. This process, of course, is also visible – and far better studied – in the mobilization of nationalism in Western Europe by historians and states during the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

St. Petersburg was the site of the most important of the Siberian regional circles, which had begun as meeting places for Siberians far from home; however, by the early 1860s, one such group had developed radical tendencies. N. M. Iadrintsev and G. N. Potanin were the leaders of this group and of Siberian regionalism.⁶¹ By 1863, most of the regionalists had returned to Siberia without receiving their university degrees due to poverty. Iadrintsev and Potanin moved to Tomsk, where they formed a new circle. Potanin was the editor of the unofficial section of the Tomsk provincial newspaper, which was one of the institutions of the 1830s introduced to Siberia only in 1857; the unofficial section published works on all aspects of the region, aside from political questions. He published an important regionalist article by Iadrintsev that called upon educated Siberians to spread enlightenment and to found a Siberian university.⁶² Potanin also became secretary of the Tomsk Provincial Statistical Committee in 1864, a post he used to organize study of the region.⁶³ The institutions of the 1830s thus fostered a new Siberian regionalism in the 1860s.

By 1863, Siberian regionalists had developed a minimal program that emphasized the social-cultural needs of an independent regional culture and, as von Mohrenschildt and others argue, a maximal program “primarily political, which proclaimed immediate secession of Siberia from Russia,” influenced by the Polish uprising of 1863.⁶⁴ Their second proclamation, “To the Patriots of Siberia,” which a recent work argues was written by Iadrintsev and regionalist S. S. Shashkov in 1863 before they left St. Petersburg, envisioned a new Siberia marked by economic and political freedom and federalism.⁶⁵ This extraordinary document proclaimed that Siberians were descended from rebels and exiles free from the taint of serfdom and so “Siberia may be the first Slavic nation to achieve the great popular deed – a democratic republic.” It ended thus, “Long live the Republic of the United States of Siberia! Long live Siberian freedom – from the Urals to the shores of the Pacific Ocean!”⁶⁶

After the manifesto was discovered in 1865 at the Omsk Cadet School, regionalists were brought to Omsk for questioning, setting off the Affair of the Siberian Separatists, which ended with the leading Siberian regionalists being exiled away from Siberia. Despite the attempts of the police, they were not able to determine the authorship of the proclamation. Some regionalists, including Potanin, however, freely admitted to calling for the independence of Siberia.⁶⁷

Government officials seem to have been fearful of possible connections between Siberia and the United States, which had been the subject of many works by Siberian and Russian intellectuals.⁶⁸ The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, while exiled in Siberia, had argued that Russia and the United States would become closer and perhaps would federate with one another. “To the Patriots of Siberia” suggested the possibility of trading Russian America, later Alaska, to the United States in exchange for weapons.⁶⁹ The Russian historian M.V. Shilovskii has argued that the sale of Russian America was made a higher priority due to the fears aroused by this affair.⁷⁰

Only after the experience of exile, when Iadrintsev was able to read widely in European and colonial history, and discuss his thoughts with political exiles from throughout the empire was there a shift to a more theoretical understanding of the region.⁷¹ By 1873, Iadrintsev began to conceive of a regionalist program that would call for the federation of Siberia into Russia as an equal partner.⁷² By the 1880s, Siberian regionalism was at the height of its influence – a decade earlier than the height of political regionalism in Western Europe.⁷³ One scholar notes that Potanin and Iadrintsev rejected Eurocentric and ethnocentric views in favor of a valorization of racial and cultural diversity, and called for the creation of autonomous cultural communities.⁷⁴ In a comparative European framework then, Siberian regionalism was in advance of similar movements in France and Spain.

During the 1860s European Russia also witnessed a rising sense of provincial identity. In opposition to the better-known state school of history, which saw the state as the driving force behind Russian history, there arose a provincialist school that admired Russia’s pre-Mongol federalist state, criticized Muscovy for destroying it, and argued that the provinces should have more say in their administration.⁷⁵ During the preparations for the abolition of serfdom, groups within the state and in the provincial committees tasked with preparing the laws for the reforms called for a provincialist system that would give local nobles in each province the political power to determine the parameters of the end of serfdom.⁷⁶ In time, this movement was defeated by a centralist view that the state understood the needs of the society better.⁷⁷

In France, regionalism moved from a cultural to a political stage between the 1860s and 1870–1871. One of the earlier manifestations of political regional identity in France, the provincialist Nancy Program of 1865, was inspired in part by liberal thought, though, even more so, by a desire to decentralize power in order to recreate older organs so that local nobles would once again have a leading role in local society.⁷⁸ In the South of France, a Midi regionalism offered a vision of the south as a distinct region of France with its own dialect, culture, and history. In the 1860s, the Provençal Renaissance culminated in what was called the *Félibrige*, led by the Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral, who called true patriotism a “natural extension of a person’s love for his native region, his commune, and his family.”⁷⁹ The creation of the Paris Commune was partly motivated by a desire to give authority to local administration and the leading city of the Midi, Marseilles, joined the rebellion. The Marseilles rebellion ended with military defeat and the imposition of martial law in Marseilles, along with Paris and Lyon, until

the spring of 1876.⁸⁰ As with Siberia, the Midi was not allowed to express political regionalism.

In Siberia, unlike countries in Western Europe, during the third wave of the 1890s, the regionalists were not able to create a political party and thus did not get experience in reaching a popular audience. In addition, the Trans-Siberian Railroad was finished during this decade, leading to a massive wave of peasant settlement from Russia, swamping the Siberians who had lived there for decades. The regionalists had difficulty in reaching this group.⁸¹ Tragically, Iadrintsev died before his time in 1894. Potanin continued to be active, but the restrictions on political activity, as well as regionalists' own belief that they should be above parties, hindered their outreach.⁸² These conditions left the regionalists without a strong base when the Russian revolution broke out.

During the 1890s, political regionalism in Western Europe came into its own, undergoing a fundamental change from an elite, academic study of the region to a political movement.⁸³ One of the first mass political regionalist movements in Western Europe was based in Catalonia. There the founding of the *Lliga de Catalunya*, which called for giving the region substantial economic and political power, took place in 1887.⁸⁴ During the 1890s, the regionalists of Catalonia and the Basque Country gained a mass base of support and worked with other groups for decentralization and federation of Spain's historical regions.⁸⁵ The collapse of empires is a transnational factor for the emergence of new regionalisms, whether in the 1890s or after 1918 or 1991. Between 1898 and 1900, this development in Spain was crowned by the creation of a new party, the *Lliga regionalista*, which brought together the federalist movements of the various regions.⁸⁶

Although political activity was forbidden in the provinces in late imperial Russia, the Russian provinces did also see significant cultural development. In 1875, the St. Petersburg publicist D. L. Mordovtsev argued that despite the attempts of the provinces to have their own literatures and to make their voices heard, it was impossible because the forces of history drew people away from the peripheries toward the center. A. S. Gatsiskii, a leading historian of Nizhnii Novgorod, noted that decentralization was necessary in culture as well as in politics and that the intelligentsia of the capitals had become so fixated on the "people" that they missed the middling population of the provinces that they needed to reach.⁸⁷ This was the first formulation of what became ever more complex attempts by the 1890s to study the province: as total biography, as local economy, and as history. The provinces also developed their own arts of self-representation, including in photography.⁸⁸

The fourth wave of regionalism had two parts: the first was a flare of political regionalism in the years after the Civil War in Siberia and the Russian North, and in Catalonia during and after World War I, which was put down by military force. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, those areas with strong regional identities became the strongholds of anti-Bolshevik resistance during the Civil War that followed the Bolshevik seizure of power in the 1917 November Revolution.⁸⁹ The 1920s were a golden age of cultural regionalism in the USSR and Western Europe.

During the era of the Provisional Government, Potanin and others proclaimed an autonomous Siberia at the First Siberian Regional Conference held at Tomsk

2–9 August 1917, raising the green and white flag of Siberia, which symbolized forests and snow, and summoning the long-awaited Siberian Regional Duma, which had been one of the main demands of the regionalists in the 1905 Revolution. Regionalist representatives were professionals, not peasants or workers. Later attempts to frame the laws of an autonomous Siberia showed that the peasant-focused Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) had more representatives, as they were able to reach the peasant masses. After the Bolsheviks came to power, Potanin moved to the right for fear of SR control, leading him to denounce the upcoming Siberian Regional Duma as illegitimate. This rejection only lent authority to the White Army leader in Siberia, Admiral A. V. Kolchak, who carried out a coup in Omsk on 18 November 1918, which led to the arrest of SRs and the disbanding of various representative organizations. Potanin died in 1920.⁹⁰ Although Kolchak was a terrible leader, the regionalists' preference for a strong Russian state with which Siberia could be federated made accommodation with the Whites seem necessary.⁹¹ And yet the military disaster that was the White Army provided no basis for a strong Russia, and the end of the Civil War meant the collapse of the Siberian regionalist movement.⁹²

In the Russian North, there was a parallel development in which SRs and other socialists created an anti-Bolshevik government that was actively defended by Allied forces carrying out a coup on 2 August 1918 in Arkhangel'sk. This group created the Supreme Administration of the Northern Region, which was filled with members from the center rather than from the north.⁹³ In early September, this administration was replaced by the centrist Provisional Government of the Northern Region, which did have representation from regionalists associated with the Society for the Study of the Russian North (established 1908).⁹⁴ However, the SRs failed to motivate the local population. They ignored northern regionalist identity, which defined itself as more democratic than the center due to its lack of serfdom and nobility, and as the heir to the medieval Republic of Novgorod. The SRs' lack of understanding of local conditions meant that they were unable to draw the residents of the north to their side. As the SRs and other socialists became more focused on the needs of the center, and even crushed the preexisting democratic institutions of the local northern Soviets, many of which were anti-Bolshevik elective institutions of peasants and members of the armed forces, the population drew further away from the SRs, many joining the Bolsheviks.⁹⁵ The northern regionalists, such as those in Siberia, cast their lot with the Whites to the point that when there was a final attempt to stave off collapse by attempting to create an independent state of the Russian North in February 1920, no regionalists took part.⁹⁶ In the end, the Bolsheviks regained control of the Russian North and, as in Siberia, the northern regionalist movement collapsed, unable to continue its advocacy for uplifting the region as a whole.⁹⁷ The inability of the intelligentsia to mobilize the regions cost them more dearly than they themselves realized. It meant that their parties, associations, and way of life were doomed to defeat by the Bolsheviks, who had capably donned the mantle of the center.

Catalan demands for home rule reached their height in late 1918 and early 1919, when the Spanish king worked with the *Lliga regionalista* for self-government

rather than separatism. However, there was agitation in Barcelona, and repressive measures were taken.⁹⁸ Catalan agitation also gave rise to regionalist claims in Asturias, Extremadura, and Aragon as well, which were put down by the army in 1919.⁹⁹ Despite this setback, the regionalist parties were able to survive and continue to gain followers.

Somewhat surprisingly, the 1920s were the decade of what I call the regionalist feast in Europe. The creation of new scholarly institutions to study regions strengthened cultural regionalism in the 1920s. The Russian Academy of Sciences created a scholarly network in the provinces that helped to coordinate methodologically innovative work in history and geography, as well as a growing network of regional museums.¹⁰⁰ In Spain, centers for the study of regions such as Galicia, Asturias, and Extremadura contributed to a rise in regional publications.¹⁰¹

During the 1920s, economic and cultural regionalism flourished in what would in 1922 be named the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Although the republics of the Soviet Union were generally ethno-territorial in their organization, the Soviets were also interested in encouraging the study of economic regions. For example, V. I. Lenin's plan for the electrification of the country envisioned district centers that would overflow with industrial and cultural values. The electrical network would also echo and promote a regional network that would create a lattice of power nuclei, with regional centers forming the nodes.¹⁰² Lenin also discussed the need to identify economic regions in order to distribute industry rationally, making the best use of raw materials and labor.¹⁰³ Geography as a discipline followed these strictures and created a new subfield of the discipline that was called the regional trend in Soviet economic geography, which saw transport flows as the determining factor in creating economic regions.¹⁰⁴ This strand of thought about academic and regional planning continued in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras with the creation of new towns located near resources. Contemporary regional history under Lenin was to become the study of how the Bolsheviks came to power in various locales; Lenin praised the work of one local historian who portrayed the establishment of Soviet power in one district in Tver province and emphasized the growth of civilized life after its establishment.¹⁰⁵

During the 1920s, the practice of *kraevedenie*, a nonpolitical form of local history focusing mainly on cultural heritage, came into being.¹⁰⁶ There was a conflict, although not usually openly expressed, between a focus on the needs of the state and on the local for its own sake. N. K. Krupskaja and other officials sought to connect local areas to the Soviet Union as a whole by encouraging the introduction of local studies into education. Their goal was to develop children's powers of observation and to root them in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷

In contrast, members of the intelligentsia created a *kraevedenie* organized by province or region that emphasized culture, not economics, and tended to focus on the prerevolutionary era. V. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii used the idea of *paysage*, or "cultural landscapes," which dealt not only with physical processes but also with spatial relationships.¹⁰⁸ One scholar called for the "local method," which would foreground the local and its experiences rather than the growth of the central state.¹⁰⁹ The culmination of this school was the work of N. K. Piksarov on

the regional principle in Russian cultural studies, which was an interdisciplinary approach to studying the art, literature, architecture, and way of life of Russia's regions.¹¹⁰

While Siberian and Northern Russian regionalism had collapsed by the end of the Civil War, Catalans continued to nurture their sense of a separate identity even after the end of World War I. Although Siberian regionalists had done much to outline the theory of an autonomous Siberia, as to a lesser extent had northern regionalists, neither had achieved what the Catalans did in terms of creating the emotional bonds with the region that the Catalan literary language, festivals, songs, and poetry cultivated even during times of political repression. In 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera established a dictatorship in Spain and cracked down on the use of Catalan symbols and language. He closed 150 Catalan organizations. This number alone suggests how much broader the associational web was in Catalonia than in Siberia or the Russian North. Despite the suppression of political regionalism, Catalan identity continued to exist and even flourish.

Under both Stalin and Franco, however, regionalism was quashed in the 1930s. One of Stalin's early purges was of the Academy of Sciences. The "academicians' affair" of 1930 saw the removal of many leading historians as well as other academicians, many of which had been leading figures of the prerevolutionary period as well.¹¹¹ In what would soon become typical of the Stalinist era, the "old *kraevedenie*" was attacked as bourgeois remnants and its followers as enemies of the state.¹¹²

In place of the old *kraevedenie*, Maksim Gor'ky established the *History of Factories and Plants*, which sought to mobilize workers to write their own history for themselves using oral history – a method of which Joseph Stalin approved.¹¹³ Gor'ky also asked nonworkers to participate, as long as they were not historians, whom he felt were unable to shape the narrative in the fiction-like style that was desired.¹¹⁴ Workers responded, stating that the workers were capable of creatively studying their own history and calling for circles for such study to be founded in each factory.¹¹⁵ This project erased the question of regional identity entirely.

In Catalonia, the story was more complex, though not dissimilar. First, there was a shift to a broader-based, left-wing regionalism that connected anarchism, working-class identity, and Catalan identity. The Catalan anarchists and other left-wing groups became more ideologically extreme. The resulting polarization of the population allowed the leader of the nationalist forces, Francisco Franco, who brought together Spanish fascists and monarchists to create his own base, to take Barcelona in 1939. The Gestapo returned Catalan leaders who had fled to Vichy France, who were then shot by Franco's forces.¹¹⁶ Franco visited upon Catalonia what some scholars have called a "cultural genocide." Between 1938 and 1953, 3,800 people were executed for fighting in Catalonia during the Civil War. The Catalan flag and anthem were banned and monuments destroyed; no use of Catalan was permitted in public, including in schools.¹¹⁷ Instead, a new Catalan identity emerged from within the Catalan Church, which Franco could not easily repress. The leaders of this new Catalan movement linked Catalan identity with religion.

In the decades after World War II, nationalism was more emphasized than regionalism, especially as fascists had deployed regionalist tropes. As we have seen, from the 1830s, there were waves of regionalist activity roughly every 30 years; however, due to the war, there was a gap between the 1920s and 1970s. This gap had different specific causes in different countries, but overall the rise of the nation as the locus of identity after the war meant that the region was deemphasized.¹¹⁸ In France, Vichy had embraced “regionalism,” which made the concept seem unpatriotic.¹¹⁹ In interwar France, pro-Nazi groups in Flanders, Alsace, and Brittany had made inroads into regional elites, leading to an era where regionalism was connected to the right wing.¹²⁰ In addition, Nazi Germany and Franco’s Spain appropriated the symbols of regional diversity.¹²¹

After the war, national rebuilding occupied most of the attention of governments, although there was some cultural regionalism in Southern France.¹²² In 1968, regionalist aspirations emerged as part of the wave of unrest that swept through Europe. In France, General Charles de Gaulle gave a speech in Lyon on 24 March 1968 on the importance of decentralization.¹²³ In May–June 1968, at the height of political unrest, Occitan, Breton, and other French regionalisms rose to greater prominence.¹²⁴

By the time of the fifth wave in the 1970s, Western Europe saw a significant rise of cultural and political regionalism as nation-states cut subsidies to underperforming regions at the same time as the European communities encouraged the devolution of some political powers.¹²⁵ There was a massive wave of regional institution-building supported by the forerunners to the European Union (EU), partly in response to the unrest of 1968, leading to a sharp rise in political regionalism. In fact, the process of European unification decreased the perceived costs of secession and thus encouraged the growth of regionalist parties.¹²⁶ While in the 1950s, regionalist parties were limited to only a few regions, by the 1970s, they had spread to the Spanish regions and the north of Italy – a process that continued in the 1980s when all of Italy and more of Spain saw the introduction of regionalist parties.¹²⁷ In Spain, after Franco died in 1975 and the first democratic elections were held in 1977, regionalist parties were strong and called for autonomy for their regions.¹²⁸ In 1978, the new democratic Spanish constitution gave real administrative and legislative autonomy.¹²⁹ By the late 1980s, the idea of a Europe of the regions was politically prominent and was given political force in the principle of subsidiarity, which proposed that decisions should be made as close to those they affect as possible. This principle was articulated in the 1991 Treaty of Maastricht that served as the basis of the European Union.¹³⁰

In contrast, the USSR returned to the level of the 1830s, as voluntary associations stimulated cultural regionalism but political regionalism was forbidden. Russian nationalists rejected Khrushchev’s attack on the church and destruction of historic monuments. In 1964, students created a voluntary association: the Rodina (Motherland) Club in Moscow to protest Khrushchev’s campaign against the Orthodox Church. Generated from the bottom up, it was never allowed to become a mass organization.¹³¹ At the same time, as Victoria Donovan has pointed out, it should be noted that Khrushchev had encouraged the rise of *kraevedenie*

after 1961 as part of a localization of his de-Stalinization plan. That move, in turn, led to tensions between central and regional officials over who controlled the narrative and actual artifacts in museums.¹³² In 1965, the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Council of Ministers created the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historic and Cultural Monuments (VOOPIK in its Russian abbreviation) as part of the party’s attempt to co-opt Russian nationalist groups. The direction of the society in Moscow was under the control of state and party, which members of the Moscow intelligentsia protested in an open letter in 1965.¹³³

VOOPIK, which had regional branches, became a focal point for cultural regionalism. It grew into a mass organization, with 7 million members in 1972, 12 million in 1977, and 15 million in 1985.¹³⁴ Relations between the center, local branches, and members of the local intelligentsia could be tense, with charges that VOOPIK allowed the demolition of churches.¹³⁵ In some cases, though, VOOPIK did fight for the preservation of churches and other buildings.¹³⁶ It also worked with the state to develop new tourist destinations, highlighting the medieval heritage of Russia. During the Brezhnev era (1964–1982), the Lenin/Krupskaja model of local history as serving the party and as particularly suited for primary and secondary school pedagogy continued to be the official stance.¹³⁷ In 1967, a new coat of arms of Novgorod was created – one that symbolized the conjunction of Soviet modernity with tradition. The prerevolutionary symbol of the town had been a pair of bears who were retained in the new coat of arms, but who were now flanking a light bulb.¹³⁸ The push to create a Soviet modernity actually underlined the gap that had opened up between the USSR and Western Europe since Stalin.

The collapse of the Soviet Union involved several types of territories. In 1990, the republics of the Soviet Union, led by Lithuania, declared their independence in what was known as the “parade of sovereignties.” These republics were organized on an ethno-territorial basis, although this organization does not in itself explain the rejection of the Soviet Union. The republics most likely to secede were those with the most wealth, fewest national minorities, and greatest measure of pre-Soviet autonomy.¹³⁹ The RSFSR was also a federation, with a mix of ethno-territorially based autonomous republics for specific nationalities, such as Tatarstan, as well as ethnically Russian regional territorial units. The RSFSR declared independence 12 June 1990 under the influence of Boris Yeltsin, who had recently been elected to the RSFSR’s Supreme Soviet; in August 1990, he told the heads of two of the RSFSR’s autonomous republics to “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow.”¹⁴⁰ A failed military coup in August 1991 fatally damaged the political status of Mikhail Gorbachev, the head of the USSR, while elevating Yeltsin. On 25 December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, and Yeltsin was the new leader of the largest country in the world, having been elected Russia’s first president on 12 June 1991.¹⁴¹ Yeltsin emphasized a civic Russian identity as being higher than ethnic or regional identities, although he was willing to allow an expansion of autonomy as long as the ultimate authority was given to the central government of what became the Russian Federation.¹⁴² After 1991, two rounds of treaties bound the 89 administrative divisions together; these were superseded by the 1993 Russian Constitution, which led to further negotiations.¹⁴³ In general,

while Yeltsin allowed regions to gain economic powers, which in practice mainly benefited regional elites, he did not allow the political secession of territorial units that had been part of the RSFSR.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, regions claimed new powers, particularly between 1991 and 1993 when Yeltsin forcibly disbanded the Supreme Soviet. Before 1993, several provinces in the Urals were working together to create a new Ural Republic in the belief that there was a sufficient economic base for independence and that separatism would solve most regional problems. Although the Sverdlovsk regional council approved a constitution for the Ural Republic on 27 October 1993, Yeltsin overturned it by dissolving the council.¹⁴⁴ Vladimir Putin has also made it a policy to decrease powers available to the regions and to increase central authority.¹⁴⁵

After 1991, study of the regions in Russia returned to the “old *kraevedenie*” of the 1920s, with its focus on culture, not politics. The intertwining of cultural and political demands that had been characteristic of the Siberian and northern regionalisms defeated in the Civil War was not characteristic of the new Russia. D. S. Likhachev, the revered scholar of medieval Russia, called for more attention to be given to the region as a constituent part of Russian life.¹⁴⁶ Some scholars drew on the interdisciplinary theoretical approaches of the 1920s.¹⁴⁷ Others worked on a new theoretical foundation for the cultural study of the provinces.¹⁴⁸

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the more restricted borders of the Russian Federation led to an interest in peripheries and borders in post-Soviet literature, which sought to define Russianness and either to work through or reject the loss of territory that 1991 entailed. Fantasies of new Russias and laments for lost Russias were both prominent.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, the two alternatives mentioned at the start of this chapter – the pre-Petrine mystical regional identity and the Catherinian Enlightenment regional identity – reemerged after 1991. Chapters by Bradley Gorski and Jane Costlow in this book present evidence of the return of a mystical regionalism in which sacred springs and the irreducible specificity of the region’s history and dialect have been emphasized in the Urals and in Orel Province respectively. Similarly, Mark Lipovetsky shows the rise of a new kind of enlightenment regional identity in Sverdlovsk/Ekaterinburg in which the universal and the regional are brought together to celebrate the Urals as one of the outposts of Russianness.

In Western Europe, the 1990s saw another wave of regionalism. During the 1990s, regionalist parties reached 15% of the vote share – a high that had not been reached since the 1970s. This result was partly due to the example of the former republics of the USSR gaining independence.¹⁵⁰ It does seem that the European Union currently encourages regionalist demands. One formulation of the Catalans in recent years has been to call themselves “the most European of Spaniards.”¹⁵¹

In Siberia, 2010 marked a campaign to encourage residents of Siberia to declare themselves as Siberians in the 2010 census. *Oblastniki*, or Siberian regionalists, have reemerged and called for Siberian autonomy, and a linguist even promoted a Siberian language based on local dialects.¹⁵² This is particularly interesting, as Seth Jolly, working from the Western European context, has argued that a

distinct language is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of regionalism.¹⁵³ Siberia might yet stand as an important counterexample, given that the strong regional interest in a Siberian language of the mid-2000s has now subsided.

To conclude, Russia was an active and early participant in the three waves of nineteenth-century European regionalism. Russia’s stronger state and politically weaker nobility than in other European countries created opportunities in Russia for other social groups to claim political and cultural space at the regional level. In addition, Siberian regionalists and others in Russia were open to federalist and regionalist ideas coming from elsewhere. In the 1920s, Russian regionalist thought was at a high level of theoretical awareness and took part in the broader regionalist feast of the 1920s. However, by the 1970s, the Soviet Union and Western Europe had decisively diverged; while political regionalism had an important and growing role to play in Western Europe, in the Soviet Union, even a cultural regionalism focused on topics opened for discussion by the party elite was unable to affect party policy. In the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union encouraged another wave of Western European regionalism as well as an upsurge of cultural regionalism among local intellectuals and a short-lived attempt at political regionalism between 1991 and 1993 among local political elites. While 1990 was a lively and interesting decade for Russian regions, when compared to the wide range of political as well as cultural activity taking place in Western Europe, we can see that the post-1945 period was the moment when the development of Russian and Western European regionalism really diverged.

The larger implications of this work can be seen at three levels. The first is the regional level. Through a comparative account of the rise of regionalism in Europe as a whole, we can see that study of the regions can rise above case studies and become important for the field of European history.

Second, at the national level, this work shows that a different scale of focus can allow for the emergence of a new narrative – one in which regionalisms in the Russian Empire and early Soviet Union were not particularly divergent from those in Western Europe. It was the Stalin era that led to a major parting of the ways with Western Europe as regards regionalism.

Third, at the transnational level, this work suggests a divergence between the European Union, whose policies encourage both cultural and political regionalism, and today’s Russia, where central power has been reestablished. This contrast can perhaps give more depth to our understanding of Putin’s reasons for opposing the expansion of the EU, as reopening the question of regional devolution of powers is decidedly not on his agenda. Study of Russian regions is crucial not only for the understanding of Russian history but also of the history of Europe as a whole.

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