

OXFORD

WAR,
REVOLUTION,
AND NATION-MAKING
IN LITHUANIA, 1914–1923



TOMAS BALKELIS

THE GREATER WAR
1912-1923

General Editor

ROBERT GERWARTH

War, Revolution, and
Nation-Making in
Lithuania, 1914–1923

TOMAS BALKELIS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Tomas Balkelis 2018

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First Edition published in 2018

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017953554

ISBN 978-0-19-966802-1

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

Preface

This book grew out of my work within an international team of historians at the Center for War Studies, University College Dublin, where we worked on the European Research Council-funded project “Paramilitary Violence in Europe and the Wider World, 1917–1923” in 2009–13. Its leader, Robert Gerwarth, provided inspiration and encouragement to write a study on the Baltic region that would focus on its transformation by continuous war between 1914 and the early 1920s. Therefore, my special gratitude goes to him and other friends and colleagues associated with the center including John Horne, Uğur Ümit Üngör, John Paul Newman, Julia Eichenberg, Gajendra Singh, Mark Jones, Matthew James, Suzanne D’Arcy, and others with whom I was able to share my initial ideas.

The Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (CREEES) at Stanford University provided an excellent venue to write an early draft. Meanwhile, the Baltic American Freedom Foundation served as my sponsor. I thank Norman Naimark, Amir Weiner, Jovana Knežević, Pavle Levi, Kristo Nurmis, Igor Casu, Aurimas Švedas, and all the others who helped me to develop and present parts of my book at Stanford. Lissi Esse of Stanford University Libraries ensured that my time at the Green and Hoover Libraries was enjoyable. I also want to thank Irena Kvieselaitienė of the National Mažvydas Library of Lithuania for her invaluable support locating my sources.

My acknowledgements also go to my current colleagues at the Lithuanian Historical Institute in Vilnius where I completed the book, especially to Česlovas Laurinavičius and Edmundas Gimžauskas for their support, inspiring insights, criticism, and suggestions. Finally, I want to thank Cathryn Steele for her assistance while preparing the manuscript at OUP. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for any shortcomings or errors in the text.

In 2018 Lithuania, as well as many other East European states, celebrates its 100th anniversary of independence. The book may be read as a history of the emergence of an independent Lithuanian state. But it can also be viewed as a sequel to my earlier *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (Routledge, 2009), in which I was interested to see how the Lithuanian national movement developed from its early roots in the 1880s until the Great War.

Lithuania’s history, like the histories of other East European countries, is a challenge for anyone engaged in naming places, people, and institutions. When dealing with administrative and institutional names, I followed, with some minor exceptions, the historical principle of preserving historical names common to a specific historical period. Hence “Vilna province,” and not “Vilnius province.” However, to avoid confusion, I used current names of geographical locations, sometimes giving their historical names in brackets. Thus “Vilnius” and “Kaunas” were kept as names of the cities, not “Vilna” and “Kovno.” In writing surnames,

I tried to follow the spelling common to a given person's nationality. In the cases when it was difficult to establish this, the original forms found in the sources of the specific period were followed. On February 1, 1918 Russia replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian one that is used currently. All dates before this point follow the old calendar, while after it they follow the new one. In the book all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

When writing this text, I used selections from several of my previous articles. I want to thank the publishers listed below for permission to reuse them here:

“Demobilization and Remobilization of German and Lithuanian Paramilitaries after the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2015): 38–57. @2015, reprinted with permission of Sage Journals.

“From Defence to Revolution: Lithuanian Paramilitary Groups in 1918 and 1919,” *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, no. 28 (2014): 43–56. @2014, reprinted with permission of Klaipėda University.

“Turning Citizens into Soldiers: Baltic Paramilitary Movements after the Great War,” in Robert Gerwarth and John Horn, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence after the Great War, 1917–1923* (2012): 126–45. @2012, reprinted with permission of Oxford University Press.

Contents

Introduction: Violence, Revolution, and Nation-Making	1
1. State Failure, Social Disaster, and Refugee Politics During the Great War	14
2. Breaking from Isolation: War and Nation-Building	35
3. New War, New Mobilizations	57
4. Two Visions of Lithuania: Revolution and the Advance of the Red Army	78
5. Multidirectional War and Paramilitarism	96
6. Home Front	121
7. The Polish–Lithuanian Conflict: “A Dirty War”	136
Epilogue: Peace or a Long-Term Crisis?	158
<i>Bibliography</i>	167
<i>Index</i>	179



Map 1. The Ober Ost in 1917.



Map 2. Lithuanian–Soviet, Polish–Soviet, and Lithuanian–Polish Wars in 1918–1921.

Introduction

Violence, Revolution, and Nation-Making

At around 3.00 p.m. on March 18, 1919 a pack of about forty armed German soldiers showed up at the “Metropolis” hotel in central Kaunas, the headquarters of the American Relief Administration that had arrived in Lithuania a day earlier. When some of them tried to enter the hotel, two Lithuanian soldiers guarding the entrance stopped them. One Lithuanian guard was shot dead at a point-blank range, and a German soldier was wounded. As the Germans forced themselves into the building in search of the Americans, a crowd of civilians gathered on the street. When the empty-handed soldiers tried to exit the building, they faced the agitated mob. A nearby Lithuanian detachment was urgently dispatched and arrested several marauders. On March 21 the funeral of the killed Lithuanian guard, Pranas Eimutis, turned into a massive anti-German and pro-government rally as thousands of Lithuanians spilled into the streets carrying his portrait. “He inscribed with his own blood our foreign policy aims. We must honor our fallen warrior,” the government daily *Lietuva* declared,¹ while all Lithuanian troops in Kaunas were ordered to join the funeral procession in full military gear.²

The incident did not make the international headlines, despite the colorful collection of actors.³ In early 1919 few people in the West knew where Lithuania or the other Baltics were, as they suddenly emerged as independent states from the cauldron of war and revolution in 1918. Yet the story epitomizes the confusing and entangled nature of a historical juncture when violence itself became a mobilizing moment for local people that have suffered several years of fighting, war displacement, foreign occupation, economic exploitation, and revolutionary turmoil. Because of its longevity and persistence, violence in its variety of shapes and colors stood at the center of the formative experience of new nation states like Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Finland, Ukraine, and Soviet Russia. It is this connection between violence and nation-making that is the focus of this study.

This book is an attempt to trace the story of the making of modern Lithuanian society through the period of continuous war from the early days of the Great War to 1923, when the violence finally subsided. Since the very notion of an independent Lithuania was in many ways constructed during the war, one may say that violence was an essential part of the formation of the Lithuanian nation state and

¹ *Lietuva*, March 20, 1919, 1.

² *Lietuva*, March 21, 1919, 1.

³ Although, it was briefly noted by the German press as a regrettable act of German soldiers.

identity. This book aims to show that war was much more than simply the historical background in which the tectonic change from an empire to a nation state took place. In many ways war not only contributed to the transformation, but also produced a number of people, and a range of policies, institutions, and modes of thinking, that shaped the country for decades after it ended.

The war violence that started in this north-western borderland of the Russian empire in August 1914 and subsided as late as in May 1923, first of all, was a great mobilizing force for the Lithuanian identity. This is not to say there were no nationally minded people who nurtured an idea of “free Lithuania” before 1914.⁴ The Lithuanian national movement arose in the early 1880s when small groups of ex-students gathered around a number of Lithuanian-language newspapers. By the turn of the twentieth century the movement already had several political parties. In 1905 they came together to claim autonomy for Lithuania within its ethnic borders. Nevertheless, before the Great War, it remained largely an elitist endeavor of nationally minded intelligentsia. Their major concern was how to build “bridges to the people,” as one Lithuanian patriot wrote in 1912.⁵ It was not independence but various types of federal autonomy that preoccupied their minds, as well as the majority of other non-Russian elites of empire before 1914.⁶

The Great War that had displaced more than half a million people from the Tsarist provinces of Courland, Kovno, Suwałki, Vilna, and Grodno came as the first serious opportunity to mobilize the population: first of all, those refugees who ended up in Russia proper. Those civilians, who now had to endure German occupation in the Ober Ost, a military state project run by German generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg that included Courland, Lithuania, parts of western Belarus, and north-eastern Poland, were also mobilized. This early “mobilization of ethnicity” occurred, as I argue in Chapter 1, amid the collapse of traditional state structures as a result of the outbreak of fighting in 1914 and the social strife that accompanied it. As the expectations of a short war and an imminent victory were shattered and replaced by despair, misery, hopes of survival, and a sense of humiliation, the pre-war political loyalties of local people were seriously questioned. The experience of enduring brutal German occupation shattered hopes of social, political, and economic stability for the population of Lithuania. Meanwhile, for the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Russia the homelessness, isolation, but also expectations raised by the Russian revolution challenged their pre-war world views and identities.

The February revolution of 1917 in Russia was a turning point that unleashed political activism of various sorts not only among soldiers, peasants, and workers,

⁴ One of the earliest references to independence of Lithuania was made by Jonas Šliūpas in 1887 in his book *Litwiny i Polacy* (New York: Lietuviszkasis balsas, 1887).

⁵ Sėjikas, “Pūvantieji tiltai į liaudį,” *Lietuvos žinios*, July 5, 1912, 1.

⁶ Ronald Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 3: The 20th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91, 130; Joshua Sanborn, *The Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14; Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London: Routledge, 2001), 27.

but also among several million non-Russian war refugees.⁷ For various nationalist elites, refugeedom, discussed in Chapter 2, provided an early springboard for political action among the masses. Thus in late May 1917 Lithuanian refugees staged their own congress in St. Petersburg and declared their desire for an independent Lithuania. When hundreds of thousands of them, tired of the hunger, chaos, and violence that had spread in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution, returned home after 1918, they found that the war had completely reshaped not only their political expectations and identities, but also their homeland.⁸

For the population in the Ober Ost their first great mobilizing moment came in November 1918 with Germany's defeat in the Great War. This was the moment when the Lithuanian Council (*Taryba*) that had emerged with German blessing and support in September 1917 grasped its chance of independent statehood and asserted itself by turning to Lithuanian society.⁹ Although the *Taryba* declared its independence as early as December 1917 (and then again in February 1918), for several months the German authorities did not allow it to form a government, and it essentially remained isolated and entangled in various German-inspired plans of political dependency.¹⁰

The implosion of three European empires in late 1918 brought a complete breakdown of state power across the entire region, stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea. As the monumental imperial spaces splintered into a high number of contested national spaces, the whole area turned into a shatter zone where a series of post-war conflicts variously described as "civil wars," "freedom fights," or "liberation struggles" erupted with a vengeance unseen since the early days of the Great War.¹¹ The gradual collapse of German rule in the Ober Ost also led to the general breakdown of state power. In November–December of 1918 a number of new political players claimed it without being able to support their claims with any significant military presence. The Lithuanian *Taryba*, the Polish Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*), and the Vilna Soviet of Worker Delegates tried desperately to scramble enough troops to fill in the power vacuum that emerged between

⁷ For the refugee crisis in Russia, see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, eds., *Homelands: War, Population Displacement and Statehood in the East-West Borderlands, 1918–1924* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

⁸ For the political and cultural transformation of the Lithuanian refugees in Russia, see Tomas Balkelis, "Forging 'a Moral Community': The Great War and Lithuanian Refugees in Russia," in *Population Displacement in Lithuania in the 20th Century: Experiences, Identities and Legacies*, eds. Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliūtė (London: Brill, 2016), 42–62.

⁹ The first public appeal of the *Taryba* to Lithuanian society was published on November 13, 1918 in Vilnius. For its text, see Aistė Morkūnaitė-Lazauskienė, *Į vietos savivaldos istorijos Lietuvoje: 1918–1919 metų dokumentai Lietuvoje* (Šiauliai: Šiaulių universiteto leidykla, 2010), 26–8.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the relationship between the Ober Ost authorities and the *Taryba*, see Raimundas Lopata, *Lietuvos valstybingumo raida 1914–1918 metais* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996).

¹¹ For recent general works on these conflicts, see Alexander Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010); Robert Gerwarth and John Horn, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence after the Great War, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

the withdrawing Germans and approaching Bolsheviks in Vilnius in late 1918. The loss of the city to the Red Army on January 5, 1919 plunged Lithuania into a new military conflict, the subject of Chapter 3. Soon new lines of confrontation hardened between Lithuanians, Germans, and Poles, on the one side, and the Bolsheviks, on the other.

The Bolshevik takeover, discussed in Chapter 4, dragged the country into a new type of war that would subside only in late 1920. If the first Bolshevik advance was eliminated by the summer of 1919 with the help of German volunteers and newly assembled Lithuanian and Polish troops, to make things even more chaotic, between July and December 1919 Lithuania and Latvia also had to defend against an invasion of German-White Russian troops under General Pavel Bermond-Avalov. Finally, in August 1920, the Polish troops, in pursuit of the retreating Red Army, launched an attack against Lithuania which eventually led to their capture of Vilnius on October 8. Respite for Lithuania came only in late November 1920 when the League of Nations negotiated a ceasefire between Poland and Lithuania that froze the fighting but also split the country into two hostile political entities.¹² Yet low-scale violence continued even after the official end of fighting until as late as May 1923. The Polish-Lithuanian conflict and its impact on the Lithuanian society are discussed in Chapter 7.

What is the significance of this unremitting violence for the emergence of the Lithuanian state and identity? First of all, the violence helped to delineate two warring state-building projects—Bolshevik and nationalist—both trying to capitalize on the social and national unrest brought about by war and revolution. Both regimes attempted to win the allegiance of local people by promising self-determination, democracy, and social reform. “The Leninist moment” with its assurance of full independence, land, and peace made in November 1917 was reinforced by the “Wilsonian moment” of national self-determination that came in the fall of 1918.¹³ Meanwhile, the violence that has erupted between two competing nationalist projects—Lithuanian and Polish—helped to chart new political boundaries of two historically entangled states. And those boundaries in most cases followed pre-war social divisions between the Polish-speaking landed nobility and the Lithuanian-speaking peasantry.

Second, during the post-war conflict Lithuanian identity has been constructed through the process of “othering” against various “enemies of the state” (be they Poles, Bolsheviks, a local “bourgeoisie,” or Germans). War was essential for state elites in helping to define not only enemies and allies, but also to disseminate a national identity among the population. In other words, war was used to establish group solidarity. Various types of violence (that included terror) against internal and external foes helped to chart the contours of the emerging community of loyal nationals. However, the excessive use of force often created tensions between the

¹² In June 1919, according to the Treaty of Versailles, the Klaipėda (Memel) region was taken from Germany and went under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations.

¹³ Arno J. Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1964), 373; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.

civilian and military authorities. Violence in all its varieties and shapes, and its consequences, are the subject of Chapter 5.

Finally, war became an effective tool for the “total mobilization” and nationalization of the whole society. Both were achieved not only by building state institutions, the army, and launching a radical land reform, but also by creating a massive paramilitary movement in the shape of the Lithuanian Riflemen Union (*šauliai*). War helped to reshape the socio-economic structure of the country and justify the radical social reform conducted at the expense of Polish landlords. Meanwhile, the *šauliai* sought to militarize society by turning civilians into citizen-soldiers. At its core, paramilitarism was an integration policy that called not only for more soldiers, but also aimed to reshape local politics and identities. In this sense, it was both counter-revolutionary (defensive) and revolutionary (expansive), as it engaged simultaneously in military action, political and cultural activism, and nation-making. The paramilitary culture that emerged in Lithuania in 1919 played a crucial role in the creation of a home front during 1919–20 and in the process of state-building during the interwar period and beyond. This new culture is at the center of my discussion in Chapters 6 and 7.

CONCEPTS, DEBATES, AND THEMES

The post-war conflict in Lithuania and other Baltic states was definitely part of a wider crisis in Russia and Eastern Europe, which Peter Holquist was one of the first to describe as the long-term continuous cycle of violence.¹⁴ In recent years, more scholars have become dissatisfied with traditional accounts that consider the Russian revolution as the key destabilizing moment in the region. They argue that it was rather an unfortunate conjuncture of the Great War and the revolution that led to the crisis.¹⁵ In their works violence itself, in its variety of shapes and forms (be it military action, revolutionary persecutions, terror against civilians, banditry, land grabs, or forced dislocations), is accorded more significance as a key formative element, as opposed to those accounts that traditionally emphasize the ideological conflict between proponents and enemies of revolution.¹⁶

Thus, basing his argument on the perspective of the long-term crisis, Joshua Sanborn called the Great War “the decolonizing moment” for the nations of the

¹⁴ Peter Holquist, “Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905–1921,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4:3 (Summer 2003): 630.

¹⁵ Sanborn, *The Imperial Apocalypse*; Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*; Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War One* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

¹⁶ For traditional accounts of the revolution, see Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); John H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); Edward H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (New York: Macmillan, 1951).

Russian empire. Placing war violence at the center of his narrative, he suggested that the process of decolonization included four major successive stages: imperial challenge, state failure, social disaster, and state-building.¹⁷ If we accept this timeline, this book explores the relationship between state failure and state-building. A similar approach was proposed by Eric Lohr who coined a term of “war nationalism” (derived from “war communism”) to describe a radical type of nation-making that had emerged in Russia’s peripheries as a result of prolonged warfare, population displacement, military rule, and ethnic conflict between 1914 and 1923.¹⁸ Mark von Hagen emphasized “the entangled nature” of the post-World War I conflict in the non-Russian borderlands and the role of ethnicity in mobilizing local populations,¹⁹ while Gregor Suny and Alex Prusin showed how the wars combined social and national revolutions.²⁰ Peter Gatrell was one of the first to demonstrate how the massive refugee crisis in Russia during the Great War unsettled the imperial structure and provided a fertile ground for the mobilization of millions of refugees by the new nation states.²¹ Meanwhile, those scholars who focused on the other side of the Eastern Front, like Vejas Liulevicius and Aviel Roshwald, showed that the occupational regimes of the Central Powers also helped to reinforce ethnic tensions through their repressive “civilizing” missions and colonizing projects.²² This book offers an account of the violent period in Lithuania and the nearby borderland region by building on the various theoretical perspectives proposed by these authors. Nevertheless, I hope that its insights may be relevant to similar processes that took place in Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Soviet Russia. All these modern states have emerged out of war, though some of them could not survive it.²³

The above-mentioned historical debate on the impact of the Great War also revealed an unfortunate gap between those authors who traditionally focus on the heart of revolution in Russia and those who study its ramifications in former imperial peripheries. Joining these two vast historiographical literatures is not an easy task. Many overtly Russo-centric accounts often ignore the fact that alongside the social revolution that swept the streets of St. Petersburg and Moscow, the non-Russian borderlands also experienced a number of nationalist revolutions that took place in Warsaw, Tallinn, Kiev, Riga, Vilnius, Tbilisi, and elsewhere. The classical paradigm of the all-encompassing Russian Civil War (or its derivative local “civil wars”) is simply not adequate to convey the variety and complexity of the conflicts

¹⁷ Sanborn, *The Imperial Apocalypse*, 5–7.

¹⁸ Eric Lohr, “War Nationalism,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, eds. Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 91–107.

¹⁹ Mark von Hagen, “The Entangled Eastern Front in the First World War,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*.

²⁰ Prusin, *The Lands Between*, 96; Ronald Suny, *Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4.

²¹ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*.

²² Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires*.

²³ On the connection between war violence and nation-making, see Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985).

that took place in all these regions after 1918. Thus, in the Baltic states, lines of confrontation ran not only along the revolutionary (Reds) and counter-revolutionary (Whites) axis, but also along nationalist lines (Germans and Whites vs. Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians; Poles vs. Lithuanians). Moreover, the belligerents often switched sides, making the conflict even more complex. Meanwhile, the presence of the Western Allies in the region further complicated the clash, adding more international significance.

On the other hand, those authors who focus largely on the nationalist dimensions of post-World War I conflict tend to ignore its revolutionary side. They often end up producing single-dimensional accounts of what happened in the western and southern peripheries of the Russian empire. The concepts of “independence wars,” “freedom fights,” or “liberation struggles” are useful when describing the interstate or interventionist nature of some of these wars, but are hardly adequate in conveying the high degree of internal social unrest that had erupted in the borderlands as a result of the Russian revolution, even if the social conflict was eventually subdued by the ethnic one. In short, taken separately, the “nationalist” (or recently coined “anti-colonial”) and “revolutionary” accounts are not able to convey the complexity of actors, social processes, and wars that transpired in the borderlands between 1918 and the early 1920s.

Perhaps it would make sense to describe these post-World War I wars, which Churchill, bewildered by their numbers and complexity, called “wars of pygmies,” by more neutral and less politically loaded terms as “borderland conflicts” or “frontier wars”?²⁴ However, we should be aware that they were fought for stakes much higher than simply new state borders or frontiers. Most significantly, as great mobilizing events, they were fought for the mental frontiers of local populations. In other words, they shaped their national and social identities and political allegiances. For the local political elites, they were nothing less than the struggle for the existence of their national or revolutionary state-building projects and for the political, social, and cultural mobilization of people. They helped to claim local populations, reject undesirable groups, and to build the political structures of emerging states. After they ended, the elites produced extensive nationalist mythologies of “struggles for freedom,” “wars of independence,” or “civil wars” that became part of collective memories, local identities, educational systems, and political cultures.

Meanwhile, for local peasantries that formed the majority of the borderland population these conflicts were also about new frontiers affecting their land possessions. As we will see, the land issue was of critical importance in these wars. Finding a solution to the redistribution of land could sometimes seal the fate of an entire state-building project. These conflicts were also seen as a promise of the new social and political order that was expected to address peasants’ desire for land, social justice, self-determination, and political representation.

²⁴ The term “frontier wars” was already used, for example, by Alexander Prusin in *The Lands Between*, 96.

In this sense, the book is also an attempt to reinsert the social dimension of post-World War I conflict back into the nation-making narrative of Lithuania and other borderland states. Even before the Bolshevik attempt to export the revolution on the tips of their guns to the West, its ideas found considerable acceptance in places like Lithuania, not to mention Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, or Ukraine. However, what is often missing in the painfully familiar Soviet accounts of the revolution is that Bolsheviks faced stiff opposition not only among nationalists, but also among other left-wing groups in the borderlands. Thus in Lithuania many local soviets emerged independently from the Moscow-inspired and -orchestrated Lithuanian Bolshevik regime based in Vilnius. In fact, often they were openly hostile to it because of the Bolshevik attempt to hijack the people's revolution. And this pattern was also visible in other countries such as Ukraine and Georgia where local revolutionary visions openly clashed with the revolution offered by Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin.

It is also necessary to point out some limitations of this book. It is neither a traditional military history nor it is a diplomatic study on the emergence of an independent Lithuania. Diplomacy, no doubt, was crucial alongside military action in the creation of post-World War I nation states such as Lithuania. The policy of Entente that vacillated between supporting the idea of an indivisible Russia and helping largely pro-Western new nation states that emerged on the periphery of the former Russian empire was highly significant in determining the post-war order. Equally important were the military interventions by Soviet Russia, Germany, and the Allies in the region. It is most likely there would have been no independent Baltic states, had Russia and Germany not lost the Great War and the Red Army not been contained by the joint efforts of the Baltic peoples, Poles, Allies, and, somewhat paradoxically, Germans. However, in my view, there is already a significant number of studies that have focused either on international diplomacy or the military course of post-World War I conflict in the region.²⁵

My focus is rather on what happened on the ground where violence took place. I hope readers will take this study as an attempt at a social history of war. This book is more concerned with the lived experience of civilians and soldiers than with the high politics of elites. Although it tells the story of the post-World War I conflict in Lithuania (and, indeed, Western readers know relatively little about it as opposed to what happened in Russia), it is more focused on the juncture between soldiers and civilians than on the strategies and actions of politicians, generals, or diplomats. The two main themes that run through the book are the impact of various military, social, and cultural mobilizations on the local population and the different types of

²⁵ Alfred Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence, 1917–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Žalys, eds., *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918–1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Pranas Čepėnas, *Naujujų laikų Lietuvos istorija*, 2 vols. (Vilnius: Lituanius, 1992); Kazys Ališauskas, *Kovos dėl Lietuvos nepriklausomybės, 1918–1920* (Chicago, 1972); Vytautas Lesčius, *Lietuvos kariuomenė nepriklausomybės kovose, 1918–1920* (Vilnius: Lietuvos Karo Akademija, 2004); Piotr Łossowski, *Konflikt polsko—litewski 1918–1920* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1996).

violence that were so characteristic of the region throughout 1914–23. The main actors will be those people who were displaced by war, but also mobilized for it: thus alongside refugees, I will focus on war veterans, volunteers, peasant conscripts, prisoners of war, paramilitary militias, and other groups who preferred guns, not diplomacy, to assert their power. I will try to tell the story of how their lives were changed by war and how their presence changed the nature of the society that emerged afterwards.

More specifically, this book is particularly concerned with the dynamic relationship between demobilization and remobilization in the post-World War I years. Recently Jochen Böhler suggested that violent clashes that took place after the Great War were the result of a complete lack of demobilization in the borderlands.²⁶ I will also explore the transformation of ex-imperial soldiers into national, revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary troops by focusing on those formations that fought actively in Lithuania in 1919–23. When thousands of ex-imperial soldiers returned to their homelands in 1918, they found themselves remobilized into various national, revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary armies. Under conditions of revolution and state breakup, demobilization fueled remobilization. In short, a rapid transition from one war to another was greatly facilitated by the availability of high numbers of demobilized troops ready to switch their uniforms.

I do not intend to suggest that there was an accumulative effect of continuous “brutalization” of Lithuanian society from 1914 to 1923. We should not forget that by the end of 1918 there was a general weariness and widespread desire among civilians and soldiers alike to return to peace and stability. By no means did all war veterans take part in these new wars fought for a variety of revolutionary, counter-revolutionary, or nationalist causes. If the Great War erupted in the region as a result of German and Russian imperial ambitions, the post-war conflicts were a consequence of the complete breakdown of state power, the ensuing competition between nationalist and Communist state-building projects, revanchist ambitions of Russian and German counter-revolutionaries, and the ethnic conflict that turned into an inter-state war between Poland and Lithuania.

If the Great War was characterized by massive mobilizations and the slow movement of imperial armies that forced millions of civilians out of their homes, the ensuing conflicts were of smaller scale, less deadly, but more ideological and ferocious. Most significantly, they were more multidirectional, transformative, and brutal to civilian populations. They also included a greater variety of combatants: Lithuanian and Polish national troops, Red Army, home guards, local militias, German and White Russian volunteers, revolutionary and nationalist partisans. New ideological stances and political loyalties born as a result of Russia’s military failure and Germany’s loss in the Great War fueled the minds of post-1918 belligerents as thousands of fresh volunteers and draftees joined these troops. Thus, instead of looking for continuous “brutalization,” perhaps it would make more sense to recognize the difference, but also a connection between the first “brutalization”

²⁶ Jochen Böhler, “Enduring Violence: The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917–21,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50,1 (2015), 74.