

Introduction

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THIS VOLUME addresses what is arguably the greatest lacuna in scholarship on the Soviet experiment: the lack of local studies. Despite the importance of local history in forcing major reevaluations of the national histories of Britain, the United States, France, Germany, and Italy, as well as elsewhere, research in local history remains at a formative stage in the field of Russian studies, largely because the closed nature of Soviet society had rendered the country's heartland invisible. A term widely used to describe an approach to the writing of history that can accommodate an array of methodologies and genres, "local history" intersects readily with other disciplines. The genre has played a vital role in the flowering of historical scholarship in the recent past, precisely when the boundaries between history and other disciplines were first called into question. Its purpose and methods have evolved with the historical profession as a whole and they may have helped give rise—to a greater extent than we appreciate at present—to the new and exciting currents sweeping the discipline.

The specific features of local sources as well as variations in historical and historiographical traditions, felt not only among countries but also within them, further characterize local history. It has its oldest genealogy in England, where several generations of historians debated the relationship between

“national” and “local” history and the gap between professional historians and enthusiasts. As local studies fundamentally revised understanding of the English Civil War and other topics, the profession increasingly came to appreciate the compelling intellectual and practical reasons for doing local history.¹ In the field of American history, the practice of local history has proliferated since the mid-1950s. It has had an energizing effect on the discipline as a whole and has undermined, by making more tentative and textured, existing national syntheses of the American experience. Local history also boasts a proud lineage in France, where much of it has been focused on the French Revolution. Following World War II, both the Annales School and Marxist practitioners, grounded in socioeconomic concerns, further enriched the writing of local history. In Germany, local history has concentrated on issues such as the Reformation, patterns of industrialization and urbanization, and the social origins of Nazism. Today, the history of everyday life or *Alltagsgeschichte* gives a new twist to the local as its practitioners scrutinize concrete micro-historical settings in their attempt to obtain a more qualitative understanding of ordinary people and to transcend the conventional distinctions between “public” and “private.” In Italy, debate over historical method produced a unique genre of local history known as microhistory, associated with the historians Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Ponci and the journal *Quadern storici*.²

These trends eventually affected the study of Russian and Soviet history outside the USSR, but only in limited ways, largely owing to the difficulty in accessing local sources and to the lack of intellectual engagement with Soviet historians. Although space does not allow for a detailed discussion of the genre in the field of Soviet history, a few generalizations are in order to guide the reader. Publication in 1958 by Harvard University Press of political scientist Merle Fainsod’s *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, based on the Smolensk Archive, which was captured by German armies in 1941 and later fell into American hands, inaugurated serious study of Soviet local history in the United States. The appearance of Fainsod’s study, however, may have discouraged further explorations of this sort, since his book cast Smolensk as a “typical” Soviet city and claimed to have made exhaustive use of the archive, the only one of its kind available in the West. Moreover, the dominant intellectual paradigm in postwar Western scholarship on the Soviet Union before the 1970s, totalitarianism, may also have discouraged study of the Soviet periphery since it placed so much emphasis on Moscow’s ability to discipline and manipulate the population. In this regard, Western views of a monochromatic Soviet political and social landscape ironically had an uneasy correspondence with Soviet narra-

tives of the country's history, which were equally wooden and one-dimensional, although for different reasons.

Well into the 1970s, few historians ventured beyond the chronological confines of 1917–21 in their research, because of lack of primary source material, leaving the post-1921 period to political scientists to consider. For this reason, the first trickle of local studies in the Russian field, based largely on published sources rather than archives, examined the Revolution of 1917 and Civil War outside the capital of Petrograd. In addition, some general histories of the revolution sought to incorporate a provincial perspective, despite the dearth of monographic studies from which to draw.³ By the 1980s, some historians had turned their attention to the Soviet 1920s and 1930s, including those who realized that Fainsod had not exhausted the Smolensk Archive.⁴ However, it was the opening of the long-sealed archives during the Gorbachev Revolution at the close of the 1980s that made it possible to conduct serious research in local Soviet archives. As a result, many graduate students and seasoned researchers, far too many to list here, launched local history projects or else added a “local” dimension to their broader studies.

The situation in the Soviet Union was of course more complicated than this. The writing of local history, often by local enthusiasts, had gotten off to a promising start in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth century as part of the emergence of a national culture and historical writing.⁵ Paralleling similar tendencies in Europe and the United States, this trend blossomed in the late nineteenth century, only to be interrupted by revolution and civil war. The practice of local studies or *kraevedenie*⁶ enjoyed an ambiguous status in the Soviet 1920s,⁷ but was officially discredited once the catechism of Stalinism, the *Short Course*, became the official historical canon in the late 1930s.⁸ A 1937 decree liquidated the professional local studies' organizations that had shown promising possibilities in the 1920s, leaving as their legacy only museum work, which now fabricated a sanitized past.⁹

After Stalin's death in 1953, the fate of local studies remained tied to that of the Soviet historical profession as a whole. Although a welcomed ferment destroyed the most stifling aspects of the influence of the *Short Course* between 1956 and the mid-1960s, the regime sought to impose a stultifying rigidity in intellectual life and by the early 1970s the practice of local history had become a key vehicle for bolstering Soviet patriotism. During the so-called period of stagnation associated with the L. I. Brezhnev era (1964–82), academic historians produced a flood of monographs and document and memoir collections on local history, which suffers from all of the shortcomings of Soviet histori-

cal writing in general. Moreover, the chronological, thematic, and interpretive frameworks utilized in these works were based on a national model, thereby making it impossible to explain things in local contexts. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization; in fact, it was sometimes possible for historians, maverick and otherwise, to publish articles and books in the provinces that would not have been issued in the capitals. This topic has yet to find its historian. Be that as it may, local history for the most part became a second-class genre, the practice of which helped to marginalize academic life in the provinces and contributed to the impoverishment of Russian and Soviet local history as practiced outside the country.¹⁰

However, the situation in both Russia and abroad changed dramatically with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a development that revitalized the writing of local history for a variety of reasons. The opening of Russian archives, collapse of the confining paradigms of Soviet Marxist historiography, and new openness among Russian historians toward topics long considered taboo or unworthy of study certainly nourished today's heightened regard for the local. In fact, perestroika made it possible for the American contributors to this volume to carry out research in local archives and for the foreign authors to craft their essays without regard to ideology. Moreover, the highly visible sociopolitical and cultural role Russia's provinces began to play contributed to a growing interest in regional or local studies, which parallels a burgeoning curiosity among historians and other scholars in daily life and in ordinary people in everyday circumstances.¹¹ In the field of Russian studies, one finds reflection of this renewed interest in local history in the spate of academic conferences on the subject and in the increasing number of Ph.D. dissertations on provincial topics recently defended or in progress.¹²

The contributions to *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–53* are products of these trends. Providing a forum for both junior and senior scholars from Russia, Ukraine, and the United States who study the political, social, and/or cultural aspects of Soviet local history between 1917 and 1953, this unique collection of essays represents the first book published in the West devoted to decentering standard narratives of the Soviet historical experience. Illustrative rather than exhaustive, the volume reclaims the multifaceted history of the periphery as it existed between 1917 and 1953. Originally presented at a conference held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in April 1999, the essays, among other topics, address how political events and social engineering played themselves out at the local level; the construction of Bolshevik identities, including the identities of class, gender, ethnicity, and place; the

Soviet cultural project and hybridization of Soviet cultural forms; and center-periphery relations. The articles enrich or complicate our understanding of major events and turning points in Soviet history. Several of the contributions reformulate center-periphery relations as dynamic and contested by suggesting how local identities could serve as a form of cultural and political capital. Some of the authors employ interdisciplinary approaches to consider the connection between language and power. All but one essay, whose methodology is that of oral history, tap local archives made accessible by the Gorbachev Revolution.

Defining the locale they are studying always represents a problem for practitioners of local history. The concept of community as an analytical tool took shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and for a long time remained a static category defined in a variety of ways—administratively, geographically, economically, or even based on one’s sense of belonging.¹³ More recent scholarship suggests that a community can also be based on how social life is organized. Communities, even those as large as a nation, can be discursively constructed and imagined.¹⁴ Although it is always ambiguous, the “local” ultimately relates to “the wider society within which it is embedded.”¹⁵

We draw on these diverse insights to illustrate our own understandings of the local, making no attempt to reach a consensus on defining the term. Nevertheless, we agree on many points. Using the designation to mean an array of Soviet administrative categories—districts, provinces, cities, regions, and republics—we conceptualize the local as the product of diverse social relations that cut across specific locations in a multiplicity of ways. In so doing, we consciously avoid the misguided efforts to justify our labors by stressing the “typicality” of the localities we have chosen to investigate. Instead, we seek to show that while the particular accounts presented in this chapter are unique, they have condensed within them more general experiences that are larger than the local. As Allan R. Pred argues, “it is through their intersection with the locally peculiar, the locally sedimented and contingent, the locally configured context, that more global structuring processes are given their forms and become perpetuated or transformed.”¹⁶ Our examples deal with several important provinces (Smolensk, Tambov, Saratov, Iaroslavl, Rostov, Kiev, Stavropol, and Samara), regions, (the Urals, the Far East, Central Asia), and republics (Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan).

We are confident that collectively our local studies will enrich understanding of the Soviet project and will force some rethinking of the country’s past. A local focus lends concreteness to interrelationships that cannot always be as-

certained on a larger scale, and can be an invaluable tool in helping to define issues on the national agenda. In fact, local studies actually help create and recreate the Center, because the relationship between center and periphery is symbiotic and dialectical. In seeking to determine the inner mechanisms and perceptions of a locale, we ineluctably focus on center-periphery contradictions and oppositions that often become the objects of our research; that is, the center-periphery dialectic is a way of understanding the world.

The two essays that open the volume offer fresh insights on the Revolution of 1917. Michael C. Hickey provides a revealing case study of the politics of class and the rhetoric of crisis in Smolensk by showing how the politicization of daily life became a critical element of politics in a small city without a large number of industrial workers. Maintaining that we must look more closely at the many factors besides labor conflict that shaped local politics in provincial cities, Hickey focuses on political contestation and the ways in which parties and groups framed and conducted politics during 1917. Although the moderate socialists' depiction of living conditions and labor conflict helped them to forge a broad working-class identity in Smolensk, these same discursive strategies got the moderates into trouble when living conditions deteriorated and labor relations worsened. Held accountable for the situation, the moderate socialists' public position started to erode as the parties hemorrhaged support to the right and the left. Following the Kornilov Affair in August, their public rhetoric began to link local crime and mob justice to rising Bolshevik influence and to the "anarchic tendencies" of the masses. In this regard, the moderates shared a broader linguistic universe and worldview with their socialist rivals: the moderate socialists, like the Bolsheviks, understood workers' estrangement not as a rational response to conditions, but as evidence that lack of consciousness (*bessoznatel'nost'*) had made the masses vulnerable to manipulation.

Also dealing with Smolensk Province, Roberta T. Manning's chapter shifts the focus to Sychevka District, an overwhelming rural one. Although no Bolshevik Party organization existed in Sychevka, a stunning 75 percent of those who participated in the elections to the Constituent Assembly backed the Bolsheviks. Why did rural politics in the district take on a more radical cast than that of the province's towns? Dismissing essentialist arguments about the peasant mindset, Manning demonstrates why we must give careful attention to structural factors that shaped the revolution. In this case, she spotlights the 35 percent of the local male population that regularly went away to work in industry but returned to the villages—the *otkhodniki*—as a transmission belt of revolutionary attitudes. Drawing on the local press, published documents,

and archival material, the author argues that intermediary social and political forces such as peasant migrant workers from Sychevka linked the urban and rural revolutions not only in 1917, but also during the Revolution of 1905–7. She thereby makes a compelling case for viewing the Russian Revolution as a process and part of a longer continuum.

Any attempt to contextualize the revolution more broadly would have to include the period of the Russian Civil War as an essential component. One of the episodes that convinced V. I. Lenin to put an end to the party's urgent and unpopular economic policies during the conflict and to usher in the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 was the peasant uprising or Green movement in Tambov Province. In his contribution, Delano DuGarm provides a sort of chilling prehistory to the violent peasant war of 1920–22 by examining the struggle for grain between 1918 and 1921. He also disputes the argument that the NEP and the end of forced grain requisitions were the logical outcome of Communist Party policies implemented already during the Civil War. Whereas previous work on the subject focused on national policy as formulated in Moscow, DuGarm shows how local conditions, political leaders, and village communities interacted to create a food-supply system that bore little resemblance to plans drawn up by officials in Moscow. Under pressure to meet state quotas at whatever cost, local food-supply officials lacked essential information such as the size of the population, harvest yields, available surpluses, and even the activities of their own agents or of armed detachments. Moreover, each new food-supply program was launched with little carryover in personnel and usually without drawing on the experience of the previous campaign. The essay reveals that for agents sent by Moscow the aims of grain collection justified the means, even at the cost of undermining the basis of support for Soviet power. At the same time, however, DuGarm points out that local officials understood that their own constituencies and semiautonomous spheres of power needed protection against encroachments from the Center. This clash between local interests and central arrogance found expression as both sides played off the party leadership in the hopes that it would support them in this conflict. The author points to a "style" of early Soviet politics, offering a trenchant case study of how local interests were crushed or cavalierly ignored for the sake of the survival of the Center.

My own essay dealing with popular unrest in Saratov at the end of the Civil War seeks to show that the political crisis facing the party in early 1921 was more far-reaching and systemic than heretofore believed. Local worker disturbances at the time and an explosion of discontent in the angry country-

side amounted to a “provincial Kronstadt,”¹⁷ representing a far greater element of the crisis of 1921 that precipitated the introduction of the NEP than historians have recognized. In depicting worker and peasant hostility as nothing more than anger over their economic conditions, the party portrayed the strikes as a work slowdown or *volynka*, denied the political nature of the threat the workers’ movement posed, and maintained that setting the economy right would bolster the party’s authority. Dismissing worker demands for a constituent assembly and worker democracy as nothing more than the hollow slogans of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, the Communists failed to see that the labor unrest had little to do with these parties per se, and had everything to do with the political and socioeconomic promises of 1917. Saratov workers had much more consciousness than Communist Party discourse allowed, and they manifested it in their desperate opposition to Bolshevik rule. In considering the question of why violence did not break out once again insofar as the issues that had brought about civil war had not been resolved, I contend that the party’s success in quelling the unrest had more to do with famine conditions than with any new popular consensus. Moreover, the NEP brought little relief to Saratov Province before the mid-1920s, suggesting that our understanding of the policy is in need of correction.

The chapters on the NEP years consider the Soviet state’s designs to re-fashion society through cultural transformation, or offer vital background to the Stalin Revolution. James T. Andrews’s essay on local science and public culture in Iaroslavl addresses the Soviet regime’s project for cultural change, the nature of public organizations in the 1920s, the debate over the concept of cultural revolution, and the struggles that independent civic organizations and public science education faced during the launching of the First Five-Year Plan. Founded in 1864, the Iaroslavl Natural History Society had led the way in popularizing and spreading natural-scientific ideas in Russia and thus represents an interesting case study. After sketching the emergence of it and other local naturalist societies before 1917 and linking them to an emerging civil society and public consciousness, Andrews details their twisted relationship with the Soviet state, which resulted in their liquidation in 1931. The author maintains that before 1928 a sort of symbiotic relationship existed between the Commissariat of the Enlightenment and the Iaroslavl Natural History Society. This was the case because of the Soviet state’s commitment to cultural enlightenment and belief that science societies outside the capital cities promoted a popular-scientific worldview that the Bolsheviks themselves saw as a vital element of their ambitious designs to enlighten the people. The

essay traces the patron-client relationship between the Commissariat of Education and the Yaroslavl Society, the steady process of centralization that had begun already in the mid-1920s, and the opposition to the state's encroachment on the naturalists during the Stalin Revolution. The essay makes clear that the vitality of civil society at the local level became a casualty of Stalinist policies, but also that it went down fighting and probably survived in distorted forms within the Stalinist state system.

In his study of the unveiling campaign launched in Uzbekistan in 1927, Douglas T. Northrop adds a national and gender dimension to the volume. His essay turns attention away from the motives behind Communist Party policies to the effect they had on local and, in this case, Muslim society. Northrop demonstrates that Moscow's interventionist policies actually helped to generate popular resistance and allowed local communities to consolidate around what emerged as "traditional" Uzbek culture against the outsiders. In other words, Uzbek society, diverse as it was, began to assert its cultural identity by resisting the Communists' unveiling campaign (*hujum*). According to the author, the veil ironically became a more integral part of Uzbek identity and more universally worn *after* the failure of the 1927 campaign. The resulting conflict over the discourse of the veil encoded issues of religion, politics, and ethnonationalism, as well as gender relations and family life. The nature of the 1927 campaign complements other recent studies, calls into question the conventional periodization of Soviet history, and documents a hardening of cultural policies before the launching of the First Five-Year Plan. Northrop also shows that many methods employed in the forced transformation of Soviet society during the 1930s were already present in embryonic form in Central Asia by 1927. Equally significant, his research reveals the Soviet state's inability to exert its will even in what it considered one of its most "backward" regions.

Mark B. Tauger's examination of the little-known Ukrainian famine of 1928–29 is bound to spark healthy controversy, for it challenges the prevailing interpretation of the grain crisis of these years, thereby putting a new spin on collectivization. Drawing on archives in Ukraine, his investigation of the interaction between central and local Soviet authorities during this difficult time shifts the focus away from ideological tensions to problems inherent in the Soviet countryside. In calling the reader's attention to the consequences of *recurring* famine, Tauger argues that natural disaster, in this case drought, proved to be a more important cause of the grain crisis than many previous studies have acknowledged. Moreover, the author describes how state policies

included not only “extraordinary measures” or the forced requisitioning of resources from the countryside, but also food relief to starving peasants. Tauger’s study of the Soviet regime’s program of relief, channeled through the Ukrainian State Commission for Aid to Victims of the Crop Failure, concludes that the Ukrainian famine underscored Soviet agriculture’s vulnerability to natural disaster and famine and, in turn, contributed to the decision to embark upon broad-scale collectivization. In other words, Tauger questions the standard interpretation of the policy, which views the process almost exclusively as a punitive attack by Soviet power on the peasants.

Essays by Irina Korovushkina Paert and David R. Shearer deepen our understanding of state-driven efforts to transform culture and society during the 1930s. The Communist Party’s assault against Old Belief in the Urals as part of the party’s cultural and modernizing project is the topic of Irina Korovushkina’s chapter. Enriching her essay with oral testimonies, Korovushkina traces the Bolsheviks’ relations toward the Old Believers, or *staroobriadtsy*, from one of patronage to outright repression in the 1930s, when the Communist Party came to perceive the Old Believers as a symbol of cultural conservatism. The author concentrates on the cluster of provinces that makes up the Urals region, where Old Belief and popular piety represented essential elements of local identity. After providing a thumbnail sketch of the Old Belief in the Urals, she zooms in on the impact of cultural revolution and the clash between Stalin’s modernizing program and popular culture, when official Stalinist discourse represented the worldview of the *staroobriadtsy* as “the spontaneous reaction of a backward rural community against modernizing forces.” In short, the state now saw them as an obstacle to molding a strong secular industrial power. As a result, the repressive hand of the government slammed down not only on popular religious practices such as pilgrimage, but also on the external appearance and bodily symbolism of the Old Believers. Paert’s instructive case study helps us understand how Old Believers—and others—became “aliens” in the world of the 1930s.

David R. Shearer’s complementary essay explores the themes of modernity and backwardness in Western Siberia, an unruly and ethnically diverse region. Viewing the Soviet state as a colonial power bent on taming the country’s Siberian frontier, Shearer describes the party-state’s attempts to bring “socialist organization” to the territory. Western Siberia was not only a magnet that attracted enthusiasts, adventurers, voluntary settlers, and dreamers, but also a refuse heap for peasants and other “dangerous” elements deported to the sparsely settled area. Despite the distinct role of the political police in

Soviet society at the time, the “police state” lacked cadres in Western Siberia, which registered alarming crime rates. Isolated from the local populations and taking seriously the threat of a Japanese invasion of the region launched from China, party leaders increasingly came to look upon the people over whom they ruled as primitive and potentially dangerous. Because party activists equated Soviet power with socialist modernization, they, like agents of other colonial powers, tapped the coercive powers of the state to assimilate, relocate, subdue, and even exterminate dangerous elements. Colonialism, Soviet-style, was not based so much on ethnic and national distinctions as it was on cultural, class, and ideological ones. It was a war on backwardness, fought by officials whose historical mission justified use of coercion and violence to bring about their vision of progress and modernity.

Paula A. Michaels’s essay in this volume is part of her larger effort to evaluate the integration of an economically underdeveloped region into the collective project of socialist modernization. Her chapter addresses one of the blank spots of Soviet history: the home front in the non-Russian periphery during the Great Patriotic War. She turns her attention to Soviet Kazakhstan, a haven for refugees and evacuees and also a “dumping ground” for hundreds of thousands of “punished peoples” exiled to Central Asia during the conflict. Detailing the experiences of medical workers in Kazakhstan, she speaks to the question of the success and limitations of the state’s mobilization efforts, which took place in the dark historical shadow of the Kazakhs’ traumatic encounter with the Soviet state during the 1930s. The archival record reveals that the mobilization of medical cadres was fraught with problems and failures, characterized by passive forms of resistance and entrenched interethnic divisions within Kazakhstan. Yet success was incontrovertible in part because medical personnel were never challenged to assert their allegiance to the regime *per se*, but instead were called upon to express their compassion and to carry out their professional responsibilities to the sick and injured. The essay thus reveals a dynamic that helps us understand how this particular cohort as well as others contributed to the Soviet war cause.

Jeffrey W. Jones draws on James Scott’s notion of public and hidden “transcripts” to examine social relations in Rostov-on-the-Don between 1945 and 1948. More specifically, Jones scrutinizes divergent perspectives on “speculation,” the illegal buying and selling of goods for profit, comparing the Communist Party’s public and hidden transcripts regarding the shadow economy with those of workers. Suggesting that definitions of “class” were formed by social contradictions and competing dialogues, he underscores the discord be-

tween the party's public and hidden transcripts, which he believes was shaped by party leaders' repressed awareness of the antagonism that existed between them and workers. While many workers made speculation a vital part of their overall survival strategies, they nonetheless saw the link between a corrupt party bureaucracy and the illicit economy as a driving force in turning workers to speculation in the first place. As a result, the author locates a separate working-class identity in the incongruity between official and popular views of the illegal economy.

The final three essays in the volume throw light on the postwar period of "High Stalinism" about which we know comparatively little. Serhy Yekelchuk's close look at cultural policies in Ukraine during 1946–48 complements recent scholarship on Soviet science and society, which challenges the depiction of postwar Stalinism as a monolithic, integrated system. Adding a sorely needed "national" perspective to our understanding of the Soviet state's campaign in cultural life associated with Andrei Zhdanov known as the *Zhdanovshchina*, Yekelchuk's study shows that in Ukraine it found reflection in an attack against manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism, not in an assault against Western influence. The author reconsiders the interaction between ideological pronouncements from Moscow, their interpretation by republican ideologues and intellectuals, and to a lesser extent the reaction of local audiences, thereby further problematizing the meaning of the *Zhdanovshchina*. He argues that in Kiev people were exhorted to eulogize the Soviet present at the expense of the Ukrainian national past. The production of the official discourse remained "negotiable" as local ideologues adjusted the general guidelines to Ukrainian realities. Intellectuals, meanwhile, consistently deviated from the politically correct course, while their audiences exercised their right not to consume the final product or to read it differently.

The city as both a reflection of a larger culture and, at the same time, as the creator of that culture is the underlying theme of Karl D. Qualls's examination of efforts to rebuild Sevastopol in the decade after the war. The struggles discussed in the essay concern discord among individuals claiming to speak on behalf of larger constituencies, as the lines between center and periphery became blurred. While there emerged a central and local view of Sevastopol's reconstruction, the struggle between them was fought among competing interest groups and individuals within the party and government, who had to take into account popular views that did not fit neatly within the confines of mere center-periphery struggles. Although the rebuilding of Sevastopol did not make significant strides until the Center marshaled sorely needed re-

sources, Qualls nevertheless documents a complicated, negotiated decision making, in which “local” visions ultimately prevailed. The city that arose, not exactly phoenix-like, from the ashes of war, managed to regain its prerevolutionary identity. Yet ironically, the Soviet state was able to depict this achievement as evidence of its own legitimacy and attainment.

The concluding essay in the volume, written by Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov, looks at oral narratives as texts with their integral tensions, silences, and specific strategies of remembering and forgetting in an attempt to outline what the authors call “the cultural transformation of provincial identity.” Selecting several discursive sites that had strategic importance for expressing one’s identity, Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov deconstruct grand narratives of the Soviet past that celebrate state building, industrialization, and social progress. Focusing on postwar Saratov and Samara, they recount human memories of hunger, of encountering the “other” in non-Russian neighbors and refugees, of observing the disabled, of grubbing for food and consumer goods, of depicting the capitals as foils that reflect one’s own provincialness, and of coming to grips with Stalin’s death. The authors demonstrate that Soviet society was filled with *multiple* centers and peripheries, some geographic, others political, social, or cultural. In so doing, they illustrate how Stalinism introduced the center-periphery paradigm into the everyday practices of ordinary people, who constantly ratified the Center by locating other peripheries.

ON BEHALF of the contributors, I invite readers to familiarize themselves with the empirically rich and topically fresh essays in this volume. To make the papers more accessible to a wider audience, we have kept the use of Russian terms to a minimum, thereby simplifying Soviet administrative categories. We also dropped the soft and hard signs from Russian and Ukrainian geographic terms and surnames because they do not help the uninitiated to negotiate the pronunciation of these words.