

INTRODUCTION

In 1929 the well-known German Jewish architect Erich Mendelsohn published a book-length photographic essay entitled *Russia—Europe—America: An Architectonic Cross-Section*. The essay was inspired by three journeys Mendelsohn had taken to the Soviet Union from 1925 to 1926 when he was advising on the construction of his design for the Red Flag Textile Factory in Leningrad.¹ In his essay, Mendelsohn attempted to make sense of Europe's changed status in the interwar period, a moment when contemporaries became ever more aware that the embrace of modernity was no longer limited to Europe. Mendelsohn saw that World War I and the Russian Revolution had changed America and Russia, transforming them from the "objects of European politics to subjects." For Mendelsohn, America was a "world power" and Soviet Russia was not a passing experiment, but a "fact" that represented the "beginning of a new order."² Like many other Germans, Mendelsohn recognized that this transformation of global power relations and the emergence of alternative models of modernity would have substantial implications for Germany's and Europe's future.

Mendelsohn's framing of the essay in terms of an opposition between Russia and America drew on an established European discourse that since the nineteenth century had presented these two countries as world powers in the making. Amer-

ica and Russia were both expansive territorially, but they had different paths of historical development. For Mendelsohn, America was more familiar to Europe, having been built by the labor of centuries of migrants from the Old World. Russia, by contrast, seemed a “riddle” that required a reorientation “towards Asia, towards a cultural area that through climate, land, race and religion is the opposite of the European.” Unlike the young country of America, Russia remained tainted by its Asiatic and Oriental past. Revolution, however, was beginning to transform Russia, allowing “the masses” for the first time the possibility to take control of their fate. Mendelsohn saw Russia with its embrace of technology as pursuing a future defined by modernity. Russia still needed to “catch up” with America and develop its own industries in order to achieve “independence from the capitalist environment, the longed-for autarky.” But Mendelsohn had doubts about whether Russians would be successful in this endeavor. Unlike the materialistic and practical Americans, the Russians had great dreams for modernity, as evidenced by their architectural plans for glass and steel buildings in the most modern style. But when it came to the actual construction of these buildings, the backwardness of Russian infrastructure and people became apparent: “Here the gap yawns: Russian peasant and intellect—steppe and motor—new form and antiquated means.” Mendelsohn concluded that Europe could not compete by becoming either another America or another Russia. Rather, it needed to find its own way to strike a balance between these two poles that would “bring the spirit and intellect into balance.”³

Mendelsohn’s employment of America and Russia as alternative and competing visions of modernity was not an uncommon one in the interwar years. As Rüdiger Graf has noted, Weimar writers and intellectuals viewed both the United States of America and the Soviet Union as “different but not necessarily contrary realizations of the future in the present.”⁴ Yet, historians of Germany have tended to pay much more attention to the American side of the equation than they have to the Russian. In part this focus reflects the extensive transatlantic ties that developed between the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States after World War II, interactions in which historians of Germany also participated. America, of course, has loomed large in Germans’ imaginations since European explorers’ first encounters with the continent in the early modern period. Europeans were fascinated by U.S. experiments with democracy and territorial expansion to the Pacific Ocean in the nineteenth century. In the interwar years, whether discussing Fordist and Taylorist projects of rationalization, the new woman, democracy, or mass culture such as Hollywood cinema or jazz music, Germans employed visions of America to articulate concerns with the promise and perils of modernity.⁵

Yet, Germans’ interactions and exchanges with Russia have also played an important role in modern German history. Much like America, Russia has also permeated German discourses of politics, identity, modernity, and (a particular

focus of the present study) empire. German and Russian histories have been intimately intertwined and are difficult to untangle without some understanding of both. The rise of Prussia as a second-tier power was very much dependent on Russia's own strategic interests in expanding its empire westward into Europe. Indeed, as Klaus Zernack has suggested, much of the modern history of Germany and Eastern Europe can be characterized by the Prussian, and later German, cooperation with Russia and Austria to remove Poland from the map of Europe. Russia was present at the birth of a Prussian German nationalism and during the revival of Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars. Russia did not intervene in the wars that led to the founding of a German nation state under Prussian hegemony.⁶

In addition to the extensive diplomatic, dynastic, and political ties that connected Germany and Russia, the nineteenth century also saw the growth of transnational civil society that linked the two countries within a broader European and indeed global network. The intensity of interactions in cultural and intellectual life, social movements, trade, and the economy increased dramatically as the century came to a close.⁷ This cultural transfer of ideas and practices was not a one-way street from West to East but was bi-directional, embedded in global patterns of exchange, apparent for example in the circulation of ideas and practices of revolution between the two countries.⁸ Although generally these interactions were peaceful, they also could be extremely violent, as they became during the two world wars. Russia's establishment of itself as a superpower in the second half of the twentieth century was symbolized by its presence in a divided Berlin, a geopolitical fact that West German political elites viewed with fear during the Cold War. Perestroika and Russia's withdrawal from central Europe allowed the reunited Germany of the Berlin Republic to appear once again.

While traces of these interactions still abound in the landscape, architecture, and cultural archive of Germany, generally speaking these histories are still thought of as separate, as though Russia were somewhere "out there" in Asia. It is only recently that historians have begun to take seriously the extent to which these histories have been deeply entangled.⁹ The lack of attention to transnational interactions between Germany and Russia is to some extent a product of the Cold War, which limited how far some topics of historical investigation could be explored. But this neglect was also a consequence of the "methodological nationalism" that has informed the writing of history of modern and contemporary Europe.¹⁰ In much of the existing historiography, German history is presented as a fundamentally internal story, a narrative of the emergence of the German nation and nation-state. This national framing has its roots in the nineteenth-century foundations of the discipline of history but was also fostered by the nationalization of European societies in the twentieth century when war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and population transfers produced more nationally integrated societies than had existed

previously.¹¹ While external actors occasionally appear in these narratives, their roles are subordinated to the main story line of the rise and fall of the nation. Yet modern German history and especially twentieth-century German history is difficult to understand without referencing the important role that Russia played as an Other in the construction of German national identity and as a force in shaping German politics, the organization of society, and the cultural values that define Germanness.

In this book I trace the transformation of German imaginings of Russia and later the Soviet Union from the turn of the century to the outbreak of World War II, with a particular interest in how these imaginings informed Germans' discourses about the status of their country in a world of empires. My focus is on the different ways in which intellectuals, nationalist activists, government officials, and other observers and commentators viewed Russia as both an imperial rival and an object of German power and influence. I utilize a variety of sources such as travel accounts, newspapers, magazines, fiction, as well as popular and specialized academic literature to trace the transformation in German imaginings of Russia during this period. Throughout my analysis of these texts, I use the term "imaginings" to indicate that there was not one singular homogenous German image of Russia but, rather, a plurality of views of Russia corresponding to the diverse social, cultural, and political positions of the observers. Such imaginings drew upon long-standing tropes and stereotypes about Russia, but these were not parts of a closed or unchanging discourse. Rather, individual figures played an active role in engaging this cultural repertoire, adapting it in diverse ways to help interpret their contemporary encounters with Russia and all things Russian. Thus Russia became a site onto which Germans projected their ambitions and expectations for the future as well as their worst anxieties about modernity. This was particularly the case during the interwar period when many Germans felt that Germany's future would be endangered if it could not reassert itself as a global power. The transformation of Russia under Soviet rule into a modern industrial society was thus viewed both as a force to be feared and to some extent as a model to be emulated, as the Soviet Union emerged as a challenger to the current world order represented by the Treaty of Versailles.

It is important to note that imaginings of Russia and of the peoples of this country—while at times based on perceptions of Russian realities—are creative constructs. These imaginings were informed by the shared history and interactions between these two countries and indeed influenced these interactions in their own right. But, as will become clear, Germans' imaginings of Russia should not be taken as a reflection of the actual history of the country. In particular, Germans' discourse about Russia and the peoples of Russia did not always correspond to how Russians defined themselves or the official names of the Russian or Soviet

state. Thus, for example, the term “Russia” or “Soviet Russia” continued to be used for the Soviet state long after the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922.¹² In addition, while both the Romanov Empire and the Soviet Union were multiethnic empires, the diversity of the different populations was not always recognized by German observers and commentators, who often employed “the Russian” as an undifferentiated category. Throughout this work I have tried to make these distinctions clear.

During the Cold War, a substantial body of scholarship was published on Western views of Russia in general and on German views of Russia in particular. While there is much in this work that is of value, some scholars often rely on static conceptions of national character and, in some cases, take Western perceptions at face value as literal descriptions of Russian difference rather than as discursive constructs.¹³ The most significant project was Lev Kopelev’s multivolume *West-Östliche Spiegelungen* (Western-Eastern reflections). Kopelev, a well-known Russian dissident intellectual who since 1980 lived in the Federal Republic of Germany, organized the project as a means of exploring the role of mutual stereotypes and prejudices in German-Russian relations and their impact on the two countries’ histories. In developing the project Kopelev hoped to understand the origins of the conflicts that positioned Russia and Germany against each other in the twentieth century. The resulting project was two separate series of edited volumes that covered German images of Russia and Russian images of Germany from the medieval period to the years before World War I.¹⁴ After Kopelev’s death in 1997, subsequent volumes carried the project into the twentieth century.¹⁵ This literature offers insight into the nature of Germans’ and Russians’ mutual perceptions of each other, especially as represented in artistic, philosophical, and literary works. But the volumes do not provide a larger interpretation, aside from pointing to the tension between the political usage of images of the other and the actual everyday desire among citizens of both countries for peace and reconciliation. In particular, the extent to which German discourses about Russia constituted expressions of power has not been explored.¹⁶

Since the end of the Cold War few monographs have investigated in depth the history of German perceptions of Russia.¹⁷ One important exception is Gerd Koenen’s ambitious study *Der Russland-Komplex* (The Russian complex). Koenen, who collaborated with Kopelev on the Western-Eastern reflections project, draws on a remarkable body of travel accounts and published material to demonstrate the complexity and intensity of German-Russian mutual interactions in the first half of the twentieth century. Koenen takes issue with Ernst Nolte’s controversial argument during the *Historikerstreit* that there was a “causal nexus” between Bolshevism and Nazism.¹⁸ For Nolte, Bolshevism was the original crime of the twentieth

century against which Nazism (and fascism more generally) was a response. From this perspective, Bolshevism was the cause of the catastrophes of the twentieth century and the crimes of Nazism were mere imitations of the Bolshevik original.¹⁹ Challenging Nolte's framing of a nexus, Koenen prefers to see what he terms Germany's "Russia complex" in a more nuanced manner, identifying its roots in a history of exchanges that began long before the Bolshevik revolution. Against the view of there having been a long-standing image of the "Russian peril," which after the Russian Revolution morphed into "anti-Bolshevism," Koenen foregrounds both the fascination and the angst that Russia evoked in Germans throughout this period.²⁰

Koenen makes an important contribution by bringing German-Russian interactions back into the mainstream discussion of German history and opening up the question of Russia's ambiguous position in the German imagination. Rather than viewing expressions of Russophobia solely as hostility toward Russia, Koenen shows how hostility and attraction could often go hand in hand, in some cases even among diehard Nazis. However, in trying to distance himself from the argument that Germany had a long-term fear of a Russian danger that fed into Nazism, Koenen underestimates many of the continuities that inform German imaginings of Russia from the turn of the century to the Third Reich. In particular, Koenen downplays the role that ideology played in Nazi war planning and the invasion of the Soviet Union, presenting Hitler's Russian policy as having been driven more by pragmatism than by any sense of ideological conviction.²¹ Certainly, imaginings (or ideology) alone do not explain the brutality of German policies in the Soviet Union during World War II, but such imaginings did impact the ways in which people act in the world, while at the same time providing legitimization for those actions. The Nazis did not need to invent an image of Russia from scratch since they could draw on well-established cultural discourses within German society and exploit them for their own purposes.

Although Koenen's "Russia complex" is tempting as an analytical frame, in this book I take a different approach. I am interested in exploring the changing place of Russia in Germany's global imaginary in an age of intensive imperial rivalry. Rather than considering German imaginings of Russia as informed by a German-Russian "special relationship," "nexus," or "complex," I frame them as emerging out of national formation and imperial competition in an increasingly interconnected world. Here I follow Christina Klein who defines the "global imaginary" as "an ideological creation that maps the world conceptually and defines the primary relations among peoples, nations, and regions. . . . It creates an imaginary coherence out of the contradictions and disjunctures of real relations, and thereby provides a stable sense of individual and national identity."²² Germans' global imaginary in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was one shaped by

a world of competing empires.²³ It was impossible to imagine the nation without placing it in the wider world and understanding how it related to other nations and empires. Indeed, in many respects, imaginings of the nation were responses to real and imagined external actors that impacted societies.²⁴

In the modern period, Germans' global imaginary situated Russia in "the East." As a metageographical concept, "the East" encompassed many different regions of the world including the traditional "Orient" of the Levant, India, and Central Asia, but it also included Eastern Europe—particularly Poland, Germany's "nearest East." Indeed, as parts of Poland had been annexed by Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century, the East, or the "German East" could also be found within the boundaries of the nation-state. Todd Kontje speaks of "German orientalism" in the plural to describe this geographic diversity, a term that is indebted to Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*.²⁵ Despite the rich scholarship produced by German orientalists, Said famously excluded them from his study since he was interested only in powers that engaged in direct imperial rule over the region, which Germany did not.²⁶ Said also proposed a discourse about the Orient that remained remarkably stable and unchanged over time. Other scholars have suggested that orientalism should be viewed in a more flexible manner. For example, Jennifer Jenkins has argued that, rather than seeing orientalism as tied to a particular form of imperialism, historians should explore the different ways in which orientalism both as an imaginary and as a practice infused the construction of national and imperial cultures in an age of increasing cultural encounters and interactions.²⁷ This approach is particularly fruitful in the case of Germany's empire in which informal economic domination was more significant than overseas colonies. In an ever more interconnected global economy, cultural representations of other parts of the world took on a greater significance as expressions of power as they worked to expand the space available for German activity in the world.²⁸

Within German imaginings of "the East," Eastern Europe occupied a unique place. The term *Osteuropa* came into common usage only in the nineteenth century and was defined by the territory occupied by the Russian Empire, Germany's immediate neighbor to the East.²⁹ Much of the body of literature on German imaginings of Eastern Europe by historians and scholars of German literature and cultural studies has focused on Poland, a country that, since the partitions in the late eighteenth century, had been divided among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Poland as a territory was the object of multiple different German imperial projects—among them, Prussian and later German settlement policies in eastern Prussia, German occupation during World War I, and a brutal laboratory for Nazi ethnic cleansing and genocide during World War II. These encounters were informed by orientaling discourses that constructed Eastern Europe as backward and as an object of a German civilizing mission.³⁰ But Germans' borderlands discourse also

invoked fears that Slavs might overrun the East, threatening the territory of German settlement. As Gregor Thum notes, the “oscillation between megalomania and angst [was the] very essence of the myth of Germany’s eastern borderlands.”³¹ This scholarship also intersects with a recent move to rethink German imperial projects, exploring not just Germany’s overseas colonial empire but also its aspirations for empire on the continent, the latter being seen as significant for achieving the former.³² Russia, however, was equally important in German imaginings of Eastern Europe during this period. For it was Russia more than any other political power that could challenge any form of German expansion into Eastern Europe. Indeed, contemporaries were very much aware of the fact that Russia’s military power gave it a decisive voice in deciding not only the extent of German dominance in Eastern Europe but also, and more significantly, the very existence of a German nation-state.

In exploring a particular German variant of orientalism directed at Russia, we should be careful not to view discourses that define the country as “Asiatic” or “backward” solely as evidence of negative perceptions of Russia or as Russophobia.³³ As Larry Wolff has observed, since the boundaries between Europe and Asia were not “fixed,” there was an “uncertainty [that] encouraged the construction of Eastern Europe as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe, but not Europe.”³⁴ The very proximity of the Other to the Self and the long history of cultural interactions and exchanges also meant that it was possible to imagine the Self in the Other and the Other in the Self. This was particularly the case at moments in which identifying with the East or forming a synthesis between Germany and Russia became attractive as a means of countering the West. In German imaginings of Russia, it is precisely this sense of duality and ambiguity about whether Russia belonged to Europe or Asia that was at the core of how imaginings of Russia operated and shaped political ideologies. As I will show, Russia was viewed as Asiatic *and* Europeanizing, barbaric *and* civilizing, backward *and* modernizing all at the same time.³⁵

Although historians have identified similar dynamics in German perceptions of Southeastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the Russian case differed in that Russia was one of the dominant political and military powers on the continent.³⁶ Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, industrialization and political unification rapidly transformed Germany itself into a global economic power. This transformation shifted the balance of power more toward Germany, with Russia becoming an object of German economic penetration. Russia’s efforts to modernize and reform the empire under the tsars and the Bolsheviks also elicited fears that Russia might catch up to Germany, especially during the great drive toward industrialization under Stalin. These changing relations between the two countries contributed to the ambiguity of Russia’s status. Thus Germans imagined

the country both as an imperial competitor to be emulated and as an object of a variety of different German imperial projects. It is important to acknowledge that German relations with Russia and later the Soviet Union were by no means unidirectional but, rather, were interactive and mutually constitutive.³⁷ While my own study keeps the focus on the German side of this relationship, I situate these imaginings within the broader context of German-Russian interactions and global interactions with other powers.

In this book I do not attempt to undertake a comprehensive survey of German perceptions of Russia. Rather, the focus is on two broad lines of inquiry. The first considers why Russia occupied such a prominent place in German imaginings of its imperial rival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What significance did Russia have in Germans' attempts to rethink their own nation's place in a world of competing empires? Why did Russia figure as both an imperial competitor to be emulated and an object of German desires for economic or political hegemony? The second line of inquiry explores the questions of continuity across the three German political regimes analyzed in this study. Can we identify continuities in German thinking about Russia across these periods? How did German imaginings of Russia inform the ideologies and practice of Nazi racial imperialism in Eastern Europe? To what extent did they contribute to a way of viewing the world in which such policies could be seen as possible?

Most of the figures studied in this book are individuals who engaged in substantial interactions with Russia. Some were intellectuals, literary figures, and journalists who traveled to Russia or the Soviet Union. Others were academics who studied the country and engaged in scholarly exchange; others were government representatives who traveled in an official capacity to the country. Still others were German-speaking émigrés from Russia whose experiences informed their oftentimes hostile attitude toward Russia. Their imaginings of Russia were thus influenced by their individual encounters with the country, its landscape, architecture, culture, and the diversity of its peoples. Yet, at the same time, one also sees common ways of viewing Russia that span the different periods, as individuals drew on longer-standing stereotypes and tropes about the country. Cultural exchange and encounters with Russia could and did transform some of those stereotypes. More often than not, however, older stereotypes were perpetuated and adapted to new situations. This pattern becomes most apparent in the exploration of continuities in German imaginings of Russia after World War I, when, despite the novelty of the Bolsheviks' attempt to establish a socialist state, travelers and observers still found much about Soviet Russia that had remained "Asiatic" and "backward."

There is no shortage of works that address the continuities in German history from Wilhelmine imperialism to the Nazi period—most famously the *Sonderweg*, the negative narrative of German exceptionalism that was enshrined in postwar

historiography, a debate which does not need to be rehearsed again here.³⁸ In moving beyond the *Sonderweg*, historians have sought to approach the *Kaiserreich* or the Weimar Republic on their own terms and not as stages on the deviant path toward Nazism. These works have been productive in restoring the complexity of social innovation, cultural and intellectual life, and everyday experiences during these periods.³⁹ As Helmut Walser Smith has argued, however, these moves have limited the temporal depth of explanation in German history. To explore connections and continuities across different political periods is not necessarily to assume that there was not a sense of contingency.⁴⁰ One theme that spans these periods is Germans' need to think about their country's status as a nation-state in a world of competing empires.⁴¹ Particularly in the Weimar Republic, considerable energy was directed toward working through the lessons from Germans' experiences during the last war and thinking about how to ensure the existence of the German nation into the future. We know that one of these answers was that of the Nazis, who employed war, conquest, ethnic cleansing, and genocide as a means of ensuring the continuity of the *Volk* into the future. This answer drew on some of the ways of seeing Germany's place in the world in general and its relations with Russia in particular that are traced in this study. However, although the cultural repertoire of stereotypes and images of Russia placed constraints on what it was possible to imagine, there was always the potential to challenge and redeploy this imagery to allow for the emergence of a different perspective.

The argument of the book unfolds in two parts. The first part, "Nationhood and Imperial Rivalry through World War I," traces the changing status of Russia in Germans' global imaginings from the early modern period to the early twentieth century in relation to Germany's emerging role as a European and global political and economic power. The chapters are organized both chronologically and thematically. They trace the origins of conceptions of Russia as being part of Eastern Europe, Russia's place in German imaginings of the world powers of the future, and the intensification of interactions between the two countries around the turn of the century.

Chapter 1 provides a brief cultural and intellectual history of German views of Russia from the early modern period until the nineteenth century. After outlining the long-standing discourses that constructed Russia as an emblem of despotism, the chapter turns toward the broader conceptual and geographical change in European thought since the Enlightenment that relocated Russia from the north to the east and marked the emergence of the idea of a German and European civilizing mission in Russia. While aspects of this move were already apparent in the eighteenth century, such conceptions were popularized and became more widely established over the course of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 explores how, after the unification of Germany, Russia, despite being a dominant political power in Europe, increasingly came to be identified with social, cultural, and political backwardness. This labeling of Russia as backward was in part a product of the changing relationship between the two powers, as Germany was rapidly industrializing and came to possess an economy with a global reach whereas Russia, despite efforts to reform and modernize its empire, still remained predominantly agricultural. This development was also the product of the changing perception of Germany's place in the broader world order of European empires. As continental powers, both America and Russia were imagined as possessing the potential to become the great powers of the future that might challenge the global hegemony of Great Britain. In response to this prospect, two different schools of thought emerged about Russia. One viewed Russia as a Europeanizing or modernizing country, while the other, influenced by Baltic German émigrés from Russia, saw Russia as Asiatic and incapable of development. The latter school gained considerable influence with the founding of Eastern European Studies in Germany, a discipline that focused primarily on the Russian Empire.

Chapter 3 turns to the growing interest in Russia after the revolution of 1905. German scholars viewed Russia as both an imperial competitor and a backward country that was increasingly perceived as a potential market for German industry and civilizing work. This change in German perceptions of Russia was most evident in German observers' discussion of Siberia, Russia's largest colonial territory. The opening of the Trans-Siberian Railway around the turn of the century brought this isolated region of the world into contact with global markets. Rather than being depicted as a desolate wasteland and penal colony for the tsars, Siberia began to be seen as a source of raw materials and a market for future expansion, one that German observers viewed as providing the potential for a political power with global reach. Indeed, with the outbreak of World War I, knowledge of Russia was put into practice as intellectuals contributed to public debates over war aims, wartime propaganda, and the planning and administration of occupation regimes in western Russia. Although Siberia was never occupied by the Germans, the prospect of access to Siberian resources continued to figure in Germans' wartime imaginations of a postwar settlement.

The three chapters that make up the second half of the book, "Re-mapping 'the East' between the Wars," all deal in different ways with the cultural legacy of German defeat in World War I and the changed international order with the consolidation of Bolshevik rule in Russia. Although the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 affected German perceptions of the country, the trauma of defeat in 1918 was more significant in shaping Germans' fascination (and in some cases obsession) with Russia and Eastern Europe more generally. Rather than adopting a chronological organization here, I have structured the chapters thematically. Each chapter is

devoted to a theme—alternative modernities, space, and the nation—traced across the political divide of 1933. This thematic approach better allows the reader to track not only the continuities from the 1920s to the 1930s but also the ruptures. This enables us to take seriously the argument that Nazism was only one of the possible products of the social and cultural experimentation of the Weimar Republic.⁴²

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which the Soviet Union was presented as an alternative version of modernity in the extensive German travel literature about the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. Of particular interest in this regard is the rhetoric of colonization that travelers and observers employed in their accounts. Travelers, whether they identified with the Soviet utopia or not, saw much that was inspiring in the Soviets' efforts to mobilize society and rapidly industrialize their country. Despite the recognition of the modernizing potential, travelers developed strategies to distance themselves from Soviet methods, and with the exception of German Communists, they saw these methods as not being applicable in Germany. Travelers thus continued to view the "New World" in the East as hampered by its "Asiatic backwardness." In the process, many German observers came to accept that the violence of Bolshevik rule was somehow appropriate to the level of civilizational development in Russia, thus reinscribing the perception of revolutionary Russia's backwardness and decisively separating Soviet Russia from European civilization.

Chapter 5 returns to the subject of Siberia in order to focus on Germans' changing spatial imaginary and in particular their fascination with continental empires. In the aftermath of the war, Germans imagined Siberia in utopian terms as possessing the land and resources that could help Germany to restore its economic strength, contributing to the popularization of conceptions of Siberia as a "space without people" that was well suited to the Germans, a "people without space." In the early years of the Republic, German officials and business interests were fascinated by the potential of Siberia as a source for raw materials and a market for exports and investment. Soviet efforts to industrialize and modernize the territory changed that perception as Siberia came to be seen as the next America, a continental empire that was capable of relying on its own resources. This idea of continental autarky as a basis for industrialization and military defense also appealed to experts on Russia under the Nazis and was an aspect of Soviet development that they hoped to emulate. Their attraction to this fantasy was all the more powerful because continental autarky appeared as a solution to the threat of a naval blockade by Great Britain, one that German experts saw as having precipitated the collapse of the home front and eventually defeat during the last war.

Finally, chapter 6 turns to the subject of German perceptions of ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union, contextualizing German views of Russia within the "*völkisch* turn" of the Weimar Republic.⁴³ By adopting a transnational approach to

the emergence of nationalist discourse, in this chapter I illustrate how both nationalist activists in Germany and German émigrés from Russia who had fled the revolution contributed to the expansion of the scope of German nationhood to include ethnic Germans in Russia. Thus I show how an expansionist German nationalism came to be popularized in the Weimar Republic. This expansionist nationalism would later play a key role in Nazi racial imperialism, which was premised on the desire to “liberate” and resettle the various ethnic German populations across Eastern Europe as part of the larger Nazi project of constructing a new world order based on a racialized hierarchy. This discourse was constantly accompanied by an anti-Semitic dimension: the realization of the utopia of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was tied to the purging of supposedly alien elements from the body politic. In this imaginary, the Jew came to be seen as the mobilizing force behind the enemies of Germanness, with “Jewish Bolshevism” appearing as the greatest threat.

This book demonstrates that imaginings of Russia played an important role in German national and imperial identities during this crucial period of European history. It illustrates the value of transnational approaches that complicate and reshape nation-centered master narratives, and it provides novel insight into the process of national identity formation by tracing how academic, official, and popular discourses shaped public opinion about foreign Others. By situating German imaginings of Russia in a broader global context, this book also shows how German discourses about Russia were expressions of Germans’ desire to assert an autonomous national identity in an increasingly interconnected world.