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“Unheard-of Brutality”: Russian Atrocities against Civilians in East Prussia, 1914–1915*

Alexander Watson

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On August 11, 1914, a week and a half after war had broken out between Germany and Russia, a terrified crowd from the East Prussian border village of Radszen appeared at the office of the local district administrator. That morning, the people told him, there had been a clash between a German cavalry patrol and a larger Russian force in their village. When the Germans withdrew, the Russians had burned down almost every building and had “begun to beat us and to shoot at us.” Four villagers had been killed, five wounded; the rest had fled in panic.¹ Similar accounts of violence against civilians multiplied once border skirmishes gave way to full-scale invasion in the middle of August. As tsarist troops poured across East Prussia’s eastern and southern borders, penetrating deep into its interior, frightening reports of civilians tortured and murdered, officials arrested, and farms and villages set ablaze attracted the attention of state authorities.² On the eve of the Battle of Tannenberg, as East Prussia’s fate hung in the balance, the Reich’s alarmed deputy chancellor, Clemens Delbrück, telegraphed the Prussian government from Army General Headquarters: “Russians annihilating property and lives of population in the occupied areas with unheard-of brutality.”³

This article examines whether East Prussia did, in fact, suffer “unheard-of brutality” at Russian hands during the invasions of 1914–15. German complaints

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¹ Report by the Landrat (district administrator) of Stallupönen, August 11, 1914. The Landrat wrote again three days later to correct the villagers’ inflated casualty estimates of eight killed and three wounded. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin (hereafter GStA, Berlin): XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3559, fols. 5 and 13.

² Report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen, August 27, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3559, fols. 20–22.

³ Delbrück to Königliches Staatsministerium, August 26, 1914. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90 A, 1059.

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about the tsarist army's violence toward civilians never attracted much sympathy. For both international opinion at the time and historians today, they were always overshadowed by the "atrocities" that, as John Horne and Alan Kramer conclusively demonstrated a decade ago, the Germans themselves perpetrated in Belgium and France.⁴ Indeed, until very recently, the consensus was that stories of the "Cossack terror" in East Prussia were mostly propaganda fabrications. While looting and even destruction have sometimes been acknowledged, systematic violence against civilians, and especially killing, has been regarded as uncharacteristic of the Russian invasions.⁵ Work by Vėjas Gabriel Liulevičius and Peter Hoeres has begun to question this view but, based on wartime and postwar publications rather than archival sources, has not disproved it.⁶

Understanding what took place in East Prussia in 1914–15 is important for two reasons. First, the Russian army's conduct in this campaign offers a much-needed point of comparison with which to test theories of German military exceptionalism. Current historiography argues that imperial German military culture was uniquely prone to promote violence against civilians. For Horne and Kramer, it was the force's institutional memory of fighting francs-tireurs in 1870–71, its operational doctrine that regarded armed civilians as illegitimate combatants, and the "militarist nationalism" that allegedly permeated its officer corps that prepared the way for its slaughter of 6,427 Belgian and French citizens in 1914.⁷ Isabel V. Hull posits that military culture was not just influential but even deterministic in shaping German conduct. "Standard operating procedures" and "basic assumptions" overvaluing force and encouraging control mania were perpetuated and reinforced without challenge owing to the army's constitutional exemption from external oversight. This, she argues, strengthened the force's

⁴ John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT, 2001).

⁵ See Imanuel Geiss, "Die Kosaken kommen! Ostpreußen im August 1914," in Imanuel Geiss, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Erste Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1978), 58–66. Also, Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 78–81.

⁶ See Vėjas Gabriel Liulevičius, "Ostpreußen," in *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, Irina Renz, and Markus Pöhlmann (Paderborn, 2003, 2004), 764–76, and Liulevičius, "Precursors and Precedents: Forced Migration in North-eastern Europe during the First World War," *Nordost-Archiv: Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte*, n.s., 14 (2005): 32–52, 39; Peter Hoeres, "Die Slawen: Perzeptionen des Kriegsgegners bei den Mittelmächten; Selbst- und Feindbild," in *Die vergessene Front: Der Osten 1914/15; Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung*, ed. Gerhard P. Groß (Paderborn, 2006), 187–91. Robert Traba's recent study of East Prussian identity attempts unsuccessfully to reconcile the different views. See Robert Traba, "Wschodniopruskość": *Tożsamość regionalna i narodowa w kulturze politycznej Niemiec* (Poznań, 2005), esp. 27–33.

⁷ Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 74 and chaps. 3 and 4. A far cruder cultural explanation attributing the violence to a dysfunctional prewar German societal "Kultur" of "militarism, nationalism, and materialism" is put forward by Jeff Lipkes in *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven, 2007), 563–74.

lethal tendency to instrumentalize civilians and set it on a course of repeated and increasingly dysfunctional violence, predisposing it to commit acts of extreme brutality against enemy populations.⁸ A lack of comparable research on other militaries means, however, that the allegedly exceptional nature of German military culture and atrocities remains highly questionable. Through an examination of Russian conduct in East Prussia, this article will help to ascertain whether the killing of noncombatants was a specifically German practice or a more general characteristic of early twentieth-century European warfare.⁹

Second, the invasions of East Prussia are important for their impact on Germany during the First World War. Historians have studied the military campaign of August 1914 and recognized its political significance: victory at Tannenberg won the German general Paul von Hindenburg immense popularity and prestige, setting him and his chief of staff, Erich Ludendorff, on a precipitate ascent that culminated in their leadership of the German army and nation during 1916–18.¹⁰ By contrast, the invasions' influence on German societal understandings of the conflict and "war culture" has been largely overlooked. Troy R. E. Paddock has demonstrated that by 1914 an image of the tsarist empire as Asiatic, autocratic, aggressive, and barbaric was firmly anchored in German public consciousness.¹¹ Yet neither histories of the popular mobilization at the war's outbreak nor the standard works on the Kaiserreich's war effort consider how the German people

⁸ Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 2005). The atrocities of 1914 are discussed as evidence for Hull's broader argument on 207–15.

⁹ The only comparable study is Jonathan Gumz's work on the Habsburg invasion of Serbia, which suggests that the Austro-Hungarian army executed 3,500 Serb civilians in a matter of weeks, making the violence there of greater intensity than that of the Germans in Belgium and France. See Jonathan Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2009), 44–59. Some excellent research undertaken recently on the tsarist army's conduct in Galicia in 1914–15 demonstrates that pogroms and mass deportations were perpetrated there against Jewish communities. Unfortunately, however, it provides less information on atrocities against gentile populations and gives no figures for overall fatalities. See Alexander V. Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005); Frank M. Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten: Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914–1919)* (Cologne, 2004); Peter Holquist, "The Role of Personality in the First (1914–1915) Russian Occupation of Galicia and Bukovina," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, ed. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 52–73; and Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *Russian Review* 60 (2001): 404–19.

¹⁰ See esp. Anna von der Goltz, *Hindenburg: Power, Myth, and the Rise of the Nazis* (Oxford, 2009), 14–42. The definitive military history is Dennis E. Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* (Hamden, CT, 1991).

¹¹ Troy R. E. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, the Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890–1914* (Rochester, NY, 2010).

reacted to the arrival of troops from this feared neighbor on their national soil.¹² This appears to be a major omission; research has shown that invasion often elicits intense emotions of outrage, violation, and victimhood that act as powerful sponsors of national unity.¹³ This article will argue that invasion must be given a central place in any account of the country's wartime history that aims to understand the success of Germany's mobilization in 1914 and its people's subsequent resilience.

This investigation is based principally on the wartime records of the East Prussian civil administration, previously thought destroyed.¹⁴ The province of East Prussia was headed by a senior president (Oberpräsident), whose files on "Russian atrocities" (*Russengreuel*) have survived intact.¹⁵ Among the records of its three counties (*Regierungen*), those of Allenstein County appear also to be largely complete; some documentation remains from Gumbinnen and Königsberg Counties as well. These papers include eyewitness and victim testimony and reports by state and church officials collected by the administration during its own inquiries into Russian military crimes. In addition, the article draws on one post-war source: a semiofficial study of the invasions written by Dr. Fritz Gause, a high school teacher and later director of the Königsberg city archive and historical museum.¹⁶ There are good reasons to regard Gause's work with suspicion. His

¹² Thomas Raithel, *Das "Wunder" der inneren Einheit: Studien zur deutschen und französischen Öffentlichkeit bei Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Bonn, 1996), and Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000). Verhey devotes two pages to East Prussia (90–91), and Raithel mentions East Prussia only briefly while discussing German perceptions of the Russian enemy (320 and 330). For standard histories' treatment of the invasions, see Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914–1918*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2004), 24, 26–27, and 99; Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914–1918* (London, 1997), 80–87, and 128. An essay by Peter Jahn does explore how German popular perceptions of Russia were influenced by the invasion, but it errs in underestimating its violence. See Peter Jahn, "'Zarendreck, Barbarendreck'—Die russische Besetzung Ostpreußens 1914 in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit," in *Verführungen der Gewalt: Russen und Deutsche im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Karl Eimermacher and Astrid Volpert (Munich, 2005), 223–41.

¹³ See, for example, Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (Leamington Spa, 1985), 3–5 and 324, and Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, chap. 8. Also, Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: The Red Army 1939–45* (London, 2005), 78–86.

¹⁴ See Liulevičius, "Precursors and Precedents," 39.

¹⁵ Comparison of today's archival holdings with a survey of documentation pertaining to the invasions published in 1930 indicates that official provincial records have had a high rate of survival. The 1930 survey mentioned four volumes devoted to Russian atrocities among the files of the Oberpräsident. I located five such volumes, two of which are now in Berlin and three in Olsztyn, Poland. See Fritz Gause, "Die Quellen zur Geschichte des Russeneinfalls in Ostpreußen im Jahre 1914," *Altpreußische Forschungen* 7 (1930): 82–106, esp. 86.

¹⁶ Fritz Gause, *Die Russen in Ostpreußen 1914/15: Im Auftrage des Landeshauptmanns der Provinz Ostpreußen* (Königsberg, 1931). For Gause's life and career, see the

book was published in 1931, a time when East Prussia was stranded beyond the Reich's border and when emphasizing the province's wartime suffering was a means of reinforcing German claims over the territory. Moreover, according to the book's preface, the work's "spiritual father" was Professor Albert Brackmann, a man now best remembered as a senior Ostforscher, one of the Nazis' academic collaborators.¹⁷ Nonetheless, cross-checks with the existing archival evidence reveal that Gause's study was a sound piece of historical research. As he utilized some important material that has since been destroyed, it is a valuable supplement to surviving provincial records.

The investigation described here is organized into four parts. The first sketches the course of the invasions, while the second examines the atrocity inquiries conducted in their aftermath. The third part analyzes patterns of Russian violence and compares them with those of contemporaneous German atrocities in the west. Finally, the fourth part examines the impact of the invasions on the German people and how these experiences affected their readiness to fight the twentieth century's first "total war."

I

When Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914, there can have been few among the two million inhabitants of East Prussia who felt no apprehension. People had begun to leave the border areas already at the end of July. Karol Małek, a native of the Masurian village Brodowen, recalled that when mobilization was announced, "everybody cried and wailed."¹⁸ The province, faced on two sides by Russian territory, was frighteningly vulnerable to attack (fig. 1). Although the Prussian war minister had publicly insisted a year earlier that "neither in East Prussia nor elsewhere is a surrender of German land considered," the army had allotted just eleven infantry divisions and a cavalry division, a mere tenth of its available forces, to its defense.¹⁹ There was little in the region of such

catalog description for 456/3—"Nachlaß von Fritz Gause," in GStA, Berlin. Five years before his death in 1973, Gause was awarded the title of Professor by the state government of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

¹⁷ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 9. For Brackmann's relations with the Nazis, see Michael Burleigh, "Albert Brackmann (1871–1952) *Ostforscher*: The Years of Retirement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988): 573–88.

¹⁸ Karol Małek, *Z Mazur do Verdun: Wspomnienia 1890–1919* (n.p., 1967), 176. For refugees, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 40. A good description of the rising anxiety felt in Allenstein, one of the province's major cities, during the period surrounding the war's outbreak is given in a report by Polizeiinspektor Schroeder[?], April 15, 1915. Archiwum Państwowe w Olsztynie (hereafter AP Olsztyn): Akta Miasta Olsztyn 259/168, fols. 16–17.

¹⁹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2001), 1:316. For the quotation, see report of Oberpräsident der Provinz Ostpreußen (hereafter Oberpräsident) to Minister des Innern, September 15, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3776, reverse of fol. 200.



FIG. 1.—The province of East Prussia, with counties (Regierungen) and districts (Landkreise). Adapted from Albert Hesse and Herbert Goedel, *Die Bevölkerung von Ostpreußen, Grundlagen des Wirtschaftslebens von Ostpreußen. Denkschrift zum Wiederaufbau der Provinz*, ed. Johannes Hansen et al. (Jena, 1916), 3:25.

economic value that it could not at least temporarily be relinquished. The population, largely German, but including a 337,300-strong Polish-speaking Masurian minority in the south and 112,500 Lithuanians in the northeast, mostly worked in agriculture and was poor by national standards. It was also scattered: almost half of the inhabitants lived in villages of fewer than 500 people. The province possessed just four self-governing cities, and three of these—Allenstein, Insterburg, and Tilsit—had only 30,000 to 40,000 inhabitants. The sole major municipality, with almost a quarter of a million citizens, was the heavily fortified provincial capital of Königsberg.²⁰

East Prussia suffered two invasions and a destructive raid in 1914–15. The first invasion began in mid-August 1914 and resulted in two-thirds of the province being briefly overrun. Attack came from two directions: General Pavel Rennenkampf's First Army, a force of six and a half infantry divisions, five and a half cavalry divisions, and 492 guns, advanced from the east on August 15. Five days later, the forces of the Russian Second Army under General Aleksandr Samsonov—nine and a half infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions, and 738 guns—crossed East Prussia's southeastern border.²¹ The panic that the invaders' arrival caused among the population was exacerbated and spread to still-unthreatened parts of the province by an ill-considered military order of August 22 instructing civilians urgently to take their harvest and livestock to safety across the Vistula. A wave of refugees, comprising hundreds of thousands of frightened people, swept westward, clogging the roads with farm wagons and cattle.²² The civil administration in areas under assault also evacuated: the president of Gumbinnen County ordered his officials on August 21 to take refuge in Königsberg, and two days later his counterpart in Allenstein transferred his offices to Danzig.²³ Meanwhile, German forces struggled to halt the Russian advance. A battle between

²⁰ Albert Hesse and Herbert Goedel, *Die Bevölkerung von Ostpreußen*, Grundlagen des Wirtschaftslebens von Ostpreußen: Denkschrift zum Wiederaufbau der Provinz, ed. Johannes Hansen et al. (Jena, 1916), 3:1–2, 5–6, and 10. Also, the companion volumes: Johannes Hansen, *Die Landwirtschaft in Ostpreußen*, 2:9, and Herbert Goedel, *Wohlstandsverhältnisse in Ostpreußen*, 5:19–31. For the minorities, see Leszek Belzyt, *Sprachliche Minderheiten im preußischen Staat 1815–1914: Die preußische Sprachenstatistik in Bearbeitung und Kommentar* (Marburg, 1998), 17 and 25.

²¹ For figures, see Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (London, 1975, 1998), 58.

²² For the refugee wave and the so-called Dirschau order (named after the Etappeninspektion Dirschau, which issued it on the instructions of the Eighth Army), see draft report of Oberpräsident to Minister des Innern, September 15, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3576, fols. 200–204. Also Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 40–59.

²³ “Kriegsbericht” of August 21, 1914, by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen, August 22, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3559, fol. 16; Telegram of Unterstaatssekretär to Reichskanzler, August 24, 1914. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BA Berlin-Lichterfelde): R43/2465d, fol. 5.

the defending Eighth Army and Rennenkampf's troops outside Gumbinnen on August 20 had been inconclusive. However, the Germans then redeployed to face Samsonov in the southwest of the province, preparing the way for the infamous Battle of Tannenberg. On August 27, they attacked the Russian general's left wing, broke through, and in the final days of the month surrounded and annihilated his Second Army, taking 92,000 prisoners and nearly 400 guns. The crushing victory prompted Rennenkampf, whose advance units had briefly cut off Königsberg, to halt. Once again shifting their men by rail, the Germans attacked the First Army at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes on September 7–10, forcing it into retreat. By September 13, having lost a further 30,000 men as prisoners, the Russians had withdrawn into their own territory. East Prussia had been liberated.²⁴

The respite did not last long, however. Throughout October there was heavy fighting along the borders, and at the beginning of November a second invasion was undertaken by a new Russian force, the Tenth Army under General Sievers. The Germans were compelled to abandon their eastern districts and withdraw to the defensive Angerapp line. This time, unlike in the summer, an orderly evacuation of inhabitants from the threatened territory was organized, facilitated by the gradual nature of the retreat and improved cooperation between military and civil authorities.²⁵ The Russians captured only one-fifth of the province, but their occupation lasted for three and a half months. It was not until the "Winter Battle" of mid-February 1915 that two German armies, attacking Sievers's flanks in the north and south, forced him into a hurried retreat.²⁶ After this defeat, tsarist units trespassed only once more on East Prussian soil. On March 17, 1915, Russian columns advanced on the province's most northeasterly district of Memel, taking the town of the same name. The operation was brief: four days later, the raiders were thrown out by a German relief force led by the military governor of Königsberg.²⁷

The Russian invasions caused immense disruption and destruction in East Prussia. According to official figures, 41,414 buildings were destroyed and another 60,000 damaged.²⁸ It was estimated that Gumbinnen County alone, where

²⁴ Showalter, *Tannenberg*, esp. 172–323; Strachan, *First World War*, 1:319–35; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 59–69.

²⁵ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 65–70.

²⁶ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Der Herbst-Feldzug 1914; Im Westen bis zum Stellungskrieg; Im Osten bis zum Rückzug*, 14 vols. (Berlin, 1929), 5:542–48; Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Der Herbst-Feldzug 1914; Der Abschluß der Operationen im Westen und Osten*, 14 vols. (Berlin, 1929), 6:324–40 and 347–49; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 116–19. For the evacuation, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 67–70.

²⁷ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Die Operationen des Jahres 1915; Die Ereignisse im Winter und Frühjahr*, 14 vols. (Berlin, 1931), 7:282–83.

²⁸ Letter of Oberpräsident to Präsident des Staatsministeriums in Berlin, April 9, 1921, and table 2 accompanying it. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3759, reverse of fols. 56 and

around one-fifth of the buildings had been wrecked, would require 198 million bricks for reconstruction.²⁹ Looting and vandalism had also been widespread. In abandoned homes and shops, officials found “furniture and household appliances smashed, the linen ripped apart, all cupboards emptied, the beds chopped up and the down scattered, letters and other papers thrown about, walls damaged by shots fired in fun, windows and doors smashed, merchandise pointlessly wasted, and the rooms fouled with human excrement.”³⁰ While the Russians were responsible for much of this, they were not the sole culprits. German soldiers were also caught thieving.³¹ Refugees too caused enormous damage; law and order broke down so badly that in October 1914 special military courts were set up to dispense justice to civilians plundering in the war zone.³²

While the material damage in much of East Prussia was obvious, it was not immediately clear how the province’s inhabitants had fared at the hands of the invaders. Was there any truth in the atrocity stories that had begun to circulate in the panic of August 1914? Officials, confronted by chaos, were unable to answer this question quickly. The population was displaced, infrastructure was damaged, and the administration needed time to regain control. It would take many months for painstaking investigations to establish the full extent of the invader’s violence against civilians.

64. For comparison, 188,981 buildings were destroyed during the Russian campaign in Galicia in 1914–15. Horne and Kramer estimate that 15,000–20,000 buildings were deliberately demolished by the Germans during their invasion of Belgium and France in 1914. However, this figure is not directly comparable to those for East Prussia and Galicia, as these latter include not only buildings destroyed intentionally but also those ruined through fighting. See *Sprawozdanie c.k. Namiestnictwa, Centrali krajowej dla gospodarczej odbudowy Galicyi za czas od czerwca 1916 do lutego 1917* (Cracow, 1917), 4, and Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 76.

²⁹ Report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, p. 7 of report; also, “Besprechung der Gumbinner Landräte,” March 1, 1915. AP Olsztyn: Landratsamt Braunsberg (Starostwo Powiatowe w Braniewie) (hereafter LA Braunsberg): 10/157, p. 5 of meeting minutes.

³⁰ Report of Regierungspräsident Königsberg, September 16, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3558, fol. 17. For another similar example, see report of Ministerialdirektor Offenberg, September 16, 1914. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1059, pp. 4–5 of report.

³¹ See, for example, the “Orders of the Day” issued by the Generalkommandos of XVII. and XX. Armeekorps, September 1 and 4, 1914. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (hereafter BA-MA Freiburg): PH5II/186, fols. 81–82 and 97. Also (for civilian complaints that German soldiers had emptied cellars), see gendarmerie report by Wachtmeister Sahn I, September 14, 1914. AP Olsztyn: Königlicher Regierungs-Präsident zu Allenstein (Rejencja Olsztyńska) (hereafter RP Allenstein): 179, fol. 107.

³² Letter from stellvertretendes Generalkommando des I. Armeekorps to stellvertretendes Generalkommando des VI. Armeekorps, September 2, 1915. Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach. Oddział w Raciborzu: 18/237/4: 8, fol. 184. During the first invasion, many towns, including Allenstein, Insterburg, and Tilsit, established Bürgerwehren (citizens’ patrols) in order to combat local looters.

II

The German government was not complacent when reports of Russian atrocities began to arrive from East Prussia. Already in August 1914 it had issued a diplomatic protest and opened inquiries to ascertain whether tsarist troops had broken international laws of war.³³ Under the Hague Convention of 1907, signed by Germany and Russia, civilians possessed some, albeit limited, protection.³⁴ Pillaging was strictly forbidden. The convention stipulated too that “the lives of persons . . . must be respected” and that “undefended” places should not be subjected to attack or bombardment. Belligerents were allowed neither to force enemy subjects to participate in operations against their own country nor to impose collective punishments in retribution for the crimes of individuals.³⁵ Civilians also had obligations, however. Most importantly, the right of resistance was severely limited: inhabitants were permitted to rise up “spontaneously” only if their territory was not yet occupied, and arms had to be carried openly.³⁶ The incentives for proving that Russian forces had contravened the convention without provocation were twofold. First, there was a financial motivation to catalog damages and identify who had caused them, as Article 3 of the convention obliged belligerents whose troops violated its provisions to pay compensation.³⁷ Second, demonstrating Russian brutality in East Prussia was a useful weapon in the diplomatic war to gain neutrals’ sympathy. It offered a riposte to the Entente’s damaging accusations of German barbarity in Belgium and France.³⁸

Two atrocity inquiries were organized by the government. First, an investigative commission was hastily dispatched to East Prussia from Berlin. It issued a

³³ For the official protest, see “Deutscher Protest gegen die russische Kriegführung,” *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, 58. Jahrgang, Nr. 228, *Erstes Morgenblatt* (August 18, 1914), 1.

³⁴ For the development of international law before 1914, see Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare: The Modern History of the International Law of Armed Conflicts* (London, 1980), 128–215. For recent research stressing the limited protection offered by the 1907 Hague Convention, see Amanda Alexander, “The Genesis of the Civilian,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 20 (2007): 359–76.

³⁵ Articles 28 and 47 (pillaging), 46 (respect lives), 25 (attack or bombardment of undefended places), 23 and 52 (operations against own country), and 50 (collective punishment) of the Annex entitled “Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land” to “Convention Concerning the Laws and Customs of War in Land. 2d Peace Conference, The Hague, 18 Oct. 1907. IV,” in *Conventions and Declarations between the Powers Concerning War, Arbitration and Neutrality (Declaration of Paris, 1856—of St. Petersburg, 1868—of The Hague, 1899—Convention of Geneva, 1906—2d Peace Conference, The Hague, 1907—Declaration of London, 1909. English—French—German (The Hague, 1915).*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Art. 2 of Annex.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Art. 3 of Convention.

³⁸ For the role played by atrocity accusations in the struggle for neutral opinion, see Home and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, chap. 6.

report quickly, in mid-September 1914, arguing that “portrayals of Russian atrocities and the reported devastation of the land are based on untruths.”³⁹ Second, on August 28, the Prussian interior minister arranged for a more comprehensive probe by instructing the presidents of Allenstein and Gumbinnen Counties, the two areas that had borne the brunt of the Russian onslaught, to organize and chair commissions to look into Russian crimes. A similar order was sent to East Prussia’s third county president in Königsberg on September 12, 1914.⁴⁰ It may not be coincidental that the minister issued his first order on the day that an official Belgian commission produced its first report on German atrocities.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the correspondence between provincial authorities and Berlin makes it clear that the investigation was intended to be thorough and objective. The county presidents were told to appoint not only local officials but also “distinguished personages not in state service . . . , who are fully acquainted with the circumstances of the district.”⁴² There was no intention of using evidence of Russian crimes to incite public outrage; the authorities refused requests by private persons and commercial publishers for information on tsarist troops’ brutality precisely because they feared that it would be exploited for sensationalist or pornographic purposes.⁴³ Rigor was essential. The commissions’ findings would face international scrutiny and needed to be irrefutable.⁴⁴

The three county presidents submitted their findings in the autumn of 1914. Although the reports differed in length and in their use of evidence, they un-

³⁹ Ernst Deuerlein, ed., *Briefwechsel Hertling-Lerchenfeld 1912–1917: Dienstliche Privatkorrespondenz zwischen dem bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Georg Graf von Hertling und dem bayerischen Gesandten in Berlin Hugo Graf von und zu Lerchenfeld*, 2 vols. (Boppard am Rhein, 1973), 1:341–42 (letter of September 14, 1914). See also letter from württembergischer Militärbevollmächtigter to Staatsminister von Weizsäcker, September 14, 1914. Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart: E 74 Bü. 465.

⁴⁰ Letters of Minister des Innern to Regierungspräsidenten, August 28 and September 12, 1914. AP Olsztyn: Oberpräsidium von Ostpreussen (Naczelne Prezydium Prus Wschodnich) (hereafter OP Ostpreußen): 3/528, fols. 5–6.

⁴¹ See Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 229–61, esp. 229.

⁴² Letter of Minister des Innern to Regierungspräsidenten, August 28, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreussen: 3/528, fol. 5.

⁴³ Letter of Regierungspräsident Allenstein to Minister des Innern, October 8, 1914. See also the requests for material by the Ernst Richter Verlag, Dr. F. Castelle and the Otto Gustav Zehrfeld Kommissions- und Verlagsbuchhandlung in AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 176, fols. 25–29, 226, 228, and 230.

⁴⁴ Letter of Minister des Innern to Regierungspräsidenten, August 28, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fol. 5. An intention to use the evidence to support damage claims is mentioned here. While the desire to exploit it for the diplomatic war is not explicitly stated, it is expressed in subsequent correspondence. Some officials feared that the rigor of the research actually damaged the diplomatic impact because it delayed the appearance of the official report on Russian atrocities until March 1915. See the letters of Minister des Innern to Regierungspräsidenten, November 18, 1914, and of Oberpräsident to Rittmeister Graf Lehndorff in Armee-Oberkommando 8, February 28, 1915. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 86–87 and 277–78.

animously agreed that the invading forces had perpetrated serious crimes against the East Prussian population. The first report was sent from Gumbinnen to the interior minister on September 25. Drawing predominantly on witness testimony and making no claim to be comprehensive, it recounted beatings, murders, and executions, as well as massacres in the villages of Seedranken and Christiankehmen. Civilians who had refused to betray German troops' positions had been harmed or even killed. While the most serious cases were confirmed in their essentials by subsequent investigation, the report's reliance on apparently unverified individuals' statements resulted in the inclusion of several far-fetched and poorly supported accounts of women, children, and soldiers having been sadistically mutilated.⁴⁵ The report provided no estimate of total civilian victims. A press release published around the same time suggests, however, that officials believed more than 360 civilian lives had been lost in Gumbinnen County.⁴⁶

The other two counties reported one month later, at the end of October. Königsberg sent only a short note that, while not detailing how evidence had been compiled, did summarize the investigation's conclusions in measured tones. It refused to endorse accounts of mutilation and acknowledged a case in which a Russian soldier had been shot dead by his officer in punishment for the attempted rape and murder of East Prussian civilians. It nonetheless stated categorically that the invaders had killed over 200 people in the county "without cause."⁴⁷ Allenstein's report was the most thorough and transparent, systematically detailing the atrocities perpetrated, district by district. It not only recounted witness statements but also cited the testimony of policemen, foresters, teachers, and priests, upstanding local officials who either had remained at their posts during the invasion or were first on the scene after liberation.⁴⁸ The research for the report's section on

⁴⁵ Gumbinnen County report, September 25, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 64–79. Gause's postwar investigation supported much of the information given in the report on killings at Seedranken (fol. 69), near Szittkehmen (fol. 71), and in Christiankehmen (fol. 78). See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 212, 160, and 188–89. The mutilation testimony was largely rejected as unconvincing by the authorities: it is significant that a document on Russian atrocities compiled from the three county reports by the Oberpräsident's office excluded most of it. See "Bericht über russische Grausamkeiten" (covering letter dated February 28, 1915). AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 279–96. Gause categorically rejected claims of mutilation. See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 230.

⁴⁶ See "Von den russischen Greuelthaten," dated September 18, 1914, in *Der große Krieg 1914: Deutschlands Kampf zu Wasser und Land; Eine vollständige Zusammenstellung von Ereignissen und Dokumenten; Monatsausgabe der Leipziger Abendzeitung; Ein Erinnerungswerk für lebende und spätere Geschlechter; 2. Heft* (16. September–14. Oktober 1914), 5.

⁴⁷ Königsberg County report, October 30, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 40–41.

⁴⁸ Some of the testimony on which this report was based survives. See, for example, reports by Oberwachtmeister Meyer, September 17, 1914, and Sekretär Klempin, September 21, 1914, in AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 93–95 and 163–64.

Lyck, the county's most severely affected district, was especially impressive. The district gendarmerie, men who knew their localities intimately, had conducted extensive investigations very shortly after the liberation; one officer recounted how he himself had located and buried victims' bodies. This enabled them as early as September to submit detailed reports showing that 127 men, women, and children from the district had been killed and around 315 forcibly taken by tsarist troops.⁴⁹ Overall, the county report gave details of more than 300 cases of murder by Russian soldiers. Some killings were apparently random, some were related to robbery, and others were executions. Men of military age were numerous among the victims. A few male corpses were found damaged, although probably not malevolently. Female fatalities were far rarer but some were reported, as were sexual assaults. There were accounts of massacres, notably near the town of Bischofsstein and in the village of Santoppen. The report also asserted that nearly 400 people had been forcibly deported. These estimates were later raised to 600 killed and 1,000 deported.⁵⁰

The county commissions convincingly demonstrated that many German civilians had been killed by Russian troops in August and September 1914.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the interior minister was not satisfied. The reports had failed to establish that the bloodshed had contravened international law. It was not sufficient, he argued, to state that "a house was burned down or a number of inhabitants shot"; it also had to be shown that "those shot had not behaved in a hostile manner toward the Russians, that there was no military reason for destroy-

⁴⁹ See the twenty-seven gendarmerie reports (written by twenty-three individual Gendarmerie-Wachtmeister) of September 21 and 22, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 169–256. The account of locating and burying bodies is in the report of Gendarmerie-Wachtmeister Freiburg, September 21, 1914, in *ibid.*, fols. 243–48, esp. 244. When the president of the county requested the reports on September 19, 1914, he appears not to have expected to be told of fatalities or forced removals. His order (*ibid.*, fol. 237) asks only for information on the return of refugees and officials and for details of plundering, crop damage, and stolen cattle. The casualty figures have been calculated from a careful reading of the original reports; the totals given for Lyck in Allenstein County's report on atrocities differ slightly (124 killed and 313 deported). Similar gendarmerie reports were written (or have survived) only for Rössel District (see *ibid.*, fols. 19–20, 35, 67–69, 89–95, 105–8).

⁵⁰ Allenstein County report entitled "Auszüge aus den Akten der Kriegskommission Allenstein zur Untersuchung Völkerrechtswidriger russischer Grausamkeiten," October 29, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 43–63. The original typewritten totals given on fol. 62 (which, in the case of the killed, tallies with the cases detailed in the report) were written over with new raised estimates in pencil.

⁵¹ The commissions' conclusions were supported by the Evangelical Church in East Prussia. Reports from its clergy led it to conclude that "at least 500 civilians" had been killed, and "at least as many carried off to Russia." See report of Königliches Konsistorium der Provinz Ostpreußen to Evangelischer Ober-Kirchenrat in Berlin-Charlottenburg, October 23, 1914. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1059, p. 4 of report.

ing the place.” Moreover, he stressed that in order to ensure reliability, testimony needed to be taken under oath.⁵² From early November the courts were therefore directed to assist the commissions, and despite the onset of the second invasion sworn statements were collected from victims and witnesses during the winter and through to the autumn of 1916.⁵³ A small selection of this evidence formed the basis of a long-awaited but disappointing Foreign Office report on “Atrocities of Russian Troops against German Civilians and German Prisoners of War,” published in March 1915. Despite the faith placed in sworn testimony, this “White Book” included some dubious mutilation stories, omitted many of the worst examples of the invader’s violence, and failed to state how many East Prussians had suffered or lost their lives at Russian hands. It was a poor reflection of the work undertaken by the province’s administration.⁵⁴

In April 1915, only a month after the appearance of the “White Book,” East Prussian authorities were, by contrast, able to supply comprehensive casualty estimates. Probably collated by district administrators (Landräte), these stated that 1,615 civilians had been killed by the Russians since the war’s outbreak.⁵⁵ An even larger number had been forcibly deported. The tsar’s government itself admitted in the autumn of 1915 to holding 7,000 East Prussians, claiming rather incredibly that they had chosen to settle in Russia.⁵⁶ The district administrators had already calculated in the spring and summer that 10,685 people had been taken.⁵⁷ A detailed investigation completed in the war’s second half found the total to be higher still. The *Verschlepptenlisten*, thick tomes containing deportees’ names, ages, and places of origin, registered 1,133 people from Königsberg

⁵² Letter of Minister des Innern to Regierungspräsidenten, November 18, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 86–87.

⁵³ Ibid. Also Gause, “Quellen zur Geschichte,” 86. The order was issued by the Minister of Justice on November 4, 1914.

⁵⁴ Auswärtiges Amt, *Greuelthaten russischer Truppen gegen deutsche Zivilpersonen und deutsche Kriegsgefangene* (Berlin, 1915). A copy is held in BA-MA Freiburg: RM5/2514. Cf. Gause, “Quellen zur Geschichte,” 87.

⁵⁵ See the tables for Königsberg and Allenstein Counties in “Besichtigung der durch die Russeneinfällen beschädigten Teile der Provinz Ostpreußen durch die Minister [Staatsministerium],” ca. April 1915. A report by the county president in Gumbinnen in the same file estimated that 418 civilians had lost their lives there. However, further inquiries had raised this figure to 451 by the summer, and it is this figure that is used to calculate the above total. See GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, and, for the Gumbinnen table (and accompanying letter dated June 4, 1915) with updated figures, AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/529, fols. 72–74.

⁵⁶ Memo from Oberpräsident to all East Prussian Landräte, September 12, 1915. AP Olsztyn: LA Braunsberg: 10/157.

⁵⁷ See the tables for Königsberg and Allenstein Counties of April and the Gumbinnen table of June 4, 1915, in, respectively, GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064 and AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/529, fol. 74.

County, 3,327 from Allenstein County, and 8,545 from Gumbinnen County: in all, 13,005 deportees.⁵⁸

The deportation of civilians was only debatably a war crime, as such action had not been foreseen or forbidden by the 1907 Hague Convention. The German administration appears to have accepted that fit men liable for military service could legitimately be arrested and removed in order to stop them from joining their country's army upon liberation.⁵⁹ Additionally, occupiers were obliged by the Hague Convention to "ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety," and it could be argued that this goal was facilitated by the removal of potentially rebellious elements from the territory.⁶⁰ Many of the deported seem highly unlikely to have fallen into this category, however: almost half of those taken were women and children.⁶¹ Infants of six weeks and people of over eighty years were among the deportees.⁶² The conditions in which they were removed certainly contravened the convention's demand that occupiers should respect "the lives of persons, and private property." Superintendent Skierlo, a seventy-four-year-old clergyman from the town of Johannisburg who was deported in February 1915, recorded the inefficiency and corruption that he encountered during his almost three-week journey to Simbirsk on the Volga. The Russian authorities had prepared little in advance, and much of the prisoners' time was spent in anxious waiting. When a cattle wagon was eventually supplied for an eight-day rail trip, it contained only hard wooden boards on which to sleep and no toilet or bucket for

⁵⁸ The lists of the deported for the Königsberg, Allenstein, and Gumbinnen Counties from ca. 1916–17 are held in GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3578, 3579, and 3580, respectively. The figure for Gumbinnen includes entries from supplementary lists in *ibid.*, 3578 and 3580, fols. 12–15.

⁵⁹ See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 236–37. It is notable that a compilation report drafted by the Oberpräsident from the county commissions' findings excluded references to the deportation of military-aged men. See "Bericht über russische Grausamkeiten" and covering letter from Oberpräsident to Rittmeister Graf Lehndorff of Armee-Oberkommando 8, February 28, 1915. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 277–96.

⁶⁰ Article 43 of the Annex to "Convention Concerning the Laws and Customs of War in Land. 2d Peace Conference, The Hague, 18 Oct. 1907. IV," in *Conventions and Declarations*.

⁶¹ Gause stated that 4,000 women and more than 2,500 children were deported. Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 243. Among the 10,685 people recorded by the District Administrators as deported, 2,578 were women and 2,710 children. Calculated from tables for Königsberg and Allenstein Counties of April and the Gumbinnen table of June 4, 1915, in, respectively, GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, and AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/529, fol. 74.

⁶² See report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, pp. 7–8 of report. For a few of many examples, see the entries for two-year-old Marta M., five-year-old Friedrich K., and eighty-six-year-old Karl J. in the Königsberg "Verschlepptenliste." GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3578, fols. 33, 24, and 22.

washing. Food was scant and money intended for the prisoners was stolen by their guards. Two old men and a child died en route. The worst of the experience ended once the deportees began their internment in Simbirsk, but life remained hard. Skierlo was only one of over 4,000 East Prussians, nearly one-third of those deported, who never saw Germany again and died in captivity.⁶³

The broad accuracy of the statistics for civilian fatalities and deportations collected by the East Prussian authorities is confirmed by Dr. Fritz Gause's study of the invasions, which he undertook in the conflict's aftermath (table 1). He put the number of people deported to Russia slightly higher, at 13,566 East Prussians, basing this estimate mainly on official figures that were later published in the press.⁶⁴ His major achievement, however, was to refine the wartime data on those killed, using material, now lost, that had been collected by the Provinzialkommission für ostpreußische Kriegsgeschichte (Provincial commission for East Prussian war history). This organization had been established in September 1915 at the behest of the senior president of East Prussia. Led by Professor Albert Brackmann, its task was to preserve the memory of the invasions and gather information to facilitate writing their history. At its request, over the winter of 1915–16, thousands of teachers across East Prussia interviewed locals and wrote chronicles of their communities' experiences during the invasions, organized according to a schema laid down by the commission. These chronicles were subjected to rigorous checks and were added to by both parish and district committees before being deposited with the Provincial Commission.⁶⁵ Gause used the results of this enormous civic effort to correct official estimates for civilian fatalities. Significantly, by eliminating double counting and accidental deaths in the fighting, he revised the official figures downward—a good indication of his scholarly integrity. His painstaking research concluded that 1,491 East Prussians had been killed deliberately by the Russians.⁶⁶

⁶³ See the diary extracts in Anna Skierlo, "Meines Mannes und meine Erlebnisse in Russischer [*sic*] Gefangenschaft vom 14. Februar 1915 bis 10. Mai 1918." AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 180, fols. 453–75. For other experiences of deportation and internment, and the fatality figures, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 236–82, and also Serena Tiepolato, ". . . und nun waren wir auch Verbannte: Warum? Weshalb?" *Deportate prussiane in Russia 1914–1918*, *DEP—Deportate, esuli, profughe: Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile* 1 (2004): 59–85.

⁶⁴ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 246 and 359, endnote 37. Gause not only used the press reports but also consulted the provincial documentation from which the figures originated.

⁶⁵ Gause, "Quellen zur Geschichte des Russeneinfalls," 90–96. Most of these chronicles are lost, along with the other papers of the Provinzialkommission für Ostpreußische Kriegsgeschichte. Only a small remnant from the districts of Johannisburg and Insterburg survives in GStA, Berlin under the catalog reference XX. HA, Rep. 235.

⁶⁶ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 229. For details on Gause's sources, see 351–52, endnote 371. Also Gause, "Quellen zur Geschichte des Russeneinfalls," 105. The official

TABLE I
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN EAST PRUSSIA, 1914–15

	Spring/Summer 1915 Investigations			Gause's Postwar Investigation		
	Allenstein	Gumbinnen	Königsberg	Allenstein	Gumbinnen	Königsberg
Killed	851	451	313	587	572	332
Deported	3,040	6,449	1,196	3,410	9,044	1,112
Raped	98	184+	56

SOURCES.—Spring/Summer 1915 investigations: tables for the Königsberg and Allenstein regions and for five districts in Gumbinnen, compiled ca. April 1915, in Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, and table for the Gumbinnen region, June 1915, in Archiwum Państwowe w Olsztynie: Oberpräsidium von Ostpreußen (Naczelne Prezydium Prus Wschodnich): 3/529, fol. 74. Postwar investigation: Fritz Gause, *Die Russen in Ostpreußen 1914/15: Im Auftrage des Landeshauptmanns der Provinz Ostpreußen* (Königsberg, 1931), 229 and 246.

While killings and deportations could be calculated with reasonable accuracy, the incidence of a third type of atrocity, sexual assault, was more difficult to establish due to victims' reluctance to report the crime.⁶⁷ The Foreign Office's "White Book" accused Russian troops of committing "countless . . . bestial rapes," stating that victims included heavily pregnant women, the aged, and a minor.⁶⁸ This claim may not have been purely cynical propaganda; an internal report by the president of Gumbinnen County from February 1915 asserted that rapes had been frequent and "in part . . . quite systematically prepared" during the second invasion.⁶⁹ While it soon became apparent that this was an exaggeration, the figure of ninety-eight sexual assaults that was ultimately accepted by provincial authorities is clearly far too low. Based on responses to a questionnaire cir-

figures that he corrected were taken from a volume, now destroyed, entitled "Listen der getöteten Ostpreußen" kept in the papers of the stellvertretendes Generalkommando des I. Armeekorps. As the information in this volume had been originally supplied by the Landräte of East Prussia, it was probably similar or identical to the statistics given to the ministerial delegation in April 1915 cited in this article.

⁶⁷ For reluctance to report rapes, see the statements by Pfarrer Krix and Freiherr von Mirbach in Allenstein County report, October 29, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 46 and 57. Gause provided no estimate for rapes, stating only that the number was not "excessively large" given the size of Russian forces in East Prussia. Reflecting contemporary racist prejudices, he nonetheless argued that Russians were more inclined than men of western nations to commit the crime. See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 224.

⁶⁸ Auswärtiges Amt, *Greuelthaten russischer Truppen*, introduction and annexes 42–54.

⁶⁹ Report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Oberpräsident, February 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3559, reverse of fol. 98. The claim of systematic sexual assault was later dropped by the president, although he still stated that "the number of rapes . . . go into the hundreds." See his report to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, p. 8 of report.

culated among evangelical clergymen, it made no allowance for unreported incidents, omitted the province's Catholic minority, and ignored the returns of ministers who had given no number but had stated that many sexual assaults had been committed.⁷⁰ The figure also does not tally with what is known about pregnancies resulting from rape by tsarist troops. Thirty-seven so-called Russian children were receiving state support by May 1917, and the authorities knew of another eleven who had either been stillborn or had since died.⁷¹ It is highly improbable that almost half of all rapes led to pregnancies.⁷² More credible, therefore, are the estimates supplied by the district administrators, which together suggest that a minimum of 338 sexual assaults were perpetrated by Russian soldiers during the invasions.⁷³

The provincial authorities' investigations left no doubt that East Prussians had suffered during the Russian invasions. Their detailed inquiries produced copious evidence of murder, rape, and mass deportations. Some officials, deeply shocked by the violence, reached for historical analogies to contextualize it; the tsar's soldiers were accused of behaving "exactly in the manner usual in the Thirty Years' War" and likened to "the Tatars who, for the last time 250 years ago, devastated this province."⁷⁴ This was hyperbole. More important are the questions of why these Russian atrocities took place, and how far they resembled those perpetrated contemporaneously by the German army in Belgium and northern France.

⁷⁰ "Besprechung über die zur Versorgung der sogenannten 'Russenkinder' zu treffenden Massnahmen," July 27, 1915. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/529, fols. 137 and 140–44. Catholics comprised 14 percent of East Prussia's population.

⁷¹ See report on "Fürsorge für die Russenkinder," accompanied by letter from Oberpräsident to Minister des Innern, November 24, 1916, and also letter of Oberpräsident to Regierungshauptkasse in Königsberg, May 5, 1917. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/530, fols. 290–93, 391–94, and 399.

⁷² Research on the mass rapes perpetrated by Soviet soldiers in Berlin in 1945 suggests that between 13 and 25 percent of rapes resulted in pregnancies. Even these percentages may be too high, however, as pregnant women were presumably especially likely to seek medical treatment and therefore to be recorded. See Barbara Johr, "Die Ereignisse in Zahlen," in Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, *Befreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigung, Kinder* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 48–54.

⁷³ This total has been calculated by adding statistics for rape in Allenstein (98), Königsberg (56), and five (of the fourteen) districts (Land- and Stadtkreise) of Gumbinnen (184) counties in tables compiled for the ministers' visit to East Prussia in April 1915. See "Besichtigung der durch die Russeneinfällen beschädigten Teile der Provinz Ostpreußen durch die Minister [Staatsministerium]." GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064.

⁷⁴ Report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, pp. 8–9 of report. In 1656, the Tatars had slaughtered 11,000 East Prussians and taken 34,000 into slavery. See Richard Blanke, *Polish-Speaking Germans? Language and National Identity among the Masurians since 1871* (Cologne, 2001), 35–36.

III

The Russian army of 1914 was in structure, ethos, and political importance not so different from its German opponent. Like the Wilhelmine and, indeed, the Habsburg armies, it occupied a privileged position in the imperial state, isolated from civilian control and owing direct fealty to the monarch. The armies' basic assumptions and standard operating procedures were also not dissimilar. Despite the need to function across an empire stretching over two continents, the tsarist force, as planning for the East Prussian campaign revealed, suffered from something of the same disregard for logistical realities, myopic faith in the decisiveness of willpower in combat, and inability to match operational ambitions to available resources as did its German opponent.⁷⁵ Nor, as its long history of colonial campaigning on the Black Sea and in Asia prove, did the tsar's army have anything to learn from its western neighbor about instrumentalizing civilians. Its leaders shared their German counterparts' deep reluctance to accept civilian resistance as legitimate—an attitude that the army's suppression of the Russian revolution of 1905 can only have reinforced.⁷⁶ There were, of course, important differences as well. The Russian officer corps lacked the cohesion and doctrinal unity of its Prussian counterpart, and unit discipline was more varied, leading to weak "linkages" that impeded the force's operational command and coordination.⁷⁷ It also had no traumatic institutional memory of battle with francs-tireurs, despite considerable experience of irregular warfare. Nonetheless, tsarist officers possessed their own bugbears and bogeymen, stemming in large part from a fateful preoccupation with ethnicity, especially after 1905. Their training, which placed much emphasis on military geography and statistics, had institutionalized an understanding of populations as composed of different ethnic "elements," each of which possessed its own specific qualities. Ethnicity became equated with reliability.⁷⁸ The consequent expectations greatly affected Russian soldiers' and officers' propensity to perpetrate atrocities when they went to war in 1914.

Recent research has recognized the imperial Russian army's potential for radical violence against civilians, identifying deportation as its most distinctive feature. The force's experience of this type of operation went as far back as the

⁷⁵ Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 160–64, and 189–98. For the German army's similar traits, see Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 2–3.

⁷⁶ Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 180–85, 187, and 192.

⁷⁷ See Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861–1914* (Bloomington, IN, 1992), esp. 3, 100–103, 215–17, 236–37, 270, and 277.

⁷⁸ Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford, 2001), 112–16. Also, Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb, IL, 2003), 65–82.

1860s, when it had bloodily expelled from the Caucasus hundreds of thousands of people belonging to ethnicities that were considered hostile.⁷⁹ At the opening of the First World War, new “Regulations for Field Administration of the Army in Wartime” granted it almost unlimited powers over civil populations in the war zone, including the authority to deport individuals or groups.⁸⁰ It used this right extensively: although Isabel Hull has pointed to the German army’s deportations of at least 23,000 Belgian and French civilians in the first weeks of hostilities as evidence of its exceptional control mania, calling the practice “a more perfect way to achieve order,” these actions were dwarfed by those of the Russian force. Around 300,000 enemy expatriates and (even before the “Great Retreat” of 1915) hundreds of thousands of Russian-subject Germans and Jews were uprooted within the tsarist empire. On the Caucasian front, 10,000 Russian-subject Muslims were forcibly removed at the start of that year. Deportations were also an important part of the Russian strategy in occupied Galicia, where 50,000 Habsburg Jews were moved around the crownland and another 20,000 to 30,000 compelled to leave for Russia in the first half of 1915.⁸¹

In East Prussia too, deportation was a defining characteristic of Russian invasion and occupation: its victims numbered nine times those killed in the invasions. Analysis reveals that the practice did not remain static. Only aggregate figures survive, but comparison of data from districts overrun once and those overrun twice testifies to a process of radicalization. In the first invasion, victims of deportation were overwhelmingly men: all but ten of the 724 inhabitants deported from the eleven districts of Königsberg County that were lost to the Russians in August and September 1914 were adult males. Similarly, 593 of 608 people removed from the six districts of Allenstein County invaded only in the same months were men.⁸² Many were of military age and were taken to stop

⁷⁹ See Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate,” 116–19, and Stephen D. Shenfield, “The Circassians: A Forgotten Genocide?” in *The Massacre in History*, ed. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts (New York and Oxford, 1999), 149–62.

⁸⁰ See Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 19, and Lohr, “Russian Army and the Jews,” 407.

⁸¹ The deportations of enemy subjects as well as Russian-subject Germans and Jews within the tsarist empire in 1914–15 is examined in Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 121–65. For the Caucasus and Galicia, see, respectively, Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge, 2011), 144, and Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 62. For the German military’s deportations, see Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 211–12.

⁸² See tables for Königsberg and Allenstein Counties, ca. April 1915, in GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064. The Königsberg districts invaded only in August and September 1914 were Labiau, Wehlau, Gerdaun, Rastenburg, Friedland, Königsberg (Land), Pr.-Eylau, Heilsberg, Braunsberg, and, marginally, Heiligenbeil and Mohrunen. Königsberg Stadt, Fischhausen, and Pr. Holland were never invaded and Memel was attacked only in

them from joining the German army. Others had been accused of spying, sabotage, or resistance, and some unfortunates were impressed with their wagons into enemy supply columns and then forced to retreat with the Russians.⁸³ Districts that were reinvaded after the autumn of 1914, by contrast, lost large numbers of women and children. In Lyck, Johannisburg, and Lötzen, the three districts of Allenstein County that had been invaded in the summer and then partially or entirely reoccupied from November 1914 until February 1915, 372 women and 716 children were taken, almost one-third of the 3,535 deportees. Among the 472 people herded back to Russia during the Memel raid in March 1915, a majority (289) were women and children.⁸⁴ The president of Gumbinnen County confirmed the unprecedentedly extensive, although haphazard, nature of deportations in the second invasion. He estimated that over 30 percent of people who had not evacuated the occupied areas had been removed. In the north of the county, whole communities had disappeared.⁸⁵

The expansion of deportations from encompassing predominantly adult males to, in some cases, including whole communities was made possible by the static warfare of the second invasion. This enabled the Russians to develop sophisticated logistical networks, facilitating the transportation of large numbers of people. It also allowed the captured territory to be comprehensively looted and the stolen goods moved: the plundering in the winter of 1914–15 was far more systematic, militarily organized, and thorough than that of the summer.⁸⁶ More important, however, the radicalization of deportation practices in East Prussia during the autumn and winter of 1914 was part of a wider set of policy shifts within the tsarist empire. In this period, the internment of enemy subjects in Russia's military-governed western provinces, which had begun with healthy military-aged males but quickly encompassed women and children as well,

March 1915. The six districts in Allenstein County invaded only once were Sensburg, Rössel, Ortelsburg, Allenstein, Neidenburg, and Osterrode. The figures underestimate the total deported (see table 1), but there is no reason to doubt that the gender breakdown they provide is broadly accurate.

⁸³ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 101 and 236–37. For men taken with carts, see also the reports by Fußgendarmerie-Wachtmeister Stombrowski and Stoysnat[?], both September 21, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 173–76 and 193.

⁸⁴ Tables for Allenstein and Königsberg Counties, ca. April 1915, in GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064.

⁸⁵ Report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, pp. 7–8 of report. Cf. Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 242–43.

⁸⁶ Report by Oberpräsident to Minister des Innern, March 20, 1915. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 362–63. Also, report by Regierungspräsident Gumbinnen to Unterstaatssekretär Heinrichs, April 21, 1915, in GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064, p. 9 of report. For corroboration from the Russian side, see the (translated) letter of a Russian soldier in AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 180, fol. 134.

drastically expanded. An even more extraordinary step was taken in the last months of 1914, when ethnic German subjects of the tsar were also expelled from these territories. Significantly, the same commanders were involved in both internal deportations and those in occupied areas. In November, the month that his army invaded East Prussia, General Sievers ordered the expulsion of all enemy subjects from the Riga District and Kurland Province of Russia. Whether similar plans were formulated for East Prussia is unknown; a surviving order from Sievers suggests that he initially intended to sweep German men toward enemy lines, not collect them and their families for transportation to Russia.⁸⁷ If an order for extensive deportations was later issued, it was implemented inconsistently; as on other fronts, confusion, indecision, and local considerations may have affected the timing and thoroughness with which the populations of different areas were removed. Nonetheless, the trend in East Prussia, as elsewhere in the winter of 1914–15, was clearly toward more total deportation, driven by the tsarist army's chief of staff, General N. N. Ianushkevich, and its commander in chief, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich.⁸⁸

The Russian military did not limit itself to moving people by force. It also deliberately killed civilians, particularly during the war's opening campaigns. Historians have not yet fully unraveled the dynamics behind this violence, which was highly diverse, encompassing at different times and places military executions and massacres, semiauthorized pogroms, and panic-induced bloodshed, as well as actions by individuals or ill-disciplined small groups. Crucially, it was shaped, like the German atrocities in the west, fundamentally by the preconceptions with which the army entered the war. As Peter Holquist has pointed out, military-statistical studies had already been prepared in peacetime by the tsarist army to predict how peoples living in territories over which it might fight would behave. These assessments proved highly important in determining the severity with which Russian invaders treated these different ethnicities in 1914.⁸⁹

A comparative glance at the tsarist army's conduct toward Ukrainians and Jews in Habsburg Galicia illustrates this point. In Galicia, Ukrainians were perceived by the army as "Russian peasants," and prewar military assessments expected

⁸⁷ See the captured Russian order reproduced in *Auswärtiges Amt, Greuelthaten russischer Truppen*, annex 81. This indicates that Sievers had been commanded by the chief of staff of the Northwestern Front Armies on November 21, 1914 (Russian calendar) to push all healthy male enemy subjects of ten years old and older toward German lines. Cf. also Sievers's announcement warning East Prussian men of working age to leave or be taken prisoner, published in Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 83–84.

⁸⁸ See Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 122–37, and Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 48–54.

⁸⁹ This argument develops Peter Holquist's work on the tsarist military's ethnic stereotyping and violence against the Jews of Galicia. See especially Peter Holquist, "Les violences de l'armée russe à l'encontre des Juifs en 1915: Causes et limites," in *Vers la guerre totale: Le tournant de 1914–15*, ed. John Horne (Paris, 2010), 191–219.

them to welcome tsarist troops as liberators. In reality, these peasants were separated by both language and Uniate faith from the Russians, inconvenient facts that prompted tsarist authorities to launch an intrusive and counterproductive campaign of cultural assimilation against them during the occupation—yet they were generally not targets of military violence during the 1914–15 invasion. Austrian officials considered them to have been “well treated.”⁹⁰

The Jews of Galicia were, by contrast, victimized. The tsar’s army was fiercely antisemitic. It held Jews to be materialistic, selfish, and cowardly; they were thought too unmartial to pose a physical threat, but prewar studies did predict that they could “serve both sides, both by supplying goods but also by spying.”⁹¹ These stereotypes, which at first encouraged contempt rather than fear, shaped Russian brutality toward Jewish communities in the opening weeks of the invasion. Pogroms, often carried out by unruly and virulently antisemitic Cossack units, were its main manifestation. Unlike German atrocities, this wild and unstructured violence had no military function, although claims that Jewish girls had shot at Russian troops were sometimes used to excuse it.⁹² It was motivated instead by a desire to humiliate, rape, and plunder. Reports compiled by a Jewish welfare activist who toured eastern Galicia in 1916, Dr. Bernard Hausner, and by local Habsburg officials and gendarmes record numerous beatings and sexual assaults, as well as massive theft and material destruction. Some victims did die, but killing was not the perpetrators’ principal aim, and this early violence consequently appears to have been less lethal than the reprisals and punishments meted out by military command in places where—as in Belgium, France, and, as will be explained, East Prussia—populations were considered to be active threats. Mounting spy hysteria soon kindled fears that Jews were damaging the army, however, and this, along with Ianushkevich’s fanatical antisemitism, increased the troops’ viciousness and prompted the introduction of radical official countermeasures. The mass deportations that began in 1915, intended both as security precautions and as preemptive reprisals, were carried out with great callousness. These deportations and the Russians’ final brutal retreat probably cost more human lives than the pogroms of the war’s first weeks.⁹³

⁹⁰ “Bericht des Legationsrates Baron Andrian über seine Informationsreise nach Ostgalizien,” July 26, 1915, p. 17 of report. Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv Vienna: MdI, Präsidiale (1914–15) 22/Galiz. (Karton 2116): Akte 19644. See also Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Seattle, 2007), 32–42.

⁹¹ Quoted in Holquist, “Role of Personality,” 57. See also Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 116.

⁹² S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I*, ed. and trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 2002), 68–70 and 78.

⁹³ See the microfilmed reports of the Jewish aid worker Dr. Bernard Hausner and the supplementary information gathered by district officials and gendarmerie in the Central

The killings perpetrated by the Russian army in East Prussia had much more in common, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with German atrocities in the west than with the comparatively mild treatment of Ukrainians or the initial “wild” violence meted out to Galician Jews. Analysis of available fatality statistics reveals that the extent of the bloodshed was remarkably similar in the two campaigns. The absolute numbers of victims of military violence were, of course, far lower in East Prussia than in Belgium and northern France: 1,491 as against 6,427 deaths. Significantly, however, if fatalities are placed in proportion to the peacetime populations of the areas overrun, it becomes clear that the intensity of the violence was closely comparable. A little over 1.7 million people lived in the districts of East Prussia captured by Russian troops, of whom 0.086 percent was killed.⁹⁴ The regions of Belgium and France taken by the German army up to mid-September 1914 were inhabited by 8.3 million people, 0.078 percent of whom were killed.⁹⁵ In Belgian areas alone the fatality rate was greater, reaching

Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem: HM2–9177 (originals held in Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi istorychnyi arkhiv Ukrainy, L’viv: fond 146 opis 4). I am grateful to Dr. Tim Buchen for alerting me to the existence of these valuable sources. They indicate that fatalities were less heavy at Russian troops’ entry into Galicia, despite the frequent pogroms, than later on in the invasion. Still, it should be noted that the early “wild violence” did include some extremely bloody incidents. In Nadwórna, seven women died after being raped in early September 1914. Among the other twenty-two inhabitants killed during the shtetl’s ten-month occupation, some may also have been slaughtered at this time. The notorious Lwów pogrom of September 27, 1914, caused up to forty-seven fatalities. See *ibid.*, fols. 14 and 59, and, for Lwów, Christoph Mick, *Kriegserfahrungen in einer multi-ethnischen Stadt: Lemberg 1914–1947* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 105–6. Also, more generally, Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 26–32 and 48–59, and Holquist, “Role of Personality,” 61–67.

⁹⁴ The peacetime population of areas that came into contact with Russian troops between August 1914 and March 1915 has been calculated at 1,727,967: namely, the population of East Prussia apart from the districts of Fischhausen and Preußisch Holland and the city of Königsberg. For population figures, see Hesse and Goedel, *Bevölkerung von Ostpreußen*, 2, 6, and 12. For the first invasion alone, the proportion of killed among the population lay in a range between 0.071 and 0.085 percent, but the most likely figure is 0.081 percent. These calculations have been made on the basis of an invaded population of 1,666,175 (same districts as above, but excluding Memel), a minimum figure for killings of 1,187 people (comprising Königsberg’s casualties without Memel added to four-fifths of those of Allenstein and Gumbinnen), a maximum figure of 1,418 (comprising Königsberg’s casualties without Memel added to all of those of Allenstein and Gumbinnen), and a best-estimate figure of 1,342 (comprising all casualties apart from the seventy killed at Memel and a further seventy-nine whom Gause [*Russen in Ostpreußen*, 159–60, 184–85, and 219] stated were killed during the second invasion).

⁹⁵ This estimate for the population of the territories invaded in August and early September 1914 is derived from figures in Ministère de l’Intérieur, *Annuaire statistique de la Belgique et du Congo belge: Quarante deuxième année—1911; Tome XLII* (Brussels, 1912), 4, and Statistique Générale de la France, *Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population, effectué le 5 Mars 1911*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1913), 1:48–59, and maps

0.13 percent of the peacetime population.⁹⁶ This was attributable less to any uniquely German propensity for brutality, however, than to the comparative abundance of military-aged males among the Belgian civilian populace at the war's opening. In both east and west, males aged between nineteen and forty-five years old were most likely to be the victims of invading armies' suspicion and aggression. As Belgium, unlike Germany, operated no system of universal conscription, the size of its target population was far larger than that of East Prussia.⁹⁷ The importance of this factor is highlighted by the abrupt drop in killings after the kaiser's army crossed into France, where the draft was even more thorough than in Germany. Although the peacetime population there was double that of the districts of East Prussia that were invaded, "only" 906 civilians were killed—far fewer than the number of East Prussians who died at Russian hands.⁹⁸

The timing of tsarist military killings also corresponds with that of the German violence in Belgium and France. The overwhelming majority of civilian deaths in East Prussia happened in the first invasion, in August and September 1914. In Königsberg County, all but the seventy-three civilian fatalities of the Memel raid took place in these months. In Allenstein County, at least four-fifths, and probably almost all, civilian deaths date from the same period. Estimating casualties in Gumbinnen County is more difficult, but widespread reports of violence and the experience of the other two counties make it highly likely that there too the majority of killings took place in the first invasion. The predominance of fatalities in this first invasion is not solely attributable to the greater extent of the Russians' advance. The tsarist army was, in this earlier campaign, more ready than it was later to kill civilians. In Lyck, for example, which was overrun in both attacks, 127 of the district's inhabitants were killed in August or September 1914, while only seven died at Russian hands during the occupation in the autumn and winter of 1914–15.⁹⁹

in Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 10 and 182. For Belgium, it comprises the prewar populations of the five provinces most directly affected by the German invasion: Brabant, Hainault, Liège, Luxembourg, and Namur. Belgian total: 4,184,946. For France, it consists of the prewar population of the départements of the Aisne and Ardennes, the Marne département except for the arrondissement of Vitry-le-François, and the following arrondissements (with the relevant département in parentheses): Lille, Avesnes, Cambrai, Douai, Valenciennes (Nord), Arras (Pas de Calais), Amiens, Doullens, Montdidier, Péronne (Somme), Clermont, Compiègne, Senlis (Oise), Meux (Seine-et-Marne), Montmédy (Meuse), and Briey (Merthe-et-Moselle). No figure for the small areas of the Vosges or Seine-et-Oise that were invaded has been estimated. French total: 4,072,638.

⁹⁶ Belgium suffered 5,521 fatalities in the 1914 invasion. See Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 74. The death rate has been calculated as in n. 95 using population statistics in Ministère de l'Intérieur, *Annuaire statistique—1911; Tome XLII*, 4.

⁹⁷ Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 69 and 95.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹⁹ As in the case of deportations, calculating fatality rates for each invasion is difficult because the most reliable statistics refer only to the whole period between August 1914 and

The Russians' violence in East Prussia was motivated, like that of the kaiser's military in Belgium and France, primarily by fears of facing a "people's war." The peacetime military-statistical studies had primed tsarist commanders to regard the province's populace as far more dangerous than that of Galicia, for ethnic Germans, unlike Jews or Ukrainians, were predicted to be hostile. Consequently, in contrast to the "wild" violence dominating the first weeks of the campaign in the Habsburg lands, which at least some senior Russian commanders tried to rein in, much of the bloodshed in East Prussia was from the outset militarily purposeful, intended to punish and deter civilian resistance.¹⁰⁰ Already on August 18, General Rennenkampf issued a proclamation warning that opposition would be "ruthlessly punished, regardless of gender or age." Places where "even the smallest attack on the Russian army is perpetrated" were to be "immediately burned to the ground."¹⁰¹ Less senior officers repeated these threats, exacted war levies, demanded hostages, and took other precautions to avoid ambush; in one village, the inhabitants were made to stand with raised hands while troops marched past.¹⁰² Lower ranks were similarly nervous and feared being poisoned by civilians.¹⁰³

March 1915. Only Königsberg County is relatively uncomplicated, as—with the exception of Memel District, which escaped attack until March 1915—it was overrun only during the first invasion. For the two other counties, Allenstein and Gumbinnen, detailed fatality statistics from Allenstein probably give the best indication of how the violence was distributed. According to Gause, 587 civilians were killed in the county's nine rural districts (Landkreise). Of these killings, 358 took place in the six districts invaded once in August and September 1914. For Lyck, which was invaded twice, detailed gendarmerie records indicate that 127 of the district's 134 fatalities took place in the first invasion. Therefore, at least 485 of Allenstein County's total 587 killings (83 percent) happened in the first invasion. In Johannisburg and Lötzen, the other two districts in the county that faced two invasions, it is highly likely that their seventy-four and twenty-one fatalities also mainly happened during the first assault. Landrat reports written after the two districts' liberation from the second invasion indicate that large numbers of killings had this time not been reported. For figures, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 229, and, for the Lyck gendarmerie reports, AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 169–256. For Landräte reports for Johannisburg (February 15, 1915) and Lötzen (February 18, 1915), see AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 177, fols. 21–23 and 31–35.

¹⁰⁰ For an attempt to end troops' initial "wild" violence in Galicia, see the order of Twenty-Fourth Corps Commander, August 13, 1914 (Russian calendar), discussed in Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 171–72.

¹⁰¹ "Bekanntmachung allen Einwohnern Ost.Preussens [*sic*]," signed by Rennenkampf, August 18, 1914, in Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Wiesbaden (hereafter HHStA Wiesbaden): Plakate und Kriegsdocumente, no. 3012/3472.

¹⁰² For officers' threats, see, for example, Pfarrer Penschuck's account of the first invasion, January 5, 1915. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fol. 237. For the villagers, see report by Oberwachmeister Freiburg, September 21, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fol. 245.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Oberförster Pietsch—Grünfliess, "Bericht über die während der russischen Besetzung von Grünfliess in der Zeit vom 23.–29. August d.Js. gehabten Erlebnisse bezw. Eindrücke." GSTa, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3560, fol. 28. Also Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 34.

More gruesome rumors of inhabitants mutilating men, similar to those that spread within the German army in the west, may also have circulated: an official Russian complaint made after the invasion prompted East Prussian authorities to exhume the bodies of six enemy officers and men buried in the district of Friedland in order to disprove accusations that civilians had stabbed out their eyes and cut off their ears.¹⁰⁴

In East Prussia as in western Europe, the fluid fighting that characterized the war's early campaigns soon created circumstances appearing to confirm military expectations of civilian resistance. Tsarist troops frequently collided with small enemy patrols camouflaged by field grey uniforms and firing smokeless munitions from concealed positions. When such clashes took place in a village or town, it was all too easy for Russian soldiers, suffering casualties but unable to identify the source of shooting, to conclude that they were being attacked by the inhabitants. In Gause's estimation, such misapprehensions cost over 200 lives, about one-seventh of all civilian fatalities in East Prussia.¹⁰⁵ They helped to provoke some of the worst massacres in the province. Around the town of Bischofsstein on August 29, for example, thirty-six people were killed by the Russians after a six-man German infantry patrol fired on enemy troops attacking the town's railway station and then hurriedly dispersed. A gendarmerie inquiry conducted in the aftermath argued that the Russians "must have suspected the civilians of being either soldiers in disguise or treacherous."¹⁰⁶ The bloodiest single incident of the invasion, the massacre of sixty-one people in the village of Abschwangen on the same day, appears to have been a reprisal for the shooting of a tsarist officer by a German patrol, mistakenly attributed by the Russians to enemy civilians.¹⁰⁷ A similar misapprehension led to the bombardment of the town of Neidenburg on August 22. Cossack cavalry entering Neidenburg were ambushed by German cycle troops; the Cossacks' corps commander, believing his men to have been shot at by the citizens, fired three hundred shells into the town as a punishment.¹⁰⁸ As in these cases, there was generally little evidence that

¹⁰⁴ "Kriegsbericht" by Regierungspräsident Königsberg to Oberpräsident, June 9, 1915. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3558, fol. 84. For the similar rumors in the German army, see Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 111–12.

¹⁰⁵ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 185. For the role of mobilization and battlefield factors in the German atrocities, see Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 113–29.

¹⁰⁶ Report by Fußgend. Wachtmeister Sahn I, September 14, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 19 and 106–7. Cf. Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 176–77.

¹⁰⁷ See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 183–84. Also, report by Regierungspräsident Königsberg, September 11, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3558, fol. 12.

¹⁰⁸ The bombardment was ordered by Lieutenant-General Martos, commander of the Russian Fifteenth Corps. In a conversation with the British military attaché to Russia a few days later, he explained that he had trained his artillery on Neidenburg because its citizens had fired on Cossack units. Civilians told the attaché, however, that a German patrol had fired at the Russians, and this was later confirmed by the town's mayor, who attested to the presence of German bicycle troops. See, respectively, Alfred Knox, *With the Russian Army*

civilians other than uniformed gendarmerie, foresters, and customs officials had resisted the enemy during the invasion. German investigations found only isolated instances of defiance—hardly surprising, as East Prussians had been emphatically warned against taking such actions by their authorities.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, the Russians clearly believed civilian opposition to be widespread. It was considered sufficiently problematic to prompt the intervention of the army commander in chief, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich: on September 2, he ordered that any habitation whose populace fired upon troops should suffer “complete destruction.”¹¹⁰

The tsarist army’s imaginary “people’s war” was not identical to that of its German opponent, however. The Russian force lacked the same traumatic memories of fighting francs-tireurs, and the focus of its officers’ obsessive fears was therefore less the civilian guerrilla than the spy.¹¹¹ The commander of the First Cavalry Division, Vasily Gurko, remembered that “from the first days of the campaign it was clear to us that the Germans were employing every conceivable method of obtaining information.” He believed that inhabitants were passing intelligence to their own side, that youths on bicycles were performing reconnaissance missions, and that espionage was being conducted by soldiers who, although disguised as peasants, were fortunately identifiable by their military-issue underwear. The local population was even thought sufficiently fanatic to set alight its own farm buildings in order to signal the advance of Russian troops to German forces.¹¹² As General Iurii N. Danilov, the tsarist army’s quartermaster-general, later confirmed, the conviction that inhabitants were tracking units with bicycles and reporting their movements by lighting fires, ringing bells, or starting windmills was ubiquitous: “those who participated in the East Prussian operations,” he recorded, “testify unanimously to the excellent organization of the support given to [German] troops by the German population.”¹¹³

Such suspicions were based on little but fantasy; even where invaders’ movements were reported to the German military, this was almost entirely due to

1914–1917: *Being Chiefly Extracts from the Diary of a Military Attaché* (London, 1921), 62 (diary entry for August 25, 1914), and Andreas Kuhn, *Die Schreckenstage von Neidenburg: Kriegserinnerungen aus dem Jahre 1914* (Minden, n.d.), 11–12 and 15–20.

¹⁰⁹ For warnings, see, for example, the notice published by the Generalkommando of XX. Armeekorps as *Allensteiner Zeitung, Extra-Ausgabe Nr. 59*, August 25, 1914. For the investigations’ findings on civilian resistance, see Allenstein report, October 29, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fol. 62, and Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 208–10.

¹¹⁰ Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 29.

¹¹¹ For the tsarist army’s “spy mania,” see William C. Fuller Jr., *The Foe Within: Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

¹¹² Basil Gourko, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914–1917* (New York, 1919), 26–27 and 36.

¹¹³ Youri Danilov, *La Russie dans la Guerre Mondiale (1914–1917)*, trans. Alexandre Kaznakov (Paris, 1927), 204.

impromptu action by postal agents, not members of the public or organized spy rings.¹¹⁴ The Russians' delusions nonetheless often had lethal consequences for the occupied population. Men caught with military papers or pieces of army clothing, not unusual in a society with peacetime conscription, were frequently executed. Some appear to have been killed simply because they were of military age.¹¹⁵ Cyclists were especially targeted: one Rössel gendarme observed in his postinvasion report that "the many cyclists [whom the Russians] met on the street had their bicycles broken up without ceremony and they themselves were also for the most part shot."¹¹⁶ Gause estimated that they comprised a full 5 percent of the victims of Russian atrocities.¹¹⁷ The tsarist army's preoccupation with spies was reflected in a pattern of violence significantly different from that of the Germans in Belgium and France. "Major incidents," defined by Horne and Kramer as atrocities with ten or more deaths, accounted for 80 percent of fatalities in the west, principally because franc-tireur scares tended to provoke panic and mass reprisals.¹¹⁸ In contrast, individuals, not communities, were usually punished for espionage. Only one massacre in East Prussia, the killing of twenty-one people at Santoppen on August 28 after the village's church bells had been rung, was associated with signaling or espionage, and it may in fact have been prompted by shooting nearby earlier in the day.¹¹⁹ Consequently, "major incidents" were much rarer in East Prussia: Gause's study recorded only twenty, in which 378 people were killed, 25 percent of the total civilian fatalities in the province. Most of the Russians' victims were executed individually or in small groups.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ For postal agents, see GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3670, reverse of fols. 31–32 and 65. Also Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 200–203.

¹¹⁵ See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 164–69. For witness testimony describing how Gurko himself examined and ordered the execution as spies of five youths arrested with bicycles, draft papers, and a pair of military boots, see Verwaltungsgewichtliche Vernehmung des Amtsvorstehers Brachvogel aus Jesziorken, October 13, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 133–34.

¹¹⁶ Report by Fußgend. Wachtmeister Sahn I, September 14, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fol. 105.

¹¹⁷ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 161–62.

¹¹⁸ Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 74.

¹¹⁹ Report by Oberwachtmeister Meyer, September 17, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 93–95. For the possibility that the massacre was intended as punishment for the shooting, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 152–54.

¹²⁰ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 149–235. These "major incidents" took place at Santoppen (21 dead), Gr. Jerutten (14 dead), Kruglanken (12 dead), Bischofstein (36 dead), Lokau (12 dead), Bartscheiten (11 dead), Lengainen (10 dead), Abschwangen (61 dead), northern part of Pillkallen District in mid-December 1914 (30 dead), Angerburg on August 23, 1914 (16 dead), during the Russian retreat (10 dead), Christiankehmen (13 dead), Barannen (15 dead), Neuendorf (16 dead), Prostken (19 dead), Ortelsburg (34 dead), Sturmhubel (12 dead), Borszymmen (13 dead), Soldau (10 dead), and Rumpischken (13 dead). Total: 378 dead. If killings in the Memel raid are counted as one major incident, the total rises to 435 dead.

The pattern of Russian violence was also shaped by the army's discipline. To German officials' surprise, and in stark contrast to the conduct of tsarist troops rampaging in Galicia, this was often good; even the senior president of East Prussia acknowledged publicly that Rennenkampf had sought to keep his soldiers in tight check.¹²¹ Isabel Hull may be correct in arguing that the tsarist military was more concerned with conforming to international legal norms than was its German opponent. Although, like other forces in 1914, the Russian army took hostages as guarantors of citizens' good behavior, none were deliberately killed.¹²² Moreover, unlike the Germans, it never used hostages as human shields.¹²³ This relative moderation is in part attributable to the fact that Russian commanders were under less pressure to advance quickly than their German counterparts, who operated under the impossible timetable of the Schlieffen Plan. However, surviving decrees issued to inhabitants by tsarist officers and accounts by East Prussian officials who experienced occupation do testify to some genuine desire to uphold law and order. The military occupation authorities in Tilsit, for example, put up posters instructing citizens to report molestation by Russian soldiers.¹²⁴ Tsarist commanders not only promised frequently to protect the population's lives and property but also punished misbehaving troops harshly: the Mayor of Neidenburg recalled that during his town's week-long occupation, the Russian town commandant ordered six soldiers to be shot and a similar number publicly whipped for plundering.¹²⁵ A strict alcohol ban was enforced

¹²¹ Account of speech by the Oberpräsident in the Prussian Abgeordnetenhaus, March 16, 1915, in Paul Schlenther, *Zwischen Lindau und Memel während des Krieges* (Berlin, 1915), 92–100. Note that the same was not said of Samsonov; most of the atrocities that took place during the Russian advance were committed by his army. See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 212–13. For interest in international legal norms, see Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 129–30.

¹²² Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 95–96. For German hostage-taking, see Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 9–74 and 76–77. French troops were also instructed in August 1914 to take hostages in occupied territory. Jean-Jacques Becker and Gerd Krumeich, *Der Grosse Krieg: Deutschland und Frankreich im Ersten Weltkrieg, 1914–1918* (Essen, 2010), 178–79.

¹²³ According to Horne and Kramer, human shields were used in thirty-two cases by the Germans in France and Belgium. Gause found only two similar cases in East Prussia, and in neither was the evidence absolutely beyond reproach. See, respectively, Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 76, and Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 103–4.

¹²⁴ Eduard Pawlowski, ed., *Tilsit unter russischer Herrschaft: 26. August bis 12. September 1914* (Tilsit, ca. 1915), 16.

¹²⁵ Kuhn, *Schreckenstage*, 37–38. Rennenkampf ordered that Russian troops caught plundering should be punished using “the most severe measures, up to and including immediate shooting on the spot.” See his order no. 23 to the First Army, dated August 6, 1914 (Russian calendar), translated by Joshua Sanborn at <http://russianhistoryblog.org/2011/02/russians-in-east-prussia-1914-pt-2>. For the harsh discipline and corporal punishment used in the tsarist army, see Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March–April 1917)*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1980), 1:34.

throughout the army, preventing the inebriation that contributed to some German atrocities in the west.¹²⁶ Major massacres were also avoided owing to senior tsarist officers' unwillingness to act peremptorily. Insterburg, which served for several weeks as Rennenkampf's headquarters, was one city spared. On August 26, a report that a shot had been fired from one of the city's houses could have prompted a violent reaction; instead, however, a proclamation was issued warning inhabitants that repetitions would be punished by burning to the ground first any house that was the site of shooting, then any street, and finally the whole city. When there was an explosion two days later at the municipal waterworks, the Russians wrongly suspected sabotage, demanded more hostages, yet again abstained from bloodshed. Even on September 10, the day before the Russians withdrew and thus a particularly tense time, the army limited itself to burning down a factory from which revolver shots were said to have been fired. No one was killed. The discipline imposed by commanders along with, in some cases, their personal restraint goes far to explain why major cities survived the Russian invasion largely unscathed. There was no East Prussian equivalent of the Germans' notoriously bloody and destructive rampage in Louvain.¹²⁷

The presence of officers was, German officials agreed, a crucial factor preventing Russian indiscipline: "where Russian troops lay in large numbers under supervision less was, as a rule, devastated."¹²⁸ This was fortunate for cities but not for scattered villages in the countryside, where small bands of cavalry roamed unsupervised and committed acts of "wild" violence. According to East Prussia's clergy, it was they who had "stolen, robbed, murdered to their heart's content."¹²⁹ Cossacks, who were responsible for many of the pogroms in Galicia, were especially feared, but whether their behavior really was exceptionally rapacious in East Prussia is difficult to determine; antisemitism was not a factor here, and their training was, after all, identical to that of regular Russian cavalry.¹³⁰ The similarity of uniforms, the ferocious appearance of men after several days in the saddle, and the widely known Cossack reputation for brutality may have prompted civilians to assume any mounted soldier who committed atrocities to

¹²⁶ Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 88. Also, Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 120–23.

¹²⁷ Ostdeutsche Volkszeitung, ed., *Beiträge zum Einfall der Russen in Ostpreußen 1914 aus der Russenzeit in Insterburg* (Insterburg, 1914), posters 5, 14, 23, and "Das Explosionsunglück im städtischen Wasserwerk am Freitag, den 28. August 1914." For Louvain, see Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 38–42, and Lipkes, *Rehearsals*, 379–542.

¹²⁸ Report of Regierungspräsident Königsberg, September 16, 1914. GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3558, fol. 17.

¹²⁹ Report of Königliches Konsistorium der Provinz Ostpreußen to Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat in Berlin-Charlottenburg, October 23, 1914. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1059, p. 3 of report.

¹³⁰ Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855–1914* (Basingstoke, 1987), 50 and 78–79.

be a Cossack.¹³¹ The violence of these unsupervised troops appears rarely to have been motivated by hatred or racism. The focus of the rank and file's ire was not ordinary Germans, but the kaiser; East Prussian officials frequently found that they had poked out the eyes in his official portraits or otherwise mutilated them.¹³² Misunderstandings between troops and inhabitants may sometimes have led to aggression, but the knowledge of Polish possessed by many on both sides probably made this less of a problem, at least in the south of the province, than in Belgium and France.¹³³ Instead, the violence was often related to looting. To peasant-soldiers from impoverished rural Russia, East Prussia appeared spectacularly rich; even their officers were impressed with the "astonishing amount of rural wealth."¹³⁴ Moreover, the army's utterly inadequate logistical preparation for the campaign meant that troops were often hungry, and the need to requisition food offered an excuse to enter dwellings and then to steal, rape, or murder.¹³⁵

Finally, reverses on the battlefield greatly exacerbated violence both by small groups of soldiers and by larger units under officers. Samsonov's troops committed many of their worst atrocities in the confusion of the last days of Tannenberg.¹³⁶ The subsequent retreat of Rennenkampf's army, which was far more traumatic than the almost contemporaneous but more limited German withdrawal in the west after the Entente victory on the Marne, was also bloody. The force's supply chain collapsed and discipline among the frightened and frustrated soldiers faltered. The chaos and danger further inflamed lethal delusions of civilian resistance. Half of all civilians killed in Gumbinnen District and more than three-fifths in neighboring Darkehmen died during the retreat. It was the southeastern

¹³¹ See, for example, Max von Gallwitz, *Meine Führertätigkeit im Weltkriege 1914/1916: Belgien–Osten–Balkan* (Berlin, 1929), 30 (entry for September 3, 1914). Cf. Traba, "Wschodniopruskość," 252–55.

¹³² See Oberförster Pietsch-Grünfliess, "Bericht über die während der russischen Besetzung von Grünfliess in der Zeit vom 23.–29. August d.Js. gehaltenen Erlebnisse bezw. Eindrücke." GStA, Berlin: XX. HA Rep. 2II, 3560, reverse of fol. 26. Also Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 28–29. Russian troops' hatred of the kaiser was probably incited by propaganda. See Hubertus F. Jahn, "Die Germanen. Perzeptionen des Kriegsgegners in Russland zwischen Selbst- und Feindbild," in *Die vergessene Front: Der Osten 1914/15; Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung*, ed. Gerhard P. Groß (Paderborn, 2006), 173 and 176–77.

¹³³ This was highlighted by the Landrat of Rössel. See his report of September 21, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fol. 11.

¹³⁴ Gourko, *War and Revolution*, 41.

¹³⁵ See Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, 192–93. For cases of looting- or requisition-related violence, see the Gumbinnen and Allenstein County reports, September 25 and October 29, 1914. AP Olsztyn: OP Ostpreußen: 3/528, fols. 44, 46, 48, 57–60, 69–70, and 72.

¹³⁶ These included massacres by retreating troops in Ortelsburg and Soldau on August 28, 1914. Other atrocities on this and the next day, such as massacres at Santoppen and Bischofstein, were committed by units still advancing. See Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 212–13 and 218.

corner of the province that suffered most in terms of absolute numbers of fatalities, however.¹³⁷ Prostken, a small town of 3,000 people in Lyck District, illustrates how horrific the destruction could be in this period. Beginning on September 8, and continuing through the night, the town was plundered by retreating Russian troops, assisted by Polish civilians from across the border. All but eight houses were demolished. Property and livestock were taken; some inhabitants were forced to drive their own cattle and horses into Russia. People were deported (272) or massacred (nineteen); the rest of the citizens fled. All that was left on liberation, reported the local gendarme, was “a pile of rubble.”¹³⁸

Examination of Russian violence in East Prussia in 1914–15 reveals German atrocities in Belgium and northern France at the war’s opening to be much less exceptional than is usually claimed. For the tsarist army, like its German enemy, preconceptions of civilian hostility were crucial in engendering violence. As in the west, those preconceptions received apparent confirmation through the disorientating conditions of modern mobile combat. Soldiers and junior officers in both forces reacted with bloody reprisals, sanctioned by higher commanders. The two armies’ fantasies and conduct were not identical: the tsarist army’s greater fear of spies than of francs-tireurs, the restraint of some of its senior officers, the marauding by unsupervised soldiers in the countryside, and a traumatic retreat all affected its patterns of violence. Nonetheless, Russian behavior in East Prussia offers little support for the view that the German military was unusually brutal. The incidence of civilian fatalities in the west was no greater than in East Prussia. Instead, the most significant distinction between Russian and German atrocities may lie in the greater dynamism and persistence of the tsarist force’s bloodletting. The kaiser’s army, for all its reputed tendency to embrace spiraling scripts of violence, rapidly overcame its delusions of francs-tireurs and had all but ceased attacks on Belgian and French civilians by the mid-autumn of 1914. Russia’s military, by contrast, proved more dysfunctional, and more radical. Descending ever deeper into an obsessive and largely irrational spy fever, it reacted in the winter of 1914–15 by initiating the mass deportation, often in lethal conditions, of men, women, and children belonging to suspect populations.

IV

The Russian army’s invasions of East Prussia, and the atrocities that it committed there, had a formative impact on Germans’ understanding of what was at stake in the First World War. Already at the beginning of August 1914, after the tsar

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 217–19.

¹³⁸ Reports by Fußgendarmerie-Wachtmeister Mattern I, September 21, 22, and 25, 1914. AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fols. 213–14 and 219–28. Also, for the figures of killed and deported, which differ from those in the gendarmerie reports, see Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 191.

ordered his armies to mobilize against the Reich, Germans had rallied behind their government, convinced of the defensive nature of the struggle and determined not to “allow the soil of the Fatherland to be overrun and devastated by Russian regiments.”¹³⁹ When, shortly afterward, East Prussia was invaded, the shock reverberated across the country. The fear, horror, and outrage felt were most famously expressed in the October 1914 appeal of ninety-three German intellectuals “To the Civilized World,” which complained emotionally of “earth . . . saturated with the blood of women and children unmercifully butchered by the wild Russian troops.”¹⁴⁰ The intensity of the emotions needs to be acknowledged, for they lay at the core of the patriotic and defensive solidarity mythologized as the “spirit of 1914.”¹⁴¹ They also account for the remarkably immediate, universal, and enduring popularity of Hindenburg after Tannenberg. So frightening were the invasions and atrocity stories that Germans revered him as a “savior,” an image that remained central to his cult during and long after the conflict.¹⁴²

The trauma of East Prussia’s invasion was transmitted through several channels to the wider German populace in 1914. The press was critically important in disseminating news of Russian assault. Ingrained stereotypes of Russia as uncultured, barbaric, and Asiatic had primed newspapers to expect that invasion from the east would be brutal; Social Democratic papers, for example, predicted already on August 1, 1914, at the opening of hostilities with Russia, that the “motley peoples of the tsar” would be unlikely to keep to civilized norms of warfare. “We do not want our women and children to become victims of Cossack bestiality,” they warned.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, once Russian attacks on East Prussia began, the German press’s reporting was far more balanced than most historians have supposed.¹⁴⁴ In August, atrocity stories were published only sporadically

¹³⁹ *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung* 43. Jahrgang, Nr. 387, *Morgen-Ausgabe* (August 2, 1914), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf “An die Kulturwelt!” Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg: Mit einer Dokumentation* (Stuttgart, 1996), 162.

¹⁴¹ Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, esp. 72–185. The perception of Russian aggression was particularly important in bringing Germany’s Social Democrats to support the war effort. See Susanne Miller, *Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf, 1974.), 55 and 69–71.

¹⁴² Anna von der Goltz and Robert Gildea, “Flawed Saviours: The Myths of Hindenburg and Pétain,” *European History Quarterly* 39 (2009): 439–64. Also, von der Goltz, *Hindenburg*, esp. 16–17 and 22–23.

¹⁴³ Quotation from Friedrich Stämpfer’s influential article “Sein oder Nichtsein!,” which first appeared on July 31 and was published widely by the Social Democratic press in subsequent days. See Wolfgang Kruse, *Krieg und nationale Integration: Eine Neuinterpretation des sozialdemokratischen Burgfriedensschlusses 1914/15* (Essen, 1993), 53, 72, and 240–42, endnote 206.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914–1918: The Sins of Omission* (London, 2000), 61, and Becker and Krumeich, *Grosse Krieg*, 184–85.

and generally appeared in letters from the front written by private individuals, not in articles backed by journalistic authority.¹⁴⁵ Far from being inventions of official propaganda, the state suppressed such accounts as the attack developed. Theodor Wolff, editor of the influential *Berliner Tageblatt*, noted in his diary on August 25, “harrowing letters from East Prussia. Nothing allowed to be published.”¹⁴⁶ Fear that atrocity stories would cause mass panic probably prompted the ban. Newspapers instead adopted a tone of forced optimism: “Good Outlook Also in the East” promised the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as the tsarist army advanced into East Prussia.¹⁴⁷ Information about the Russian attack was nonetheless sufficiently detailed and frightening to ensure that victory at Tannenberg was greeted with almost hysterical relief. On Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz, Wolff witnessed on August 30 “unbelievable enthusiasm” as the extra edition reporting the triumph was snatched from vendors’ hands, individuals were lifted up by the crowd to read it aloud, and thousands of people together celebrated the liberation.¹⁴⁸

From September, once the threat posed by invasion had receded owing to Hindenburg’s victories and more reliable information became available from the newly freed territory, newspapers were able to write extensively on Russian atrocities.¹⁴⁹ Drawing on prewar stereotypes of Russia, many commentators portrayed the violence as “the introduction of Asiatic barbarism onto German soil.”¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, their reports were far from wholly one-sided. The *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, for example, which at the end of August had denounced tsarist

¹⁴⁵ See the “letter of a German officer” as well as the summary of a similar private account of atrocities in the *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 58. Jahrgang, Nr. 228, *Erstes Morgenblatt* (August 18, 1914), 2. These were originally published in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*. Editorial confidence in the veracity of these accounts was probably strengthened by Germany’s official warning to the Russian government regarding the conduct of troops in East Prussia, notice of which appeared on the front page of the same day’s *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

¹⁴⁶ Theodor Wolff, *Tagebücher 1914–1919: Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Entstehung der Weimarer Republik in Tagebüchern, Leitartikeln und Briefen des Chefredakteurs am “Berliner Tageblatt” und Mitbegründers der “Deutschen Demokratischen Partei,”* ed. Bernd Söseemann, 2 vols. (Boppard am Rhein, 1984), 1:91 (diary entry for August 25, 1914).

¹⁴⁷ “Gute Aussichten auch im Osten,” *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 58. Jahrgang, Nr. 235, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (August 25, 1914), 1.

¹⁴⁸ Wolff, *Tagebücher 1914–1919*, 1:96 (diary entry for August 30, 1914). Cf. also the fourth “Stimmungsbericht” of Polizeipräsident in Berlin, September 2, 1914. BA Berlin-Lichterfelde: R43/2398, fol. 138.

¹⁴⁹ This is reflected in the press extracts in *Kriegsdokumente: Der Weltkrieg 1914/15 in der Darstellung der zeitgenössischen Presse*, ed. Eberhard Buchner, 9 vols. (Munich, 1915), 2 and 3, index entries for “Ostpreußen” and “Kriegsgreuel.” A detailed examination of the *Liegnitzer Zeitung*, *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, and *Frankfurter Zeitung* also confirmed it.

¹⁵⁰ *Vossische Zeitung*, quoted in “Russische Greuel,” *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 253, *Abendblatt* (September 12, 1914), 1. Cf. Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, 192–93.

troops as “robbers, murderers, and arsonists,” acknowledged in mid-September that not all Russians were alike: the Cossacks, certainly, had been brutal, yet the typical guard officer was credited with “a breeding and fineness of conduct which would not allow him to look on the excesses of his subordinates quiescently.”¹⁵¹ The reports were frequently factually accurate; newspapers printed accounts by provincial officials well placed to explain the atrocities. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* used such testimony to report on Russian violence in Labiau, the bombardment of Neidenburg, and the Abschwangen massacre.¹⁵² Magazines published sketches and photographs of fleeing civilians and ruined towns, assisting readers from other parts of Germany to empathize with the East Prussians’ plight.¹⁵³ Press reports stressed that the invasions had endangered the entire nation: the suffering and sacrifices of the population in the province had been undergone, the public was told, “in the interest of the whole Fatherland.”¹⁵⁴

Accounts of the violence in East Prussia were also disseminated through more personal channels. The units that fought in the province, although nominally local, contained high proportions of soldiers from other parts of Germany: over two-thirds of the men in the First Army Corps, for example, came from Westphalia and Brandenburg.¹⁵⁵ Through their letters, these troops passed on their shock at the destruction to relatives far removed from the fighting. “The war is very hard for our poor East Prussians,” one war volunteer told his parents in Saxony at the end of August, describing for them the sight of burning farms, abandoned villages, and starving cattle.¹⁵⁶ Soldiers liberating the province

¹⁵¹ *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, Nr. 3 (August 30, 1914), 5, and Nr. 5 (September 13, 1914), 5. This was not an isolated example. For other acknowledgments of good Russian behavior, see “Die Besetzung des Postamts Eydtkuhnen durch die Russen,” *Liegnitzer Zeitung*, 79. Jahrgang, Nr. 196. 1 Beilage (August 22, 1914), “Hilfe für die Provinz Ostpreußen” and “Die Verwüstungen in Ostpreußen” in, respectively, *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 246, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 5, 1914), 2, and Nr. 55, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (February 24, 1915), 2.

¹⁵² See “Wie die Russen in Ostpreußen hausten,” “Hilfe für die Provinz Ostpreußen,” and “Russische Greuel,” in, respectively, *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 256, *Abendblatt* (September 15, 1914), 2, Nr. 246, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 5, 1914), 2, and Nr. 249, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 8, 1914), 2.

¹⁵³ See, for example, “Rückkehr ostpreußischer Flüchtlinge in ihr zerstörtes Dorf” and “Geiseln,” in *Illustrierte Geschichte des Weltkrieges 1914/15: Allgemeine Kriegszeitung*, 31. Heft, 120 and 38. Heft (n.d.), 260; *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, Nr. 4 (September 6, 1914), 8, Nr. 6 (September 20, 1914), 5, and Nr. 8 (October 4, 1914), 6; and the many photographs published from December 1914 onward in *Illustrierte Ostdeutsche Kriegs-Zeitung*. Unlike Entente propaganda on German atrocities in France and Belgium, graphic portrayals of violence against civilians do not appear to have been published in the Reich. Illustrators concentrated instead on refugees and material destruction in East Prussia.

¹⁵⁴ “Der russische Einfall in Ostpreußen,” *Liegnitzer Zeitung*, 79. Jahrgang, Nr. 198. 1 Beilage (August 25, 1914). Cf. *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, Nr. 6 (September 20, 1914), 2.

¹⁵⁵ Showalter, *Tammenberg*, 142–43.

¹⁵⁶ Kriegsfreiwilliger Gustav K., letter to parents, August 31, 1914. BA-MA Freiburg, MStg 2/3788.

sometimes found civilian corpses and, more frequently, heard from inhabitants of their suffering under the “devilish opponent.”¹⁵⁷ Perhaps because they were traumatized by battle or projecting fears of mutilation or anxieties about their own masculinity, combatants were especially prone to exaggerate these accounts or invent wholly imaginary tales of Russian sadism toward women and children.¹⁵⁸ These stories traveled rearward, causing men not yet in action to expect enemy inhumanity and to interpret what they saw on the battlefield in this light. In Landwehr Infantry Regiment 76, for example, a unit recruited around Hamburg, troops were outraged by stories of Russians slicing off women’s breasts and nailing down children even before they reached East Prussia at the end of August.¹⁵⁹

The vicarious experience of invasion was intensified by the fact that many Germans far removed from East Prussia not only read of but actually came face to face with victims of the Russian attacks. Large movements of civilians westward within Germany, although rarely mentioned in the historiography, were a defining part of the war experience in 1914. During the summer attack, more than 800,000 East Prussians fled their homes.¹⁶⁰ Most hid in local forests, headed for Königsberg, or took their cattle and struggled across to neighboring West Prussia, but well over 30,000 traveled by rail over the Vistula to Berlin, Brandenburg, Pomerania, and beyond.¹⁶¹ During the second invasion in November, the impact on the rest of the country was even greater as, assisted by a well-organized evacuation, a quarter of a million East Prussian refugees, out of a total of 350,000, spread across Germany. Chartered trains brought 34,000 to Pomerania, 21,000 to Schleswig, and 20,000 to both Lüneburg and Danzig. Another 25,000 went

¹⁵⁷ Unteroffizier der Reserve Nikolaus B., diary/memoir, September 11 (additional note) and 22, 1914. Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen (hereafter DTA): 1610, 1.

¹⁵⁸ For an example, see the testimony of Wehrmann August Schult, January 24, 1915, in AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 179, fol. 465. Cf. Auswärtiges Amt, *Greuelthaten russischer Truppen*, esp. Anlagen 35, 39, 40, 41, and 74, and Gause, “Quellen zur Geschichte,” 87. A similar tendency for soldiers to invent stories of extreme brutality against women and children was also witnessed on the French side. See Ruth Harris, “The ‘Child of the Barbarian’: Rape, Race and Nationalism in France during the First World War,” *Past & Present* 141 (1993): 170–206, esp. 186–91.

¹⁵⁹ See Heinrich Holsten, ed., *Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment 76 im Weltkrieg* (Stade, 1938), 17–18. In this case, the stories came from East Prussian refugees, but similar tales were spread, for example, by some officers. See the testimony of Muskettier Fritz Wamp, January 23, 1915, in AP Olsztyn: RP Allenstein: 180, fols. 203–4.

¹⁶⁰ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Die Befreiung Ostpreußens*, 14 vols. (Berlin, 1925), 2:329. The magnitude of the refugee movement is confirmed by contemporary figures in “Besichtigung der durch die Russeneinfällen beschädigten Teile der Provinz Ostpreußen durch die Minister [Staatsministerium],” ca. mid-April 1915. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1064.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Minister des Innern to Finanzminister, September 3, 1914. BA Berlin-Lichterfelde: R43/2465d, reverse of fol. 21. Cf. Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 59–62.

to Frankfurt an der Oder, 12,000 to Potsdam, and 6,000 across the country to Osnabrück. Most were accommodated with private persons, not isolated in barracks. A further 80,000 East Prussians used ordinary branch trains to reach safety, most going to Berlin or Westphalia.¹⁶² These refugees were even more important than the press in disseminating accounts of Russian brutality; their claims that “the Russians had murdered women and children in East Prussia,” tortured civilians, and burned habitations were already being passed by word of mouth and discussed across Germany from August 1914.¹⁶³

Not only refugees but also military evacuees from the east brought the invasion to central and western Germans. At the beginning of November 1914, with a second invasion looming, the Prussian War Ministry ordered that recruits not yet posted to units and the three premilitary year groups of seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds living in threatened areas on the eastern frontier should be removed to safety. The scale of this evacuation is today difficult to ascertain, but it was certainly substantial, for it embraced not only East Prussia but also parts of the border provinces of Posen, Silesia, and probably West Prussia. While some men were transported a relatively short distance into the interior of these provinces, many were taken to Brandenburg, Prussian Saxony, Pomerania, Hannover, and Schleswig Holstein. More than 17,000 were sent to the Province of Hessen-Nassau in the west of Germany.¹⁶⁴ The measure was probably intended to avoid a repetition of the deportations of military-aged men undertaken by the Russians during their first incursion into East Prussia. Yet to an excited and anxious public, the movement of so many youths was a confirmation of more macabre fantasies about the invader’s brutality. One rumor had it that the evacuation was necessitated by tsarist troops’ practice of hacking off the hands of healthy German males.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Gause, *Russen in Ostpreußen*, 69–70. Also, “Die ostpreußischen Flüchtlinge,” *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 326, *Abendblatt* (November 24, 1914), 2.

¹⁶³ See Piete Kuhr, *There We’ll Meet Again: The First World War Diary of a Young German Girl*, trans. Walter Wright (n.p., 1998), 18 (entry for August 9, 1914) and 42 (entry for September 10, 1914). Also (illustrating how quickly such stories spread to central and western Germany), Princess Evelyn Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics and Daily Life in Germany throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York, 1920), 21 (entry for August 26, 1914), and Hilde G., diary, August 27, 1914. DTA: 700/I.

¹⁶⁴ Correspondence between stellv. Gen.Kdo. XVIII. Armeekorps, Oberpräsident in Cassel and Regierungspräsident in Wiesbaden, November 15–19, 1914, fols. 15–17, and order from Kriegsministerium to stellv. Gen.Kdo. II., III., IV., V., VI., IX., X. and XVIII. Armeekorps, December 12, 1914, fol. 234. The order to evacuate was issued on November 4, 1914. HStA Wiesbaden: Preußisches Regierungspräsidium Wiesbaden (405), no. 8364.

¹⁶⁵ Major Artur Hausner, diary (vol. 2), November 16, 1914 (p. 18). Kriegsarchiv Vienna: Nachlässe: B/217 Hausner.

The intense emotions generated throughout Germany by soldiers' letters, press reports of the Russian invasions, and contact with refugees and evacuees found expression in an enormous fund-raising effort for East Prussia. After appeals by the mayor of Königsberg and the provincial senior president, donations poured in across the Reich. The nation drew together as municipalities from Breslau to Bremen offered tens of thousands of marks to the beleaguered province.¹⁶⁶ The king of Saxony and his government pledged 250,000 marks.¹⁶⁷ Private individuals of all classes were also keen to demonstrate solidarity: in Frankfurt am Main, for example, donors ranged from Professor K. Borchardt (200 marks) and factory director E. Weber (100 marks) through to tram conductor J. Müller and senior post assistant Vorgt (ten marks each). Class IIIB of the Elizabeth School raised twenty-five marks, but the city's "Wednesday Pub Regulars' Citizens' Association" did rather better, collecting fifty-two marks.¹⁶⁸ Voluntary efforts were soon centralized into the Ostpreußenhilfe: Verband Deutscher Kriegshilfsvereine für zerstörte ostpreußische Städte und Ortschaften (East Prussia Aid: Union of German War-Assistance Associations for Destroyed East Prussian Cities and Towns). A sponsorship system was organized whereby communities in western and central Germany adopted East Prussian towns or districts. The city and surroundings of Cologne raised funds to help rebuild Neidenburg District, Opeeln County sponsored Lyck, and Frankfurt am Main supported Lötzen.¹⁶⁹ Picture books and postcards portraying the destruction, songs dedicated to East Prussia, and multifarious war kitsch ranging from wall calendars to porcelain kept the province in the public eye and offered Germans the chance to demonstrate their feelings of solidarity.¹⁷⁰ The campaign's spectacular success testifies to how closely the Reich's citizens identified with the invasion's victims: by May 1916, more than twelve million marks had been raised by the Ostpreußenhilfe.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ See the notices in *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, esp. 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 244, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 3, 1914), 2, and *Abendblatt* (September 3, 1914), 3, Nr. 247, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 6, 1914), Nr. 254, *Erstes Morgenblatt* (September 13, 1914), 2. Also, telegram of Präsident des Senats der freien Hansestadt Bremen, September 5, 1914. GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 90A, 1059.

¹⁶⁷ Letter of sächsisches Ministerium der auswärtigen Angelegenheiten, September 8, 1914. BA Berlin-Lichterfelde R43/2465d, fol. 15.

¹⁶⁸ See the lists entitled "Ostpreußensammlung" and "Hilfe für Ostpreußen" published regularly in the *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*. The donors mentioned here appeared in the 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 249, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 8, 1914) and Nr. 271, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (September 30, 1914).

¹⁶⁹ Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen: Geschichte und Mythos* (Munich, 2005), 204–7.

¹⁷⁰ See the files requesting permission to sell a range of goods for the benefit of East Prussia in GStA, Berlin: I. HA Rep. 191, esp. 3211, 3212, 3215, 3216, 3217, and 3222.

¹⁷¹ Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum Lüneburg, ed., *Die Ostpreußenhilfe im Ersten Weltkrieg: Zur Ausstellung "Zum Besten der Ostpreußenhilfe"* (23.9.2006–28.1.2007) (Husum, 2006), 16.

The vicarious invasion transmitted to Germans through press reports, soldiers' letters, and firsthand contact with East Prussians united the populace behind their country's war effort in 1914. Yet the mobilizing potential of the experience ended neither with the celebrations and thanksgiving church services that marked the second liberation in February nor with the outrage provoked by the final Russian assault on Memel in March 1915.¹⁷² Perpetuated by memoirs, histories, and even some best-selling novels and children's literature, as well as by the *Ostpreußenhilfe*, the memory and fear of invasion remained potent.¹⁷³ In the autumn of 1917, when war weariness, polarization over war aims, and disappointment at the U-boats' failure to achieve quick victory brought civilian morale to a nadir, the government sought to exploit this fear in order to renew public resolve.¹⁷⁴ The Seventh War Loan campaign took as its central theme the predatory objectives of the Reich's opponents and warned that failure to subscribe would lead to invasion, this time from the west. The propaganda illustrated the threat by recalling East Prussia's suffering at Russian hands in 1914–15: one leaflet reminded its readers of the "robbery, murder, arson, and rape" that had taken place in the province. Another, featuring a dramatic drawing of British cavalrymen beating and looting from German peasants that was strongly reminiscent of accounts of Cossack behavior in East Prussia, prompted its readers to imagine a future in which "German land should, as once in East Prussia, be laid waste and destroyed" (fig. 2).¹⁷⁵ Even a short film was made that drew on the northeasterly province's recent history in order to advertise the war loan. The

¹⁷² For the celebrations and services, see *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 59. Jahrgang, Nr. 49, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (February 18, 1915), 1, and Nr. 51, *Zweites Morgenblatt* (February 20, 1915), 2. Commentary on the Memel raid can be found in *Deutsche Kriegszeitung*, Nr. 13 (March 28, 1915), 4–6. For more personal reflections, see the diary of Ruth H. (a fourteen-year-old from Upper Silesia), fols. 9–11 (entries of February 18 and 23, 1915). DTA: 1280, 1.

¹⁷³ Jahn, "Zarendreck, Barbarendreck," 229–33. Jahn highlights the success of Richard Skowronnek's novel *Morgenrot* (Berlin and Vienna, 1916), half a million copies of which had been published by 1934.

¹⁷⁴ See the "Chart of German Civilian Morale" plotted by the Military Intelligence Division of the US War Department, General Staff, reproduced in George G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford, CA, 1938), insert between 192–93. For conditions on the home front in this period, see Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), esp. 190–218.

¹⁷⁵ See the leaflets "Zukunft des deutschen Landwirts im Falle eines englischen Sieges!" and "Der Feind im Land!" and cf. "Wie brennt die Wunde—brennt die Schmach!," all in Württembergische Landesbibliothek/Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart: Flugblattsammlung–7. Kriegsleihe (1917). Also the front page of the pamphlet "Die 7. Kriegsleihe" in HStA Stuttgart: J150 Nr. 232/8. Hindenburg, the savior of East Prussia, featured heavily too in the campaign's appeal. See Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War*, 210.

Der Feind im Land!



Zukunftsbild der
deutschen Landwirtschaft

Feuer und Mordio geht und ruft es durch alle Gassen.

Der Feind ist im Land, nun gehts an die Habe der Bürger des Reiches, an Weib und Kind, an Mensch und Vieh! Was hilft da das Straffen der Fäusie, was hilft unser Grimm in dieser Not? Sie greifen aus und wehren sich, doch Schnitter bleibt der Tod. Wie da die Schwaden niedersinken, wie da die Garben stehn zu Hauf, es gibt ein Rennen, Ketten, Flüchten, — schrecklich ist des Schicksals Lauf. — Soweit wenn es mit uns gekommen ist oder kommen würde, daß deutsches Land wie einst in Ostpreußen verwüstet und zerstört werden sollte, da würden wir erst begreifen, was unser Heer ist. Da würden wir erst den Krieg begreifen in seiner ganzen Furchtbarkeit und Entsetzlichkeit, wenn wir Haus und Hof verlassen müßten, der Mann vom kranken Weib, die Mutter vom stehenden Kinde, kleine Kinder von ihren Eltern losgerissen würden, verwundet, getötet, hinausgejagt, entblöht, verhegt und geschändet, verurteilt zu Hunger und Qual. Vom Pfluge die Pferde — die Mutter vom Herde — der Vater getötet — die Heimat verödet! —

So ist der Krieg! — So schreitet er einher!

Da gibt es kein Befinnen, kein Denken, kein Überlegen, kein Wägen, da geht nur eine Lohse des Entsetzens, eine Sturmflut des Grauens durch das ganze Land. Was heimatische Erde uns war, treue Stätten, liebe Erinnerungen, die Gräber der Eltern und der Kinder, die heiligen Kirchen des Landes, alles steht in den Flammen und Verwüstung. Aufgebroschen sind die heiligsten Gefäße, die nie von unberufener Hand berührt, der Leib des Herrn liegt geschändet auf den Stufen des Altars und das Blut der treuen Bewacher rieselt darüber herab, vorbet an den Leichen der gläubigen Frauen und

Nr. 1. Druck und Verlag der Graph. Kunstanstalt Jos. C. Huber, Meßen vor Münden. (Wesf. geschäft.)

FIG. 2.—“Der Feind im Land!” (“The Enemy in the Country!”). Front page of a propaganda flier issued for the Seventh War Loan, autumn 1917. Original in color. Courtesy of Württembergische Landesbibliothek/Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart. Flugblattsammlung—7. Kriegsanleihe (1917).

drama showed a wealthy and contented farmer's family in East Prussia suddenly disturbed by the cry "the Russians are coming." As the staging directions explained: "Cossacks and Russians rush like animals into the village, burning and laying waste to everything in their path—the terrified inhabitants want to save themselves from the sea of flames—but mercilessly the Cossacks throw them back into the blazing fire, pull women and children onto the road and pitilessly knock down all who approach them to plead. . . . They pay no attention to the whimpering women—the screams for help of following children echo unceasingly in the ears." For Germans not wishing to see these scenes repeated in 1917, the message was clear: "Yes, we must support our Fatherland with money!"¹⁷⁶

Equally significantly, East Prussia also provided the inspiration for the major media event of 1917: the release of the motion picture *Ostpreußen und sein Hindenburg* (East Prussia and Its Hindenburg). A lavish costume drama produced at a time of severe textile shortages, the film required an army of extras and featured both the kaiser and Hindenburg. It was billed, justly, as "the greatest national sensation film of the present."¹⁷⁷ The film told a story of East Prussia, beginning with its heathen past and its cultural development by the Teutonic Knights. The German claim to the land having been established, the focus then switched to the Napoleonic period, the humiliations of 1806–7, and the triumphant liberation of Prussia from occupation in 1813. The final part, the film's "dramatic high point" in the opinion of one critic, then took the viewer into the province's most recent history. Accompanied by a stirring soundtrack, the screen displayed East Prussia's invasion in 1914 and the atrocities committed by the "Russian hordes." Far from exaggerating, these scenes were, according to an educationalist asked to comment on the picture, "too true to life." Yet, he continued, "these facts are now common knowledge, and we cannot allow ourselves to balk at looking these things in the face." The film ended on a high note, with the province's deliverance through the advance of Germany's victorious soldiers under Hindenburg. As they left the cinema, spectators should have been filled with the conviction that, just as East Prussia had passed through adversity in 1813 and 1914 and had been redeemed, so too Germany would hold out in its present struggle and its greatness would be resurrected.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Staging directions for *Der Heimat-Schützengraben* (1916), reproduced in Ulrike Oppelt, *Film und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg: Propaganda als Medienrealität im Aktualitäten- und Dokumentarfilm* (Stuttgart, 2002), 337–38. The film was shot as an advertisement for the Sixth War Loan but was reused in the Seventh War Loan campaign. See Jette Kilian, "Propaganda für die deutschen Kriegsanleihen im Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Massenmedien und Spenden-kampagnen: Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. Jürgen Wilke (Cologne, 2008), 136–37.

¹⁷⁷ See the advertisement in *Der Film*, Nr. 7 (February 17, 1917), 6–7. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Philipp Stiasny for his generosity in providing me with copies of articles and advertisements from *Der Film*.

¹⁷⁸ Articles in *Der Film*, Nr. 2 (January 13, 1917), 29, and Nr. 9 (March 3, 1917), 35–36.

Although evaluating the effectiveness of this propaganda is difficult, there are indications that it did fulfill its purpose. *Ostpreußen und sein Hindenburg* received enthusiastic reviews from critics and won audiences' approval. One fifteen-year-old described the experience of seeing it as "absolutely lovely" and many others agreed: according to a Düsseldorf cinema, the film's first run of screenings was a "great success."¹⁷⁹ The army certainly believed that it had stiffened morale. Noting the public's positive reactions at showings, the Deputy Command of the First Army Corps in Königsberg praised the film for having "raised and strengthened understanding for total endurance."¹⁸⁰ Similarly, although the Seventh War Loan campaign could not resolve sharpening societal divisions and exhaustion, its attempt to inspire fear of renewed invasion by reactivating traumatic memories from 1914–15 may well have helped to remobilize Germans for another year of fighting. Apart from the Sixth War Loan, which had been advertised when expectations of a quick victory through unrestricted submarine warfare were at a peak, no previous war loan had more subscribers or raised so much money. Despite the poor prospects for victory—the loan was advertised before Russia's Bolshevik Revolution—and the approach of a second "turnip winter," the Seventh War Loan attracted more than five and a half million signatures and raised over twelve billion marks.¹⁸¹

The invasions of East Prussia were a central part of Germans' experience in the first months of hostilities. Through newspapers, soldiers' letters, refugees, and evacuees, people throughout the Reich underwent a vicarious invasion. This affected the country profoundly. In 1914, it played a crucial role in rallying Germans behind their leaders for a defensive struggle. While this unity ultimately collapsed under the strain of war, the shared memories and myths of trauma that were also bequeathed by the experience proved more durable. Even in 1917, they could help to drive Germans to further sacrifice in order to avoid renewed invasion and occupation.

V

The Russian army perpetrated grievous acts of violence against noncombatants during its invasions of East Prussia at the opening of the First World War. By the time of the province's final liberation in March 1915, 1,491 German civilians had been deliberately killed and hundreds more raped by tsarist troops. Over 13,000,

¹⁷⁹ Diary of Ingeborg W., entry of October 24, 1917. DTA: 1494/I, and letter from Asta-Nielsen-Lichtspiele GmbH in Düsseldorf to Eiko-Film GmbH, reproduced in *Der Film, Nr. 16* (April 21, 1917), 31.

¹⁸⁰ See letter from Chef des Stabes of stellvertretendes Generalkommando des I. Armeekorps to the Eiko-Film GmbH, published in *Der Film, Nr. 16* (April 21, 1917), 30.

¹⁸¹ Konrad Roesler, *Die Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reiches im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1967), 79 and 207.

almost half of whom were women and children, had been brutally ripped from their homes and deported into the depths of the tsar's empire. Only two-thirds of these deportees would survive their wartime captivity. The invasions had been accompanied by widespread looting and devastation. More than 100,000 buildings had been damaged or destroyed, most in heavy fighting but some as a result of military reprisals or after being plundered. East Prussia's few cities had escaped serious harm, but over one-quarter of its farms and villages and three-fifths of its small towns were scarred or ruined.¹⁸²

This "unheard-of brutality" was not so exceptional as the Reich's deputy chancellor Delbrück believed. Similar violence was in fact being committed contemporaneously against civilians by militaries all across Europe in 1914. Close structural parallels exist between Russian actions in East Prussia and the more famous German "atrocities." In both armies, preconceptions of civilian hostility formulated in peacetime were activated by the shock of modern, mobile warfare. Although patterns of violence differed, Russian, like German, troops responded aggressively and senior commanders authorized bloody reprisals and punishments. Moreover, while more research is needed, there are already strong indications that neither force was unusually brutal. The Austro-Hungarian army outmatched both its ally and its principal enemy in viciousness. It killed 3,500 Serbian civilians in the first weeks of war and perhaps 25,000–30,000 Ukrainians during its campaign in Galicia.¹⁸³ Nor was such bloodshed confined to the armed forces of conservative monarchies. The French Republic's military both shot and took hostage noncombatants during its brief occupation of Alsace-Lorraine.¹⁸⁴ Arguments seeking to place the atrocities of the kaiser's army in Belgium and northern France within a narrative of German exceptionalism are therefore much misguided. Violence against civilians was a European way of war in August 1914.

How then did these international atrocities of 1914 relate to the rest of Europe's bloody twentieth century? The tsarist force's brutality, more than that of its German opponent, does hint at some continuities with the exterminatory warfare practiced three decades later in central and eastern Europe. Its deportations can

¹⁸² These proportions of damaged habitations are calculated from official figures in Traba, "Wschodniopruskość," 32, and Hesse and Goedel, *Bevölkerung von Ostpreußen*, 2.

¹⁸³ See Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 58, and Mick, *Kriegserfahrungen*, 72. Also, Anton Holzer, *Das Lächeln der Henker: Der unbekannte Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung 1914–1918* (Darmstadt, 2008), esp. 46–53, 62–65, and 72–81.

¹⁸⁴ Becker and Krumeich, *Der Grosse Krieg*, 178–79. A German official investigation, whose results should however be treated with caution, found that over 3,000 Alsace-Lorrainers not eligible for military service had been deported or evacuated by the French army during the war. See Johannes Bell, ed., *Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg: Dritte Reihe im Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses*, 5 vols. (Berlin, 1927), 1:168.

plausibly be set in a continuum stretching from imperial colonization practices to the punitive and security displacements ordered by Stalin in the Second World War. Moreover, Russian conduct, unlike that of the Germans, testifies to the murderous potential of racialized thinking already in the early twentieth century. Ethnic stereotyping made a crucial difference to the dynamics of violence that the recent focus on “military culture” has ignored or underplayed. In the German case, the imperial army’s imaginary *francs-tireurs* were race-neutral. The delusion’s indistinctness actually accentuated its danger initially, as not only French but also Belgian and even Polish and Jewish civilians fell victim to it, but it also enabled its rapid abandonment.¹⁸⁵ The tsarist army differed in imparting fixed racial characteristics to the spies that it so feared. This contributed to the persistence of that fear and encouraged radicalized countermeasures, culminating in the deportation of entire suspect communities. In 1914–15, it was the Russian military, not the kaiser’s force, that more closely preempted the Nazi Wehrmacht’s unstoppable scripts of irrational, racialized violence.

Even so, the parallels should not be drawn too closely. As Peter Holquist has argued, both structural and political checks, including government intervention as well as domestic and international criticism, prohibited any possible slide by the Russian army from deportation into genocide in 1915.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, the shedding of civilian blood on the battlefield in 1914, driven principally by fear, was everywhere still far from the ideologically fueled and hate-inspired killing of 1941–45. East Prussia’s experience shockingly illustrates the latter’s far greater lethality. The imperial Russian army’s violence at the start of the First World War killed less than a tenth—or three-tenths if deportation fatalities are included—of a single percentage point of the province’s population. The Soviet army’s invasion of East Prussia in January 1945 involved, by contrast, a truly terrifying level of murder, rape, and destruction. As many as 311,000 civilians, 12.5 percent of the prewar inhabitants, perished through exposure, starvation, massacres, and deportation.¹⁸⁷

The greatest significance of atrocities in East Prussia, as in the west, may thus lie less in what they presaged than in their immediate, impressive power to mobilize. Internationally, East Prussian suffering never could compete for attention with that of the Belgians. This was partly inevitable: the plight of a region belonging to a belligerent power was always going to attract less sympathy than a neutral country invaded. It was also a consequence of the late and unimpressive

¹⁸⁵ For Polish and Jewish victims, see Laura Engelstein, “‘A Belgium of Our Own’: The Sack of Russian Kalisz, August 1914,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10 (2009): 441–73.

¹⁸⁶ Holquist, “Les violences de l’armée russe,” 191–219.

¹⁸⁷ Kossert, *Ostpreußen*, 330. See also Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), esp. 71–76, and Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 260–77.

atrocity report issued by the German Foreign Office and of the fact that the list of obscure villages and towns emptied or destroyed by the Russians yielded no single, defining outrage able to capture neutral foreigners' imagination so well as the ravaging of Louvain and burning of its university's priceless library. In Germany, however, Russian brutality in East Prussia made an immense impact. The First World War was, historians have noted, "the first media war."¹⁸⁸ Newspapers were extremely important in transmitting the province's suffering to the Reich's population. So, by spreading refugees and evacuees across the country and by carrying post back from the front, were the railways—another institution integral to modern society. The German people as a whole underwent a vicarious invasion in 1914–15, which generated feelings of shock, fear, and anger so intense that state propaganda could still appeal to them in 1917 as it sought to steel the exhausted nation to hold out. In this sense too, the Russian atrocities in East Prussia were for contemporaries, if not for historians today, far from "unheard-of brutality." Widespread knowledge of the violence, by reinforcing popular understanding of the conflict as a necessary, defensive struggle and underpinning patriotic solidarity behind Hindenburg, played a central role in mobilizing Germans to fight the First World War.

¹⁸⁸ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), 212.