

The Revolution That Did Not Happen

Rebellion and Reaction in the Post-Imperial Borderlands 1905-1921: Poland and Finland in Asymmetrical Comparison

Russian Poland was among the most militant tsarist borderlands during the 1905-1907 Revolution. Harboring long-lasting strikes and breeding bellicose street fighters, Poland witnessed an unprecedented political upheaval manifest in the emergence of mass parties, labor unions and a new public culture. However, only a decade later, when revolutionary movements again loomed large and shook the whole region, Poland remained relatively calm. Forging a new statehood rivaled the earlier popular drive toward social revolution. Despite the Bolsheviks' march on Warsaw to spread the socialist revolution westwards, the popular mood stuck with national unity. Polish popular classes stood almost unanimously on the side of the Polish nation state, even after it failed to deliver its promise to be a socialist-leaning one. What then were the processes responsible for the withering-away of social-revolutionary tendencies?

This project addresses this conundrum through a broader asymmetrical comparison, thereby shedding light on the dynamic of revolution, reaction and state-building in the late imperial and post-tsarist borderlands. The investigated dynamic in Poland was part and parcel of a broader late-imperial sequence; in different contexts, various responses were given during the revolutionary crises. Thus, the Polish case is best seen with the comparative backdrop of other major tsarist borderlands: Finland, the Baltic area and Transcaucasia. I plan to compare the sequences of events producing the revolutionary situations and to explain their different outcomes through a diachronic analysis of the respective political fields during the 1917-1921 revolutionary conjuncture in the region.

The proposed project is an asymmetrical comparison of the Polish rebellion, nationalist re-mobilization, and eventual integration of the subaltern classes, with other revolutionary sequences ending in distinct outcomes. The analysis of ideological landscapes will explain the occurring divergences. I will analyze sources on political languages as newspapers and pamphlets against the backdrop of sources documenting social unrest. Deftly integrating historical sociology, conceptual history and historical discourse analysis, my work addresses the entanglement of structural factors and intellectual transformations in political process in highly interdependent trans-national context.