

Who Were the “Greens”? Rumor and Collective Identity in the Russian Civil War

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In the volost center of Kostino-Otdelets, located near the southern border of Borisoglebsk uезд in Tambov province, there occurred what was identified as a “deserters’ revolt” in May 1919. While no one was killed, a group of known deserters from the local community raided the offices of the volost soviet, destroying many documents relating to the previous months’ attempts at military conscription, and stealing the small number of firearms and rubles held by the soviet administration and the volost Communist party cell. The provincial revolutionary tribunal investigated the affair soon after the events, for while there was an obvious threat of violence, no such escalation occurred, and the affair was left to civilian institutions to handle.

The chairman of the volost soviet, A. M. Lysikov, began his account of the event on May 18, when he met with members of the community following a morning church service in order to explain the recent decrees and directives of the provincial and central governments.¹ In the course of this discussion, he raised the fact that the Council of Workers’ and Peasants’ Defense in Moscow had declared a seven-day amnesty for all those young men who had failed to appear for mobilization to the Red Army, particularly those who had been born in 1892 and 1893, and had been subject to the most recent age-group mobilization.² It was at this moment that one of the young men in the village approached him to ask if it was possible to ring the church bell and call for an open meeting of deserters in the volost, at which they could collectively agree whether to appear for mobilization. Permission was refused, and nothing further was heard on the matter. After seven days, however, local Communist party members were treated to nighttime searches of their homes by small

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¹Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tambovskoi oblasti (GATO), f. R-5201, op. 2, d. 407, l. 4.

²An additional mobilization had begun in April 1919 in which ten-to-twenty adult men from each volost were called up, without reference to specific age groups.

groups of men, who confiscated firearms but did no physical harm. And then the soviet offices were raided, with more firearms taken, records destroyed, and cash looted. There were rumors of an uprising by the deserters.

According to one of the young men in the village, I. I. Kaveshnikov, there were the beginnings of clandestine organization.³ Himself a Red Army serviceman on leave due to ill health, Kaveshnikov nevertheless joined the other men in the nearby woods following the collection of firearms from the nighttime raids. The man who assumed the leadership role of the group, I. S. Kaverin, evidently addressed the assembled during their first meeting, and asked for all those who were opposed to the Civil War to step forward. All the men did so, including Kaveshnikov. Taking this as confirmation of their willingness to resist conscription, Kaverin explained his plan of action, involving the appointment of a delegation that would go to nearby villages in order to conduct similar raids for firearms and to appeal for other local men to join their group. According to Kaveshnikov, the men who had assembled in the forest and who listened to Kaverin began to voice their misgivings almost immediately. Kaverin's plans "sounded a lot like just another war," enough to scare off the men, who left Kaverin and returned to their homes. This was the conclusion of the incident, according to the tribunal investigators, who eventually dropped the case.

Within a matter of weeks, though, the entire area of southern Tambov province, including Kostino-Otdelets, would be in the throes of deserter-led disturbances, the actions of the "green army," whose activities would affect the majority of provinces in the Soviet republic in the summer of 1919. The desire to evade military conscription, to stand aloof from the "fratricidal" (*bratoubiistvennaia*) civil war, eventually gave way to a more militant form of neutralism that saw hundreds of thousands of young men take up arms in or near their native villages, appoint commanders and form headquarters (*shtaby*), and attack state institutions and Communist party personnel. The actions of this "green army" compromised the fragile stability of the Red Army front lines in the south and the north, and while they did not make a decisive impact on the strategic fortunes of the Red Army in 1919, the disturbances and violence did prompt an intensification of anti-desertion measures within Soviet territory that involved the widespread use of armed patrols, hostage-taking from among the village population, courts martial and public executions, as well as the extensive use of monetary fines and the confiscation of movable property. It is clear that the appearance of the mysterious "green army" marked a qualitative transformation in the resistance of rural men to conscription, indicated in miniature by the suggestive yet ultimately impotent "deserters' uprising" in Kostino-Otdelets, which occurred a short time before. Yet by the end of the summer of 1919, the "greens" had all but disappeared, never to reemerge in the context of the Russian Civil War or after. What was the "green army"? Where did it come from, and how are we to evaluate its significance in the history of the Russian Revolution and Civil War?

These are fairly basic questions, yet despite the extensive treatment of the greens in published histories of that era, virtually none ask such questions in light of available evidence. The chromatic quality of the label is certainly suggestive of a "third force" in the Russian Civil War, apart from both Red and White, and has been used by one recent history to

³GATO, f. R-5201, op. 2, d. 407, ll. 7-7ob.

identify the conflict between the Bolsheviks and opposition socialist parties during the early months of the Civil War.⁴ Its strong association with the rural rebellions against both the Soviet government and the military administration of the White-held territories during the Civil War conflict has underscored the link between the “greens” and the peasantry, and some of the most prominent and identifiable names associated with rural rebellion during that era (for example, Nestor Makhno, Aleksandr Antonov) have been labeled “greens” by notable historians.⁵ Yet none of these figures, neither the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) in 1917–18 nor the “bandit” rebels of the end of the Civil War, identified themselves as “greens,” and nor did their supporters and sympathizers.⁶ In the formulations of other recent histories, the label “green” has become shorthand for armed rural resistance during the Civil War, while for others it captures the quality of peasant political mobilization more broadly, in a *categorical* manner reminiscent of the “peasant movement” (*krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*) school of Marxist historiography.⁷ The uncritical use of the label “green” does little to compromise the value of these individual empirical studies, but it suggests that the “greens” as a *historiographical* phenomenon belongs to a more generalized search for the popular will in the midst of Civil War-era polarization, and a need to ascribe a measure of cohesion to the phenomenon of resistance found on—at the very least—the aggregate level.⁸

As a *historical* phenomenon, one must begin any analysis of the “greens” with the acknowledgement that there were those groups in the countryside that called themselves “greens” and there were those that did not. The evidence suggests that the first self-identified “greens,” appeared in the spring of 1919. The number of such groups spread rapidly yet unevenly across a vast stretch of territory through the mid-summer weeks. Yet, with some

⁴Geoffrey Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* (London, 1996).

⁵Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1993), 95–96; Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920–1921* (Palo Alto, 1976). In the case of Siberia during the same period see Norman G. O. Pereira, *White Siberia: the Politics of Civil War* (Montreal, 1996), 156–58.

⁶A search through recently published document collections of the main Civil War era rebellions bears out this conclusion, as does my own more in-depth research on the Antonov rebellion in Tambov province. See the three volumes edited by V. P. Danilov and Teodor Shanin, *Krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoi gubernii v 1919–1921 gg.*, “Antonovshchina”: *dokumenty i materialy* (Tambov, 1994); *Nestor Makhno: Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1919–1921: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 2006); and *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Povolzh'e, 1919–1922: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 2002); Erik C. Landis, *Bandits and Partisans: The Antonov Movement in the Russian Civil War* (Pittsburgh, 2008); and V. I. Shishkin’s edited volumes, *Za sovery bez kommunistov: Krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tiimenskoi gubernii 1921 g.* (Novosibirsk, 2000); and *Sibirskaiia Vandeiia*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2000–2001).

⁷Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, 1994), chap. 9; Donald J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton, 2002), chap. 12; Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, ed., *Völkeraufstände in Russland: Von der Zeit der Wirren bis zur “Grünen Revolution” gegen die Sowjetherrschaft*, vol. 65 of *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* (Wiesbaden, 2006).

⁸The promotion of the color green in its association with “popular” resistance can probably be traced back to the early émigré writings of the Russian socialist opposition, as they reported on the continued armed rebellion against the Soviet state in 1921 in a manner consistent with pre-1917 idealized conceptions of the *narod*. See Vladimir N. Brovkin, ed., *Dear Comrades: Menshevik Reports on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War* (Palo Alto, 1991), 234–37. On a purely anecdotal level, it is striking how many recent publications that deal with rural politics in the Russian Civil War are published with green-colored bindings, including the series published by ROSSPEN and edited by V. P. Danilov and T. Shanin (“Krest'ianskaia revoliutsiia v Rossii, 1902–1922”).

minor exceptions, such self-identified “greens” disappeared as a political phenomenon after only a matter of months, and later armed rural rebels in the Civil War did not seek any continuity with those earlier rebels through the appropriation of the label. The “greens” as a political phenomenon, far from being a stable and enduring component of the Civil War political spectrum, appears entirely brief in duration and unstable in orientation. The present essay will explore the historical contours of the “green” phenomenon in the Russian Civil War by beginning with the assumption that there must be some sort of meaning to be recovered from this peculiar dynamic. Recent studies of popular mobilization and social movements have explored the role identity plays in the genesis and sustenance of collective political action, particularly the active manner in which *collective* (as distinct from individual, *social*) identity claims must be asserted, contextualized, and continually rearticulated.⁹ An important component to the collective-identity claims made in this regard involves the narrative connections that link underlying issues such as grievances, worthiness, solidarity, and objectives.¹⁰ Historians have long been aware of the importance of ideas, ideals, and identities in popular political mobilization. Several years ago, Daniel Field tentatively explored the role of a dominant popular myth in instances of anti-seigniorial violence in the second half of the nineteenth century, which suggested that ideas played as much a part in mobilization as did political opportunity and material resources.¹¹ The present essay will extend this theme through the examination of what one might call a “weak” collective identity, the emergence of which highlights the importance of projecting a sense of “we-ness,” but which proved inchoate and unsustainable.¹² As such, the brief lifespan of the “greens” serves as an excellent, albeit speculative, case study in the failure of a nascent political movement, the weaknesses of which nevertheless highlight the importance of collective identity to successful political mobilization.

THE RISE OF “SO-CALLED ‘GREENS’”

One basic point can be made at the outset of this essay: there was no such thing as the “Green Army.” This point can be made with some confidence, and with only one exception, which will be discussed below. A second point can also be made with some confidence: we will never know the true concrete origins of the “greens.” While it is tempting to speculate

⁹For an overview see Scott A. Hunt and Robert D. Benford, “Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Oxford, 2004); Alberto Melucci, “The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis, 1995); and idem, “Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements,” in *From Structure to Action: Comparing Movement Participation Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klandermans et al. (Greenwich, CT, 1988). On the distinctions between collective and social identities see Peggy A. Thoits and Lauren K. Virshup, “Me’s and We’s: Forms and Functions of Social Identities,” in *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, ed. Richard Askmore and Lee Justin (Oxford, 1995).

¹⁰Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society* 23 (1994). For an application see also Erik C. Landis, “Waiting for Makhno: Context and Legitimacy in a Russian Peasant War,” *Past and Present*, no. 183 (2004).

¹¹Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1989).

¹²David A. Snow and Doug McAdam, “Identity Work Processes in the Context of Social Movements: Clarifying the Identity/Movement Nexus,” in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, ed. Sheldon Stryker et al. (Minneapolis, 2000), 42.

on the symbolic significance of the color green in Russian peasant culture, and on its other potential meanings within the context of revolutionary politics and the Civil War that may constitute its mainsprings, it is most likely the case that the most banal explanation of the origins of the name are correct; that is, it is an appellation tied to the wooded refuges in which young draft dodgers collected and, ultimately, organized for armed resistance.¹³ The story of the greens is inextricably tied to the early history of military conscription and desertion in the Russian Civil War. For the Red Army, the desertion problem reached its peak in the early summer of 1919, following a series of mobilizations beginning in June 1918 of various age groups of men born between 1886 and 1898. While the Red Army grew substantially over this period, its desertion problem was less a matter of discipline within the ranks (although this was an issue) than it was a matter of local governance and control, for the vast majority of those classified as deserters were recidivists or draft dodgers who had exploited the weak level of organization within the local network of the Military Commissariat, conspired with or bribed local soviet officials, or who had demonstrated a certain virtuosity in the art of self-concealment. The result was an unknown, yet enormous, number of young men in the Soviet countryside classified as “deserters,” although few had ever enlisted, and even fewer had absconded from active units of the Red Army.¹⁴ In an effort to address this growing problem in Soviet-administered territories, and as a complement to the organization of the Military Commissariat at the local level, the All-Russian Soviet Executive Committee (VTsIK) ordered the creation of a separate bureaucracy in late December 1918—the Central Anti-Desertion Commission—to establish a statistical picture of the desertion problem and to police the localities in an effort to round up recidivists and those who assisted them.¹⁵

The ability of the new Anti-Desertion Commission to address this task was limited in its initial months by basic organizational issues, but by April 1919 several provincial and uezd commissions had managed to organize their own armed patrols that would comb the countryside, and they were also given formal powers to confiscate movable property from the families of known deserters and those suspected of assisting them.¹⁶ In addition, in the

¹³As Victor Serge described the phenomenon: “A most mischievous movement had grown up inside the armies engaged in the Civil War, White, Red, and the rest: that of the Greens. These borrowed their title from the forests in which they took refuge, uniting deserters from all the armies that were now unwilling to fight for anyone, whether Generals or Commissars: these would fight now only for themselves, simply to stay out of the Civil War. The movement existed over the whole of Russia. We knew that in the forests of the Pskov region, the Greens effective in the forests were on the increase, numbering several tens of thousands. Well organized, complete with their own general staff, and supported by the peasants, they were eating the Red Army away.” See Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London, 1984), 87.

¹⁴The frustration regarding the unknown extent of the desertion problem was widespread, fuelling the calls for the Red Army to cancel or delay future mobilizations. See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 76, op. 1, d. 55, ll. 8–9. See also T. V. Osipova, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo v revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 2001), 302.

¹⁵M. A. Molodtsygin, *Raboche-krest'ianskii soiuz, 1918–1920* (Moscow, 1987), 138. On the desertion problem generally see Orlando Figes, “The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War, 1918–1920,” *Past and Present*, no. 129 (1990).

¹⁶S. P. Olikov, *Dezertirstvo v Krasnoi armii i bor'ba s nim* (Moscow, 1926), 39. Such powers would make anti-desertion squads central to the Soviet government's efforts at redistribution in the villages, with confiscated property in principle going to the poor peasantry. See Emily Pyle, “Village Social Relations and the Reception of Soldiers' Family Aid Policies, 1912–21” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997), chap. 5.

same month the VTsIK appointed several plenipotentiaries with the assignment of expediting the institutionalization of the “struggle with desertion” in several key provinces and ensuring that strict vigilance was observed in enforcing anti-desertion measures at the local level.¹⁷ With the enforcement of draft orders assuming a more concrete and threatening form, deserters in many localities grew more aware of their precarious status, turning to more organized forms of collective self-protection, arranging meetings in which compliance with draft orders was discussed, and even soliciting the sanction of the local community at large if the will to resist mobilization prevailed.¹⁸

It is reasonable to assume that the first reports of the “greens” in Soviet territory emerge following the developments described above.¹⁹ The earliest reference in a recently published collection of Cheka composite reports (*svodki*) on the political situation in the provinces comes from June 4, 1919, with patrols of the local Cheka in the area along the border separating Tula and Iaroslavl’ provinces reporting on a sizable uprising of “so-called ‘greens’”: “The character of the uprising is still unclear. There is evidence of some organization among the insurgents, who are well-armed with rifles and even possess a machine gun.”²⁰ The reference to the “character” of the insurgents most likely pertains to its political contours, for the “so-called ‘greens’” were an unknown commodity. Armed resistance by groups of deserters was nothing new: there had been frequent disturbances surrounding military mobilizations in the summer and autumn of 1918, and the same Cheka *svodki* for 1919 had settled into a familiar codification of such occurrences as “white-guardist,” rather than “kulak,” mainly owing to the undeniable presence of former Tsarist military officers at the center of several of these incidents following the focused campaign to mobilize such men for service in the Red Army in the autumn of 1918.²¹ Throughout June 1919, such reports of greens and even of the “green army” proliferated, spreading across not only the Iaroslavl’ and Moscow military sectors but also appearing in Voronezh, Saratov, and other provinces in the shadow of the Southern Front. The uncertainty regarding the greens, and perhaps a measure of condescension, would remain evident in Cheka *svodki* and other state and party correspondence for several weeks, with the continued use of the expression “so-called” (*tak nazyvanyi*) preceding mentions of the “greens” and the “green army,” terms consciously placed in quotation marks. In a genre defined by the attribution

¹⁷Several pieces of correspondence issued by these plenipotentiaries regarding the progress of military mobilization and anti-desertion measures are contained in *Perepiska sekretariata TsKa RKP(b) s mestnymi partiinymi organizatsiiami*, 11 vols. (Moscow, 1957–), vols. 7, 8.

¹⁸RGASPI, f. 17, op. 65, d. 125, l. 55ob.; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 393, op. 13, d. 574v, ll. 4, 21.

¹⁹While examples of abusive conduct by anti-desertion squads frequently achieve prominence in the published literature, it is the pressure brought to bear on groups of deserters more generally that is of most importance here. See, for example, Alexis Berelowitch and V. P. Danilov, eds., *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK-OGPU-NKVD, 1918–1939: Dokumenty i materialy*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1998), 1:275–76; and Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 23–24.

²⁰*Sovetskaia derevnia* 1:137. This is not the earliest known reference to “greens” in Soviet territory; the term can be found in archival materials from (at least) May 1919.

²¹On the mobilization of such former officers see V. V. Britov, *Rozhdenie Krasnoi Armii* (Moscow, 1961), 231. For an example of “white-guardist” deserter uprisings see the case from Pskov province (May 23, 1919) in *Sovetskaia derevnia* 1:133.

and designation of categories that were almost always politically fraught, the “so-called ‘greens’” had yet to achieve stable classification at this early stage.²²

If there was uncertainty, then the available information would have provided little clarification. The only official published reference to the “Green Army” appeared in *Pravda* on May 13, 1919, in a brief editorial providing a positive assessment of the rebels that had emerged in the areas of Sochi and Novorossisk of the Black Sea Maritime province.²³ There, the actions of local communities to defy the efforts of the White military administration to procure grain and conscript young adult men was working in the favor of the Red Army and Soviet government, and although the Soviet side had no formal links as yet with the self-styled “greens” of the Black Sea region, as they did with several partisan groups working behind the front lines of Kolchak’s army in Western Siberia, the example of the resistance to White rule by these “greens” was given a positive and supportive treatment, as well as prominence, in the central Soviet press. The organized resistance there began in February and March 1919, as Denikin consolidated his hold over the region, and it is most likely that these were truly the first “greens,” although it remains unclear exactly when this label emerged as the principle identifier among anti-White rebels.²⁴ With the exception of the *Pravda* editorial, it is difficult to assess how the information regarding the Black Sea greens travelled to the heart of Soviet Russia. The role of opposition parties remains a possibility, but the evidence is scant. An undated anarchist proclamation, entitled “The Green Army,” describes the growth of desertion and armed resistance behind the front lines of both the main belligerents, but it reveals only the most basic familiarity with the phenomenon and articulates only a mild appeal for others to join.²⁵ And despite the close association of the SRs with the Black Sea greens, there is no evidence that this party was behind the initial organization of the anti-White rebels, nor is there evidence that it played a concerted role in the spread of the greens in Soviet-held territory.²⁶

²²See Peter Holquist, “‘Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work’: Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Modern History* 69:3 (1997).

²³I. T., “Zelenaiia armiiia,” *Pravda*, May 13, 1919.

²⁴The earliest published document making reference to the greens is a White proclamation encouraging “green army men” to lay down their arms and return to their villages. The document, unfortunately, has no precise date, but the editor of the volume suggests March 1919. See A. A. Cherkasov, *Narodnoe opolchenie na Chernomor’e: Armiiia tretiei sily v grazhdanskoi voine* (Sochi, 2003), 26–27. See also idem, *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Chernomor’e v periode revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voiny* (Krasnodar, 2003), 56. Like most other historians of the greens, Cherkasov displays no interest in the label itself, and as such it is impossible to determine if most of his references to the “greens” derive from the sources or are his own. This same complication is found in V. V. Kondrashin, *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie v Povolzh’e v 1918–1922 gg.* (Moscow, 2001), which provides one of the more extensive treatments of the phenomenon.

²⁵V. V. Shelokhaev and V. V. Kriven’kii, eds., *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy, 1917–1935 gg.*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1999), 2:361–62. The editors’ effort to date the proclamation April 1919 is probably in error; June or July are much more likely given the sudden appearance and growth of the green phenomenon.

²⁶There is scant mention of the greens of 1919 in either of the main document collections on the SR party. See N. D. Erofeev, ed., *Partiia sotsialistov-revolutsionnerov: Dokumenty i materialy, 1900–1925*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 2000), 3:pt. 2; and Marc Jansen, ed., *The Socialist Revolutionary Party after 1917: Documents from the PSR Archive* (Amsterdam, 1989). In the case of the Black Sea greens, the connection with the SR party is made via two of the central figures in the history of this movement, N. V. Voronovich and V. N. Samarin-Filippovskii, both of whom were SR members. However, as discussed below, these men assumed a prominent role only after the commencement of hostilities between the local village communities and the White administration.

In June 1919 the Red Army began compiling reports on the theme of desertion using the information gleaned from private letters that had undergone perustration to and from enlisted personnel. At the time these reports began appearing, one of the themes that drew the attention of military officials involved information relating to the activities of the “green army.” Most of the excerpts chosen for inclusion in these fortnightly reports related to the encouraging or discouraging words provided by locals to servicemen on the possibility of returning home and living undisturbed as a deserter. Several from the beginning of June also reported the start of organized, armed resistance by groups of deserters:

No one is enlisting to serve, and in Suzdal'skii uezd many deserters have organized and are living in the forest. ... Their organization extends across two volosts. An anti-desertion patrol went there and came back reporting that they [the deserters] are well-armed and have dug trenches.

The number wishing to serve is declining, and the ranks of the deserters are increasing all the time. The deserters are very capable peasants, and they are well organized. About three hundred of them are in the forests and are well-armed. They have dug trenches and stockpiled food. This is the green guard (*zelenaiia gvardiia*). In Muroiskii forest there are many of them, and in the village of An'kova there was a confrontation between the deserters and Red Army soldiers. Victory went to the deserters, who far outnumbered them.

Here no one is going off to the war any longer and they have begun organizing a green army. Our village is just full of deserters, living at home, and no one asks any questions.

The Red Army is turning into the green guard.

There is a [Red Army] mobilization being conducted now, and they are taking people as old as thirty-two, but everyone is avoiding the draft and new army of deserters is being formed that numbers as much as eighty thousand men called the green army.²⁷

Some letters referred to the “greens,” others to the “green army” (or the plural, “green armies”), and still others to the “green guard.” The numbers could be modest, and likely to be reporting only on local groups, or they could be impressive, as in the final one quoted above from Voronezh province.²⁸ (It could be added that the phenomenon was described most frequently in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, but in the case of this particular type of source, this may reveal more about the interests of Soviet investigators than about the knowledge of those writing letters.) In either case, what was being shared was the “news” regarding local conditions, deserters, and the new phenomenon that would come to be known as the “green army.”²⁹

²⁷RGASPI, f. 17, op. 65, d. 125, ll. 12, 12ob., 13, 14, 14ob.

²⁸A letter from Orel province notes that the number of deserters in the province exceeds seventy-four thousand—information most likely gleaned from the local press or passed on via local state or party officials (*ibid.*, l. 20).

²⁹As an excerpt from a Red Army soldiers' newspaper illustrates, the spread of this news (“absurd rumors”) raised concerns regarding the potential disruption to discipline. See V. P. Butt et al., eds., *The Russian Civil War: Documents from the Soviet Archives* (Basingstoke, 1996), 89.

An illustration is provided in the statement given to revolutionary tribunal officials in Moscow province (Bronnitskii uезд) by Ivan Silin, described by investigators as one of the “leaders” of a local group of greens in June 1919. Silin explained how he and others got together to join the “green army”:

I was staying with my sister, Mariia Alekseevna Tsareva, in the village of Bessonovo, and on one evening I casually went out for a walk in the village. That same day there had been notification of the planned military mobilization, and locals were instructed to appear at the military commissariat before June 18. One of the villagers, Nikolai Zazulov, told us that he was not going to appear, and all the others (including myself) similarly stated the intention not to appear. I then asked: “If we don’t go, what will happen then?” “They’ll try and round us up.” Then one of the younger men said: “Let’s go join the green army,” to which I replied that I had heard that there was a “green” army in Khoteichi (Usmerskaia volost), and all the others began saying, “Yes, there is one,” although in reality no one knew for sure. We then agreed – although I don’t remember the details very well – that we should gather together all the local deserters and survey among them who intended to serve and who would not appear for mobilization, all for the purpose of learning how many men were with us. We also agreed to approach those in other villages and ask who among them were willing to join us. And it was on this basis that we decided to act.³⁰

Rumors of the existence of a “green army” could have a galvanizing effect, catalyzing improvisation that nevertheless could fall into familiar patterns of local mobilization (for instance, sending small delegations to neighboring villages). The conditions within which the green phenomenon blossomed represented fertile ground for the propagation of rumor.³¹ As mentioned earlier, the disturbances associated with the greens were concentrated in areas encroached upon by the shifting front lines of the Civil War.³² The uncertainty regarding the approach of Denikin’s armies from the south, or of the fortunes of the other White forces in the east and north, heightened anxieties in the villages and towns alike. Mobilizations to the Red Army, in some areas, were combined with declarations of martial law and even evacuations of soviet and Communist party personnel.³³ The rise of the greens cannot be understood exclusively in terms of a widespread unwillingness to serve in the Red Army. It was the *strategic* context, with all the risk and uncertainty that it entailed in the summer of 1919, that made something like the “green army” possible. If “news” of the greens spread in the manner that a rumor is transmitted, it gained its peculiar force in that it enabled action amid conditions of great uncertainty, as Silin’s testimony illustrates.

³⁰A. I. Voitsekian, *V zelenom kol'tse* (Moscow, 1928), 103–4. Voitsekian served in the Military Commissariat in Naro-Ufimskii uезд in 1919. His book is one part memoir of the events in Moscow province in the summer of 1919, and another part fictional reconstruction of the events as seen from the perspective of the rebels. The appendix includes a small sample of archival documents relating to the greens in this area, from which this quotation is taken.

³¹Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis, 1966), 17, 23–24.

³²This fact would color later assessments of the disturbances. See N. Movchin, *Komplektovanie Krasnoi armii* (Moscow, 1926), 138.

³³For an illustration see the anonymous letter describing the situation in the Tambov provincial town of Borisoglebsk, dated May 2, 1919, published in *Krest'ianskoe vosstanie*, 27–28.

The more such rumors proliferated, and the more inflated the figures noted in those rumors grew, the more tangible the “green army” became in both real and imaginary terms.³⁴ The quality of the rumor became infused with agency, distinct from more conventionally defensive or even apocalyptic rumors that historically accompany periods of rural unrest.³⁵

AUTONOMY AND ANTI-MYTH

The political character of the greens remained unclear, however. It is not surprising to learn that former officers of the Tsarist army and other individuals with service experience played a prominent role in the organization of these groups of greens, both because of their own status as deserters and, presumably, their willingness to assume a leadership role among local men in a similar position. (Under such conditions, of course, men without military experience would likely defer to such men.) As the reports of greens in Soviet territory proliferated, the details that emerged fleshed out the extent of the organization displayed at the local level, with groups not only working to expand their numbers through recruitment but also to recognize leaders or commanders, establish *shtaby*, and initiate defensive preparations in their strongholds located outside the village, such as digging trenches and distributing weapons.³⁶ For Soviet officials, the role of former officers became central to understanding the emergence of such organized contours to the greens, and it justified the continuation of the use of the term “white-guardist” in characterizations of the political orientation of the greens.³⁷ But there was little to support this conclusion at first. Early reports of the slogans championed by the organized and self-styled “greens” in their appeals for support were decidedly neutralist, with calls to “Beat the Communists” and for an end to civil war combined with declarations of neutrality as regards the fate of Soviet power.³⁸

³⁴Like other popular movements—not confined to the Civil War—received information regarding allies and supporters played a critical role in local mobilization. In the case of the greens, this most clearly emerges from the statements taken by revolutionary tribunal investigators. For example, see Voitsekian, *V zelenom kol'tse*, 47, 107, 109. K. I. Sokolov describes rumor as the great force multiplier for the greens, which—as concerns mobilization and appeals for support—was certainly true. See his “‘Zelenoe dvizhenie’ v Tverskoi gubernii,” in *Dni slavianskoi pis'mennosti i kul'tury: Sbornik dokladov i soobshchenii* (Tver', 1997), 92.

³⁵Prominent examples that provide contrast here are the rumors of brigandage in the first year of the French Revolution and the rumors that accompanied the campaign to collectivize agriculture in the USSR. See George Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (Princeton, 1982); Clay Ramsay, *The Ideology of the Great Fear: The Soissonnais in 1789* (Baltimore, 1992); and Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford, 1996), chap. 2. Elizabeth J. Wood has described how such an “assertion of agency” can be considered a tangible end in itself in her *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, England, 2003), 241; and idem, “The Emotional Benefits of Insurgency in El Salvador,” in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin et al. (Chicago, 2001).

³⁶Olikov, *Dezertirstvo*, 70–71. V. L. Telitsyn (via Sokolov) characterizes the martial attributes of the greens as an example of ritual inversion and carnival-esque “play” rooted in peasant popular culture, but a less “anthropological” interpretation is probably more appropriate given the real circumstances confronting those groups identifying themselves as greens, and in consideration of the role played by individuals with military experience. See Telitsyn, “*Bessmyslennyi i besposhadnyi*”? *Fenomen krest'ianskogo buntarstva 1917–1921 godov* (Moscow, 2003), 214–15; and Sokolov, “‘Zelenoe dvizhenie,’” 92.

³⁷The names associated with the organization of the greens would also include members of the former aristocracy. See Osipova, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 314.

³⁸GARF, f. 393, op. 13, d. 483, ll. 448–448ob.; Sokolov, “‘Zelenoe dvizhenie,’” 85–86.

Neutralism, however, proved unsustainable and quickly shaded into what could be termed “militant neutralism” as groups armed themselves and the state intensified the campaign to round up deserters.³⁹ After having introduced terms for an amnesty for all deserters who voluntarily surrendered to state authorities in early June 1919, less than a fortnight later the Central Anti-Desertion Commission issued instructions calling for an intensification of anti-desertion measures on all fronts, by which it meant a two-pronged approach involving anti-desertion propaganda and redoubled activity by anti-desertion patrols.⁴⁰ The latter included authorizing anti-desertion patrols, armed units of the Cheka, and newly organized internal security forces (VOKhR) to confiscate movable property and take hostages from families of known deserters and those suspected of assisting them.⁴¹ In addition, field courts consisting of representatives of the Anti-Desertion Commission, the Cheka, the Military Commissariat, and the Communist party were organized to accompany the anti-desertion campaigns in certain provinces, and they were authorized to dispense summary punishments and executions.⁴² Several provinces affected by green-related disturbances were placed under martial law to facilitate the crackdown.⁴³

Such measures raised the stakes considerably, and private letters once more attest to the impact this had on attitudes toward desertion. “Your wife advises you not to run away from the army, because here there are many deserters who are being rounded up and shot on the spot,” read one such letter from late June 1919.⁴⁴ Another letter from Moscow province described the new methods of the anti-desertion effort:

A Red Army brigade came to our village not long ago to round up deserters, but they managed to collect only a few because so many of them had managed to run away to the forest. On the next day, the brigade called a general assembly in the village and explained that they are going to detain all the fathers and mothers, all the livestock, and even the village elder, and execute them. Our deserters gathered together to discuss this, and decided to surrender. After this, the Red Army brigade departed for the village of Fromovo, but there the deserters declared that they would not surrender, but the brigade managed to capture them all the same.⁴⁵

In Kostroma the work of the anti-desertion squads—a low-prestige assignment that frequently enlisted the participation of one-time deserters themselves—inspired revulsion but produced results nevertheless:

In Sametskaia and Petropavlovskaiia volosts they have begun an intensified struggle against desertion. An armed patrol arrives and battle commenced. In Sametskaia

³⁹On “militant neutralism” and the desire of some to maintain “a neutrality as strict as that of a tree in a forest” during the American Civil War, see Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (Oxford, 1989), 48–51.

⁴⁰See the June 17, 1919, circular, reproduced in *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 280–81.

⁴¹VOKhR had only truly begun organizing its own units in June 1919, after its creation the previous month.

⁴²Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv, f. 42, op. 1, d. 1875, ll. 9–10, 14–16; Kondrashin, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 195–96. For a more selective quotation from the same document reproduced in Kondrashin see Movchin, *Komplektovanie*, 138.

⁴³GARF, f. 393, op. 13, d. 483, l. 462 (Tver'); *ibid.*, d. 544, ll. 218, 225, 226 (Iaroslavl'); *ibid.*, d. 574v, l. 19 (Riazan'); V. P. Rachkov, *Na vnutrennom fronte* (Iaroslavl', 1982), 83.

⁴⁴RGASPI, f. 17, op. 65, d. 125, l. 14.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, l. 72.

they burned down the entire village of Samet'. Several innocent people died. Such extraordinary commissions are not staffed by what you would call people—they are simply savages. They arrive in a village, they gather together all the clothes and products they want for themselves, and then they demand “hand over the deserters,” but there are no deserters, they are told, but they refuse to believe this. They seize the fathers of young men and cut their throats.⁴⁶

The exercise of these new powers varied according to the availability of armed government forces and the proximity of the front lines, which placed strain on the capabilities of local soviet administration. In Voronezh, Tambov, and Saratov provinces—all either partially occupied or threatened with occupation by Denikin’s forces advancing from the south—reports of larger gatherings of greens attested to their increasingly assertive activities, attacking railroad stations and soviet offices, and threatening their own occupation of small towns.⁴⁷ The threat these groups posed behind the frontlines of the Red Army’s Southern Army Group placed any claims to neutrality under considerable strain. *Pravda*, in an editorial from early July, played up the suspected connections between the Whites and the “greens” (once more placed in quotation marks throughout), attributing the rise of these organized groups to the sinister involvement of Denikin’s agents.⁴⁸ Leon Trotsky, writing from his military train, expanded on this interpretation of the green phenomenon:

It is usually said that the Green bands consist mainly of runaway soldiers and deserters, who do not want to fight for either side. At first sight, this is indeed how it seems. ... But, in fact, the results turn out differently. The latest intelligence tells us that the Green bands have joined Denikin’s army and are fighting on the side of the Whites against the workers and peasants.

Trotsky’s point was that the “so-called ‘greens’” were nothing more than Denikinites awaiting the approach of the Whites armies. “Better an open White Guard enemy, whom you know,” Trotsky wrote, “than a low-down ‘Green’ traitor who crouches for a time in the woods and then, when the Denikinites approach, sinks his knife in the back of the revolutionary fighters.”⁴⁹

The emergence of a clear political interpretation of the greens as the work of outside agitators and counterrevolutionaries, rather than a spontaneous expression of popular resistance, signaled the beginning of the end of the expression “so-called” as a qualifier in official reports on deserter-related disturbances. In its place arrived the expression “white-green.” While it is certainly reasonable to conclude that White agents did play a role in

⁴⁶Ibid., I. 70. Another letter, from the same province, states: “They began to take extremely severe measures, even shooting the family members of deserters. In the villages there soon was not a single deserter remaining, without question having all surrendered [to the military commissariat] at Kineshma; in that week alone there must have arrived 10,000 deserters” (ibid., I. 70).

⁴⁷Ibid., d. 133, I. 20 (Tambov, July 1, 1919); ibid., d. 125, II. 55–55ob., 60 (Saratov, July 6–7); Donald Raleigh, ed., *A Russian Civil War Diary: Alexis Babine in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Durham, NC, 1988), 147–48; *Sovetskaia derevnia* 1:146–47; *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie*, 282–85; Erik C. Landis, “A Civil War Episode: General Mamontov in Tambov, August 1919,” *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 1601 (2002): 5–7.

⁴⁸G. Rafarov, “‘Zelenye,’” *Pravda*, July 3, 1919.

⁴⁹Leon Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, trans. Brian Pearce, 5 vols. (London, 1979), 2:326–27.

fomenting disorders behind the lines of the Southern Front, the prominence given to the role of such agents of counterrevolution—whether Whites, SRs, or Left SRs—in Soviet reports on these events soon attains a categorical status regardless of the proximity of the front lines of the Civil War.⁵⁰ Combined with the escalation of the armed conflict between the Soviet state and deserters, political engagement with the green phenomenon can also be understood as inspiring a more profound, yet still inchoate, effort to articulate a politicized collective identity for the resistance. “Long live the Green Army” and references to the “Green Army of the Rear” on posters and other modest pieces of agitational literature were noted by Soviet authorities, as were other, more familiar slogans of the SR opposition, such as “Long live the Constituent Assembly.”⁵¹ Such slogans were far from pervasive, however, just as clear expressions of opposition to the Soviet government lacked prominence.⁵² Organized neutralism is a rare phenomenon in the history of civil war, but even less common are sustained neutralist movements.⁵³

While the intensified campaign to round up deserters, complete with an array of coercive measures that targeted local communities, directly and rapidly worked to produce a wave of voluntary surrenders on a scale that surprised even Red Army and Anti-Desertion Commission officials in late July and August 1919, the political campaign against the self-styled greens proved effective in a more subtle manner, functioning as a kind of “anti-myth” that undermined the legitimacy of armed resistance.⁵⁴ As an explanation for the rise of the greens, the promotion of the role of counterrevolutionary agitators and organization placed the resistance of the deserters squarely within the polarizing political context of the Civil War. The actual involvement of such individuals was far from being the rule, of course, but given the fragility of the greens as a political movement—one that was de-centered, that spread most prominently by force of rumor, and that possessed neither coherently articulated objectives nor recognizable leaders—it was especially vulnerable to such a secondary rumor that explains the rise of the original, mobilizing rumor of the existence of the “green army.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰See the contrast between consecutive monthly Commissariat of Internal Affairs reports from Tver' province for June and July 1919 in GARF, f. 393, op. 13, d. 483, ll. 448–49.

⁵¹RGASPI, f. 17, op. 65, d. 125, l. 67; *Sovetskaia derevnia* 1:151, 54; *Krest'ianskoe vosstanie*, 34.

⁵²Pro-White sentiment was in evidence, of course, and was understandably seized upon by Soviet officials reporting on developments (*Sovetskaia derevnia* 1:163; Voitsekian, *V zelenom kol'tse*, 47).

⁵³The historiography of the Clubmen of the English Civil War era is instructive in this regard, as their parochialism and presumed neutrality have come under scrutiny. See David Underdown, “The Chalk and the Cheese: Contrasts among the English Clubmen,” *Past and Present*, no. 85 (1979); and A. J. Hopper, “The Clubmen of the West Riding of Yorkshire during the First Civil War: ‘Bradford Club-Law,’” *Northern History* 36:1 (2000).

⁵⁴V. O. Daines and T. F. Kariaeva, eds., *Revvoensovet respubliki: Protokoly 1918–1919: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1997), 288; Figs, “Red Army and Mass Mobilization,” 207–8; Osipova, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 316–20. The useful concept of “anti-myth” is from Edgar Morin, *Rumor in Orleans*, trans. Peter Green (London, 1971), 81–93. Neutralism, more generally, may be uniquely susceptible to such accusations. See Roger Howell, “Neutralism, Conservatism and Political Alignment in the English Civil War, 1642–9,” in *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642–1649*, ed. John Morrill (London, 1982), 73.

⁵⁵This is illustrated by an anecdote from Voitsekian, in which local deserters respond to local Communist party propaganda identifying their leader (Kutyarkin) as nothing more than a former officer and adventurer by murdering him and depositing the body outside the volost soviet offices (*V zelenom kol'tse*, 43–44). At his trial in Moscow in 1924, Boris Savinkov admitted to making plans to establish some sort of leadership and central

While reports of disturbances and violence involving deserters identifying themselves as “greens” continued, their number diminished after August 1919. Desertion from the Red Army, of course, did not cease, despite the hopes of Soviet officials who saw the massive return of draft dodgers in the late summer of 1919 as a watershed moment in relations between the Soviet state and the peasant population that provided the main pool of conscripts.⁵⁶ But desertion did change in character, becoming more about the management of supply and security in reserve garrisons than about scouring the countryside for draft dodgers. Deserters, nevertheless, remained at the center of many rural uprisings and disturbances in the final months of the Civil War, as a group representing an important “first actor” transforming local grievances into defiance and anti-state violence.⁵⁷ The frame of reference for local mobilization, however, was much more restricted in that it did not contain the kinds of collective-identity claims that accompanied the brief period of the “green army” in the summer of 1919. Rather than seeing rural resistance and popular politics during the Civil War as a gathering anti-Soviet movement that culminates in the large-scale rebellions of 1920–21, it is instead a pronounced *discontinuity* that defines the phenomenon of popular political mobilization in the Soviet countryside.⁵⁸ That discontinuity hinges upon the failure of the “greens” as a viable collective actor rather than on the failure of political mobilization in the countryside *tout court*.

Besides fundamental organizational shortcomings, the “green army” possessed no clarity regarding its origins and mainsprings, and it lacked an ideational basis from which to claim sustained popular support. Later rebels in the Civil War era, such as Nestor Makhno and Aleksandr Antonov (and to a much lesser extent the regional movements in Siberia), were able to articulate a much finer sense of their own place in the context of Russia’s era of Revolution and Civil War, and this contextualization became an important component of their success in forging relatively sustained political movements.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the “greens” had become discredited, either as the product of manipulation by individuals harboring counterrevolutionary sympathies, or the unorganized and unsustainable expression of resistance that brought suffering to village communities. Rather than representing a manifestation of peasant political identity in a categorical sense, the failure of the greens instead serves to demonstrate just how weak loyalties and preferences typically are in conditions of civil war.⁶⁰

THE GREENS FROM HISTORY TO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before concluding, it is necessary to return and consider the special case of the greens of the Black Sea region. Located between the Cossack Kuban and Georgia, the people of the

direction for groups of “greens” in 1919. However, Savinkov, while diagnosing one of the fundamental weaknesses of the phenomenon, was (at the very least) ill-positioned to assert such leadership while in Warsaw. See *Delo Borisa Savinkova* (Moscow, 1924), 8–9, 69.

⁵⁶Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 25–28.

⁵⁷Kondrashin, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 187.

⁵⁸For instance, Osipova, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, chap. 5; and M. S. Frenkin, *Tragediia krest'ianskikh vosstanii v Rossii, 1918–1921 gg.* (Jerusalem, 1987).

⁵⁹On Antonov in particular see Landis, “Waiting for Makhno.”

⁶⁰See Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, England, 2006), 103.

Black Sea Maritime province had never truly known Soviet rule, and it was only after the White military administration sought to consolidate its control over the region that the initial self-styled “greens” took to the wooded hills and mountains to avoid conscription in Denikin’s armies.⁶¹ Their initial success in 1919 was attributable to the rather meek efforts of the Whites to hunt them down, but the armed groups also demonstrated a willingness to coordinate their efforts across the territory, exploiting the space afforded them by the overarching tensions maintained by the Russian Whites and the Georgian government.⁶² The success of these groups of greens continued as Denikin’s armies grew more stretched during their advances into Soviet territory, but by August 1919, at the height of Denikin’s “drive to Moscow,” the disorders in the deep rearguard of the Whites forced them to expand their military presence in the region and establish garrisons in several of the major villages in an effort to quell the resistance. Reprisals against the civilian population were an integral part of this escalation, and many villages were burned as the Whites sought to deal with their own “green problem.” As in Soviet Russia, many of the erstwhile greens surrendered to the White military administration.

The resistance continued, however, and was transformed by the involvement of SR activists and military advisors, most prominently V. N. Samarin-Fillipovskii and N. V. Voronovich, the former a long-time member of the SR party and the latter a Tsarist-era military officer with moderate SR leanings. In November 1919, representatives of the surviving armed groups met and agreed to submit to the authority of a newly formed Black Sea Liberation Committee. Armed activities would resume under the name of the Peasant Militia (*Krest'ianskoe opolchenie*), although references exist to the “Popular Militia” (*Narodnoe opolchenie*) and the “Black Sea Militia” (*Chernomorskoe opolchenie*). The emergence of the Black Sea Liberation Committee coincided with the rapid disintegration of the White forces under Denikin, and while the Peasant Militia played a role in deepening the military crisis of the White movement in 1919–20, eventually occupying the resort town of Sochi and briefly establishing its own regional government, the Liberation Committee’s autonomy remained fragile as greater numbers of former Red Army and Volunteer Army servicemen—all Soviet sympathizers—entered its ranks.⁶³ Eventually seeking to promote a political platform that championed independence for the former Black Sea Maritime province, the committee and its militia (depleted following a schism with pro-Soviet soldiers) were forced back to the forests and mountains by the advance of General Shkuro’s Kuban Cossacks into the region, bringing close on its heels the Soviet Red Army.

⁶¹“Soviet power” had been achieved in 1917 by moderate socialists and Bolshevik party members in Sochi, but rule from Moscow was never a reality before the White military administration assumed control over the territory in 1918.

⁶²Cherkasov, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 77. At least one memoirist claimed that these early “greens” in the Black Sea region were pro-Soviet in sympathy, on shirts pairing their unique insignia of the green leaf with a red star or simple red ribbon. This was an inversion of the official flag of the Liberation Committee, which featured a green cross against a red background. See M. Dobranitskii, “Zelenye partizany (1918–1920 g.g.),” *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 8–9 (31–32) (1924): 73–75. Siberian rebels in Tiumen' province in 1921 also claimed the color green for their flag, understood in reference to the forests and fields worked by the region’s peasant population. The flag also featured white, representing the snows of the Siberian tundra.

⁶³On the influence of pro-Soviet sympathizers see V. Favitskii, “Zelenaia armiia v Chernomor'e,” *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, no. 8–9 (31–32) (1924).

Voronovich and other leaders of the original Peasant Militia endeavored to continue the struggle in the area around Sochi, but by July 1920 they effectively abandoned the fight, and Voronovich left for Prague and then Berlin with the objective of raising awareness of the Black Sea liberation struggle and appealing to Western governments for direct support.

The first fruits of this mission was the publication of a collection of documents published in 1921, edited and introduced by Voronovich, entitled *The Green Book*.⁶⁴ The book is remarkable in part because of the title, for the label “green” had been almost completely displaced following the organization of the Liberation Committee and the Peasant Militia under Voronovich’s guidance. As Voronovich makes clear in his introduction, the resistance movement in the Black Sea region before November 1919 had largely been without political ideas, without a clear sense of the context of its own actions and how local grievances related to the wider conflict of the Russian Civil War.⁶⁵ Overcoming the parochialism of the Black Sea rebels in 1919 began with the consignment of the identifier “green” to an earlier stage of the struggle, and one encounters the expression only rarely in Voronovich’s selection of documents.⁶⁶ What is more, in recently published archival materials, the Liberation Committee at its height only makes reference to “green army men” when discussing the activities of irregulars outside the control of the Peasant Militia.⁶⁷

After further publishing a memoir of his time in Sochi leading up to and including his months as commander of the Peasant Militia, Voronovich—quite reasonably given the circumstances—abandoned the task of promoting the cause of Black Sea liberation.⁶⁸ He continued to write memoirs, but these later works published after his move to North America related to his pre-1917 experiences—his early upbringing and army service, and his time as a royal courtier.⁶⁹ Voronovich’s commitment to his Black Sea comrades in 1921, however, cannot be questioned, and the revival of the identifier “green” in his efforts to promote their struggle was thoroughly intentional, for it appealed to an imagined popular movement of anti-Soviet, anti-White resistance, the hope for which was sustained among émigré socialists and their benefactors in the European capitals in the years following the Bolshevik takeover. In this sense, then, Voronovich’s book represents the first installment in the long

⁶⁴N. Voronovich, ed., *Zelenaia kniga: Istoriia krest'ianskogo dvizheniia v Chernomorskoii gubernii: Sbornik materialov i dokumentov* (Paris, 1921).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁶⁶The only reference to the “greens” post-November 1919 in these materials is in a document produced by a delegation of Kuban Cossacks, who mistakenly address the “Green Army Liberation Committee” (*ibid.*, 91–93). Such mistaken references to the “Green Army” can be found in insurgent materials originating along the periphery of the Antonov rebellion in Tambov (Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 129), and in the very earliest days of the insurgency in Tiumen’ province in February 1921 (*Za sovety bez kommunistov*, 179–80). That such isolated references were clearly in error, and were subsequently corrected by rebel activists (to “Partisan Army” in the case of Tambov, and “People’s Army” in Tiumen’), provides further indication of the circumscribed nature of the green phenomenon.

⁶⁷Cherkasov, *Narodnoe opolchenie*, 40.

⁶⁸N. Voronovich, “Mezh dvukh ogniei (Zapiski zelenogo),” and “Dokumenty k vospominaniiam N. Voronovicha,” both in *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, ed. I. V. Gessen (1922; reprint ed. Moscow, 1991).

⁶⁹N. Voronovich, *Vechernii zvon: Ocherki proshlogo* (New York, 1955); *idem*, *Russko-iaponskaia voina: Vospominaniia* (New York, 1952); *idem*, *Zapiski kamer-pazha imperatritsy Aleksandry Fedorovny* (New York, 1952). Many of Voronovich’s writings have recently been collected and published as a single volume: *Potonuvshii mir: Ocherki proshlogo, 1891–1920* (Moscow, 2001).

historiography of the greens and the search for the popular will in the experience of the Russian Civil War.

The conditions of civil war in Russia, in which the main belligerents exercised limited levels of control over large expanses of territory and over populations, left generous spaces of opportunity for aspiring “third forces” and, especially, for rural rebels. The capacity of such groups to acquire weapons, too, was alarming for both the Soviet government and the White administrations in Siberia and the south of Russia. It was only in rare cases, however, that these rebels managed to forge sustained movements. The present essay has highlighted the role that collective-identity claims play in the genesis and development of movements of resistance. The localized efforts to resist conscription in the Red Army grew as the Soviet state intensified the hunt for draft dodgers, and these local acts of defiance grew more elaborate and threatened to assume mass form on the strength of received information regarding the apparent organization and linkages suggested by the collective labels “green” and “green army” to describe Civil War-era neutralism. The mechanisms by which the green phenomenon spread and assumed a measure of seriousness behind the front lines of the Red Army reveals much about the structural conditions of civil war in Russia that conditioned this and other episodes of popular mobilization. Ultimately, however, the failure of the greens as a mass movement serves to indicate the importance of other factors beyond considerations of opportunity and material resources that are integral to the successful development of movements. Among these is the articulation and projection of a historically contextualized, politicized collective identity.