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«The province...But, indeed, that *is* Russia!»
The Imagined Province in War and Revolution

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Abstract – ‘The Imagined Province’ investigates the shifts in the ‘idea of the province’ in the period of world war and the Russian revolution and civil war. I argue that the mental and emotional valence of Russia’s map changed markedly over these nine years as regionalist and provincial pride came into literary culture, urging a fresh view of central Russia outside the capital cities. Though this change of perspective emerged in essays, stories, and poetry throughout Central Russia, this article focuses mainly on the Volga Region. Authors of many different political stripes contributed to this shift – among them, regionalists like Evgenii Chirikov and Nikolai Kliuev, pro-revolutionary socialists such as Maksim Gor’kii and Matvei Dudorov, and Bolsheviks like Aleksei Dorogoichenko and Fedor Bogorodskii. As the Bolsheviks regathered Russia, these provincial voices were overpowered by more prominent voices from the center. Nonetheless, they established a ‘usable history’ that remains a substrate of Russian culture even today, challenging the simplistic binary juxtaposing ‘capital’ and ‘province.’

Keywords – Volga; Revolution; War; Usable History; Imagined Geography.

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«The province...But, indeed, that *is* Russia!»
Evgenii Chirikov, *Pacification: Notes of a Provincial*, 1916

«...the province, you know, is narrowmindedness»
Boris Pil'niak, *The Naked Year*, 1922

In his novel, *The Echoes of War* (*Ekho voiny*, 1915) the Volga-region writer, Evgenii Chirikov describes the announcement of World War I in a nameless «any town» in a nameless province. In contrast to the normal humdrum of everyday life, when the local doctor announces the outbreak of war, suddenly everyone is interested and united, specifically against the local German who owns the town apothecary (*Ekho voiny*, 14-16). Although this town and its province remain faceless and nameless, the more general «Rus'» is on people's minds. Soldiers are called to duty «from all Rus'», and, as they draw near to the «enemy borders» (*Ekho voiny*, 91), they sense that they are going «somewhere», and suddenly place names start to appear – Ivangorod (near St. Petersburg), Brest-Litovsk in the westernmost part of the empire, Opochna and Petrokov in Russian-occupied Polish lands (*Ekho voiny*, 133-137). This treatment accords with the traditional literary depiction of the nineteenth-century province (Lounsbery; Krylov; Klubkova and Klubkov in Belousov and Tsiv'ian, 27). Nonetheless, despite his rather satirical treatment of the province in his novel, in his work as a journalist Chirikov worked tirelessly to imprint a more vital image of the province on the national consciousness. A decentralizing idea was gaining ground throughout Russia, as evidenced by Chirikov's lengthy exposé of gross corruption in provincial governance and his support for provincial editors, journalists, and their publications in his 1916 book, *Pacification: Notes of a Provincial*. This article will argue that, starting at least with Chirikov's book, the mental and emotional valence of Russia's provincial map changed markedly in the second decade of the 20th century as regionalist awareness and provincial sentiment made their way into literary culture, urging a fresh view of central Russia outside the capital cities.

The province described in fiction of the 19th and first years of the 20th centuries is an important if negative aspect of Russian imagined geography, which spoke both of mental centralization and cultural deference to the capital cities. Created visually by Empress Catherine II, provincial towns and cities were designed to be poor copies of the westernized capital city St. Petersburg, which itself was a simulacrum of European cities, especially Stockholm and Venice (Roosevelt; Lounsbery, 2005, 2020). After the Great Reforms, the binary opposition between capital and province, dominant in the literary imagination, faced increasing challenge (Evtuhov, Smith-Peter). Though the dismissive attitude toward the province continued to dominate in Russian literary life, in the second decade of the 20th century alternative imagined geographies took root among strong writers with provincial roots, and the idea of the 'provincial' gained a major redefinition. Extremely popular writers, for example, the Kazan' writer, Evgenii Chirikov, and later, Maksim Gor'kii, originally from Nizhnii Novgorod, challenged the nineteenth-century stereotype of the dull and culturally derivative province. Because the concept of 'province' was the creation of the Petrine imperial state and was associated with corruption of the police and the idea of the servitor state, these and other advocates of civil

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society focused their attention on provincial initiatives of social change. This image would dissolve in the acid of civil war, only to be reestablished on different footing in the Soviet era.

'Imagined Provinces' asks why and how a stronger and more interesting view of specific provinces emerged in the early 20th century. Its goal is to show the growth and trajectory of the idea of the 'province' in literary culture and track its new meanings through the full establishment of Soviet power in 1922, which inaugurated a new stage of gradual and then forceful recentralization and diminishing of provincial presence. Nonetheless, during this time regionalist sentiment made its way into writing culture and into the deep Russian cultural archive, creating an alternative imagined map of Russia.

The works discussed here – many of them rare and generally unknown – are available on the website, *Mapping Imagined Geographies of Revolutionary Russia, 1914-1922* (MAPRR), an open-access database with over 600 works by 75 writers, all but a handful of them composed during the war and revolution period from 1914 to 1922 (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/>). This assemblage of works focuses mainly on writers of many different political inclinations, who were typically from areas outside of the two capitals, and works written directly in the time period that project spatial and, more specifically, geographical imagery. *Mapping Imagined Geography of Revolutionary Russia* builds an imagined geography of revolutionary Russia by connecting spatial-geographical images of various types and scales with political attitudes and feelings expressed in these literary works. The site contains maps and graphs that will help us understand provincial consciousness and provincial literary activity at this time.

The terms 'province', 'gubernia' or governorate, and 'uezd' or district are historically intertwined and complex. The province was a large administrative unit conceived on a European model and imposed from the capital, mainly (though not only) in European Russia, beginning with Petrine administrative reforms in the early 18th century (Belousov and Tsiv'ian). My use of 'province' is very general and refers to all these levels of secondary and tertiary cities and their surrounding areas – functionally, any central Russian area outside the two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow. In terms of its mental and emotional valence, the province has been defined in contrast, on one hand, to the rural village and the gentry estate and, on the other, Russia's far-flung regions and borderlands. As Anne Lounsbury has shown, particularly before the Great Reforms and continuing afterward, major writers dismissed the province as a kind of anonymous, muddy 'nowhere', a highly imitative, semi-Europeanized homogenization of non-capital Russian cities that by implication robbed each province of its distinct character (Lounsbury 2005). In contrast, recent historical studies show efforts on the part of provincial activists to put their provinces on the map by describing a particular province geographically, economically, ecologically, demographically, and so forth, by keeping good local records and statistics, and – very importantly – rhetorically, by 'purveying' the province both to themselves and to allies in St. Petersburg (Evtuhov; Belousov and Tsiv'ian; Smith-Peter, 2018). The shift in literary attitudes that I am claiming has so far escaped literary-historical attention, perhaps partly because it took place in the rather murky and difficult war years and because of a historical tendency among literary scholars to focus on major writers in the twin capitals and to ignore literary production elsewhere.

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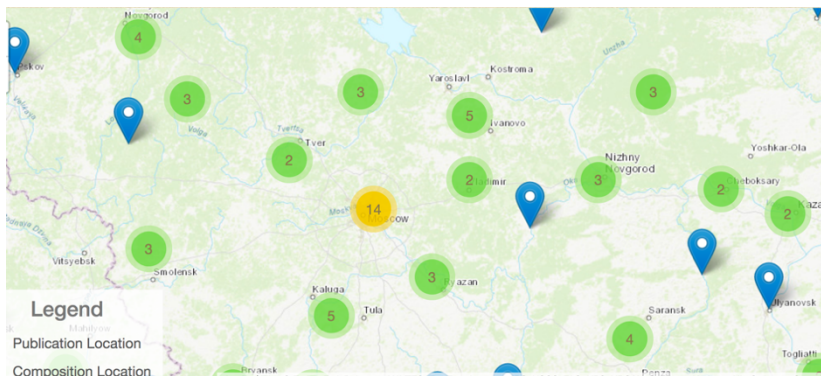


Fig. 1 – Imagined geography of Central Russia, 1914-1922. This map shows every mappable location mentioned in a work in the MAPRR corpus, written during this period. <https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/locations>

ography’, marking geographical locations mentioned in literary works written during those nine years. Even this simple map suggests that the anonymous, faceless ‘city of NN’ from 19th-century fiction is fading. At least 25 European Russian provincial cities and towns appear on the imagined geographical map, not strongly but still no longer simply a provincial ‘nowhere’ or ‘anywhere’. Figure 2 shows a still robust map of actual writing and publishing activity between 1914 and 1922. Moscow and Petrograd still predominate, though we also find significant literary presence in 12 provincial cities of European Russia.

Looking ahead, we find three ways in which the provinces gained in prominence in the war years – through activist literary promoters of the province, focusing on Chirikov and Gor’kii; through peasant writers who drew attention to their regions, mainly Matvei Dudorov and Nikolai Kliuev; and through pre-1920 Bolsheviks who celebrated provincial cities and their connections to labor and worker solidarity, here, mainly Aleksei Dorogochenko and Fedor Bogorodskii.

A next stage in imagining Russian provinces will be to show how Bolsheviks from the center demoted provinces to mere liminal spaces, to war zones that functioned not as a place in and of itself but as the means to the Bolsheviks’ end of reconquering Russia. Of greatest importance here will be the Bolsheviks’ most important and prolific literary propagandist, Dem’ian Bednyi (pseudonym of E. A. Pridvorov). The final stage of this process will be Bolshevik writers’ three rhetorical means of ‘regathering’ Russian lands, all but erasing the idea of the province – through corporeal mapping (Bogorodskii), through traveling Russia (Aseev), and finally through rhetorical attack from the center, keeping the province in view only as a way to reassert the central power of Moscow (Maiakovskii).

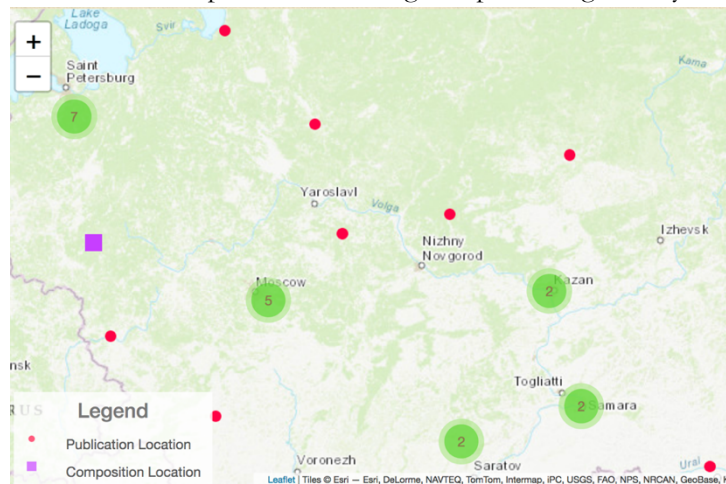


Fig. 2 – Of Central Russia, 1914-1922. Green circles show locations where more than one work was either composed or published. Red circles and purple squares indicate only one instance of these activities. <https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/locations?dates=1914&dates=19>

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1. Literary promoters of the province

Immediately before and during World War I Chirikov and Gor'kii made provinces into visible, interesting places where at least some thinking, politically aware people live. In their writings, the provinces are places where, despite the worst efforts of tsarist governors and their police, learning and enlightenment was spreading. In the case of Chirikov, allegiance to areas outside the capitals were becoming an important aspect of Russian national identity. We discuss two works by Chirikov, *Pacification: Notes of a Provincial* (*Uspokoenie: Zametki provintsiala*, written 1913, published 1916) and *Volga Tales* (*Volzhskie skazki*, 1916) and two works by Gor'kii, the second volume of his autobiographical trilogy, *Out in the World* (*V liudiakh*, 1916) and his revolution-era editorials in the journal, *Novaia zhizn'* (*Nesvoevremennye mysli*, 1917-18).

Chirikov's 1913 exposé of the suppression of provincial freedom of speech, *Pacification*, showcases provinces striving to be incubators of progressive social change. Immediately the book's subtitle, 'Notes of a Provincial', shows Chirikov's identification as a proud provincial. Chirikov offers a sustained and well documented critique of the autocracy and its police state, the «endless politics of pacifying [*uspokoenie*], at the foundation of which lies lawlessness».¹ Chirikov argues that a strong, active 'citizenry' (rather than the traditional, passive 'inhabitants' and 'residents') is taking shape across Russia's provinces. Led by local and provincial newspapers and journals, ordinary people are promoting and defending civil rights, especially the freedom of speech and the rule of law, which themselves are currently 'in prison' (*Uspokoenie*, 117).

Chirikov starts by praising traditional monthly 'thick journals' as evidence of «a gradual accumulation of potential energy in society, all kinds of awakening and the need to wake from the lengthy hibernation, induced by the reaction of the eighties».² Journal editors learned to work around the censors incrementally, by taking «gradual 'daring steps'».³ His ironic tone, however, suggests that this timid incrementalism is not enough, and, praising the editors of multiple provincial journals who have landed behind bars or paid hefty fines for their advocacy of free speech, Chirikov calls for bolder speech and action (*Uspokoenie*, 11).

As he continues his argument, Chirikov sweeps aside the familiar, faceless provincial 'city of NN'. By naming individual cities where brave editors and writers carry on the struggle for civic freedoms, he is mapping Russian provinces in a new and disruptive way, mentioning, for example, Perm', Viatka, Ekaterinburg, Troitsk, Orenburg, Ufa, Smolensk, among others (*Uspokoenie*, 11-12). Throughout the book he spends significant time exposing cases of tsarist officials' graft, corruption, and lawlessness across Russia's provinces, adding at least 17 more names to his civil-rights map of provincial Russia.⁴ Chirikov's evidence adds breadth to the reader's awareness of Russian towns and cities where people live and work and where journalists are trying to practice press freedom, exposing various forms of oppression and corruption. It is important to note, too, that Chirikov assails more geographically abstract tsarist terms for Russia, particularly «Rus'». While at this time the word Rus' was typically larded with tsarist

¹ *Uspokoenie* 25; «Режим, нажим, прижим... и один сплошной вой обывательский от бесконечной политики успокоения, в основу которой положено беззаконие».

² *Uspokoenie* 3; «Рост таких журналов указывал на постепенное накопление потенциальной энергии в обществе, на всяческое пробуждение и потребность проснуться от продолжительной спячки, навеянной реакцией восьмидесятих годов».

³ *Uspokoenie* 3; «Несмотря на бдительное око цензуры, печать исподволь вырабатывала в цензорах привычку к постепенным "дерзновениям", и обычное право писателей и издателей как-то естественным ходом жизни расширилось».

⁴ Chirikov mentions: Serdobsk (15), Tsaritsyn (15), Saratov (15), Kaluga (20), Nizhnii Novgorod (27), Arkhangel'sk (38), Novomoskovsk (39), Viaz'ma (41), Voronezh (58), Kholm (61), Tula (62), Vladivostok (69), Viatsk (72), Vologda (74), Vol'sk (267), Pyzh (80), Riazan' (83).

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nationalist feeling, Chirikov applies it with heavy irony, connecting the idea of Rus' to the practice of taking bribes (*Uspokoenie*, 86).

Chirikov ends *Pacification* by asserting the crucial role of the provinces in a robust and thriving Russia of the future:

The province...But, indeed, that *is* Russia! Indeed, life is generated not in departments of obstacles, not in circles of Godseekers and Godbuilders, futurists or any kind of throwbacks, ... but in the depths of our national mentality. And where ever will you see and grasp it if not in the limitless Russian province? In the last eight years [since the revolution of 1905] the province has changed beyond recognition: it has grown 100 years and instead of aging has grown more youthful! ...it has left behind its former Gogolian yardstick, has been inducted into the mysteries of social and political life, found its voice, sometimes even louder and more forcible than the voice of the capital cities; its voice is significant because it belongs to no one circle but is a national, Russian citizen's voice! The province has sensed that now, at this new stage, its time has come to build life, rather than just obey the various departments of obstacles and hang around various waiting rooms in the capital.⁵

Despite the gross racism and nationalism of the ruling elite, who stand, in Chirikov's view, for a narrowminded 'Russia for the Russians!' mentality, the provinces have become drivers of a better integrated civil society. Once the provinces have gained greater journalistic freedom, as well as some greater measure of economic and legal autonomy from the capital, Chirikov argues, they will assure Russia a richer and more robust future.

In his *Volga Tales* (*Volzhskie skazki*, 1916) Chirikov does his own work of challenging a vague Russian nationalism prejudiced against the provinces. In keeping with his exclamation, «The province... But, indeed, that *is* Russia!», he redefines national identity by weaving a series of tales about various Volga towns and provinces. He intends both to amuse tourists and to instill love of nation through the imagined geography of the Volga and its communities. Unusual in this work is his attempt to embrace Russian national feeling (with an admixture of Pan-Slavism) and Russian cultural diversity.

Like many travelogues and travel stories popular in the 19th century, *Volga Tales* focuses national feeling.⁶ Indeed, Chirikov redirects a sense of national pride in two ways, by both mapping the Volga region as the true center of European Russia, which defines the geography of 'Russia', and instilling a progressive concept of national feeling that embraces various cultures and creeds. In his introduction Chirikov claims that to consider oneself truly 'Russian', one must have traveled the Volga and discovered its secrets. The Volga, in Chirikov's view, is "truly our national river" (*Volzhskie skazki*, 7; «воистину наша национальная река»). He beckons his readers with promises of the Volga's powers of enchantment—embodying Russians' 'fairytale kingdom with its undying "Ivan the Fool", sorcerers, wizards, changelings, and

⁵ (*Uspokoenie*, 259-260; «Провинция... Да, ведь, это и есть Россия! Ведь жизнь творится не в департаментах препон, не в кружках богоискательства и богостроительства, футуризма и всяческого атавизма, не в разрешении женского естества, так посрамленного храбрым рыцарем своего «мужского естества», а в недрах народной психологии. А где ее увидишь и поймешь, как не в необъятной русской провинции? В восемь лет провинция стала неузнаваемой: она выросла на сто лет сразу и не постарела, а помолодела! Она всеми силами всей души выросла, вышла из прежней Гоголевской мерки, приобщилась тайн общественно-политической жизни, подала свой голос, порою значительно более громкий и веский, чем голос столичный; голос значительный, потому что он – голос не кружковой, а – народный, российский голос! Провинция почувствовала, что теперь, на новом этапе, пришел ее черед творить жизнь, а не только прислушиваться к разным департаментам препон и толочься в разных столичных передних, отпуская на чай различным курьерам и лакеям «его превосходительства»)

⁶ For example, see Kleespies; Ronda; Cox.

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all sorts of devilry». ⁷ At the same time as he charms his readers, Chirikov both chides his readers for knowing and loving the Volga «too coldly» (*Volzhskie skazki*, 7) and asserts that traveling the Volga, living for a while near the Volga, and learning its stories and legends makes travelers aware of its major role in forming Russians as a nation and building the Russian state:

Precisely that [our hidden connection to the Volga] gives birth in the mysterious depths of our soul to an incomprehensible, powerful pull toward and sense of love for our fatherland, its people, and to this grand river, which, not by chance, Russian people call their «Mother»... This mother-river has bound our past and present into one sturdy knot. All along its shores hover the shades of the past in the form of traces...both physical and verbal.⁸

By focusing on the Volga and its centuries-old formative power, Chirikov decentralizes his readers' view of Russia, calling the whole of the Volga region the very heart of Russia, the «gatherer of the Slavs» (*Doch' neba, Volzhskie skazki*, 7; «собираательница славянства»). In itself the river and its areas embodies the principle of Slavic unity.

At the same time as Chirikov appeals to national Russian feeling in his narrative mapping of the upper reaches of the Volga, he also celebrates the multicultural character of the middle and lower regions of the river: «When you sail along the middle part of the Volga, it starts to seem that all the peoples of Europe and Asia met up here, along with all their gods, both evil and kind, with all their offspring and households: the Great Russian, the Small Russian [Ukrainian], the Tatar, the Chuvash, the Cheremys, the Mordvinian, the German, the Jew, the Persian, the Kalmyk...Christians of various confessions, believers in Buddha, Mohamed, the terrible Old Testament Jehovah, Zarathustra, the original heathens».⁹

Further, Chirikov reaffirms the Volga as a kind of road that allowed «Rus» to move and that brought Asian peoples to Rus' and that now has all the peoples he mentioned before, «the remnants of the historical struggle of peoples for control of the Volga, now living in peace with the Slavic tribe».¹⁰ He finds the best example of functional multiculturalism in the city of Cheboksary, the capital of the Chuvash community, in which many cultures live side-by-side: «In the capital of the Chuvash kingdom there is an ancient Russian shrine that enjoys the deep respect of both Christians and Chuvash pagans, [a respect] born of historical traditions, or

⁷ *Volzhskie skazki* 7; «сказочное царство-государство, с неумирающими до сей поры “Ивануш-ками-дурачками”, с колдунами, ведунами, оборотнями и всякой чертовщиной и нечистью».

⁸ *Volzhskie skazki* 11-12; «именно от этого в тайных (12) глубинах души рождается непонятное властное тяготение и любовь к отчизне, к ее народу и к этой великой реке, которую русский народ недаром называет своей “Матушкой”... Эта мать-река связала в один крепкий узел наше прошлое с настоящим. На всем ее протяжении призраки прошлого реют над вами то в образе исторических древностей и археологических остатков глубокой старины, в образе целых городов и посадов, в образе развалин – в памятниках вещественных; но не меньше найдете вы на Волге и ее берегах и памятников не вещественных – легенд, преданий и сказок, в которых сохраняет память народная смутные следы древних исторических воспоминаний и переживаний».

⁹ *Volzhskie skazki*, 95; «Когда вы плывете по Волге средним плесом, то вам начинает казаться, что здесь собрались на свидание все народы Европы и Азии и все их боги, злые и добрые, со всеми чадами и домочадцами: великоросс, малоросс, татарин, чуваш, черемисин, мордвин, немец, еврей, персиянин, калмык... Христиане разных толков, последователи Будды, Магомета, грозного ветхозаветного Иеговы, Заратустры, первобытные язычники».

¹⁰ *Sviataia gora, Volzhskie skazki* 171; «Так как Волга была великой исторической дорожкой, по которой двигалась Русь и по которой народы Азии двигались на Русь, то и ныне, начиная с Нижнего Новгорода, вы попадаете в смесь племен и народов: чуваша, татары, черемисы, киргизы, калмыки, персы – все это осколки исторической борьбы народов за обладание Волгой, мирно соживающие теперь с славянским племенем».

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more precisely Christian religious legend».¹¹ In the story, ‘The Holy Mountain’, a Russian driver tells Chirikov’s narrator about the strange appearance of a mountain in the middle of the steppe, now in terms of a Christian legend intended to affirm faith. Upon reflection, the narrator realizes that the same kinds of legends about mountains moving appear in the lore of the other religions of the area: «It became indubitably clear that in this instance an Orthodox Russian peasant had appropriated the story from a Kalmyk religious cult, which itself had reworked a Buddhist legend».¹² Through this bit of religious anthropology the narrator arrives at a position of progressive multiculturalism: «The centuries passed, peoples of various races learned to live side by side; Saint Nicholas became the ‘Righteous Judge’ of the pagan Chuvash, and the Russian peasant calls Mt. Bogdo, the sacred mountain of the Buddhist Kalmyk, a ‘holy mountain’ and devoutly doffs his cap before it».¹³ Implied here is a different model of social-political polity in which Orthodoxy is not the dominant religion but only one among many and in which believers of various creeds respect the others.

In *Volga Tales*, Chirikov has verbally mapped European Russia in a decentralized way that completely avoids mention of the capital in St. Petersburg and its oppressive governance. He has succeeded in animating life and legend in these cities, towns, and villages, while also inculcating a real sense of allegiance to Russia in all its particularities, instead of the usual vague sense of pride in Russia’s vastness. Being ‘Russian’, in this view from 1916, means knowing, loving, and celebrating the history and all the ethnic, cultural, and geographic variety that the Volga region – and by extension, Russia – has to offer.

Also from a Volga provincial city, Nizhnii Novgorod, the self-educated Maksim Gor’kii enhanced the interest of the provinces in the second volume of his autobiographical trilogy, *Out in the World* (*V lindiakh*, 1916). Here Gor’kii describes his first jobs, including bus boy on a steamer to assistant in an icon-painting shop, and his first employers, as well as his first efforts at gaining an education beyond primary school. Of great importance, he maps the Volga region around Nizhnii Novgorod city and province, transforming the nineteenth-century idea of the province as a faceless, muddy, and culturally derivative vastness filled with benighted people. Although replete with ignorant and cruel people, who have a narrow view of their world, this provincial landscape also becomes a colorful, deeply diverse place motivated by growing forces of change.

The first voice we hear is that of Gor’kii’s tough, salty grandfather whose marked, even lyrical, love of his homeland emerges in full force: «In my youth, when I was working as a *burlak* [barge hauler], I spent time in Zhiguli [a height of land near Samara]... Ah, Leksei, you’ll never experience what I did! The forests on the Oka – from Kasimov [town in Riazan’ Province] to Murom, and – the forest beyond the Volga, stretches to the Urals, that’s it! All that is limitless and beyond marvelous... // We brought embroidery and oil from Saratov to Makarius at the market, and we had the shop boy Kirillo from Purekh with us, and the barge crew, the Tatar from Kasimov, Asaf, something like that... We got to Zhiguli, caught the north wind in our face and exhausted ourselves, stopped the barge dead, began to rock, – and then went on shore to get into trouble. And May on the earth, the Volga is like a sea, the waves mound

¹¹ *Volzhskie skazki*, 171-172; «В этой столице чувашского царства есть древне-русская святыня, пользующаяся глубоким уважением как христиан, так и чуваш-язычников, рожденных из исторического предания, а вернее христианской религиозной легенды».

¹² *Volzhskie skazki*, 178; «Стало с несомненностью ясно, что в данном случае православный русский мужичок позаимствовал сюжет из калмыцкого религиозного культа, переделавши буддийское предание соответственно своей собственной религии».

¹³ *Volzhskie skazki*, 179; «Прошли века, сжились бок-о-бок на матушке Волге разноплеменные народы и, – Никола-Угодник сделался “Праведным Судьей” у чуваша-язычника, а гору “Богдо”, священную гору калмыка-буддиста, русский мужик называет “Святою горою” и снимает пред ней набожно шапку!»

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up and roll, like thousands of swans, down to the Caspian. And those Zhiguli mountains are springtime green».¹⁴

For the adolescent Gor'kii, Nizhnii Novgorod comes across as the center of world, though a center that he wants to leave. In several of his descriptions he maps the city, conveying specific sites and the people who inhabit them as a three-dimensional reality. For example, he describes the path to the icon shop where he worked for a time: «In the morning in the cold twilight of the dawn we would cross the whole city along the sleepy merchant street, the Il'inka, to the Nizhnii Bazaar: the shop was on the second floor of the Merchant Mall... Beside our shop was another that dealt in icons and books, run by a black-bearded merchant, a relative of a well-educated Old Believer, well known beyond the Volga in the parts around Kerzhenets [northeast of Nizhnii Novgorod]».¹⁵ Here we get a brief vignette of an Old Believer, an educated, though far from westernized Russian dissident. Elsewhere, Gor'kii mentions people of other confessions and cultures who live in Volga provinces, for example, Saratov Germans with their Lutheran bibles (*V lindi*, ch. 12).

Importantly for the young Gor'kii, as for his grandfather, the river serves as a chance to travel and see a wider world. For a short time, he works in a steamer buffet, shuttling between Kazan' and Nizhnii Novgorod and dreams of wider travel: «I was enchanted by the constant motion of the steamer. It was unpleasant whenever it pulled up to the landing, and I kept hoping for something to happen, and we would steam from Kama to Belaia, to Viatka [north of Kazan'], and then, but then [steaming] along the Volga, I would see new shores, cities, new people. But none of that came to pass».¹⁶ Instead of opening up new vistas, this Nizhnii Novgorod world seems locked into itself.

In contrast, a very few of Gor'kii's acquaintances appear to share this yearning to broaden mental horizons. For example, one character who has traveled through the southern and southeastern parts of European Russia, thus mapping it, defends Nizhnii as the best of all possible cities: «Brother, God ordered everything well [...] The sweet sky, the earth, rivers flow, steamers run! You board a steamer and go wherever you want: to Riazan' or Rybinsk, Perm', all the way to Astrakhan! I've been to Riazan', it's OK, but more boring than Nizhnii; Nizhnii is great, a lot of fun! But Astrakhan' is more boring. In Astrakhan the main thing is there's a lot of Kalmyks, and I don't like that. I don't like Mordvinians, those Kalmyks, Persians, Germans, or any other types of peoples».¹⁷

¹⁴ *V lindi*, ch. 3; «Бывало, в молодости, в Жигулях, когда я бурлаком ходил... Эх, Алексей, не доведется тебе видеть-испытать, что мною испытано! На Оке леса – от Касимова до Муром, али – за Волгой лес, до Урала идет, да! Всё это безмерно и пречудесно... – Вели мы из Саратова расшиву с маслом к Макарию на ярмарку, и был у нас приказчик Кирилло, из Пуреха, а водоливом – татарин касимовский, Асаф, что ли... Дошли до Жигуля, а хватил ветер верховой в глаза нам – выбились из силушки, встали на мертвую, закачались, – сошли на берег кашу варить. А – май на земле, Волга-то морем лежит, и волна по ней стайно гуляет, будто лебеди, тысячами, в Каспий плывут. Горы-те Жигули, зеленые по-вешнему».

¹⁵ *V lindi*, ch. 12; «По утрам, в холодном сумраке рассвета, я иду с ним через весь город по сонной купеческой улице Ильинке на Нижний базар; там, во втором этаже Гостиного двора, помещается лавка. [...] Рядом с нашей лавкой помещалась другая, в ней торговал тоже иконами и книгами чернородый купец, родственник староверческого начетчика, известного за Волгой, в керженских краях».

¹⁶ *V lindi*, ch. 6; «Меня страшно пленяло непрерывное движение парохода. Было неприятно, когда он останавливался у пристани, и я всё ждал – вот случится что-то, и мы поплывем из Камы в Белую, в Вятку, а то – по Волге, я увижу новые берега, города, новых людей. Но этого не случилось».

¹⁷ *V lindi*, ch. 17; «Хорошо, брат, устроено всё у бога, – нередко говорил он. – Небушко, земля, реки текут, пароходы бежат! Сел на пароход, и – куда хошь: в Рязань али в Рыбинской, в Пермь,

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Gor'kii imagines himself as a boy resisting this narrowminded, racist view of the world that puts Nizhnii Novgorod at its center. From the start he dreams of travelling both physically and mentally. It is books that teach him about the world beyond. As he looks at the limitless expanses of forest and steppe to the north and east of Nizhnii Novgorod, he suspects that the world is not just empty and boring:

Now, looking at the distances beyond the Volga, I already knew that it was not empty, though before it would happen that you would look across the Volga and you would feel especially dull: the meadows lay flat, over the meadows – a hazy, cold blueness. The earth seemed empty, lonely... This cheerless void that sucked everything out of your heart promised nothing. The captions to illustrations told me in understandable terms about other countries, other people, they spoke of various events in the past and present; I could not understand much, and that bothered me. Sometimes strange words like 'metaphysics', 'chiliasm', 'Chartist' – pierced my brain... Beyond all that I saw flashes of a living truth that meant a lot to me, the outlines of another life, of other relations. It was clear to me that in Paris draymen, workers, soldiers, and all 'unskilled workers' were different from those same people in Nizhnii, Kazan', and Perm', – they spoke more boldly with their masters, and behaved more simply and independently.¹⁸

By the end of his memoir Gor'kii leaves the relative isolation he perceives in Nizhnii and goes east to Kazan', «secretly hoping that I might find a way to study».¹⁹ Despite Gor'kii's ennui in this Volga world running like a red thread throughout *Out in the World*, he has made the Volga area visible and registered many memorable characters, who love these landscapes and this part of Russia. And clearly, a part of Gor'kii still loves his homeland.

Following the line first started by Chirikov's provincial journalism, in some of his revolution-era editorials from 1917 and 1918, Gor'kii actively defended the provinces. Writing for the Petrograd Menshevik newspaper, *Novaia zhizn'* (*New Life*), he made a much stronger claim for progressive trends in provincial life than he had in his autobiographical writing. He argued that broad-based 'enlightenment' in the form of civic education was underway in the provinces. In an article from June 29, 1917, Gor'kii asserted that provincial cities and towns were seeing serious efforts to educate real 'citizens', including homeless street children. For example, in his view, the Unaffiliated Council of Young Adults (Vnepartiinyi Soiuz molodezhi) for people aged 13 to 20 was a force for civic education: «in the provinces cultural infrastructure [stroitel'stvo] is developing – I'm not exaggerating, when I say that in dozens of towns and district cities 'houses for the people' [culture clubs], you can see that people are striving

до Астрахани! В Рязани я был, ничего городок, а скушнее Нижнего-то; Нижний у нас – молодец, веселый! И Астрахань – скушнее. В Астрахани, главное, калмыка много, а я этого не люблю. Не люблю никакой мордвы, калмыков этих, персиян, немцев и всяких народцев».

¹⁸ *V lindi*, ch. 9; «Теперь, глядя в заволжские дали, я уже знал, что там нет пустоты, а прежде, бывало, смотришь за Волгу, становится как-то особенно скучно: плоско лежат луга, в темных заплатах кустарника, на конце лугов зубчатая черная стена леса, над лугами – мутная, холодная синева. Пусто на земле, одиноко. [...] Ничего не обещает эта унылая пустота, высасывая из сердца всё, что там есть. Объяснения к иллюстрациям понятно рассказывали про иные страны, иных людей, говорили о разных событиях в прошлом и настоящем; я многого не могу понять, и это меня мучит. Иногда в мозг вонзаются какие-то странные слова – “метафизика”, “хилиазм”, “чартист”... за всем этим я вижу проблески живой и значительной для меня правды, черты иной жизни, иных отношений. Мне ясно, что в Париже извозчики, рабочие, солдаты и весь “черный народ” не таков, как в Нижнем, в Казани, в Перми, – он смелее говорит с господами, держится с ними более просто и независимо».

¹⁹ *V lindi*, ch. 20; «Осенью этого года я уехал в Казань, тайно надеясь, что, может быть, пристроюсь там учиться».

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energetically for enlightenment [nauka], for knowledge. But the press in the capitals is passing over this salvational phenomenon in silence».²⁰

2. Peasants poets map the province

At the same time as citizens-rights movements were lending weight and meaning to various provincial locales, and thus visualizing Russia in a new and more complex and vital way, some poets, particularly the peasant poets, Matvei Dudorov and Nikolai Kliuev, were engaging in another kind of regional mapping. Though they tended to focus on the idea of the village – instead of specific villages – and identified with regions, rather than specific provinces, they were still naming non-capital places. In so doing, they named unusual regions and locales as homelands and sources of real strength, thus putting them on the increasingly interesting Russian map. The feelings associated with these places typically were those of affinity and even love, though often complicated by a sense of alienation (Dudorov) or fear (Kliuev).

Dudorov's poetry from his collection, *Bumps in the Road* (Ukhaby: stikhi, 1922), calls the Tver' province and the northern headwaters of the Volga River his homeland: «I came from the fields of the Upper Volga / To the call of big cities».²¹ The poet is alienated from his Tver' peasant roots and has traveled across peasant 'caftan Russia' (armiaznaia Rus') looking for happiness, moving eventually to the city, Moscow, with which he has fallen in love: «Along the wide roads of caftan Rus', / Along little traveled tracts... // Enchanted by the calls of factory whistles / and treated kindly by mother-misery, / I fell in love with Moscow, and the melodies of the hanks of yarn / I untwist into a patterned sea».²² Nonetheless, he finds magic in the countryside: «The aromas of the fields, the crimson sunrise... And the woods whispered to me, "Arise!"»²³

Despite his feelings of alienation from his peasant roots, Dudorov is always passionate about the rural environment. In a poem from 1921, *My soul is a field of rye*, even when he has been moving toward the Bolshevik program, Dudorov returns to his Tver' homeland and the Shosha River, a northern tributary of the Volga near Tver', to immerse himself in the joys of fields and flowers: «And in the fields by the Shosha / In the fragrant clover of the meadows, / Like a bee on the pistil, I / Gather the perfumes of flowers».²⁴

In Dudorov's lyrical world, the upper-Volga area around Tver' is 'home'. For Kliuev, the northern part of Russia, north of the Volga, is mapped as home – and the site of many of his pseudo-folkloric mythologizations. In his book devoted to Kliuev's poetics, Michael Makin describes Kliuev's 'toponymic poetry': «despite Klyuev's presentation of himself as a poet of specific beliefs and places, his poetry suggests opposite tendencies: toward collage, poetic, rather than programmatic coherence; and mythologization outside of conventional geography and history» (Makin, 101). Indeed, Kliuev's world is filled with talking birds and magical wise

²⁰ <http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/600>; «В провинции развивается культурное строительство, - не преувеличивая, можно сказать, что в десятках сел и уездных городов организуются "Народные дома", наблюдается живейшее стремление к науке, знанию. Столичная печать молчит об этом спасительном явлении».

²¹ <http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/543>; «Я пришел из полей Верхневолжья / На призывы больших городов».

²² <http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/548>; «По широким дорогам армяжной Руси, / Мало еженным, хоженным трактам, ... Зачарованный зовами фабрик свистков / и обласканный матерью – горем, / я влюбился в Москву и напевы мотков / расплетаю узорчатым морем».

²³ <http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/548>; «Ароматы полей, алый солнца восход, / Буревестника гордого песни, / Меня с раннего детства манили вперед, / А леса мне шептали, Воскресни!»

²⁴ <http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/541>; «И на полях родных близ Шоши, / В душистом клевере лугов, / Я, как пчела на цветоноше, / Сбираю запахи цветов».

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women and wise men and is grounded in a mythic map of Russia of Kliuev's own making. Although he is far from thinking or writing in a 'provincial' register, his 'toponymic poetry' certainly does put northern Russian towns on the map, primarily from Petrozavodsk and Arkhangel'sk provinces in the far north.

Kliuev's mapping of Russia is strongly kinship based – referring to his homeland quite formally as *Mater*²- Russia (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/295>). His map of Russia includes relatively few towns and cities, though he does mention Kargopol and Pudozh to the east of Lake Onega (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/297>), Kostroma on the northern Volga (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/302>), mainly as home areas of Old Believers. Instead, his imagined map is built predominantly on waterways, the Kama, Don, and Volga Rivers, and Lake Onega (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/301>), and the Andoma River on the southwest side of Lake Onega (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/298>). He also features famous rock formations (the Valdai boulders, Finnish stone, and Ural Mountain granite (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/301>) and the Sekir Mountain in the far-northern White Sea and Paleostrov on the northwest shore of Lake Onega (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/298>). Kliuev treats all of these areas as Russian sacred ground, shifting them out of the range of social and political change to a mythic and spiritual realm.

3. Bolshevik provincial poets

The peasant poets tend to relate to more specific physical-geographical sites and human settlements than Bolsheviks do, though with some exceptions. When we consider writing by Bolshevik authors of the revolution and civil war period, we see that the province as an idea all but disappears, to be replaced by the smaller locales of a factory or a barge on a river. When they do appear, provincial cities are connected to labor and convey a feeling of worker solidarity and world-transforming worker belligerence. The Bolsheviks divide into two groups. All typically serve centralized Bolshevik purposes, though those from a certain region often evince a deeper passion for their region. For example, in the work of the Volga-area poets, Dorogoichenko and Bogorodskii, we find a frequent celebration of worker might in physical geographical images of natural force. In other Bolshevik poetry the province then transforms into liminal space, as fronts and battle zones to be conquered, but without intrinsic meaning or merit in and of themselves.

Both Dorogoichenko and Bogorodskii are from the Volga region and feel a powerful attachment to it. In Bogorodskii's long poem, *Bronze Force*, the description of the river, «it's as if the Volga / cawing / had taken off for Zhiguli for a heist», has a sense of the wild, even rapacious force of the Volga River and its landscape.²⁵ A sense of the Volga's power as a kind of liberation emerges in Bogorodskii's poem about Volga stevedores who, just as the spring-time, flooding Volga frees itself of ice, fight their way free of their chains: «Oh, heavy labor! To you, 'Arise' / sings the flowering spring /»; and further on: «To you, with the wrought iron neck, / To you, with the high cheekbones, / broad-shouldered, shaggy / with a bronze chest / and gnarled hands / this is a spring song / free like the Volga».²⁶

In his poem, *Zhiguli*, Dorogoichenko similarly pictures the Volga as a «lioness» beating up the Zhiguli Mountains near Samara (<https://mpgrr.herokuapp.com/works/171>). Elsewhere, in his poem, *Volga*, he adds a historical, human rebellious element to this natural violence of

²⁵ «как будто Волга / каркая / пошла в Жигули на разбой!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/115>).

²⁶ «О, тяжкий труд! Тебе “воскресни” / поет расцветная весна. / [...] Эх, дубинушка, ухнем! / Развеселая сама пойдет! / сама пойдет. / Подернем! / да ухнем! / Тебе, с чугунной шеей, / Тебе, широкоскулый, / широкоплечий, мохнатый / с медной грудью / и заскорузлыми руками / это свободная, как Волга / весенняя песня» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/117>).

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the Volga River: he celebrates the seventeenth-century revolt of Cossack Stepan Razin and the Emilian Pugachov rebellion of the late 18th century when «Across the Zhiguli Mountains along the wild-free Volga / Beggars and trash caroused». ²⁷

Some poems refer not to a provincial city but a working suburb nearby. For example, Bogorodskii focuses on Sormovo, an industrial ‘village’ near Nizhnii Novgorod that had by the late 19th century become a machine-building center: «Sormovo / praises the commune / with the bronze of verse». ²⁸ Here Sormovo is a place that heralds the commune and communal agency of workers. One of Dorogoichenko’s poems expresses affection rare in a Bolshevik work for a specific place, Samara. Like Bogorodskii’s poem, this one focuses on the force of Samara’s workers: «I love you, my Samara, / For your sure and caustic gaze / For the might of your workers’ blows. / For the breadth of your soul». ²⁹ And, in *Zhiguli*, Dorogoichenko sees the Volga plain as the site of great hope, a «new day» with a «red sunrise»: «Along and over the Volga is a new day: / It will clothe in a red shirt: / Both the city – the naked toiler, / And the Zhiguli burial mounds». ³⁰

4. Bolshevik provincial propaganda doggerel

In contrast to Bolshevik poets from a specific area, Bolsheviks from elsewhere map the province, if at all, as a war zone, a liminal space that has lost the sense of being a ‘home’ to someone and is instead a transitional site of competition between Bolsheviks and their enemies both internal and external. Much more in the way of Bolshevik propaganda aimed at winning new recruits to the Bolshevik cause are the long narratives in doggerel by the Ukrainian poet Dem’ian Bednyi, which appeal to ordinary peasants and soldiers from opposing armies. These works were written chiefly in 1919, the pivotal year of the Civil War, though they also herald the fierce Bolshevik offensive of late summer and fall 1918. The White Army threatened to retake Moscow from the south. To the east, harsh fighting in the crucial industrial and agricultural provinces around the Volga River made the Kazan’ and Samara provinces among the major battlegrounds of the whole Civil War. As perhaps the most important Civil-War-era Bolshevik propagandist, Bednyi, who had no emotional allegiance to this area, uses three of his many narrative doggerels from 1919 to attract ordinary people toward the Bolshevik side. At the same time, Bednyi’s poetry turns what was province into liminal space, no longer ‘place’ that holds great significance, but merely lines to be crossed and territory to be conquered.

In the course of 1919, perhaps Bednyi’s most productive year, he wrote fast and furiously with two political goals in mind – to satirize the upper strata of Russian society and to convert the lower strata of soldiery and even peasantry. During this year he published at least 15 new cycles and long poems. ³¹ Of particular interest for our understanding of Bolshevik imagined geography of the province is his collection, *Red Army Soldiers*. Bednyi’s poem, *On the Front near Kazan’ and Samara* (На фронте под Казанью и Самарой, 1919), expressly makes the area into a battle zone where Bednyi’s propaganda poems are being distributed by airplane, while

²⁷ «По Жигулям вдоль Волги вольной / Гуляла голь, да беднота» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/170>).

²⁸ «Чугунными славами / влилась в твое ухо, / как в форму / чугуно литейных цехов – / это-ли / Сормово / славит коммуны / бронзой стихов!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/115>).

²⁹ «Люблю тебя, моя Самара, / За взор уверенный и колкий / За мощь рабочего удара. / За широту души» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/170>).

³⁰ «По-над Волгой новый день: / Оденет красною рубахою: / И город – труженика голого, / И Жигулевские курганы» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/171>).

³¹ The best available bibliography is: *Russkie poety XX veka: Materialy dlia bibliografii* (ed.: L.M. Turchinskii). Moskva: Znak, 2007. https://imwerden.de/pdf/turchinsky_russkie_poety_xx_veka_materialy_k_bibliografii_1900-1960_2007__ocr.pdf.

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soldiers from the White Army shoot at the plane: «On the front between Kazan' and Samara / An airplane buzzes-rovers. / Handbills fly from the airplane. / Read, White Army camp, / The missive of Poor Dem'ian!» (see Figure 3).³²

In *The Kazan' Situation* (Расказанское положение, 1919) Bednyi uses the retaking of Kazan by Trotskii as a warning to Samara, celebrating the Red Army as a «dark storm cloud» and «mighty avalanche»: «Oh you, Volga, wide and deep, / That you are broad, free, deep, / Go back to your good, old anarchic ways, / Roar and go wild at Samara! / Tell everyone there about the Kazan' affair, / About the worker and peasant army: / It's moving-rushing like a dark storm cloud, / A dark storm cloud, a mighty avalanche; / It's fighting for its foreordained future, / For Soviet, for Soviet power, for ordinary people! / It's fighting, burning with a furious zeal. / – Fly high, red flag over Samara!»³³ Bednyi's *Near Samara* (Pod Samaroi, 1919) marks the city as a focal point of the war for the Volga region, still only a liminal space to be conquered: «Trotskii visited the regiment before lunch / In parting, he gave a speech. / He said: Forward! To Samara! / Friends, in our decisive battle / Let the enemy feel your retribution!»³⁴ Because of its simplicity and accessibility, occasional humor and clear braggadocio, Bednyi's propagandistic poetry was popular among the newly literate (Men'shutin, Siniavskii, 21). It was, however, less than supportive of provincial place-based identity.



Fig. 3 – Illustration showing propaganda pamphlets being distributed by airplane onto a desolate provincial landscape. Note that the people spread at regular intervals along a trench are shooting at the biplane. Dem'ian Bednyi, *Krasnoarmeitsy*, 1919, p. 39.

5. Bolshevik mapping of regathered Russian lands

While Bednyi poured out reams of doggerel to convert the rank and file in battle zones, other poets celebrated the reunification of Russia under the Bolsheviks. To mark the process of

³² («На фронте под Казанью и Самарой / Гудит-ревет аэроплан. / Летят листки с аэроплана. / Читай, белогвардейский стан, / Посланье Бедного Демьяна! (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/97>). The pseudonym Dem'ian Bednyi means Poor Demian.

³³ («Ой ты, Волга многоводная, широкая, / Что широкая, раздольная, глубокая, / Ты тряхни своею вольностью старую, / За шуми да разбушуйся под Самарою! / Расскажи там всем про дело про казанское, / Что про войско про рабочее, крестьянское: / Оно движется-несется темной тучею, / Темной тучею, лавиною могучею; / Оно бьется за судьбу свою свободную, / За Советскую за власть простонародную! / Оно бьется, горит ревностью ярою. / – Выше взвейся, красный флаг наш над Самарою!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/98>).

³⁴ «В полку был Троцкий пред обедом / Держал напутственную речь. / Он говорил: Вперед! В Самару! / Друзья, в решительном бою / Пусть враг узнает вашу кару!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/99>).

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regathering Russia after winning the civil war in 1920 and 1921 (depending on the region), Bolshevik poets engaged in two kinds of mapping – ‘corporeal’ mapping and ‘travel mapping’. Corporeal mapping treats Russia as terrain on which a Promethean poet could lie outstretched and symbolically touch the peripheries of the Russian lands. This imagery helps imagine the regathered Russia, in a sense, as one body. For example, in his long poem, *Bronze Force*, Bogorodskii imagines himself as a giant splayed out across all Russia: «I lay my ear / on Siberia’s taiga / I poked the Baltic with my foot»; and further: «My head lifted / from Siberia’s shaggy taiga, / as thinly the spring gave itself / to the poet’s thousand-stringed lyre!»³⁵ At another point, as one of the great rivers of the world, the Volga becomes something like the hand of the new «bronze force» that «slowly blessed the whole laboring world».³⁶

Travel mapping follows a trajectory across Russia, typically from east to west, to name and thus claim Russian territory. In *Travel Voucher: Chita-Moskva, 1921* (*Putevka: Chita-Moskva, 1921*) the modernist poet Sergei Tret’iakov, who had spent part of the Civil War doing party work in the Far East, marks the regathering of Russia’s provinces through a late Civil-War train passage from the Far East to European Russia, from Chita in Eastern Siberia to back to the center of power, Moscow. Here he reasserts a traditional mockery of the province and its utter desolation after the horrors of civil war, while also implicitly celebrating the process of Bolshevik consolidation of power (Hoffman). As the poet travels across the Urals into European Russia, he turns to grotesque and unfeeling mockery of Viatka, the city and province, far to the northeast of Moscow: «In the ear of Russia filthy cotton wadding – / Viatka»; and then: «Slattern! Unwashed snout! / Lips hanging limp, like laundry on the line»; and finally, the city speaks back: «This place – so to say – isn’t just a piece of snot on a bast mat».³⁷ Viatka is compared to a foul, lice-ridden streetwalker. Clearly this ‘travelogue’ puts a provincial city crushed in the civil war into the gutter.

Sibgorod, the ninth of the ten poems that make up Tret’iakov’s cycle, depicts not just one province but a generalized image of depredation of the Civil War in provincial cities. In fact, in this poem the poet shows greater empathy for cities where revolutionary will to change has now been replaced with a new patina of Bolshevik power – posters, five-pointed stars – on one hand, and starvation and destroyed infrastructure, on the other: «With your bare hands / You took the boiling water of rebellion, / And see across the rivers / Not one bridge». As a result, now the erstwhile «roar of revolution / Is the song of a sick sister». The final poem emphasizes this tonality of grief and anxiety at the destruction of Russia and the abuse of its people: «And I see – the shrieks for food, / Gathering grains on garbage heaps, / Russia sick and beggarly / Wrapped all peoples into a bullhorn».³⁸ Provinces per se are no longer part of the mapping picture but are subsumed into the whole-country scenario.

³⁵ «Ухо свое / Положил на тайгу Сибири / Балтику ткнул ногой...»; «Голова поднялась / из косматой тайги Сибири, / как бедно весна отдалась / тысячеструнной поэтовой лире!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/115>).

³⁶ «И вот / руками / как Волга и Нил / медная сила / весь трудящийся мир / медленно благословила» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/115>).

³⁷ «В ухе России грязная ватка – / Вятка»; «Фефела! Немытое рыло! / Губы развесила, что бельё для просушки»; «Мы-ста – мол – тоже, не сопя на рогоже!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/573>).

³⁸ «Гольими руками / Брала кипяток восстания, / И вот над реками / Ни одного моста у нее»; «Россия больная и нищая / Все народы свернула в рупор» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/575>).

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6. The Bolsheviks' recentralized map

The Civil War brought appalling suffering to the provinces, especially those that saw the fiercest fighting. Among those were the central Volga provinces.³⁹ Bolsheviks who spent the majority of the Civil War in the center wielded a view of the province as a tool for angry remonstrances against the rich Westerners without having any real knowledge or feeling for the province. The major voice in this sense is Vladimir Maiakovskii, who, having boasted in 1920 about the Red Army as a kind of multiple 'Volga Rivers' for whom there are no mouths (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/318>) and celebrated the victory over the White Army in Crimea, washing the Earth in blood (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/319>), whines in 1922 about famine in the Volga region. Historically, it should be noted, Bolsheviks were at least as guilty of requisitioning seed grain from peasants as the White forces were and were thus just as guilty of bringing utter misery to this and other regions. In his tendentious poem, *Bastards!* (*Svolochi*, 1922), published in the Party paper, *Izvestiia*, Maiakovskii directs his «wolf's howl» against the Europeans and Americans he considers to be the enemies of all Russians: «They'll die out. / 20 million people will die out! / In the name of all the people laid to rest here – / a curse henceforth, / a curse forever / from the Volga to those who turned their fat mugs away».⁴⁰ He insists that Russians write out a «bill to the bourgeoisie» that has a «number a kilometer long / that barely fits on the page». In another poem in his role as Party poet, *My Speech at the Genoa Party Conference* (*Moia rech' na genuevskoi konferentsii*, 1922), also published in *Izvestiia*, Maiakovskii wants to force British Prime Minister Lloyd-George to face the «hungry hell»: «Stab your vision into the Volga: / isn't this / hungry hell, / isn't this peasant devastation – / the tail end of your wars and blockades?»⁴¹ Maiakovskii, enacting the view that the best defense is offence, fails to consider the bill that the Bolsheviks themselves amassed for all the seed grain that the Red Army seized.

Such was the effect of turning a provincial 'place' into a liminal space. In general, as their imagined geography shows, Bolsheviks tended to focus not on localities but on a vast borderless imagined world and the major world cities that this new world embraced. At the same time, their vision for Russia was broadly oriented toward centralized power.

Conclusions

Though Siberian regionalism is usually the prime example of Russian social and political consciousness that developed spontaneously, beyond the nationalism imposed by the tsarist government and its propaganda arm in the official Russian Orthodox Church, this body of wartime literature shows real growth of provincial consciousness across various parts of Central Russia. By 1922, that relatively new provincial consciousness had been suppressed in some cases and coopted in others. Chirikov and Gor'kii, went into exile – Chirikov because he completely rejected the Bolsheviks' terror tactics and Gor'kii for his trenchant though still supportive critiques of the new regime. These views of the province were soon overshadowed by

³⁹ See, for example, Chapple, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/the-horror-of-russias-civil-war-in-photos-from-red-cross-mission/29699442.html>.

⁴⁰ «Вымрет. / Вымрет 20 миллионов человек! / Именем всех упокоенных тут – / проклятие отныне, / проклятие вовек / от Волги отвернувшим морда толстоту»; «Цифрами верстовыми, / вменяющимися едва, / запишите Волгу буржуазии в счет!» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/321>).

⁴¹ «Каким золотом – / хватит ли в Сити?! – / оплатите это, господин Ллойд-Джордж? / Вонзите в Волгу ваше зрение: / разве этот / голодный ад, / разве это / мужицкое разорение – / не хвост от ваших войн и блокад?» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/322>).

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Bolsheviks from the center, some of whom imaginatively turned the province into a liminal space and others who returned the province to its old status as a backwater. For example, Aleksandra Kollontai's short story, *Soon* (*Skoro*, 1922), tells a shmaltzy tale set 50 years in the future, in 1972, about the residents of a communal home getting a holiday «fir tree». The «red grandmother» at the center of the story reminisces about the revolutionary years and the wonder of electric lights on the tree. She claims (spuriously) that this type of lighting accelerated the process of electrification in the provinces «where until the last decade [i.e. the 1960s!] such innovations had not come» (<http://maprr.iath.virginia.edu/works/307>). The view of the province as backwater would be supported in a completely different register by independent writers, such as Boris Pil'niak, who in *The Naked Year* (*Golyi god*, written 1920, published 1922) again depicted the pre-revolutionary provincial town Ordynin very much in terms of its narrowminded merchant elite and their stolid, ritualized view of the world. Despite the fact that by 1922 the promoters of the province had been silenced through exile, the cat was out of the bag, and imagined geography of Russian provinces had undergone serious change. Despite the depredation of revolution and civil war and the efforts of the Bolsheviks to limit access to books and even in many cases to destroy books, the groundwork had been laid in the years just before and through the 1917 revolutions. A much more lively provincial geographical imaginations had now entered the Russian 'cultural archive' and would reemerge in the late- and post-Soviet world.

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