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A Villager's Map of the Provinces

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Abstract – What did a Russian peasant's 'mental map' look like between 1917 and the consolidation of the Soviet order in 1934? To what extent does a specific province or oblast have a place on this map? Was 'provincial Russia' how peasants thought about the vast non-urban territory in transition? Provincial identity is an elusive category during any period – it was not the mental or physical space in which peasants lived. They resided in a village, were members of a parish encompassing several neighboring communities, and had contact with larger geographical units when they bought and sold goods, left for work in towns or cities, or were called up for military service. The fact that provincial identity is difficult to quantify does not make it insignificant, and, with the help of rural literature and oral histories, this paper will track provincial and regional ties among peasants for this period.

Keywords – Russia; Province; Village; Identity; Cognitive Map.

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From the Russian Revolution of 1917 well into the Stalinist era, Russian peasants continued to find their way through the world by means of internal, cognitive maps (Parthé 1997). They began to fill in these maps at a very young age and added new locations throughout their lives. In *Skazka moego detstva* (The Fairy Tale of My Childhood) Nikolai Rylenkov (b. 1909) wrote that his world gradually expanded from the stove on which he slept to the entire *izba* (peasant home), the village limits, and then on to the neighboring fields and forests, all of which he could recall in great detail fifty years later. This map could include up to three different names for one village, but was it likely to include the name of the surrounding province, or others nearby? Did peasants in general think about Russia's vast territory as something composed of provinces or of themselves as provincial?

'Provincial' identity is an elusive characteristic of Russian peasants during any period. According to official records at the dawn of 1917, a rural family was listed as residing in, for example, Vladimir or Penza, but its members would have identified themselves first of all as peasants living in a particular village, and then as members of an Orthodox parish (*prikhod*) that encompassed several neighboring settlements. The female side of the family would generally have married just outside this small circle, so that in time the family (*rod*) extended over a couple of parishes. They would also be aware of the nearest body of water that played a significant role in their lives. Contact with a wider world came when goods were bought or sold at regional fairs, when villagers returned from factory work or a pilgrimage, when people with specialized skills (e. g. harness-makers, tailors) did their rounds, and when taxes were collected. Regional battles of the kind that took place during the Appanage era (c. 1230-1530) were a thing of the distant past, and for centuries, when the men of the village were summoned for military duty, they were expected to defend the whole of Russia.

The fact that the province in which Russian peasants lived was not the salient aspect of their identity does not render it unimportant. However, to capture with any precision what it did mean to them requires a variety of sources, each of which yields discrete bits of useful information. The revolutionary and early Soviet periods have been covered in numerous studies of the majority rural population, which, beginning in 1914, was drawn by events into a wider sphere than ever before. Some regions, like Vologda and Vyatka, have been analyzed in greater depth than others, both by *kraevedy* (Russian specialists in local history) and by non-Russian scholars who gained access to particular caches of primary materials. Thanks largely to Viktor Berdinskikh of Vyatsk State University, there are also thousands of transcribed oral recordings of residents of his province born between the 1890s and 1920s; in the course of retelling their lives, the contours of their world emerge. Finally, the *derevenshchiki* (Village Prose writers), who were born in rural Russia and whose literary school flourished between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s, drew heavily on the stories of older villagers to supplement their own memories. Along with fictional works, several of the *derevenshchiki* also published non-fictional essays and books about the history and traditions of particular areas of Russia that included their village, but was in no way limited to it.

Historians examining rural Russia from the late tsarist era until the beginning of collectivization paid considerable attention to *otkhodnichestvo* (traveling for seasonal work), when

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

economic necessity led men from their villages to the nearest large town or to one of the capitals, where they labored in factories or handicraft workshops alongside *zemliaki*, other people from their home province. Peasants from Ryazan, Tula, Smolensk, Kaluga and other regions sought each other out, pooling their resources to live together, celebrating weddings, baptisms and other life events, and helping each other to get messages and packages back to their respective villages. Robert Eugene Johnson has described the typical worker as «having one foot in the village and one in the factory» (*Peasant and Proletarian*, 28-31, 34, 50). A peasant's *zemliak* might be from a region as large as Siberia, but was usually from a smaller territory, and workers from the same area might 'cluster' in a given industry and congregate in one neighborhood of Moscow (68-9). Johnson offers the fascinating historical note that the ethnomusicologist Mitrofan Pyatnitsky closely observed the singing styles of peasant workers from various provinces who spent time in Moscow, and he formed a choir in 1910 with singers from Voronezh, Ryazan, and Smolensk, which eight years later found approval and support from Lenin, and was eventually named after its founder (74).

In *Russian Peasants in Revolution and Civil War*, Aaron Retish concentrated on Vyatka, tracing an increase around 1914 in interaction between the 'idyllic, autarchic village' and the town (6-8). With relatively poor soil and a harsh climate, outmigration to Moscow and other cities grew with the province's population (18-19). With its 25,000 villages, it is hardly surprising that, as the distance from their homes increased, villagers saw greater value in their provincial identity. After the February Revolution of 1917, local *zemstvos* (councils) helped to keep the villages informed of the rapidly changing situation, holding meetings at the *volost* (district) level. As the Provisional Government struggled to establish itself, the intelligentsia living in provincial centers took on more responsibility, but this did not mean a widespread 'provincialization' of the peasantry and the intelligentsia's efforts to reach villagers are widely considered to have failed (65-79; Figs. "The Russian Revolution," 323-45). A revival of the 1905-era All-Russian Peasant Union gave the rural residents of Vyatka and other areas the hope that they would be able to influence the crucial question of land distribution, but the Bolshevik coup later that year, and the civil war that followed, ended the possibility of a satisfying resolution (84-5; Gill, *Peasants and Governments*, 132-69).

Communist agitators were soon sent into districts and villages to set up small cultural centers with reading rooms stocked full of provincial and national newspapers, and to educate peasants about various aspects of the new order, including Soviet holidays and how they were to be celebrated (Retish, 223-6). The Bolsheviks preached an identity based not on geography, but on class (poor, middle, or well-off peasants called *kulaks*), as mandatory *kombedy* (committees of the poor) helped to establish the Soviet order in the countryside (194-5). Regional identity was not strengthened by the fact that borders and names were redrawn – and then redrawn again – by the center. Vyatka, for example, was merged with another province in 1929, then reconstituted five years later as the Kirov region in honor of a native son who had just been killed in Leningrad (11, n. 28). Government surveillance was nothing new for Russia, and the Bolshevik regime established a two-way operation, with reports going from village to *volost* to *uyezd* (county) to province and then on to Moscow (211). Decisions based on such reports made a return journey from the center to the village.

The idea that villagers were not passive observers of change is emphasized by Sarah Badcock in *Politics and People in Revolutionary Russia. A Provincial History*. From February to October 1917, peasants, reacting to local conditions, attempted to secure gains for their local communities, and the discussions that ensued at all levels revealed differences in outlook between ordinary people and the center (which badly needed supplies for the troops), and between the center and the province (181, 209-19). Other historians have also identified a preference among the peasants for 'localist solutions' to the social problems of 1917 (Figs, 338). In Badcock's view, local identity and interests grew during this time, a development that was not

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

helpful to a government attempting to survive until elections for a Constituent Assembly (Badcock, 240).

Provincial Landscapes. Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953 begins with Donald Raleigh's observation that *kraevedenie* (local studies), a subject which had been enthusiastically pursued for decades, lasted until the 1930s, when increasing government pressure left only museum work as a safe occupation (3). Roberta Manning traces the radicalization of the *zemliachestvo* (seasonal work force), which returned home in 1917 with newspapers, pamphlets, and a desire to seize land, rather than wait to be given it, in those provinces still containing large gentry estates (35-68). James Andrews focuses on the Bolshevik center's suspicion of local initiative; he traces how, after 1928, the politics of 'center-periphery relations' harmed provincial study groups because of their dependence on state subsidies (105-24). David Shearer tackles the vast western Siberian *kerai* (region) that was not subdivided into *oblasts* until the late 1930s, and continued to be a place of resettlement for people expelled from European Russia (194-216). This enormous *kerai* contained isolated areas of population, and only a few cities of note (Novosibirsk, Omsk, Tomsk). Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov studied the province of Samara, one of numerous places on the Soviet map that were renamed Kuibyshev in the mid-1930s after the death of this prominent revolutionary figure. The authors' study of oral histories from Samara led them to the following conclusion.

Provincial Identity is not stable and fixed; it is born in disputes with the Center, in opposition to the metropolis. At the same time, provincial identity is not whole, but is split into many dichotomies. It constantly ratifies itself as a Center by locating other peripheries [...] that support its centrality. [...] Provincial citizens do not have only one provincial identity. (326)

A religious map of provincial Russia marked places of importance like churches and monasteries, some of which were the sites of wonder-working icons or connected to local saints. The most spiritually-charged of these locations drew pilgrims from all over Russia in single numbers and large groups, including for the annual progression in late spring of a celebrated icon of St. Nicholas from the city of Vyatka to the Monastery of St. Trifon in Velikoretsk (Great River), about a hundred miles away. This icon had first appeared in 1383, three years after the battle in Kulikovo, and by 1917 the rituals and traditions surrounding it had been in place for more than half a millennium; the icon and the pilgrimage were sources of regional pride and, it was hoped, divine protection. The pilgrimage was banned in 1935 and the icon and cathedral in which was housed were destroyed, but there is evidence that some still walked this path until the practice was resumed – using a copy of the original icon – in 1989.

In "Subversive Piety: Religion and the Political Crisis in Late Imperial Russia," Gregory Freeze described the canonization of regionally popular saints as a way to solidify ties between the Orthodox tsar and his people. In 1903, Nicholas II traveled to the isolated Sarov hermitage in Tambov to join 300,000 pilgrims from all over Russia, but local authorities excluded peasants from the ceremonies and Sarov failed to become a national shrine or even a provincial attraction to equal Velikoretsk. Freeze claims that the push from the center to stage-manage this ritual could never have achieved its purpose, because popular religious culture «made the sacred immanent, fixed in the local and particular rather than the abstract and national. For that very reason each locale had its own panoply of saints, relics, and icons, whose very presence served to sanctify the landscape» (308-50). Russia's Old Believers had their own spiritual map of the provinces, marked by places – like the Urals – where it was safe to practice their religion, and pilgrimage spots where their martyrs and other leaders were buried, like Veselye Gory in Nizhny Tagil (Paert, *Provincial Landscapes*, 171-93).

Margaret Paxson's *Soloyovo. The Story of Memory in a Russian Village* is based on research conducted in northern Vologda during the 1990s. The elderly villagers' memories of what life was like *ran'she* (before, earlier) take readers back to the early Soviet years, when communist

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

officials showed up, unasked, to reorganize rural life. According to the eloquent accounts in this book, nothing good ever came from the arrival of an unknown person (*chuzhoi*) from the *volost*, *uyezd*, or provincial capital, and peasants lived «at great psychic distance from the power center of Moscow» (143-5, 325). They display little curiosity about other places, and the couple with whom Paxson lived had traveled to Leningrad (about 400 miles away) only once; they were somewhat better acquainted with Belozersk and the city of Vologda (141). Peasants looked down to the earth and up to the sky, but rarely much further than that – they were centered, and not in need of other, more famous places to validate their existence.

Solovyovo remained its own world and it was all the *rodina* (homeland) that its residents required, with a visible world of rough-hewn dwellings filled with locally sourced objects, and the invisible spirit world contingent to it. Traditionally, one of the most important tasks for peasants was to maintain a positive relationship with the land on which they depended for sustenance by being on good terms with their family, extended back in time (*rod*), with local spiritual forces, and with the saint associated with the nearest parish. One of the ways this was accomplished was by means of periodic trips to the parish cemetery and the celebration of special summer and winter holidays, which had been decided long ago in each parish. Virtually everything they believed in and practiced was «deeply local» and both state and ecclesiastical power were far away. The church near Solovyovo was torched in 1936, but «the idea of church space» remained a unifying, healing force six decades later (247, 334, 339).

Viktor Berdinskikh brought the methods of oral history to the study of peasants from his native Vyatsk region, his *zemliaki*. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the help of university students, he tape-recorded over a thousand Russians born between 1900 and the 1920s. The first volume based on these transcripts, *Krest'ianskaia tsivilizatsiia v Rossii* (Peasant Civilization in Russia), contains a powerful section called “The People and Power” (*Narod i vlast'*) in which respondents emphasize how everything – propaganda, orders, threats, fear, rumors – came from somewhere outside the village as the Soviet power infiltrated everyone's life (283). New rituals for weddings and funerals were introduced, churches and their contents were destroyed and priests arrested, but old women still gathered in the evenings to sing religious songs (286-92, 297). Orders from the center were not always clear – first there were to be communes, then the communes were dissolved, then the demand came that kulaks be identified (even if there were none in a given settlement), and then villages were gathered into collective farms with unfamiliar names (312-16, 331-5). An alternative to the government's version of events came from beggars wandering in from other regions where there was famine (330). Memories of the 1920s include cars arriving to arrest people working in the fields, the shooting of local clergy, and the disappearance first of textbooks, and then of notebooks in which students had made drawings (402-10).

In *Russkaia derevnia: byt i nravy* (The Russian Village: Daily Life and Mores) Berdinskikh includes less politically-tinged material about the peasants' sense of place. Two women born in 1900 emphasize the importance of local names for the ravines, swamps, forests, fields, and streams, while another woman born in 1914 said that she was able to read the signs of nature, a crucial skill where every year presented a challenge to survive (22-24). Speakers explained that up until the 1930s each village had a section of forest for its own care and use, and each village knew the story of its origins and the reason for its placement by a bend in the river or on the side of a hill as well the stories associated with other parts of their parish (28-9, 34-7). What these interviews described was a self-sufficient, complex world of the village and its near surroundings (39-48, 67). The village assembly (*skhod*) and traditional fights between villages survived until the 1930s, when outside authorities crushed many of the remaining manifestations of peasant independence (49-53). Still, the elderly peasants preserved their local songs, proverbs and sayings, distinctive intonation, and festive dishes (67-95, 105). In Berdinskikh's analysis, every settlement had its own atmosphere, its *dukhovnoe pole* or 'spiritual field' (100).

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

Before the Revolution, notions about the world outside their district were 'mythological' and many peasants had never traveled even as far as the county or provincial center (200).

Berdinskikh's third major oral history book is *Rechi nemykb. Povsednevnaia zhizn' russkogo krets'ianstva v XX veke* (Voices of the Mute. Everyday life of the Russian peasantry in the 20th century). There is some overlap in the transcribed conversations as speaker after speaker remembers local names, nicknames, and holiday customs. The fact that, along with the spinning done by women, every family practiced some sort of skilled trade made it less crucial for the men to spend long periods of time earning money in the city (78, 90, 109, 215). It was also helpful to know the best places to fish, and gather berries and mushrooms to supplement the family's diet (97-8). A man born in 1922 said that he lived a very local existence up until World War II, when he finally left the village and encountered *zemiaki* from his own and neighboring oblasts (236).

Although Berdinskikh rarely mentions Village Prose, his recordings and analyses are a perfect complement to this body of literature and they validate a number of its idyllic aspects that have often been criticized as false and dangerously utopian (Parthé, *Russian Village Prose* and *Russia's Dangerous Texts*). Despite a genre title that seems to encompass and champion every part of Russia that is not urban, the village 'supertext', upon closer examination, breaks down into a number of regional variants, especially for the North and Siberia, and into the literary 'brands' of even smaller swaths of territory (Razuvalova, *Pisateli – "Derevenshchiki,"* 33). Thus, Fedor Abramov is celebrated in Arkhangelsk, Vasily Belov in Vologda, Viktor Astafiev in Krasnoyarsk, and Valentin Rasputin in Irkutsk, in their home towns and in regional centers: the national literary fame of a native son finally gave these outlying places some working cultural capital.

A brief digression into the lives of Village Prose writers will help explain how they contributed to an understanding of the post-Revolutionary province. Most of the writers were born between about 1910 and 1940 and grew up in a traditional Russian setting. They moved further away for secondary school, and even further for the military, and, in a number of cases, to attend the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow, where their more sophisticated and better-read urban classmates remembered the 'provincialism' of the young men's speech and clothing, condescension that was not lost on its recipients (Razuvalova, 109-14). Whether villagers studied in Moscow or not, the structure of the Soviet Writers' Union made it advantageous for them to first offer their work to regional journals and gain membership at the regional level, while striving simultaneously to gain a foothold in the Moscow and RSFSR branches, which were established, respectively, in 1955 and 1958 (Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* 69-79, 110-14). The *derevenshchiki* benefited from an easing of censorship after 1953, and an increased tolerance for Russian nationalism after 1964. The *russkost'* (Russianness) of their regional accounts gained many of them large print runs, substantial critical attention, and the welcome opportunity to thrive professionally while living closer to home for much of the year, which prevented them from losing contact with the sources of their creative inspiration.

In Village Prose, both fiction and non-fiction, there was always a tension between an all-Russian resonance and one that was a very local. In *Divis'-gora* (Magic Mountain) Vladimir Lichutin was adamant that the concept of *rodina* (homeland) was too vague and all-encompassing; it had to be narrowed down to a place about which we remember everything, something that he sought to do for a small area of Arkhangelsk (20, 49). Vasily Belov's 1982 *Lad. Ocherki o narodnoi estetike* (Harmony. Essays on Folk Aesthetics) marks an attempt to bridge the gaps between local, regional, and national history. Belov, who was born in 1932, describes the book's subject as everyday life in the North, and credited his mother with supplying half of the material it contained (7). While keeping a still-traditional village at its core, attention is paid to the *volost* as a «fundamental "unit of measurement"» for peasant life, with its own way of speaking (*vygovor*) and a name that originated locally (49, 106-7).

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

In order to tell a story for a largely urban Russian audience, Belov expands his view to the entire province, and beyond its borders to places of great spiritual and cultural importance like Kizhi and Solovki, and he describes the humble pilgrims who journeyed there and back from other parts of Russia. This ambitious volume covers many aspects of life in the North: cuisine, clothing, the cycle of life, the calendar of holidays and the rules surrounding them, genres of folk culture (e. g. *skazki* and *chastushki*), and favorite religious images in the North (the Mother of God, St. George, and Nicholas the Wonderworker).

Although Yury Kazakov was a trained jazz musician from Moscow, during the 1950s he spent long periods of time in central and northern Russia and wrote stories of great feeling and power. *Pomorka* (The Old Woman by the Sea, 1959) takes place on a September day on the White Sea coast, where the narrator pays close attention to the ninety-year old woman in whose house he was lodging. Kazakov contrasts this self-contained life in one place with the postcards from exotic locations sent to her by family members, many of them fishermen. Acknowledging himself a chance visitor brought to the *pomor'e* (coastal region), the story leaves an indelible impression of a very specific kind of provincial setting.

Vladimir Tendryakov used the theme of a journey home for his 1964 autobiographical story *Den' na rodine* (A Day in one's Home Town). This short piece actually covers two journeys, one as a five-year-old in late 1928 or early 1929, and the other forty years later. When he was very young, his father's work had taken the family from Makarovskaya in Vologda to the southern Russian steppe, but the boy had been told at length about the wonderful place called *moia rodina* (my home town) where everything was *svoe* (native, one's own). He learned of family nicknames, his mother's *rodina* in nearby Ignashikha, and of his grandmother's habit of leaving the village to walk to Troitsa Monastery in Sergiyev Posad, and other holy places, surviving by begging alms along the way. He characterizes the location of his hometown as «a quiet corner of our vast Russia». At the end of the story, the narrator spends the night in a Vologda hotel, and when he closes his eyes, he can still see the village, which was for him «the beginning of everything» (*nachalo vsekh nachal*).

Five years later, Tendryakov recorded further childhood memories, which were not published until 1988, four years after his death. *Para gnedychk* (A Pair of Bays) takes place in 1929, when a village's streets were suddenly filled with poor and better-off families, who had been instructed to exchange houses. This process was being supervised by the author's father, who had been sent there by the Party, but he did not get a chance to finish the job in this settlement, and was soon transferred elsewhere with his family. The father is summoned to oblast-level conferences, where the policy of dekulakization was laid out for those tasked with implementing it. A second story, *Khleb dlia sobaki* (Bread for a Dog) takes place four years later, when displaced kulaks were being sent north from Tula, Voronezh, Kursk, Oryol, and other regions. People were starving, but the author's family was well fed because of the responsibilities his father has been given by the *raion* authorities. Tendryakov remembers the love he felt for his father, along with the sadness and confusion over policies dictated from outside these villages, as the boy attempts to distribute food to people, but is overwhelmed by their need, and finds it easier to feed a hungry dog. Vasily Subbotin's *Proshchaniye s mirom* (Farewell to the World), published in the same year, sketches similar scenes of upheaval as rural Russia seemed to be on the move, not of its own will.

Viktor Astafiev was born in the Krasnoyarsk village of Ovsyanka in 1924 and his writing reflected those origins and his service in World War II. In 1988, he published additional chapters of his celebrated memoir *Poslednii poklon* (The Final Bow). "Predchuvstvie ledokhoda" refers to a feeling that the Yenisei River was about to begin freeing itself of ice, as it did every spring. The scene is set in late 1934, after the Kirov assassination and at the beginning of a widespread search for 'enemies'. Seven members of the local kolkhoz management were summoned to a meeting in Krasnoyarsk; thinking that they might receive help with seed grain for

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

the coming year, the men dressed in their best clothes, filled their *papki* (folders), and set off. All seven were locked up, without explanation, until the end of April, at which time they were released, also without comment. When they arrived on the side of the river opposite their homes, the river ice had begun to break up and it was no longer safe to cross. Terrified that they might be arrested again, they hastily assembled some rafts and set out anyway, as residents of Ovsyanka watched from the other shore, crossing themselves and praying quietly in order not to frighten the river. When one of the returning kolkhoz officials fell in, the villagers rushed to save him; as soon all the men reached shore, the river made a frightening sound, reminding people of its undisputed force. The author's grandmother, who, Astafiev says, fought the *bezbozhniki* (militant atheists) her entire life, was fond of reminding people that it was prayer that had saved these men. The story establishes three sources of power (*vlast*) in the region: the state (through its provincial agents), nature, and God, and it was an almost insurmountable challenge to stay on the right side of all three.

Another Siberian native, Valentin Rasputin, was born in a village on the Angara River in 1937. His 1972 autobiographical story *Vniz i verkh po techeniiu* (Downstream) also contrasts still-vivid childhood memories of spring thunderstorms, berry and mushroom picking, and fishing, with the knowledge that a massive hydroelectric project has flooded his village forever. Four years later, Rasputin published *Proshchaniie s Materoi* (Farewell to Matyora), which focused on an island village in the Angara whose existence was threatened by the same project. The novel is very specific about the details of traditional village life, while its scope also expands to an apocalyptic vision of Siberia, Russia, the rural world, and the entire planet, something that was emphasized by the 1981 film called simply *Farewell*. The elderly remaining residents of the island have distinct memories of the Revolution and the accompanying changes to their lives, all of which originated from somewhere up or down the river. What they know of life beyond Matyora and nearby settlements comes from people who have drifted in from Tula and other areas. Having contrasted the local and the universal, in 1991 Rasputin chose to take a regional approach in *Sibir', Sibir'* (Siberia, Siberia), which featured essays on the cultural history of Tobolsk, Baikal, Irkutsk, Gornyi Altai, Kyakhta, and the ancient settlement of Russkoye Ustye. Rasputin elevated the interest of urban readers in Siberia by presenting it as more than a vast, froze, sparsely populated territory (Parthé, "Village Prose Writers"; Ogden, "Siberia as Chronotope").

Vladimir Krupin (born 1941), the youngest of the major *derevenshchiki*, followed a similar path of highly personal and localized writing, like the 1981 essay *Sorokovoi den'* (The Fortieth Day), which takes place not far from his birthplace, and is a lament for the loss of so many colorful place names. This was followed by works that delved more deeply into a history that included, but was not restricted to, his personal geography. His 1987 *Vyatskaia tetrad'* (Vyatsk Notebooks) begins with a phrase he heard from a fellow Vyatsk resident whom he encountered on a train: "*zemliachestvo – poniatie kruglosutochnoe*" (coming from the same region is a full-time concept, 176-8). Using a variety of historical sources, some going back hundreds of years, Krupin explores what it means to have come from Vyatsk, which he describes as «an unconquerable outpost in northeast Russia» (174). Krupin is proud of his region's history, even its reputation for unruliness, and his goal is to fill in the gaps for his *zemliaki*. One of the native sons of whom he is proud is Dmitry Konstantinovich Zelenin (1878-1954) whose distinguished ethnographic career began with the exploration of the province in which he was born (203-6). There is no special emphasis in Krupin's work on the Revolution and early Soviet era because he does not acknowledge a sea change in the character of the people; he does mention men from Vyatsk encountering each other on the battlefields of World War I (244-5), and observes that Moscow has always been very far away. At the end of his notebooks, he admits that he while he has read a great deal, he will never be privy to all that someone like his

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

grandmother Sashka knew. She could *remember* things that had disappeared during her lifetime, while Krupin could only *imagine* them (282).

Like Tendryakov and Astafiev, some of Fedor Abramov's most dramatic scenes from the decades after the Revolution came in a story that only appeared in the late 1980s. Abramov worked on *Poezdka v proshloe* (A Journey into the Past) between 1964 and 1974. The main character, Miksha, born in 1918, has always been very proud of his uncles, both Bolshevik activists, especially his Uncle Alexander – a heroic figure throughout the *raion* - who was supposedly killed by villagers in 1930 during the struggle against kulaks and Orthodox believers. On a journey back to his village in 1965, Miksha learns that his uncle was actually killed by the brother of young girl whom he had raped. He also learns that his father, from whom he was estranged, was truly heroic, having saved an innocent man from the uncles' rifles during the Red Terror of 1919. The fortunate man's widow asked Miksha: «What were our peasants guilty of? We live a thousand versts [660 miles] from Moscow». The message from all these delayed stories is that the transmission belt of Soviet authority worked its way from the center all the way down to the village with a brutal efficiency.

It is fitting to end with another work of Fedor Abramov, who came up with one of the most useful terms for describing a Russian peasant's map of the world. He understood that each village had its own life story, lexicon and habits, and the 'nests of peasants' seem at times as distanced from the rest of Russia as the 'nests of gentry' did a century earlier. In *Put'i-pereput'ia* (Paths and Crossroads) the third volume of a tetralogy collectively called *The Pryashins* (1958-78), the kolkhoz chairman Lukashin, who was sent into the area five years earlier, made a tremendous effort to acquire what the narrator calls *lesnaia gramota* (forest literacy): «He knew almost all of the names on the very complex and confusing map of Pekashino», and if asked, he could name «all the small surrounding settlements and the legends that residents of Pekashino associated with them» (82-3). This is no small feat because there were sometimes multiple local names for places and people and, as the narrator explains, there are stories to accompany some of these names. This knowledge was generally passed down, as Rasputin said in *Farewell to Matyora*, from one memory to another, and was necessary not simply for the purpose of fitting in and be trusted, but in order to find ones way through field and forest, where the only human-made signs might be *zatesi* (marks made on a tree). These names and places survived the early decades of Soviet life and, years later, was still the most important geographical information to have mastered.

Along with a village and its surroundings, sketched out in great detail, the peasants' map of Russia c. 1917-1934 revealed awareness of the larger divisions of this massive state, but more than provinces, peasants thought in terms of the North, the Urals region, Siberia, central Russia, the southern steppe, areas along well-known rivers (*priangar'e*, *privol'zhe*), and the two capital regions. However, while the peasants' world ended at the border of the village or parish, it became increasingly important for them to know something about the city at the center of each province, and about the other sub-divisions that spread out towards the village, because it was along this path that the capital's orders were issued and implemented. While good relationships with the *domovoy*, *leshii* and other spirits could bring them some level of protection close to home and in the forest, there was no *spiritus locum* for a province, let alone for Moscow. Unlike rural havens protected by spirits whose behavior was known and understood, a province was something named and delineated by powers far away for the purpose of control, not for co-existence.

Mikhail Epstein writes of the province as being 'peripheral' to the center (26), but being on the cultural and social periphery did not protect even remote villages from the less benevolent intentions of the center. Coming from a province could afford a peasant useful connections and assistance when he found himself far from home. Back in a village that kept many of its self-sufficient ways until the mid-1930s, a province was, like the center to which it answered,

A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

a source of intrusion, and not a meaningful attribute of rural identity. It was not the social, cultural, spiritual, or physical space in which they spent their lives, what Liudmila Zaionts calls a person's 'mental paradigm' ("Provintsiia.: Opyt Istoriografii," 70). Provincial studies of Russia may not bring decisive answers to questions of Russian identity, but «this isn't a cosmos where all lines intersect» (Billington, 35-6). The answer may be to sketch as many 'maps' of Russia as possible, and draw from them a sense of the terrain of this enigmatic and endlessly fascinating civilization.

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A Villager's Map of the Provinces

Kathleen Parthé

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